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# THE COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

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## STUDENT SENATE CONSTITUTION

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## I. Purposes and Powers

### 1. Preamble.

We, the students of the Columbia University School of Law, believing that student life is best served through dialogue and participatory administrative decision-making, do establish the Columbia Law School Student Senate.

### 2. Purposes.

The Senate shall:

- A. Serve as a representative body to discuss the affairs of the Law School and the quality of life of the students;
- B. Maintain a dialogue with the Administration and Faculty of the Law School, represent the students on all Student-Faculty Committees, and advocate student interests and inform the students when appropriate;
- C. Discuss matters concerning the broader University community, and present and support conclusions to the University Senate and the University administration;
- D. Promote the social and general welfare of the students, and foster a sense of friendship and respect within the Law School and in our larger university community and neighborhood;
- E. Act to develop and implement programs advancing student aspirations and concerns, and serve the student body by organizing services and activities.

### 3. Powers.

The Senate shall have any authority necessary and proper to carry out its enumerated purposes except for those powers expressly denied in writing by the Dean of the Faculty of the Law School. The Senate shall have the express and sole authority to establish a student activity fee and appropriate all the funds thereby generated.

## II. Statement of Responsibility

Each Senator's responsibility shall be enumerated in the Statement of Responsibility, which shall be signed by each Senate candidate when submitting a candidate statement for election to the Senate. The statement shall read as follows:

"If elected to the Senate, I hereby agree:

1. To represent the entire student body diligently and faithfully;
2. To listen to student concerns and voice those concerns before the Senate;
3. To help foster an environment of cooperation, community and respect among the members of the student body;
4. To attend all mandatory Senate committee and general meetings and functions commensurate with Senate attendance policies; and

5. To assist and participate in Senate functions, including but not limited to those enumerated in this Constitution and By-laws and commensurate with Senate work rotation policies.

If I fail to use a good faith effort to abide by the aforementioned conditions, I agree to resign from the Senate and understand that if I do not tender my resignation, the Senate may remove me from office.”

### III. Membership

#### 1. Apportionment.

The Senate shall be composed of:

- A. The first-year, second-year, third-year, and LL.M./J.S.D. classes shall each elect up to twelve senators at-large from the members of their class. If under twelve are elected, the number of senators will be as elected, unless a special election is called for by the special election procedures under Article III(4), or the number of elected senators in a class is fewer than five.
- B. One of the second-year J.D. class Senators shall be a transfer student elected at-large by their fellow transfer students. Joint degree students shall, during their final year, be members of the third-year class.
- C. The Law School’s representative or representatives to the University Senate, who shall be elected pursuant to University Statutes.

#### 2. Spring Senate.

The Post-Spring/Pre-Fall Elections Senate shall consist of all Senators elected during the Spring Elections and a continuing University Senator and shall be known hereafter as the “Spring Senate.”

#### 3. Eligibility for Office.

No person shall be a Senator who will not be in residence at Columbia Law School for at least one full academic semester during the year for which she or he is elected.

#### 4. Terms of Office.

Senators elected in the Spring begin their term of office when new officers are elected. Senators elected in the Fall or in a special election begin their term upon election. A term ends when new officers are elected for the year following the year for which the Senator was elected unless otherwise provided within this Constitution. In the event of a vacancy on the Senate, the Parliamentarian shall hold a special election to fill the seat within 14 days unless determined to be impracticable by the Executive Board. In the event that the Executive Board has not scheduled a special election, such an election can be forced by submission of a petition of 10 or more Senators.

#### 5. Attendance Policy.

The Senate shall maintain an attendance policy for its members. Records of attendance shall be kept, and the Senate and its Executive Board shall establish the policy in its By-Laws. The Senate and its

Executive Board shall enforce the attendance requirements and are authorized to review the membership of any Senator who violates attendance policies.

#### 6. Expulsion for Non-Attendance.

In the event that the Executive Board reviews a Senator's continued membership in the Senate pursuant to Section 5 of this Article, that Senator shall be given notice of the review and be allowed a hearing at her or his request before the entire Executive Board. A four-fifths ( $4/5$ ) majority of the entire Executive Board shall be required to expel a Senator. The Executive Board shall give notice to the Senate of its decision in the event it expels a Senator. At the request of the expelled Senator, the Senate at its next Regular Meeting shall hear all appeals as to fact and procedure from the findings of the Executive Board and may reverse the expulsion by a two-thirds ( $2/3$ ) majority of the Senators present.

