

## 2019-2020 End of Year Report: President Deanna Schmidt

**Congratulations!!** You are the PRESIDENT of the Student Association at Truman State University! The power is yours, and with that power comes a great deal of responsibility--but also fun, memories, and so much satisfaction in getting to serve this wonderful school and help your fellow students. As my role model of a Student Government President and personal cheerleader, Kyra Cooper, once said, "Welcome to my monologue"--it's not often we get a platform to just share all of our thoughts from this crazy position!

I've been fortunate to serve on this body for four years now, and in those four years I have seen good, bad, and ugly sides of Student Government and Truman. That being said, I'm thankful for all of these experiences, because they've helped me better understand how to lead, and also have given me context for what Student Government is capable of and what to avoid. I hope that those who I worked with this year have had a positive experience--I know that I have. I don't claim to have been perfect in the position, and know that looking back there are things I could've done better or differently. But, as I'll touch on later, it doesn't do much good to dwell on all of the things that could have been--that takes time away from focusing on everything you accomplished and still hope to see accomplished in the future.

I'm sure people probably won't read this in its entirety (except maybe Katie, hi Katie! And maybe Josh if you're curious!), and those two already basically know all of this and I will continue to share it with them as they grow in their roles this year and stay in touch, but if by some chance someone else is reading this, I hope this helps give a snapshot into what life was like this year on Student Government in general, and specifically through my position as President. I definitely don't claim to know everything, but I hope that sharing these insights into what my year was like in this position can help give some suggestions for future presidencies to just keep improving upon one another!

### General Advice (Manifesto?)

The word to remember throughout your term as President is BALANCE. This encapsulates every piece of advice I can think to give.

#### *Balancing Yourself*

This is the same concept as the oxygen masks in an airplane--in order to adequately lead and take care of the Student Government and the student body, you need to first make sure you are taking care of yourself. Be sure that you have outlets *outside* of Student Government--you are surely a passionate individual who cares a lot about the work you're doing and the people you're doing it with, but remember that Student Government does not define you, and you are more

than the work you do in this role. To remind yourself of this, be sure to stay involved with people and things outside of the body--keep up with your hobbies, other clubs, friendships, family, and whatever else brings you joy. Have people to talk to about things other than Student Government, and enjoy those people, conversations, and activities.

The balance of this, of course, is continuing to work hard. To quote the great Kyra Cooper yet again, she put in her end of year report (that I have, truthfully, lived faithfully by since I got this job) that the President should be working harder than everyone else on the body. This is also true. The best motivation for the body to get work done is to see their leader working hard, and working enthusiastically. It can get hard, but remember why you took this job, and continue to surround yourself with people who inspire you to do this work. The first of these people is your VP--get ready for a long and fun ride together! :) Your VP will truly be the source of this motivation--they will be your cheerleader, helper, right hand person, and "work spouse," as Dr. Thomas once told Keaton and I. That being said, trust your VP. Trust them with whatever you need--projects, honesty, inspiration, jokes, and all your information. Work together, and enjoy it. There is quite likely never going to be another time in your life you get a built-in best friend, confidant, and assistant all in one who you get to make great change with. Work hard together, and inspire the body to do great things through that work.

### *Balancing the Body*

Next, once you're all balanced yourself, you can focus on balancing the organization you are now leading. This is perhaps the hardest part of the job, at least in my experience. I think I always thought that representing the entire student body would be the most stressful, but really, managing the bureaucracy and inner nature of this group of highly motivated people challenged me and showed me what being a leader meant more than anything else.

Like I mentioned in my introduction, I have been so fortunate to see both bad and good Student Governments. When I first joined the body my freshman year, the body was incredibly competitive and divided; they fought over every little thing, made nearly everything political even when it didn't need to be, and were purely workplace associates. Under Kyra and Sarah's administration the next year, the body *bonded*, having Student Government weekly dinners, hanging out outside of meetings, becoming friends with committee members--and more. This clearly has its benefits--the more welcomed people feel on the body, the more motivated they are to return and to work hard. We inspire each other, lift each other up when projects aren't going well, and can share in each others' joy when they go well. By working together, we definitely accomplish more. Keep morale high, and you will see great results.

