

Speaker of the Student Senate End of Year Report

Submitted by Adam Barker: 2018-2019 Speaker

The Year in Review and Some General Notes

Serving as Speaker of the Student Senate this year has truly been an honor. This position is possibly the strangest position on Student Government, but it is undeniably important.. As far as official duties go, there are not many listed in our rules aside from running the full body meetings and setting the agenda for them. However, there is much more to this than meets the eye, and it can be a rather tedious and frustrating process at times. There is also that little note about being Ethics Justice Pro Tempore that can sneak up on you. But everything else you do is largely up to you. This year, I can break almost everything down into three basic categories: **administration, ethics, and rules**. I will talk about these more in a moment, but first I want to talk about the main philosophy that I used in everything I did this year.

My job was to serve others in following their agenda, not create my own agenda. When I first came into the position, my plan was to reign in some of the inefficiency I had observed and set some hard rules. However, as time went on, I began to realize that the better approach was actually to simply be ready to help anyone on Student Government. This is a creative group of individuals, and what they really need is a friend there to support them, encourage them, and help them get their projects and ideas before the rest of the body. I have found that attempting to draw lines in the sand and pushing back when you do not like how somebody is doing something rarely accomplishes anything other than stifling creativity and hurting the encouraging and respectful atmosphere of Student Government. A look back at this year and recent years reveals that the Speaker has a large influence over the general attitude and environment of the body. Some have argued the Speaker's influence is as important or more important than the President's (some meaning people other than me just in case you were wondering.) If you run meetings and interact with people with enthusiasm, professionalism, respect, and kindness, then the rest of the body will follow. But if you introduce an attitude of hostility, immaturity, or indifference, then it will have a negative affect. Of course, there is a balance between putting the wishes of others first and being a leader and standing firm on what you think is best. But I think the key to being Speaker is to prioritize being a servant leader and encouraging creativity in others, not rivaling the President or others by having your own agenda. If the Speaker and President are able to work together well from the start and even be friends, then that is a foundation for a great year in Student Government.

Administration

Setting the Agenda

This is one of the explicitly stated duties of the Speaker in the Constitution, and it is an important one. Make sure to send out the agenda at a good time before the meeting to give people time to read it over and look at the resolutions and other items. This year I tried to send out the agenda by 6:00 PM on Saturday. The normal agenda template works fine, so please feel free to continue using it. This year, I requested a Friday night deadline, but I accepted late submissions. This proved to work pretty well for the most part. There were a few weekends where I had a frustrating amount of late submissions, but most weekends it was not a problem. If it does become a bit of a problem, just let the body know in your weekly report. I would greatly discourage keeping a hard deadline and not accepting anything

after that time, as I believe it is more important to have items come before the body than stick to an arbitrary rule. This goes back to my “Year in Review” section. It also prevents there being a lot of proposed changes to the agenda at the meeting. Now, the truth is that the Speaker has a lot of power when it comes to creating the agenda. However, I would strongly encourage putting everything you receive on the agenda if it possible. Of course, there were certain times this year when I decided not to put something on the agenda, at least not at first. But each time that occurred, I contacted the person, and we either fixed the problem with the proposed item or figured out another way to bring it before members of the body. For example, you can suggest discussing a topic at the Executive Committee meeting rather than at the general body meeting.

To send out the agenda:

- 1) Create it in Google Drive.
- 2) Copy and paste the ListServe email list under “bcc”.
- 3) Address it to “stugov@truman.edu”.
- 4) Attach the agenda from Google Drive.
- 5) Type a generic but genuine message with well-wishes and any other relevant information.

Running the Meeting

Be familiar with parliamentary procedure and the precedents set by former Speakers. Then follow whatever you want and get rid of the rest! Try to ensure the meeting is a good combination of both productivity and efficiency. You get to make the speaker’s list of people who wish to talk during a discussion. Here is a secret: it is up to you to determine the order! My default method, which I almost always followed, was to put people on the list in the order they raised their hand. But if you find that discussion is being dominated by certain individuals or groups, then feel free to allow some others to talk first. However, exercise caution in doing this. Do not allow personal opinion to affect how you make these decisions. Also, I found in some discussions it was best to be rigid and stick closely to the speaker’s list, and in others it was better to allow some back-and-forth discussion. Just use your discretion. In addition to Parli Pro, be sure to know the rules relevant to the items on the agenda, such as whether an item needs a majority or 2/3 vote to pass. I would recommend reviewing the relevant rules before each meeting, even if you think you know them. That way, if there is a question, you know right where the answer is. And trust me, it is okay to check the rules in the meeting if you are unsure about something. You cannot be expected to always remember everything, and it is much better to ensure that everything is run correctly than to deal with a violation of the rules! Finally, the main thing is to be kind, enthusiastic, and confident. Set a good tone for the meeting, and take charge. If you make a slight mistake or are unsure about something, just keep going and act like everything is fine, because it is! As long as you are doing your best and are being confident and respectful, everyone will be quite satisfied with your leadership.