#### 7. Expulsion for Other Reasons.

Senators may be expelled for reasons other than absence by a vote of a two-thirds ( $2/3$ ) majority of the Senators present at a Special Meeting. All Senators must receive notice of the actual expulsion motion at least one week prior to the Special Meeting. Expulsion motions may be introduced only by written resolution stating the reasons for expulsion and signed by at least one-third ( $1/3$ ) of the entire Senate or four-fifths ( $4/5$ ) of the entire Executive Board.

### IV. Elections and Referenda

#### 1. Spring and Fall Elections.

By no later than April 15, the Senate shall hold elections (the "Spring Elections") to determine the second and third year members for the upcoming year, except that one second year seat shall be reserved for a transfer student to be elected in the Fall Elections. By no later than September 30, the Senate shall hold elections (the "Fall Elections") to determine the first-year, LL.M., J.S.D. members for that year.

#### 2. Election Commission.

Before each election and referendum the President, with the advice of the Executive Board, shall appoint an Election Commission of not less than five nor more than nine students over which the Parliamentarian shall preside. If the Parliamentarian is a candidate for office in that election, the President shall designate another Senator to preside over the Commission. The Election Commission shall conduct the above elections and referenda. No student serving on the Election Commission may be a candidate in that election. Any member of the Executive Board may serve on the Election Commission if not running for further elective office.

#### 3. Procedures for Elections.

No candidate shall be elected who has not submitted a statement of candidacy to the Election Commission, except for write-in candidates. This statement must be submitted by the deadline set by

the Election Commission, in order for that candidate's name to appear on the ballot. The Election Commission shall notify all students of the election at least five (5) days prior to the deadline for candidacy statements. The Election Commission shall provide all candidates a copy of the rules of the election after submission of candidacy statements.

#### 4. Elections Disputes.

In the case of any alleged impropriety regarding the qualifications or legitimacy of a candidate, the Election Commission shall be the judge and render a decision. Any decision of the Election Commission may be appealed to the Senate. A two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Senate is required to reverse the Commission's judgment. The Senate's decision shall be final. The Election Commission shall follow the voting procedures as provided in the By-Laws.

#### 5. Recall Elections Procedure

Senate members may be recalled by students in their class. To trigger a recall, students must present the Parliamentarian of Senate with a petition that contains the signatures of at least twenty-five (25) percent of the total number of students that voted in the election. Only the signatures of students in the same class as a Senator will be counted towards the recall requirement. The Parliamentarian will ensure that the petition meets the required number of signatures and if it does, students in the Senator's class will participate in a recall vote. If the students want to recall the Parliamentarian, then the President shall ensure that the petition meets the required number of signatures. A Senator will be recalled if two-thirds (2/3) of the students participating in a recall vote against that Senator. If less than twenty (20) percent of students in a given class participate in a recall election, then the Senator will remain in his or her position.

### v. Executive Board

#### 1. Election of Officers.

Within five to fourteen days after the Spring elections, by secret ballot and by majority vote with run-off elections if necessary, the following officers shall be elected in the following order: President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary and Parliamentarian. The officers shall serve from their election until the following election of officers at the first meeting after Spring elections. Only members of the Spring Senate shall be eligible to vote in this election.

#### 2. Composition and Quorum.

The above officers shall constitute the Executive Board. They shall have all the duties and powers designated and any further ones as delegated by the Senate, so long as not in contravention to this Constitution and By-Laws. The President or any two officers may call a meeting of the Board, but at least three officers must be present to conduct business.

### 3. Removal of Officers.

Officers may be removed from office for any reason by two-thirds (2/3) of members present at a Special Meeting called for such purpose and at which a quorum exists. Senators shall be notified of the removal resolution at least one week in advance. Motions for removal may be introduced only by written resolution stating the reasons for removal and signed by at least one-third (1/3) of the Senators or four-fifths (4/5) of the Executive Board. Removal from office does not affect membership status on the Senate.