But--again, balance. One of the hardest balances to find is that of camaraderie and professionalism. Too much friendliness can also lead to negative effects on the body. I would never have thought so had you told me this at the beginning of my Vice Presidency, but it's true, and it's a delicate line to walk.

Projects are accomplished and ideas are tweaked on Student Government (and through any organization, really) through revision, and that revision requires some levels of constructive criticism. It is critical to preserve some level of professionalism on the body to ensure that members know that while it's great to forge friendships within our group, our first duty in this organization is to enact change, and that sometimes requires difficult conversations and civil disagreements. It's okay for people to disagree and talk about their opinions; it's especially okay for you as President to have such difficult conversations with members of your administration. You are President for a reason, and you must be able to maintain professional, working relationships with each member of this organization--sometimes that means sitting down with a chair when they aren't performing their duties to talk through that with them, and sometimes it means having to bring a voting senator you're friends with up for removal because they haven't been following attendance requirements. Remember to distinguish between friendships and professionalism--and help your members to be able to do the same so feelings aren't hurt.

One important subpoint to this is the matter of confidentiality. As President, you will be privy to information on all levels--from individual associate senators to executive board matters to university matters shared with you by the University President. As such, be prudent and careful about who you talk to about such matters. The more people who know about confidential things, the less likely it is to stay confidential. Your VP is the first, and often the only, person who you should share confidential information with. Not a chair who you really like, not a voting senator who happens to be in the office, and sometimes not even your executive board. Be smart and trustworthy with information, and continue to balance these personal and professional relationships accordingly.

Lastly on the topic of balancing the body, remember yet again that Student Government is not the end-all-be-all to each member's life or future. They too are humans. Be realistic in your expectations, and be conscious of the possibility of burnout. Sometimes this also means having (again) difficult conversations with members who may be biting off more than they can chew. Be sure to be honest with them about how much is too much--talk about their schedules realistically, and talk through solutions to ensure they won't be sick of Student Government in a matter of months. This goes for morale of the body as a whole, too--be sure to balance the amount of events and projects being worked on. Asking members to table for four events in a week may take a toll--utilize open communication to ensure minimal overlap of these events.

### *Balancing Students & Faculty, Staff, and Administration*

Here's the big one--the public side of the job! This is something that I have been fortunate to have been acclimated to early on in my career on StuGov because of my work on Academic Affairs and with faculty. I think it's also something that many new students on Student Government have to grapple with as they learn how to accomplish their goals on the body. It can surely be daunting, but it is absolutely essential if you want to see real, tangible change.

I can start by touching on the student side of things, but if you got elected to this position, you surely are in touch with the students on this campus pretty significantly. Keep these

connections--stay in touch with students off the body to keep getting their opinions. Stay active on social media--as annoying and toxic as it can be, in this public leadership position, it's critical for you to stay in touch with students, and that's how so many other students are expressing concerns and, often, crying for help. I discovered the Facebook page "Overheard at Truman" way too late in the year--check up on there often, because it seems to be very active with students who may often slip through the cracks!

In the vein of balancing, though, remember to stay connected to students with a good head on your shoulders. Hear their concerns, ensure they know they are heard, but remember to think critically before responding or promising action. Oftentimes, there is more behind the stories being shared, and it's essential for you as both a leader and liaison to gather all information from all sides before rashly deciding any solution or position on an issue. Students, especially in recent years, have seemed to become more vocal about campus issues but less thorough in checking about facts or reasoning behind certain decisions before voicing their concerns. Stay informed, stay calm so as to not rile anyone up more than they need to be, and stay diplomatic.

Similarly, remember that while balancing student concerns with the various individuals and groups you meet with in your position: faculty, staff, and administration. First of all, it is absolutely CRITICAL that you, as President, are showing up to faculty groups as much as possible. They need to know that you and Student Government *care* in order to maintain our relationships, and this will help you forge relationships with them when you need their help to pass policy and make change. It can be overwhelming; don't give up just because you think you don't know what's going on. Ask questions, know you don't have to fully understand every small change they discuss, and always insert student opinion when possible. THIS is how change happens--working within the system, not just shouting student concerns into a void when students are unhappy about something.

