

VSA

Vassar Student Association

Organization Certification Packet

2009-2010

What Is a Certified Organization? What benefits do certified groups enjoy?

The Vassar Student Association (VSA) has almost 130 certified organizations covering a wide range of activities and interests. These groups are run entirely and exclusively by students, an organizational structure that allows valuable opportunities for leadership and engagement. Our student organizations help make Vassar what it is today.

Organizations, like the College itself, change with the times. We encourage the creation of student groups that add to extracurricular life at Vassar. However, creating a new organization comes with a great deal of responsibility, from devising programming to fiscal management, to long-term challenges such as membership recruitment and retention. Certified organizations do enjoy a number of privileges over unrecognized groups; for example, they may apply to the VSA Council for funds and annual budgets. They can also reserve space on campus and use tables in the College Center. These privileges are often essential for successful programming on campus. Although starting a new organization takes dedication and commitment, the opportunity for leadership is a centerpiece of the Vassar experience. Take advantage and get involved.

The Certification Process

The process for certification follows these steps:

1. Have an initial meeting with the Vice President for Activities.
2. Read the enclosed sections of the VSA Constitution and Bylaws relating to organizations.
3. Draft a cover letter with a statement of intent and a general argument for certification.
4. Give your letter, application, constitution, and signature list to the Vice President for Activities.
5. The application is brought to the Activities Committee, which may ask you to come to answer questions, etc.
6. The application is approved by the Executive Board and sent to the VSA Council.
7. You present the application to the Council, where it will be voted upon.
8. If approved, you are an official VSA organization and added to the official list. You receive a budget number and from the Vice President for Finance. You can also apply for seed money.
9. Make sure to turn in all organization reports and other requests of the Vice President for Activities and the Vice President for Finance. These are importance responsibilities of being an organization leader.

To Do Checklist:

- ___ Complete the enclosed application questionnaire
- ___ Write a Constitution (reference template included)
- ___ Get at least 20 signatures (Remember, the more you get, the better an argument you put forth for why you should be certified). The signature list should be composed of the following components: name, class year, email address, dorm, and designation of whether or not the individual is a member or supporter of the group. This list must be fully legible and verifiable. Illegible student information will be disregarded, and discovery of fraud may seriously impede your bid for certification.
- ___ Draft a cover letter with a statement of intent addressed to the VSA.
- ___ Turn this all in (cover letter, questionnaire, constitution, and signature list) to the Vice President for Activities.
- ___ If you have any questions talk to the Vice President for Activities in the VSA Office or at VSAactivities@vassar.edu.

4. Does your group have ties to any other student group, academic department, or administrative office? If so, please explain:

5. What other organizations have you worked with in the past, and/or could you work with in the future?

6. Have you previously received funding for your group's activities? If so, who funded you and what was that funding used for?

7. List some fundraising ideas you have, in as great detail as possible:

8. Estimate your budget for next year (and itemize):

9. List some possible events your organization would hold and how they would contribute to the campus community:

10. Any other information you think we should know that is not in the other parts of your application?

Constitution Template

Use this as a guideline in creating your constitution

Questions in italics should be considered when shaping the content of your constitution.

Article I – Name

The name of this group shall be <group name>.

Article II – Purpose/Mission of the Organization

What is the mission of your group?

What does your group work to achieve or accomplish?

What values motivate that effort?

What are the opportunities or needs that your group exists to address?

What principles or beliefs guide your group's work?

Your mission statement should be about three or four sentences long.

Article III – Membership Requirements

Membership shall be open to all members of the Vassar community.

What do people need to do in order to be members?

Are there different kinds of membership? How are they different?

Who is eligible to become a member of your group?

If your group awards membership selectively (e.g. through an audition or application process), what criteria does your group look for in its members?

Article IV – Officers

The Executive Board shall be composed of four officers: the President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Only students may be officers.

1. President

The President shall call and lead all meetings of the general body and the Executive Board of the group. The President shall also be the primary contact with the VSA leadership, responsible for reporting to the Vice President for Activities.

2. Vice President

The Vice President shall be responsible for coordinating all of the group's programming events. The Vice President shall maintain contact with the SARC intern. The Vice President will also assume the responsibilities of the President in the event of an absence.

3. Secretary

The Secretary shall be responsible for all communications of the group and will record minutes at all meetings.

4. Treasurer

The Treasurer shall be responsible for all financial matters of the group and maintain an inventory of all of the group's assets, including capital items. The Treasurer shall be the liaison to the Vice President for Finance for all financial matters.

What are the officers of the organization?

What are the duties of the officers?

How are the officers elected/appointed?

There must be at least two officers: a primary contact to the VSA leadership and a contact for financial matters. Other positions can be added at your discretion.

Please do not list names of individuals in this section.

Article V – Meetings and Quorum

Meetings of the general body of the group will happen <describe frequency>. In order for the meeting to be official, at least <describe proportion> of the members must be present.

How often does your group hold meetings and what occurs at your meetings?