### 4. Vacancies in Offices.

In the event of a vacancy in any of the offices, with the exception of the Presidency, a successor shall be elected from the Senate as soon as practicable.

### 5. Officer Powers and Duties.

The powers and duties of the officers shall be as follows:

#### A. [President]

The President shall be the chief executive officer of the Senate. She or he shall be responsible for the prompt and orderly execution of this Constitution and all resolutions of the Senate, represent the Senate at official functions, serve as the primary student liaison to the Administration, and further the purposes of Article I of the Constitution. In addition, she or he shall preside over Senate and Executive Board meetings, prepare and distribute the agenda for Senate meetings, and call meetings of the Executive Board and Emergency Meetings of the Senate. She or he shall also coordinate the complaints and suggestions to and reports from Senate members on Student Faculty Committees. She or he shall appoint the Senate Communications Director.

#### B. [Vice President]

The Vice President shall preside over the Senate and Executive Board in the absence of the President and shall succeed to the office of the President in the event a vacancy arises. She or he shall preside over the Student Life and Social Activities Committee as Chair and shall further the purposes of Article I of the Constitution. Her or his duties shall include, but not be limited to, supervising the organization of social activities as well as supervising the publicity of Senate activities.

#### C. [Treasurer]

The Treasurer shall be the chief fiscal officer of the Senate. She or he shall be in charge of all funds of the Senate, however generated, and collect and distribute such funds only as authorized by vote of the Senate or Executive Board. She or he shall keep complete records of all financial transactions according to standard accounting principles and shall make regular financial reports to the Senate, which shall be in writing, at least once per semester. She or he shall preside over the Budget Committee as Chair. After officer elections, the incoming and outgoing Treasurers, with the advice of the outgoing Budget Committee, shall create standard budget allocation and appeal forms, and establish procedures for the Budget Committee in accordance with the guidelines found within the By-Laws.



#### D. [Secretary]

The Secretary shall be in charge of keeping all records except those relating to fiscal matters under the purview of the Treasurer. She or he shall keep minutes of all Senate meetings and post conspicuously a copy of the same as soon as approved by the members. She or he shall be in charge of the administration and execution of Senate correspondence, assure the efficient operation of the Senate's office, and be responsible for the orderly transmission of all Senate records and history to the newly-elected Secretary. She or he shall be responsible for keeping track of attendance by Senators at Student-Faculty Committee meetings and at internal Senate standing and ad hoc committee meetings. She or he shall also supervise the preparation and timely distribution of Course Evaluations. She or he shall preside over the Community Action Committee as Chair.

#### E. [Parliamentarian]

The Parliamentarian shall assist in the orderly operation of meetings and elections, interpret the Student Senate Constitution and By-Laws, and serve as a supervisory member of ad hoc committees designated by the Executive Board. She or he shall preside over the Law School Student Organization Recognition Committee and all Election Commissions designated by the President, unless ineligible under Article IV of the Constitution.

### 6. Procedures for Election of Officers.

A vote of the majority of incoming eligible senators present at the Executive Board election is required to elect the Executive Board members. In Executive Board elections, the President votes with a closed ballot, but her or his vote is counted only in the case of a tie, with the exception of the presidential election where there will be no tie-breaking vote. All officers except the Parliamentarian and the President may speak on the floor during the election meeting. If either the President or the Parliamentarian is running for elective Executive Board offices then the next highest ranking Board member(s) (Vice President then Treasurer then Secretary) shall serve as substitute(s) for either person for purposes of these elections during the election meeting, although he or she shall still be able to participate in determining the procedures for the meeting as outlined below. The Executive Board shall determine procedures for the meeting including, but not limited to, taking proxies, length of speeches, length of Senator's comments and questions to candidates and shall announce these procedures to all those eligible to vote at least five (5) days before the election meeting.

## VI. Meetings

### 1. Regular Meetings.

A Regular Meeting of the Senate is one in which routine business of the Senate is conducted in furtherance of the Constitution and By-Laws. Regular Meetings shall be held at least twice per month during the academic year except during May and December, and they may be held more frequently by a majority vote of the Executive Board. The Senate may address any topic typically reserved for a Special Meeting during any Regular Meeting of the Senate.

