

CONSTITUTION OF THE COLUMBIA BLACK LAW STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

(Current as of 02/13/2023 amendments)

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CONSTITUTION OF THE COLUMBIA BLACK LAW STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

PREAMBLE

We, the Students of the Columbia University School of Law, acknowledge the need to assume a proactive role in the development of the Black Legal Community, articulate and promote the needs of Black Law Students, increase the degree of professionalism among Black attorneys, encourage and prepare Black secondary and collegiate students for higher education, and increase awareness of and commitment to the needs of the Black Community as a whole, and do therefore establish the Constitution of the Columbia Black Law Students Association. The purpose of the Columbia Black Law Students Association shall be to: articulate and promote the professional needs and goals of Black Law Students, foster and encourage professional competence, focus upon the relationship of the Black Law Student and the Black Attorney to the American legal structure, instill in the Black Attorney and Law Student a greater awareness and commitment to the needs of the Black community, influence the legal community to bring about meaningful change to meet the needs of the Black community, adopt and implement a policy of economic independence, encourage Black Law Students to pursue careers in the judiciary, and do all things necessary and appropriate to accomplish these purposes.

ARTICLE I Name

This organization shall be known as the Columbia Black Law Students Association, hereinafter referred to as "BLSA."

ARTICLE II Affiliation

BLSA is a member chapter of the National Black Law Students Association.

ARTICLE III Membership

Section 1: Eligibility for Membership

All law students currently matriculated at Columbia University School of Law shall be eligible for membership.

Section 2: Classification of Membership

1. Membership in BLSA shall consist of dues-paying law students currently registered and attending Columbia University School of Law on a full or part-time basis. Active membership may be conferred at any time by payment of dues.
2. A member of BLSA is also classified as a member of the National Black Law Students Association.

Section 3: Duties of Membership

1. Regular participation in the activities of BLSA shall be incumbent upon each chapter member.
2. The dues-paying obligation of active members may be waived if a chapter member is unable to meet this requirement due to extenuating circumstances. The Executive Board shall make such a determination.
3. Active members must participate in one BLSA community service activity each year. The Executive Board may approve alternatives for meeting this requirement.
4. All first year students must participate in no fewer than one (1) committee as described in Section 3 of Article VI in this Constitution or any ad hoc committees created by the Executive Board.
5. All first year students are strongly encouraged to participate in BLSA's mentorship program.

Section 4: Rights of Membership

Only members shall be entitled to all privileges of BLSA, including, but not limited to the privileges of voting, holding office, nominating a candidate for elected office, removing a member of the Executive Board and ratifying and amending this Constitution.

ARTICLE IV Officers

Section 1: Eligibility of Officers

Persons eligible to hold office in BLSA must be active chapter members and in good academic standing, pursuant to the guidelines of Columbia University School of Law.

Section 2: Classification of Officers

The BLSA officers shall be: President, Vice President, Secretary & Communications Chair, Treasurer, Community Service Chair, Social Chair, Social Consciousness Chair, two Third- Year Representative, and two First-Year Representatives.

Section 3: Executive Board

The BLSA officers shall collectively be referred to as the "Executive Board."

Section 4: Term of Office

1. Executive Board members other than First-Year Representatives shall take office by the last day of Spring Semester classes immediately following their election.
2. First-Year Representatives shall take office within one-week of their fall election. Their term shall expire by the last day of Spring Semester classes.

Section 5: Duties of Officers

The officers shall perform the following duties and all others necessary for the efficient functioning of BLSA and the Executive Board. These duties shall include weekly attendance at each Executive Board meeting and each General Body meeting. The hierarchy of officers follows the order below.

1. President: The President shall be the representative and spokesperson of BLSA. The President shall have ultimate responsibility for all activities and funds of BLSA. The President shall chair all meetings of the Executive Board and the chapter membership. The President shall attend the Regional and National BLSA conferences.
2. Vice President: The Vice President shall have responsibility for all standing and ad-hoc committees of BLSA. The Vice President will assume the responsibilities of the President in the event of the incapacity, absence or removal of the President. The Vice President shall assist the President and other officers with any responsibilities as needed. The Vice President shall attend the Regional and/or the National BLSA conferences.
3. Secretary & Communications Chair: The Secretary & Communications Chair shall chair the Communications/Historian Committee and be responsible for maintaining the records and correspondences of BLSA. The Secretary shall be responsible for the maintenance and distribution of minutes, agendas and announcements regarding the meetings of the Executive Board and chapter membership. The Secretary shall maintain the BLSA Membership Newsletter, mailing list, email inbox, and assist in maintenance of the website(s) and social media channels. The Secretary shall assist the

President and other officers with additional responsibilities as needed.