### *Balancing Humility*

And, lastly, perhaps the best overall advice I can give is to "check yourself" ;) This is key. I think each president I have seen has struggled with this in their own right, wherever they fall on the spectrum of "too humble" to "too confident." You are President for a reason, and you have the right and responsibility to lead this organization and student body. You have a lot to learn and you don't know everything, but you also know enough to be the leader this organization needs, and they are looking to you for guidance. Have confidence in yourself and your decisions, but be open to change and learning new things. Don't dwell on the "shoulda, coulda, woulda"s--you made decisions for a reason, and the more time you spend thinking of what you could've done differently, the less time you have to keep moving forward! Stay humble, stay kind, stay confident, and you will do amazing things.

And, with that, I believe I have stood on my soapbox long enough. Know that I am praying for you and this incredible organization, and that this organization and university have my whole heart. Take care of them well :)

## Projects

### *Truman Week*

Student Government always helps with Truman Week, but usually just with move-in and 1-2 other events. This year we took a much more active stance, with mixed results. It definitely helped boost our numbers and visibility on campus--I would dare to say every incoming student had some direct interaction with at least one Student Government member over the course of the week! This likely helped a great deal with our recruitment (See below for more info). However, this was a pretty intense week for our members, as each member had to help with at least 2-3 events per day to keep them staffed. Additionally, because of the chaos surrounding the planning of Truman Week this year, many of the events we helped with were not very clear in communicating how we were expected to help. This led to some frustration. Also, perhaps the greatest tragedy of this year's Truman Week was Katie and I being convinced last minute to emcee the College Cup Finals--spoiler, we aren't funny, it didn't go very well! Here are just some general tidbits of advice for Truman Week:

- Stay in good communication over the summer with the individuals/groups planning Truman Week (this changes year to year), and Laura. Ask specific questions to know what you're getting your members into.
- Think carefully about how much is too much for your members to do. It's okay to say "no" to a few activities that are just infeasible. It would really stink to have burned out members before the first day of school!
- Remember to make some fun for your body, too! Plan the first bonding night of the year during that week :)

### *Recruitment of New Members*

This is perhaps what I am most proud about from this year--despite significant decreases in enrollment, we somehow managed to recruit what I'd say was a record number of new members this year, both voting and associate senators. Tips to keep this up:

- UTILIZE SOCIAL MEDIA! If you don't have the passwords yet, remind me to send those to you. This is how you engage with students. Our video we made in the fall about Avengers/Student Government did the trick, I'm convinced ;)
- Utilize Truman Week! As busy as we were, we got so much face time, and were able to directly talk with students to show them what we do and convince them they would be a good fit for the body.
- Appoint as many positions as possible, including Associate Senators! Do not stick your poor VP as a pro temp committee chair for too many committees, and remember that associate senators are incredibly valuable committee members that can get so much work done. Remember to stay close with them to ensure they know they are integral members of the body, and they may even want to run for Voting Senator as soon as possible!

### *OAF*

Ah, the object of my sincerest hatred. Jk, kind of. OAF is not easy, especially now that some crazy person went and made it a standing committee for year to year...oops!

But in all seriousness, that was done for a reason. First, this now means we can ask for budget increases yearly, and we don't have to wait three years if there are significant changes in the economy or state of the university. Also, I would never wish this year's process on anyone--we had a hard time getting people to apply, then selected a chair who didn't do anything for an entire semester, then had to deal with a pandemic. So here is my advice:

- Talk to Laura. Always. This is a confusing process, and Laura has been through it multiple times and knows EVERYTHING. She will tell you exactly what to do and when to do it, as long as you ask!
- Get started on everything early. Establish connections with your fellow fee based presidents before summer, really! Just so you know you'll be working together, and to start that relationship. Make a groupchat--they're fun, they don't bite!
- Advertise for the open positions HARD--it doesn't *sound* fun on a piece of paper, so talking to people is really necessary. I went and talked to the DSP business fraternity, and that helped a lot. You need bodies on the committee to make this work, so advertise and recruit hard.
- Be close with your Treasurer! As though that wasn't an option, lol. But they get this and know the ins and outs of your budget, so they will be key to putting together your proposal.
- Stay close with the fee based presidents--we all got very close this year, and that definitely helped us throughout the process.

