

Resolution 3

# The University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA)

## Fall 2007 Session

October 10, 2007

*Be it Enacted by the Association, having been considered by the  
Internal Development Standing Committee, a*

### RESOLUTION

on

## **An Undergraduate Student Referendum:**

*The Nature of Student Representation*

(Decided: [Y/N/A])

#### **Nature of the Situation:**

It can be argued that student governance at Penn State University - University Park has been dismantled. This can be characterized as the absence of student decision-makers selected in a centralized, democratic process. Over time, students have been convinced that this type of student government is unable to operate effectively, or is outdated, and that a decentralized “student voice” is preferable. As this belief has become entrenched as dogma, student interest and support has declined rendering the “student voice” – in its current form the UPUA – impotent and deemed ineffective. The student body claims to desire a more effective advocate, but, the UPUA submits, what students fail to understand is that without any inherent authority, even the simplest concern requires the navigation of a complex web of groups and administrators before it can be resolved.

The decentralization of the student voice has led to several problems. First, there is zero accountability, through any democratic mechanism, to the student body for these elements. Second, the wealth of groups required to perform simple tasks leads to confusion among students, ultimately resulting in inefficiency. These problems have all but eliminated democratically made decisions and created an environment ripe for the dominance of administrative decisions in the governance of student life.

#### **Purpose of the Request:**

While student government cannot have legitimacy without the active support of students, it may not be able to gain legitimacy without receiving assistance and responsibilities from the Penn State administration. The passage of the Constitution: Revised 2007 demonstrates that the elected leadership of the UPUA is ready for a student government that has been proven to work at hundreds of other universities. However, the UPUA is a long way away from attaining the powers that students once held.

The UPUA contends that the problems outlined above cannot change through mere advocacy. This is because the administration has limited incentive to alter the current diluted structure. More importantly, centralization is difficult because the institutions that would need to be integrated into a single student government have been designed and implemented with the support of administrators. The desire for successful change, then, must have its genesis with students. Recent history has proven that the most effective way to validate an argument for change, in the eyes of the administration, is through polling the student body. Through the creation of the UPUA, a precedent has been set that student referenda are an acceptable and actionable justification for radical change in the organization of the students.

**Therefore, the UPUA believes a series of referendum questions should be devised to ask the student body if they share these views and agree that this problem needs to be corrected in the manor outlined by this Resolution. From the outcome of the referendum, the UPUA can**

**determine if the student body desires change. Then, if students mandate reform, the UPUA and all student leaders can devise solutions and advocate for their implementation.**

**Plan for Action:**

According to Article 8, Sections 1 & 4 of the UPUA Bylaws, “the UPUA may conduct referenda of the University Park Student Body to obtain information concerning any subject under its purview. A majority of those voting, with at least 10% of eligible voters participating shall be required for a decision. Decisions shall be considered binding upon the UPUA from the point of voter approval for perpetuity.” As such, the President and the Executive Board in consultation with the Internal Development Committee shall on behalf of the Association with the Assembly’s advice and final consent prepare and place a series of referendum questions before the undergraduate student body gauging their concerns and present a course of action dealing with student government centralization, with the following constraints:

1. A comprehensive and detailed plan shall be presented to the Assembly at a regularly scheduled weekly meeting by the end of November 2007 for majority approval. Parts of the plan may and should be presented to the Assembly earlier to ensure successful execution of the enclosed objectives. Only the final authorization to conduct the referendum shall qualify and be considered compliant with the constraints imposed by Article 8, Section 3 of the UPUA Bylaws.

2. The referendum shall be conducted in an appropriate manor online in the month of December 2007 starting at least two academic weeks prior to the first final-examination day of the Fall semester.

3. A budgeted advertising campaign and strategy shall be developed to advertise the referendum date(s), subject, relevance, and importance in compliance with Article 8, Section 3 of the UPUA Bylaws. In no way shall any advertisement of the UPUA be manipulative. All advertisements will serve only to inform and present the questions at hand to the undergraduate student body.

4. All referendum questions shall attempt to present the issues at hand impartially, but this requirement shall not supersede the necessity to provide proper context and relevance to the issues. The following subject matters will be incorporated into the questions:

- Understanding if undergraduate students know the roles of the following organizations: the University Park Allocation’s Committee (UPAC), Cabinet of Student Leaders (COSL), HUB Advisory Board, Student Organization Conduct Committee (SOCC), Funding Allocation Board (FAB), Student Activity Fee Board (SAFB), Student Programming Association (SPA), UPUA Legal Affairs, Off Campus Student Union (OCSU), Center for Student Engagement (CSE), Associated Student Activities (ASA), the Student Advisory Committee for Information Sciences & Technology (SAC-ITS), and the Academic Councils.
  
- Understanding if students’ believe their representatives should be elected by students or if elections are an unnecessary formality. Can unelected students appointed by non-elected students make decisions of the student body’s behalf?

- Should the UPUA, as the elected voice of the student body, have policy and other oversight authorities over organizations that discipline registered student groups, the policies and room applications for the HUB (student union), the distribution of the student activity fee monies (restrictions etc.), and the spending of student activity fee monies for execution of big ticket programs (\$100,000 projects)?
  
- Should the UPUA be the only advocacy group the administration will directly deal with, thereby forcing all other groups to involve the UPUA in their advocacy creating, as the UPUA Constitution: Origin 2006 describes as, “a unified and informed voice representing undergraduate students. . .”?
  
- Do students want centralized student decision-making and powers vested in the elected UPUA student leadership or decentralized decision-making among numerous, independent, and unelected organizations?
  
- What do students believe the function of the UPUA is and should be if not to exert policy authorities over and accountability to organizations that make decisions on behalf of the student body?

Respectfully submitted,

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Off-Campus

Tempest Reed  
On Campus

Jay W. Chamberlin  
Internal Development Chair  
At-Large

Committee Vote: 3/0/0

Chair: Jay W. Chamberlin

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Hillary Lewis, President  
The University Park Undergraduate Association

Date