4. Treasurer: The Treasurer shall be responsible for maintaining all finances as well as overseeing and coordinating fundraising activities of BLSA. The Treasurer shall make biannual financial reports to the Executive Board at the first Executive Board meeting of each semester. The Treasurer shall be responsible for receipt of mail sent to BLSA. The Treasurer shall assist the President and other officers with additional responsibilities as needed.

5. Community Service Chair: The Community Service Chair shall be responsible for coordinating all community service activities of the chapter. This Community Service Chair shall coordinate no fewer than two events per semester that provide opportunities for all active members to participate. The Community Service Chair will chair the Community Service Committee. The Community Service Chair shall appoint the Jailhouse Bookclub Subcommittee Chair. The Community Service Chair shall assist the President and other officers with community facing activities and additional responsibilities as needed.

6. Social Chair: The Social Chair shall be responsible for securing venue and food for chapter meetings, planning no fewer than two social events each semester. The Social Chair shall plan an annual retreat in the Fall Semester of every year. The Social Chair shall chair the Social Committee.

7. Social Consciousness Chair: The Social Consciousness Chair shall plan events/campaigns around social justice issues that affect the Black Community. The Social Consciousness Chair shall organize events that improve the social and academic climate for Black law students at Columbia Law School. This includes partnering with other student groups, administrators, faculty, and staff, as appropriate, to advocate for the needs of Black law students. The Social Consciousness Chair shall work with the President and Vice President to identify changes that would most benefit Black law students. The Social Consciousness Chair will work with the Social Justice Initiatives career office to create public-sector focused events and programming. The Social Consciousness Chair shall maintain regular communication with their BLSA counterparts and other student leaders at New York area law schools., The Social Consciousness Chair shall chair the Social Consciousness Committee. The Social Consciousness Chair shall plan events, including The Open Mic Night, in the month of February in order to celebrate Black History month with the assistance of the Social Consciousness Committee and First-Year Representatives.

8. Third-year Representative(s): The Third-year Representative(s) shall be responsible for the planning of no fewer than one programming event per semester for their class. The Third-year Representative(s) shall ensure that the views of third year students are adequately represented. The Third-year Representative(s) shall ensure that the views of LLM members are adequately represented.

9. First-year Representatives: The First-year Representatives shall be responsible for the planning of no fewer than one event per semester. The second semester event should be during Black History Month, preferably educational or charitable in nature. First-year Representatives shall ensure that the views of first year students are adequately represented. The First Year Representatives shall lead the General Body Meeting during Black History Month.

10. Public Interest Chair: The Public Interest Chair shall observe and respond to the needs of the Chapter's Public Interest community as an elected member, with E-Board voting power.. This group comprises two categories of active members: those pursuing public interest post-graduate employment and those heavily participating in social justice work during law school. The Chair may appoint a deputy chair to assist with material duties, including, but not limited to: collaborating with the social consciousness chair, organizing professional development events for public interest active members, and planning social events for the Chapter's Public Interest community. The Chair shall assist other board members as needed.

11. Each Executive Board member shall provide an official transition report consisting of, but not limited to, a detailed synopsis of yearly activities and important contacts. The transition report shall be conferred on the incoming Executive Board by the first day of July.

ARTICLE V Election of Officers

Section 1: Election Chair

1. The Election Chair shall be appointed by the Executive Board, shall be a member of the Executive Board, and shall not vote or be a candidate for an elected position during his or her tenure.
2. Subject to the approval of the Executive Board, the Election Chair shall supply all necessary details for the election procedure and shall promulgate any necessary rules pertaining and proxy and absentee voting.

Section 2: Nominations

1. Candidates for all elected positions may be nominated by active chapter members or by self-nomination through submission of a written notice of candidacy to the Election Chair during a nomination period determined by the Election Chair.
2. A candidates' meeting shall be held following the nomination period to allow all candidates to make brief statements and answer questions before the chapter membership. The time of this meeting shall be determined by the Election Chair.
3. At the beginning of the candidates' meeting, additional candidates may be verbally nominated by active chapter members or through self-nomination. This nomination period shall expire before the candidates' statements are presented.

