Q. What goes in our constitution?
The UAPPOL Student Groups Procedure outlines the basic articles required in a student group constitution in Article 2. The Constitution Template provides guidelines for the specific content that should be included in a constitution. All of these articles must be met in the body of your constitution, and not in separate bylaw or internal group policy documents. If you want to go into detail about specific processes, or create bylaws that can be more easily changed without going through a constitutional amendment procedure, those details might be better suited for bylaws or an internal procedural document.

For example, the constitution might say that the VP Events is responsible for planning 3 social events each year. The bylaws might state that the VP Events plans a Welcome Party. The procedural and transition documents could specify where the Welcome Party is usually held, how people are told about it, what kind of food is ordered, and in which term it usually happens. That way, the VP Events could customize and plan the event without having to amend the constitution.

Q. What is our registration level?
Your student group will be registered with the University of Alberta, but may also be recognized by other campus organizations in order to receive additional benefits. Your group may be registered with Campus Recreation, the Students’ Union or the Graduate Students’ Association, provided you meet certain requirements.

Q. What are our compliance requirements?
In order to operate on campus, you group must comply with all local, provincial and federal laws, and must comply with University of Alberta and Student Group Services policies, procedures and guidelines as well as the policies and procedures of your registration level. These include the following membership requirements: U of A groups must have 2/3 student members. SU groups must have 2/3 undergraduate student members, and GSA groups must have 2/3 graduate student members. All group executives must be current students.

Q. Can we include the names of our executives in the constitution?
No. Things that change from year-to-year should not be included in the constitution. If you have very specific processes for your group that you want to record but that may change frequently, you can email them to SGS to keep on file or upload them onto BearsDen – but don’t add them into your constitution.

Q. Our constitution is private. Can we still be a student group?
Constitutions are meant to be public documents. If there is an external organization that is requiring that your constitution be private, please talk to SGS. If you have just decided that you want your constitution to be private, that’s not okay – your members need to be able to participate in the operations of your student group.

Last updated March 2015
Q. Can we have a one-page constitution? What about a 100-page constitution?
SGS has no requirements for the length a constitution must be to be valid. If your group has a 100-page constitution, though, people likely won’t be able to read and interpret it effectively. (If you find that your group actually needs 100 pages of material to cover your governance, we’d suggest that you meet with us to figure out how better to structure your operations!)

Q. How often should we/can we change our constitution?
You should read your constitution once a year at the very, very minimum, so that you know what information is included in it and can ensure that your group’s operations aren’t in conflict. How often you should change it really depends on your activities. If your group has run in the same way for ten or twenty years, and the constitution is still a useful document for you during transition and yearly operations, then there’s no reason to change it. You can change it as often as you’d like, really, providing that your amendment procedures are followed.

Your group will be required to submit your constitution to SGS each year, but it will only be formally reviewed for compliance and edits each three years. This streamlines the registration process while still holding constitutions to account for their requirements under UAPPOL. If your constitution is ever amended in such a way that it comes into conflict with the law, University of Alberta, Students’ Union, Graduate Students’ Association and Student Group policies, procedures and guidelines, the higher authority will take precedence.

Q. Can we make jokes in our constitution?
Sometimes. Your group is welcome to customize certain elements of your constitution to be more entertaining or engaging, if that’s what you’re looking for – you could assign the president the title of “Master Jedi” if you wanted to. However, writing that the “Master Jedi” of the organization has supreme dictatorial powers would not be okay. Even if it were a joke to those of you who wrote it, that item would immediately be flagged at administrative levels.

Q. Our group is really small. Can we have a quorum of two members for a meeting to be valid?
No. Think about the consequences of that – you could have two executive members having coffee together, and provided that your apparatus for calling meetings is easy or nonexistent, they could decide to completely overhaul your group. SGS recommends that your quorum be as large as possible. If you have problems getting your members to come to a meeting, consider online meeting options once in a while, or provide free food, or come up with creative ways to recruit more passionate members.

Last updated March 2015
Q. If one of our executives leaves partway through the year, can we just pick someone to replace that person?
Yes. If it’s in your constitution that vacancies will be filled by appointment, SGS knows that is sometimes necessary. However, be careful – if you appoint a President to take over a Treasurer’s responsibilities, and they both have signing authority, you’ll have effectively enabled one person to clear out your bank account. Manage your risk!

Q. What happens if our group shuts down?
First of all, you need to let SGS know. Some basic procedures for group dissolution should be outlined in your constitution. Things you’ll want to think about are where any extra funds go (and it’s not okay to simply give them to the executive members) and where your resources should go if your group has collected any. SGS can help you navigate the processes of getting your group closed down if that happens, and we’re happy to help. (If your group is a Faculty Association in danger of shutting down for any reason, you will need to talk to Discover Governance.)

Q. Our external organization appoints our executive – is that okay?
No. Your executive needs to be democratically elected in some fashion. Every member should have a say in how the group is run. External affiliates should not be entirely controlling a student group’s operations; for information on ideal external affiliate relationships with student groups, contact SGS.

Q. What are voting thresholds?
A voting threshold is the number of votes required for a motion to be passed. In Robert’s Rules of Order, there are three common voting thresholds – a simple majority (more than 50%, or 50% plus one vote), a substantive majority (2/3 or 66.67%), or super majority (3/4 or 75%). Your group can decide which of these you would like to use; Robert’s Rules again has some guidelines for you. You can also decide that 100% of members should be in favour – if you’d like to do this, search for consensus-based models of procedure or decision-making.