Voting

When there is a vote, be sure to know the rules behind that particular item (majority, $\frac{2}{3}$, etc.) There is a voting spreadsheet that the secretary uses, and it is a very useful tool. I would keep it open on your laptop, so that you can confirm the results. Be sure to look carefully at the numbers. The spreadsheet is not beyond error. Also, make sure everyone at the table knows what they are voting on and what “yes and no” mean, as this can be confusing in certain scenarios. There is a document in the Speaker’s Manual that talks a bit more about the voting spreadsheet.

Office Hours

Either you or the secretary should create a Google spreadsheet at the beginning of each semester so that people can sign up for an office hour. Simply ensure that this gets done. Also, it is a good idea to inform and remind the body of what an office hour is and tell them some possibilities for how they can use that time.

Rules and Information

Be sure to know the rules and be able to inform the body about them. Also, make it a point to know the ins and outs of Student Government: know who is in charge of what and what projects are going on and how Student Government functions. Be able to advise others in a variety of areas, such as who to contact if they have a question or how they should write a resolution. Finally, I would recommend doing a Parli Pro review at least once a semester (I recommend at the fall retreat!) I did not do this spring semester, and I regret it, as there were new members who could have used such a presentation (there is a PowerPoint presentation in the Speaker Manual.)

ListServe

Unfortunately, it falls to you to take care of the ListServe (our email list). The ListServe, to put it simply, is abysmal. There were multiple times this year when it simply would not work, and I could not figure out why. But it has been operating quite well lately, so perhaps the tribulations are over. There is a document in the Speaker Manual that should help you update it and keep it up. You might think about making a separate email list in a Google Document, just in case you have trouble with the ListServe.

Ethics

Commentary

Upon election as Speaker, you automatically assume the duties of Ethics Justice and Elections Administrator. Also as Speaker, it is vitally important that you know the Constitution, Standing Rules, and Ethical Code of Conduct very very well. Make sure to study these rules in depth and refresh your memory regularly.

Elections Administrator

Read the Rules

Make sure you read the rules for elections in the Constitution and Standing Rules and know them quite well. Elections are very important, and they should be run as professionally and ethically as possible.

Stay On Top of Dates

This is of utmost importance! Fall elections are one of the first things you will deal with as Speaker, and they really do sneak up on you. Try to fix the dates as soon as you can; I suggest contacting Laura and Dr. Edwards over the summer or right at the beginning of the year to figure them out. Keep in mind that Fall has many rush weeks for Greeks life and other organizations; try to select a time frame that does not many conflicts. Remember, you must pass these dates by the second meeting of the fall semester.

Elections Handbook

Make sure to revise the Elections Handbook for the upcoming election and ensure it has all of the information it needs according to our Standing Rules. It has to be first and second read and adopted

by the body, so make sure you leave yourself plenty of time. I would recommend having at least some of it complete by the beginning of the semester and getting it approved as soon as possible.

Elections Hearing Board

Be sure to put together an Elections Hearing Board in accordance with our Standing Rules. I will discuss this a bit more under the “Rules” section, but it must consist of between 5 and 9 members. The members do not have to be on Student Government, aside from you and the Student Representative to the Board of Governors. But I would recommend having a mix of Student Government members and outside students in order to have a mix of viewpoints.

Promotion

Promote elections as much as you can! I would recommend making two posters, one advertising elections and the other promoting running for office. This should be done as soon as possible, and I would recommend having them done (excluding the dates) before the beginning of the semester. Be sure to contact publications as soon as you are able so that you will receive the posters in plenty of time. Also, make sure they are approved by the CSI. If Student Government has a Public Relations Director, you might want to consult them when you make the posters. In addition to posters, there are a lot of other ways to promote elections. Attend Freshman Week, attend the Activities Fair, attach a blurb to the StuGov student body wide email, meet with organizations, table, you name it. Social media is also important, and it wouldn't be a bad idea to take over the Truman Snapchat during elections week. The biggest problem with most of our elections is that people don't know they are happening, even if we do extensive promotion. Encourage people on the body to tell their friends and their classmates **in person** about elections. This has proven to be the most effective way to promote them.

Ethics Justice

Ethics Hearing Board

Thankfully, I did not have to handle any ethics violations by a member of Student Government, so I do not have much to say in this area other than you should be familiar with the process of forming an ethics hearing board should the need arise.