Section 3: General Rules of the Election of the Executive Board

1. The Executive Board, with the exception of First-Year Representatives, shall be elected by a majority of active members. First-Year Representatives shall be elected by a majority of first-year members.
2. All members shall vote by ballots prepared by the Election Chair.
3. Each active member shall have one vote.
4. In the event that no candidate receives a simple majority of votes cast for a particular position, a subsequent election, between the two candidates receiving the most votes, shall be held until one candidate receives a simple majority of votes cast.
5. In the event of a tie vote, a subsequent election, between the tied candidates shall be held until one candidate receives a simple majority of the votes cast.
6. All grievances concerning the election procedure shall be directed to and resolved by the Election Chair with approval of the Executive Board. Any member of the Executive Board filing and/or involved in a grievance must recuse themselves from the decision-making process.

ARTICLE VI Standing Committees

Section 1: Classification of Committees

BLSA shall have thirteen (13) standing committees: Academic Development, Admissions, Alumni Development, Community Service, Health & Wellness Committee, Mentorship, Paul Robeson Conference, Paul Robeson Gala, Professional Development, Social, Social Consciousness, Communications/Historian, and Scholarship.

Section 2: Composition of Committees

1. Each committee shall be chaired or co-chaired by chapter members. . Committees shall be composed of chapter members on a voluntary basis, unless stated otherwise in part three of this section. Each committee, unless stated otherwise in part three of this section, shall consist of chapter members. The Vice President serves as the liaison between the committee and the Executive Board.
2. For the purposes of this section, a student's class is determined by the Registrar's Office.
3. For purposes of this section, the Mentorship Committee shall only have a chair or co-chairs, and no committee members.

Section 3: Committee Descriptions

1. Academic Development is responsible for enriching the academic experiences of all BLSA members with a special focus on 1L students.
2. Admissions shall be responsible for outreach to prospective and admitted students. The committee chair(s) should maintain a relationship with the Admissions Office.
3. Alumni Development is responsible for maintaining a relationship with BLSA Alumni both directly, and through the Alumni Development office. Alumni Development shall also plan an Alumni Reception each semester, as well as other events. The Alumni Development Committee must maintain the Alumni Database as well as produce an Alumni Newsletter at least one time per semester.
4. Communications/Historian is responsible for maintaining and updating all BLSA websites, documenting BLSA events through photography and other mediums, and recording BLSA history.
5. Community Service shall assist the Community Service Chair. The committee is responsible for community service and political activities.
 - a. Jailhouse Book Club: The committee will include a Jailhouse Book Club Subcommittee. The Chair of the Subcommittee will be selected by the Community Service Chair. The Jailhouse Book Club Subcommittee Chair will oversee the Jailhouse Book Club programming, logistics, and board.
6. Health & Wellness Committee shall organize at least 1 event per semester that raises awareness around or increases access to health and wellness for all BLSA members. The committee is responsible for coordinating initiatives and increasing access to useful self-care resources that are tailored to the unique and elevated needs of Black students and people of color. The committee shall plan events that are appropriate for all members.
7. Paul Robeson Conference shall organize the annual Paul Robeson Conference each spring. The committee is responsible for selecting a topic or theme, confirming panelists and all aspects of logistics dealing with the conference.
8. Paul Robeson Gala shall organize the annual Paul Robeson Gala. The committee is responsible for selecting an honored guest(s) and alumni honoree(s) and organizing all logistics concerning the gala.
9. Professional Development is responsible for planning events that enrich the professional development of all BLSA members. The committee shall plan events that are appropriate for each class level and for public and private sector employment. The chairs shall work with the Offices of Career Services, Social Justice Initiatives, and Judicial Clerkships to plan and promote relevant programming.
10. Social shall plan social events for the entire BLSA membership, including the monthly general body meetings and the annual BLSA retreat in the fall. The committee shall assist the Social Chair as needed.
11. Social Consciousness shall assist the Social Consciousness Chair in planning events for Black History Month, and shall assist the Social Consciousness Chair as needed.
12. Scholarship is responsible for administering and selecting the recipients of BLSA scholarships. The committee will be comprised of seven members appointed by the President, and chaired by one chapter member . The committee will be comprised of: the chapter member as chair, two members of the faculty of Columbia Law School, whether full-time or adjunct faculty, one member of Student Services of Columbia Law School, one member of the Financial Aid Office of Columbia Law School, one BLSA alumnus or a 3L former BLSA Board member, and the BLSA President. The committee will be governed by the BLSA Scholarship document.