### 2. Special Meetings.

A Special Meeting of the Senate shall be called to discuss issues that need specific attention. Such

issues include, but are not limited to, Constitutional and By-Law amendments, expulsion, budget allocations, and Student Activity Fee. A Special Meeting may be called by either the President, any two (2) members of the Executive Board, or one-third (1/3) of the Senate. Written notice of the meeting shall be placed in each Senator's folder, electronic mail or their equivalent, at least seven (7) days in advance. Other business may be discussed at a Special Meeting, but the special business must be addressed and concluded first.

### 3. Emergency Meetings.

An Emergency Meeting of the Senate shall be called to deal with urgent issues that require immediate attention. An Emergency Meeting may be called by either the President, any two (2) members of the Executive Board, or one-third (1/3) of the Senate. The meeting shall be preceded by as much notice as possible, and in the event that the meeting is called by one-third of the Senators, such notice shall not be less than twenty-four (24) hours. Notice may be given by phone, electronic mail or in person, and an attempt must be made to notify each Senator.

### 4. Meeting Attendance Compulsory.

Attendance at Regular, Special, and Emergency Meetings shall be compulsory. Any other event or meeting shall be designated as compulsory by a majority vote of the Senate at a meeting held at least one week prior to such event, and notice shall be given in writing through the student folders, electronic mail or their equivalent, to all Senators not present at such vote, at least seven (7) days prior to the event.

### 5. Prohibited Dates for Meetings.

No Regular or Special Meetings shall be convened on weekends, holidays, or during vacation periods. No Emergency Meetings shall be convened on holidays or during vacation periods.

### 6. Emergency Authority.

In the event of an emergency that requires immediate action before the Senate can meet, including emergencies arising during vacation periods, the President, with the advice and consent of the Executive Board when possible, shall act for the Senate. In such event, the President shall inform the Senate of her or his action(s) at the earliest possible time.

### 7. Quorum and Open Meetings.

All meetings of the Senate, whether Regular, Emergency, or Special, shall require a quorum of at least one-half (1/2) of the Senate in order to conduct business, pass Resolutions or approve changes to the Constitution or By-Laws. Members of the Law School community may attend Senate Meetings but may not participate. A meeting may be closed by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Senate or a four-fifths (4/5) vote of the Executive Board.

## 8. Voting Thresholds.

Votes of the Senate shall pass if supported by a majority of the members present at a meeting at which a quorum exists, except when the Constitution or By-Laws require a higher percentage. Amendments to the By-Laws shall pass if supported by two-thirds (2/3) of members present at a Special Meeting called for such purpose and at which a quorum exists. Votes may be taken by voice or by show of hands, but any Senator may require that the tally be recorded for a show of hands, and one-fifth (1/5) of the Senate may require a roll call vote.

## 9. Effective Dates of Resolutions and By-Laws.

Resolutions and By-Laws shall take effect upon passage unless a later time is specified. Resolutions and By-Laws shall remain in effect until repealed unless another date is specified.

## 10. Authorities and Rules of Order.

Senate meetings shall be governed by this Constitution and the By-Laws. The Senate may, from time to time, establish standing or special rules consistent with this Constitution or the By-Laws. All other rules of order shall be determined by the presiding officer with the advice of the Parliamentarian.

# VII. Revenues and Expenditures

## 1. Student Activity Fee.

Each year, the Senate shall hold a Special Meeting for the purpose of determining, in accordance with instructions promulgated by the University Office of Student Information Services, both the preliminary budget and the Student Activity Fee for the following academic year. Changes to the Student Activity Fee shall pass if supported by two-thirds (2/3) of members present at a Special Meeting called for such purpose and at which a quorum exists. In the event such majority is not achieved, the Fee shall not be subject to change until the next such Special Meeting. The Student Activity Fee shall appear as a term-bill charge for all students and shall not exceed one-half of one percent (0.5%) of the J.D. program tuition projected for the following academic year.

## 2. Other Revenues.

The Senate may, with the consent of the Administration, introduce concessions or hold events for the Law School community in order to generate revenue. The Senate reserves the right to sell, rent, subcontract, or franchise the proceeds and/or management of such revenue-producing operations.