### *Board of Governors Student Representative Search*

Ah, I was such a lucky duck, not only did I get to serve as President during a historic global pandemic, but before this even erupted, my presidency happened to fall at the magic six year timeline where both OAF and the BOG student search collided! And I made it work, so I know you can too if you need to, because I had no idea what I was doing. Some tips:

- Again, TALK TO LAURA! She knows everything. Also, talk to President Thomas, because she can provide more background information on the role and what they're looking for.
- START EARLY. I can't emphasize this enough. Everything took longer than expected, but mainly finding people to serve on the committee. I started before summer, and we still were running tight on time to make a nomination in the fall.
- Come up with your plan for voting on your slate before it comes time to vote--we ran into some issues there, but they resolved themselves pretty quickly because we had some great people on the selection committee.
- Honestly, I can't think of more tips off the top of my head, but I'd love to chat about what we did if you have specific questions. Future presidents: text me at 314-215-1765 and lmk how things are going! How fun!

### *New Student Round Table*

Because of the overwhelming success of last year's inaugural Presidents' Round Table, we tried to do an inaugural "New Student Round Table" event this fall to gather new students' opinions of their first semester. It was not as successful in terms of attendance as we would've hoped, but the feedback we got was invaluable. So, definitely recommend, but perhaps with a few tweaks:

- We got feedback that the name and nature of the event seemed intimidating to new students. Try something more informal; "Pizza with Student Government" (emphasize food, that was an actual suggestion!) perhaps?
- We were also told that making students come to us seemed like a barrier, because they weren't likely to leave their dorms or other activities just to come talk to scary StuGov people. Try to meet them where they are; maybe holding smaller events in each Res Hall?
- Don't go in with expectations to talk about lofty policy goals, but rather manageable things impacting their daily life. Also, be open to talk about whatever they bring up, because they may be struggling with things we don't even know yet!

### *Podcasts/"Fireside Films"*

Ah yes, another attempt of Katie and I to reach out public...that they didn't ask for, lol! That's okay. We tried to start regular podcasts introducing listeners to what StuGov was working on, how StuGov works, etc. It was a great idea in theory, and probably could've been improved if we had kept at it, but we did one on Academic Affairs and got about 20 listeners (2 of which were my parents), so we didn't return to it. Again, I think if we had kept with it and tried to push more topics on a regular schedule, it may have caught more traction. An idea if you have a lot more dedication to the idea and patience with Audacity.

After that, we thought it would be easier and more personable to try a "Fireside Film" where we recorded a video of ourselves drinking tea in front of the SUB's fireplace. This was super fun, much easier, and supposedly got better views on social media, but we aren't sure if this would've stuck if we kept with it. Another good idea to persevere on a more regular basis!

### *Vision Document*

Again, one of my proudest accomplishments was finally getting to see a Vision Document through. A few factors contributed to this, namely that we were able to have the original Vision Document writer from the late 1990s come back to campus as our speaker at Fall Retreat, Katie and I nagged the great Austin Derbak for about a month to come back to the body as this committee's chair, and Katie and I served on the committee to help. This was a lot of work, but we absolutely needed to get someone off the body to chair the committee, because that was the only way it was going to get done. Two administrations tried, and failed, to run it themselves, and we knew we couldn't do it, so bless Austin Derbak. Looking forward to seeing the final product! Ideas for future Vision Docs only may be to consider new multimedia options for revealing the document, because students likely won't read the document in its entirety. It is important for faculty, staff, and administration to read, but to truly engage students, try to think of new ways to reveal the information.

### *Committee Programming*

As one of my last acts as President, I proudly tried to uproot the entire Student Government system of events that has effectively been in place for years! Yay for shaking up the system!

Really, though, it doesn't make any sense why we require chairs to do entire weeks of programming at certain times of the year. Give them more flexibility, and space these events out more for the sake of our budget and sanity. I'm curious to see how this goes, but I think it could definitely help us focus more on policy, which is our main goal. Best of luck!

### *New Curriculum*

Lol, I don't even know what else I can say. Four years of these chats and I'm both ready to move on and I just so wish I could see it go into effect. Stay on top of these changes, even the seemingly small ones, because those could still majorly impact students. Also send me updates of Symposium.

<3 #truluvstugov, Deanna "Danger" Schmidt signing out! <3