ARTICLE VII Governance

Section 1: The Executive Board

1. Each Executive Board member shall have one vote, except the President who only votes in cases of a tie. The President shall chair all votes.
2. The Executive Board shall have the power to implement all programs and administer all business matters concerning BLSA.
3. The Executive Board shall have the power to create ad-hoc committees deemed necessary to carry out BLSA objectives.
4. The Executive Board shall declare an office vacant if an officer becomes unable to serve for any reason.

Section 2: Special Powers of the Executive Board

1. The Executive Board shall have the power to appoint the chairpersons of all standing and ad-hoc committees.
2. The Executive Board shall have the power to remove a chairperson of a standing or ad-hoc committee for failure to fulfill his or her duties or for grave misconduct.
3. The Executive Board shall train the newly elected Executive Board members immediately following the election.
4. The Executive Board shall have the power to establish and administer scholarships. These scholarships will be governed by a separate BLSA Scholarship document, which can be amended pursuant to procedures codified in that document.

ARTICLE VIII General Body Voting Procedure

Section 1: Quorum

Quorum shall consist of one-half of the active members of BLSA and shall be required for all votes that are non-election matters. An active member may authorize another active member to serve as a proxy for all votes that are non-election matters. In order to authorize a proxy, an active member must correspond with the Elections Chair via a signed statement or email originating from their Columbia account.

Section 2: Discussion Period

There shall be a discussion and/or debate period, the length of which is to be determined by the presiding officer, on the date the vote is taken. Members may move to call the question at any time during this period. A call to question requires a two-thirds vote from the meeting's quorum.

Section 3: BLSA Statements

Proposals for official BLSA statements to the general public, not including general press releases regarding BLSA events, a unanimous Executive Board vote. BLSA statements include decisions to endorse and/or become signatories to the statements of other organizations or individuals.

Section 4: Constitutional Amendments

Amendments to this Constitution shall be adopted pursuant to Article IX below.

Section 5: Officer Elections

Officers shall be elected pursuant to Article V above.

Section 6: Other Matters

All non-procedural matters other than official BLSA statements and Constitutional Amendments to be voted on by the general BLSA body shall require a simple majority of present members' votes to pass.

ARTICLE IX Ratification, Amendments and By-Laws

Section 1: Ratification

This Constitution shall be adopted by a simple majority vote of members, where there is a quorum consisting of one-half of members.

Section 2: Amendments

1. This Constitution shall be amended pursuant to a motion receiving a two-thirds vote of Executive Board members present in a meeting with quorum.
2. All proposed amendments shall be approved by a two thirds vote of the present membership. Such a vote shall be announced in a manner reasonably calculated to notify the membership.
3. There shall be a discussion and/or debate period, the length of which is to be determined by the presiding officer, on the date the vote is taken. Members may move to call the question at any time during this period.

Section 3: By-Laws

This Constitution may be supplemented with By-Laws. The By-laws may only be adopted by a simple majority vote in a regularly scheduled meeting where there is a quorum consisting of one-half of members and shall be changed in the same manner.

ARTICLE X Impeachment

Section 1: Grounds for Impeachment

An elected officer may be impeached for failure to fulfill their duties or for grave misconduct.

Section 2: Initiation of Impeachment Procedure

1. The Executive Board may initiate an impeachment proceeding by a simple majority vote.
2. The membership may initiate an impeachment proceeding by circulating a petition stating the reasons for impeachment, attaining signatures of one-fourth of the active membership and submitting the petition to the Executive Board.

Section 3: Notice

The officer to be impeached shall be given written and verbal notice of impeachment and the reason(s) therefore within a reasonable time prior to the specially convened meeting referred to in Section 4, Subsection 1 of this Article.

Section 4: Impeachment Procedure.

1. The Executive Board shall call a specially convened meeting for the chapter membership to hear the impeachment charge and defense.
2. The highest elected official not involved in the impeachment proceeding shall chair the specially convened meeting. The hierarchy of positions are detailed in Article IV Section 5.

3. In the event the Executive Board initiates an impeachment proceeding, an Executive Board member, voting for the initiation of such proceeding, shall have an opportunity to present the case for impeachment at the specially convened meeting.
4. In the event the membership initiates an impeachment proceeding, a petitioner for the impeachment shall have an opportunity to present the case for impeachment at the specially convened meeting.
5. Any officer being impeached shall have an opportunity to respond to the case for impeachment at the specially convened meeting.
6. A vote for removal shall be held if a quorum consisting of one-half of members is present.
7. The officer shall be removed if two-thirds of the votes cast favor impeachment.