Who needs to be there in order for the meeting to be official?

Please do not list time-specific meetings in the constitution.

Article VI – Elections

Elections shall occur near the end of the second semester. Nominations shall be accepted from the general body of the group, and all candidates shall deliver a brief statement of their interest in and qualifications for the position. Election shall occur by secret ballot and winners will be chosen by a majority vote.

Article VII – Amendments to the Constitution

Amendments to this constitution may be made by a 2/3 majority vote of the group.

Article VIII – Impeachment or Removal of Officers

In the event that an officer of the group fails to maintain the responsibilities of the position (because of dereliction of duty, incompetence, or employment of funds or property of the group for private gain), then that officer may be removed from office by a majority vote of the general body.

This is a rough outline. Feel free to make your own adjustments as long as the information is still there. If you have any questions or would like any help talk to the Vice President for Activities.

VSA Constitution:

Article V:

Section 5: Organizations

- A. The VSA Council shall have the power to certify student organizations in accordance with the VSA Bylaws. The requirements and privileges of certification and shall be set forth in the VSA Bylaws.
- B. The VSA Council shall not certify any organization whose purpose the VSA Council feels duplicates the purpose of a previously certified organization.
- C. Organizations violating the VSA Constitution or the VSA Bylaws, or otherwise violating VSA policies, shall be subject to disciplinary action as set forth in this constitution and the VSA Bylaws.

VSA Bylaws:

Article I: VSA Council

Section 11: Activities Committee

The Activities committee shall:

- A. Be chaired by the VSA Vice President for Activities.
- B. Oversee all VSA organizations and organization partnerships, in conjunction with the Vice President for Activities.
- C. Consider all applications for certification.
- D. Suggest to the VSA Council new, and review existing, policies pertaining to organizations.
- E. Consider and recommend to the Council all disciplinary action relating to organizations.

Article IV – VSA Organizations

Section 1: Applicability

All student interest groups, clubs, sports teams, performance groups, publications, residences, and academic classes Certified by the VSA Council shall be defined as VSA Organizations, and be subject to the stipulations of the VSA Constitution and the VSA Bylaws.

Section 2: Membership

All VSA Organizations must designate one member as the organization's contact person and another member as the organization's treasurer, and register these names with the VSA Vice President for Activities.

Section 3: Meetings

- A. Meetings shall generally be open to all members of the Vassar community, unless stipulated otherwise in the organization's constitution, and be publicized. The Vassar community shall be defined as active, matriculating students, faculty, staff, and alumnae/i of Vassar College.

B. VSA Organizations may occasionally hold closed meetings as stipulated in their constitutions. Organizations may be asked to justify any closed meeting to the VSA Vice President for Activities.

Section 4: Constitutions

A. All VSA Organizations are required to draft their own constitution, stipulating the functions and objectives of the organization, the positions and responsibilities of the officers, how amendments to their constitution may be proposed and ratified, the process for election, impeachment and removal of organization's officers and organization's membership guidelines, meeting format, and the definition of quorum. Residences and classes are exempted from this requirement.

B. If any organization fails to forward a copy of their organization's constitution to the VSA Vice President for Activities, he or she may invoke disciplinary action.

C. After an organization has passed an amendment, it must be submitted to the VSA Vice President for Activities, who shall then act with all due expediency in reviewing the amendment. The Vice President for Activities has the power to veto amendments, which he/she deems to be non-structural and not affecting the nature of the organization; all other amendments are subject to the veto of the VSA Council.

D. The executive board of each VSA Organization must submit a signed and dated copy of their organization's constitution at the beginning of each academic year to the VSA Vice President for Activities. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.

E. No VSA organization's constitution may conflict with the VSA Constitution. In the event that an organization's constitution does conflict, those conflicting portions shall be null and void, with stipulations in the VSA Constitution taking precedence.

Section 5: Removal of Officers

A. Any organization's officers may be removed from office by the procedures set forth in the organization's constitution or may be removed under indictment procedures stipulated by Article X of the VSA Constitution.

B. Resignations shall be considered upon receipt of a letter to the president of the organization in question. If the president is resigning, the resignation letter shall be considered upon receipt to the vice-president of the organization. If both the president and the vice-president are resigning, or the organization does not have a vice-president, the resignation letter shall be forwarded to the VSA Vice President for Activities, or to the remaining governmental structure of the organization.

C. Any change in the organization's officers must be registered with the VSA Vice President for Activities.

Section 6: Certification

The VSA Council may certify an organization. Any organization pursuing formal Certification must consult with the VSA Vice President for Activities to discuss the objectives, membership, functions, plans, proposed budget, and other relevant aspects of the organization. The VSA Vice President for Activities may also sit in on an organization's meetings, review sample publications, or observe an organization's functions in order to assess student interest in the organization and its likelihood for long-term successful and responsible campus programming.

Section 7: Procedures for Certification

A. In order for an organization to be considered for certification, the following requirements must be met:

1. The group must have a core membership and/or strong support of at least 20 VSA members.
2. The group must show that there is no other already existing organization that duplicates the purpose and needs of their membership.

