

# ADVISER FLEX GUIDE:

## ADDRESSING CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND VIRTUAL LEARNING IN MANAGING A STUDENT COUNCIL

The current pandemic and delay in returning to in-person instruction presents continuing challenges to student councils and to advisers carrying out council management duties. Students—both prospective members and current members—may also face challenges in meeting eligibility requirements as well as maintaining and fulfilling membership obligations.

The national office has prepared the following guidance to assist council advisers in navigating this uncharted territory. Councils should continue to emphasize student and staff safety in the performance of all council meetings, activities, and events.

### What Policies Must Councils Continue to Adhere to During This Time?

Councils should continue to follow their constitutions or bylaws as closely as possible and recognize that some compromises may be necessary based on circumstances. Review any modifications or changes to council procedures outlined in the constitution or bylaws and communicate them to all stakeholders; the *NatStuCo Handbook* is a good reference. In all situations, councils should:

- Make efforts to preserve selection/election criteria and candidate and member eligibility requirements.
- Acknowledge and help student members navigate special circumstances that might disrupt their abilities to perform their duties.
- Ensure that members receive due process in circumstances of discipline or removal from office. Removal from office should be used on rare occasions when other disciplinary actions were ineffective.
  - o As part of due process, removed or dismissed members have a right to appeal the decisions to their school principals.





## Eligibility

For many, the 2020 spring semester was interrupted when schools moved to remote learning and a significant number of districts directed their schools not to assign traditional grades for the latter part of the year and cancel most student activities. The decision impacted students in terms of scholarship and their engagement in a variety of events, both of which could affect their plans to run for student council office or other member position on the council

How can councils address member selections and elections under unique conditions that are taking place in learning environments this year? There are several things to keep in mind:

- Councils that include a scholastic component for eligibility may need to adjust how grades or GPA are calculated for council membership purposes.
  - o Consider temporarily lowering the required cumulative GPA, in recognition of the increased difficulty students are facing.
  - o Determine an eligibility equivalent from the nontraditional grades given in the spring.

## Elections

In addition to adapting your eligibility requirements, schools operating on distance learning and limited or modified in-person instructional models should utilize electronic forms in the election process to ensure maximum student involvement in the process.

- 1) Ensure an accessible and equitable process for interested students to become candidates and run campaigns.
- 2) Consider adding a short essay or open-ended questions component to your candidate packet that helps students establish their candidate platform and express why they are running for office.
- 3) Leverage the opportunities of web-based programs and mediums to establish a procedure for candidates to create and submit campaign materials for online viewing after being reviewed and approved by the adviser and/or election committee.

## Officer Installations

In lieu of in-person installation ceremonies, councils can hold virtual ceremonies. An excellent resource for installations can be found on the NatStuCo website in the Adviser Resource Center under Elections and

Selections, with tools that include:

- Ceremony planning suggestions
- Sample outline of a ceremony
- Suggested songs and music titles
- Sample oaths of office

[www.natstuco.org/adviser-resource-center/elections-and-selections/officer-installation-ceremonies](http://www.natstuco.org/adviser-resource-center/elections-and-selections/officer-installation-ceremonies)

## **Service: Individual Service Hours and Group Service Participation**

If your student council has required service hours for membership, the council has flexibility with regard to individual service and group service activities. They can:

- Extend the deadlines.
- Reduce the number of hours/activities required for this year.
- Revisit and expand the number and kinds of acceptable service activities.

We offer some virtual resources to help councils adapt their service requirements to accommodate social distancing and other limitations:

- This year, National Student Council is partnering with DoSomething.org to promote online voter registration drives, which can serve as a great virtual service project. More information can be found online.
- In addition, DoSomething is piloting a Volunteer Credit Program, from which students can receive a digital certificate verifying their time spent on a particular service project once completed.
- National Student Council also offers the following resources:
  - o <https://leadasap.ysa.org/gysd/#ideas>
  - o [www.pointsoflight.org/virtual-volunteering-opportunities/](http://www.pointsoflight.org/virtual-volunteering-opportunities/)
  - o [www.goodmorningamerica.com/living/story/virtual-volunteering-ways-volunteer-home-time-coronavirus-69741410](http://www.goodmorningamerica.com/living/story/virtual-volunteering-ways-volunteer-home-time-coronavirus-69741410)

In addition to these resources, councils can consider hosting the following virtual group service activities:

- Tutoring (in-person and online)
- Letter-writing or card-writing campaigns to nursing homes, first responders, or elementary students



- Video messages of hope or support

Consider allowing members to present new solutions for providing service, and use this opportunity to redefine what constitutes true service in their community. This can serve as a topic for the first council meeting of the year. We encourage councils to change the mindset about service in learning environments, and consider any efforts and activities that support the NatStuCo tenet on service: helping build a climate of caring and tolerance through volunteerism and service to others.

Finally, councils may want to consider waiving or modifying service hour requirements as long as this option applies to all student members. For this, we recommend a council vote and adviser approval. Waiving or modifying service requirements may be necessary when a high percentage of council members cannot access or participate in service opportunities in a safe and meaningful way.

## Meetings

Council meetings may be held virtually, while recognizing that some students may have limited access to their home computers. In those or similar cases:

- Make accommodations for those students, such as allowing them to check in with an adviser or a council officer. Doing so would count toward their meeting attendance.
- Record meetings and post them for members to view, and confirm viewing with the adviser.
- Consider using a message board or GroupMe type of communication to allow students to check in instead of attending live meetings. Count check-ins toward meeting attendance requirements.
- Host meetings on school-approved platforms or secure any needed permissions to use others.

## Member Expenses

If your council members typically incur expenses for council activities or apparel, consider how those will be collected this year if there is no in-person instruction at the time the funds are normally collected. If your council expenses have decreased in light of financial hardships facing some families, consider:

- Reduce member costs and waive any disciplinary action for nonpayment.
- Provide optional funding support opportunities to parents to help



support the council.

- Seek out a sponsor or philanthropic support to cover council member expenses.
- Reach out to parents who may be interested in contributing support to other students/families who may be experiencing hardships due to coronavirus or other family challenges. The purpose of these funds would be to help cover the cost of council apparel, council activities, or graduation insignia.

## Closing Thoughts

Clearly communicate all changes with parents and students in writing. Be sure to keep your administration up to date with all changes related to your council, and secure principal approval for any related to elections or those that significantly veer from current practices and policies. With any changes to your election process or service requirements, be sure to document them in your local school bylaws and communicate changes to all students and faculty in writing.

The national office would like to extend a message of thanks for all that you do for your students, whether they are members of NatStuCo or not. We understand that this year will likely bring some challenges, but we are confident that we can navigate them together.

## Contact Us

Our Customer Care Center is available to assist you with any concerns that arise this year.

**Phone: (800-253-7746, option 4)**

**Email: [NatStuCo@NatStuCo.org](mailto:NatStuCo@NatStuCo.org)**