## 3. Expenditures by Senate.

The Senate shall exercise exclusive control over the spending of funds obtained under Sections 1 and 2 of this Article. The Senate shall spend such funds to further the purposes of this Constitution. In addition, the Senate may, at its discretion, delegate the right to spend Senate funds to students and student organizations who apply to the Senate for such right. Once a disbursement of Senate funds has

been authorized, the Treasurer shall execute such disbursement on behalf of the Senate. Such expenditures shall be governed by the By-Laws.

#### 4. Expenditures by Other Entities.

The delegation to students and student organizations of the right to spend Senate funds shall be governed by the By-Laws.

### VIII. Committee Policy

#### 1. Student-Faculty Committee Membership.

The Senate shall provide student representatives to each Student-Faculty Committee, as defined in the By-Laws.

#### 2. Standing and Ad Hoc Committees.

The Senate shall establish standing and ad hoc internal committees as required. The purposes and responsibilities of the standing committees shall be as set forth in the By-Laws.

#### 3. Committee Service Required.

The University Senator and internal Senate committee chairs shall serve on at least one (1) internal Senate committee. All other Senators shall serve on at least two (2) internal Senate committees. Refusal to satisfy the provisions of this Section may be grounds for review of the Senator's membership, as provided in Section 5 of Article III of the Constitution.

#### 4. Selection of Committee Members

Membership on internal Senate committees, both standing and ad hoc, shall be open. The Executive Board shall appoint members only to those internal Senate committees for which there are fewer than three members. The Executive Board shall select one Senator from each class to serve on each of the Student-Faculty Committees. Committee assignments shall be made no later than October 15.

#### 5. Committee Chairs and Reporting.

The Chair of each internal Senate committee shall be chosen by the President with the advice and consent of the Executive Board, except as otherwise provided in the Constitution and By-Laws. Internal committees shall report and make recommendations to the Senate, and their actions are reviewable by the Senate.

#### 6. Internal Committees Designated.

The internal committees shall include, but not be limited to Student and Academic Affairs, Student Life and Social Activities, Budget, Community Action, Law School Student Organization Recognition

and Graduation.

## 7. Duration of Committee Service.

Notwithstanding Article III of the Constitution, members of the Budget and Graduation Committees shall continue to serve in their capacity as committee members through Commencement Day of the academic year for which they were elected or appointed.

# IX. Ratification and Amendment

The Constitution and any amendment may be proposed by: Either the student body or the Student Senate can propose changes to this constitution in the form of amendments.

## 1. Effective Date of this Constitution.

This Constitution takes effect from the election of new Senators near the end of the Spring semester of 1990.

## 2. Approval of this Constitution and Amendments Thereto.

The Constitution and any amendment to the Constitution shall be approved by two-thirds (2/3) of the students voting in a ratification referendum which follows the guidelines set forth in Section 4 of this Article. At least 10 percent of the student body must vote for the referendum to be valid.

## 3. Proposal of this Constitution and Amendments Thereto.

The Constitution and any amendment may be proposed by:

- A. The senate may propose an amendment by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Senators present at a meeting called at which a quorum exists.
- B. The student body can propose an amendment by presenting a petition to the Parliamentarian that contains the signatures of at least fifteen percent of the student body. The Parliamentarian must certify the petition if it meets the required number of unique student signatures.

## 4. Referendum Procedures.

A ratification referendum shall be held within thirty days – not including vacation days – of the proposal of the Constitution or of any amendment. The student body shall be given notice of the referendum at least seven (7) days before the referendum is held. Notice may be satisfied by placement of a written announcement in the folder, electronic mail or their equivalent, of each law student. If the referendum is for an amendment proposed by petition, one representative of the signers of the petition shall have the right to be present to observe the tallying of the ballots.

Passed Senate: March 20th, 2012  
Effective April 2nd, 2012

Amended April 20th, 2017

— Executive Board —

— Constitution and By-Laws Committee —

Nona Farahnik, President

Sean Berens, Vice President

Rahul Desai, Treasurer

Aaron Rubin, Secretary

Steven Jean, Parliamentarian