Funds Allotment Council Grievance Appeal

In our Standing Rules, as well as in the FAC Constitution, it states that the Ethics Justice presides over an ethics committee in the case that FAC appeals an official grievance. This indeed happened this year for the first time, and it was quite a process. Here is how I handled it after I received an appeal by the FAC Chair:

- 1) I replied to the FAC Chair and informed her that I was now in charge of handling the grievance.
- 2) I contacted our Student Government advisors to inform them of the issue and ask for any help they could offer. Unfortunately, they had no help to offer.
- 3) I contacted the SAB and FAC representatives to Student Government and successfully acquired their help in finding me one person from their respective organizations to serve on the ethics committee (as it states in our Standing Rules). I also contacted Laura to ask for a student worker from the CSI. I located two voting senators from Student Senate for the committee. I also informed the FAC Chair and the FAC Advisor that they were members of the committee. All of these members were kept secret, in accordance with the rules.

- 4) Once I had the committee, I sent out a Doodle poll and found a time when we could all meet. I then contacted Laura and found a room in the SUB where we could meet.
- 5) I contacted the FAC Chair and asked her to send me parts of the FAC Constitution and By-Laws that were relevant to the grievance. I then sent those to all of the members of the ethics committee and asked them to review them.
- 6) I read the entire FAC Constitution and By-Laws to ensure I would be informed on any rules relevant or indirectly affecting making a decision on the grievance appeal.
- 7) I met with the FAC Chair, the FAC Treasurer, and two members of the opposing party (the Club Baseball team) an hour before the meeting to discuss what exactly occurred and to gather any more relevant information before the committee met.
- 8) The committee met for an hour and a half. I gave the party who submitted the Grievance approximately 15 minutes for opening statements and a few minutes for questions from the committee. I then gave FAC (who was only represented by the Chair and their advisor) about 15 minutes for opening statements and then a few minutes for questions from the committee and members of the opposing party. I offered both parties the opportunity to bring forward witnesses, but they both declined. I then allowed some time for open discussion between both parties and the committee. Then we moved into closed session, in which only the members of the committee had some time to discuss the issues. Then we held a vote by secret ballot. We invited the opposing party back in and announced simply that we had upheld FAC's appeal. We did not divulge the numbers from the vote.

If this happens again, I recommend having more contact with both parties before the meeting, just to ensure both sides are informed and comfortable with what is going on. The club baseball team had a PowerPoint presentation that included recordings from conversations with FAC. In the future I would encourage that kind of preparation for both of the parties to ensure that the ethics committee has enough information, like we did this time! I would also try to meet with both parties at an earlier date than the meeting so that you can ensure everyone knows what is happening and that everything is set. Overall though, this process proved to be a success, and everyone was pleased with how the issue was handled.

Rules

Rules Revision

This year on Rules Revision we revised the section on attendance and absences, we changed the Sexual Assault Prevention Committee to the Sexual Assault Prevention Designee, we changed and clarified language regarding committees and committee chairs in the Standing Rules, we revised the process for choosing the Student Representative to the Board of Governors, and we improved the descriptions of primary committees in the Constitution. We talked about changing the Purple Friday Subcommittee from a subcommittee to a secondary committee, but decided against it due to the fact that secondary committees are supposed to exist to perform a particular service. We also looked through the President's new procedures for OAF next year. There are still a couple of things we did not get to though. One is fixing some of the language in the section of the Standing Rules about the Elections Hearing Board, especially the part about having five to nine "voting members" on the committee. Another thing on the table is possibly getting rid of the separate position of

Appropriations Committee Chair and making that chairship one of the Treasurer's duties. Finally, the AFAC and ESFAC operating procedures could use some heavy revision. And of course, the rules still have a number of ambiguities and contradictions that could be looked at, so your work is cut out for you! I would recommend trying to recruit a mix of newer members and senior members for this committee next year because they would provide a nice set of diverse viewpoints on the rules. I would also recommend that if you see a potential area of controversy in one of your resolutions, run it by someone such as the President first. This could save you a lot of time and headaches at the meetings.

List of Precedents

Commentary

Finally, here is a short list of some of my Speaker precedents that I hope will be helpful.

- 1) Informing voting members they can submit a secret ballot before leaving the room if they are being appointed to a "major appointments" position,
- 2) Putting a five minute limit on questions after reports and ensuring that they are indeed questions or relevant comments, not discussion,
- 3) Combining questions and discussion into one 15 minute slot when discussing a money motion,
- 4) Requiring all committee chairs, including secondary, subcommittee, and ad hoc chairs to be appointed by the process of major appointments,
- 5) Allowing questions and responses pretty freely in discussion items and sometimes in other discussions.

Respectfully Submitted,

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