B. The group must submit a detailed description of their history, the mission statement for the proposed organization, a formal constitution, a letter requesting formal Certification, and a signed list of at least 20 VSA members who strongly support and/or plan involvement with the organization.

C. Upon approval of the VSA Vice President for Activities, the request for certification shall be brought to the VSA Executive Board and, if approved, a motion shall be brought to the VSA Council to make the group a Certified Organization. The members of the group shall be advised as to the date the vote shall take place, and shall be asked to appear before the Council in order to answer any questions Council members may have. Both the certification request and the proposed constitution shall subsequently be presented to the VSA Council for final approval.

D. Once certified, an organization is required to present a list of its executive board members to the VSA Vice President for Activities, as well as turn in organization reports upon request of the VSA Vice President for Activities.

E. Certified organizations are expected to abide by the VSA Constitution and the VSA Bylaws.

F. Certified organizations shall receive a VSA Budget number, into which they may deposit funds.

G. If a certified organization incurs a debt, it must repay that debt within two academic semesters or its recognition must be revoked. Such organizations may not re-apply for recognition or authorization for at least one calendar year. The statement of purpose shall determine if a group represents a new organization, or an old organization attempting to be re-certified.

H. A certified organization may reserve tables in the college center, reserve rooms and spaces throughout campus and officially use "Vassar" in its title.

1. If a group is not certified by the VSA Council at the meeting when the vote is held, the group may request again to be certified in one semester's time.

Section 8: Deficits

- A. Any deficit incurred by an organization in a semester shall carry over in full and continue to be the responsibility of that organization in subsequent semesters.
- B. The VSA shall not budget organizations to cover past debts.
- C. Organizations that accumulate debts are expected to have eliminated those debts through fundraising two semesters after the debt is incurred.

Section 9: Surpluses

Any surplus left by an organization at the end of a budgeting period shall remain in the organization's account.

Section 10: Monetary Responsibility

- A. Organizations are expected to spend money responsibly.
- B. At any time, the VSA Vice President for Finance and/or VSA Executive Board may inquire into purchases they deem questionable or excessive. If abuses are found, the organization and/or individuals in question may be subject to disciplinary action.

Section 11: Budgeting Eligibility

No organization shall be eligible for budgeting without formal VSA Certification, having their constitution on file with the VSA Vice President for Activities, or failing to comply with budgeting procedures.

Section 12: Bank Accounts

- A. No organization funded by the VSA shall hold funds in any bank account.
- B. All organization's funds shall be deposited in, held in, and requisitioned from an account controlled by Vassar College. Any organization refusing to deposit all funds in their VSA account shall forfeit its entire organization's budget to the Organizational Contingency Fund.

Section 13: Fundraising

- A. Fundraising shall be defined as money raised over and above the amount spent to hold the fundraising event.
- B. All organizations must fundraise in order to supplement their semester or yearly budget in a manner the organization deems appropriate and in a responsible manner.
- C. The amount of money that a VSA organization has fundraised, through outside financial assistance or otherwise, must be reported to the VSA through the organization's reports.

Section 14: Outside Financial Assistance

VSA Organizations may obtain outside financial assistance as part of their fundraising efforts under the following conditions:

- A. Before attempting to obtain outside financial assistance, all VSA organizations must consult with the VSA Vice President for Finance and the Development Office. Advertising contracts made between media organizations and corporate advertisers are subject to review/approval of the VSA Vice President for Finance and the Director of Campus Activities.
- B. Outside financial assistance shall be defined as any contributions or donations of money, services, or equipment by any company/organization outside of the VSA or Vassar College. Business transactions between VSA organizations and outside companies/organizations that result in a profit for VSA organizations are also defined as “outside financial assistance.”
- C. If the VSA Vice President for Finance determines that the VSA organization may not be able to uphold its end of the agreement, the contract shall be subject to review by the VSA Council.
- D. All financial assistance shall be a factor in the budgeting process for the semester or year.
- E. Any VSA organization attempting to obtain outside financial assistance must inform its corporate sponsor in writing that a contribution to a VSA organization may or may not be tax deductible.
- F. All solicitations of alumnae/i must be conducted in conjunction with the Development Office.

Section 15: Anticipated Revenue for Programmed Events

Treasurers must stipulate on their budget request form and in their monthly organization reports all anticipated revenue and expected attendance for all programming planned.

Section 16: Funding and Academic Credit

The VSA does not fund organizations from which student members may receive academic credit.

Section 17: Reimbursement of Students in a VSA Organization

No VSA organization, with the exception of the Classes, Resident Halls, and VSA Executive Board, may pay a member of its own constituency for services rendered to that organization.

Section 18: Political Endorsements and Funding

VSA Organizations must reimburse or pay the College for any services or facilities provided to the organizations for use in connection with political campaigns or campaigns to influence specific legislation.

Section 19: Donations to Off Campus Groups or Organizations

VSA Organizations cannot donate VSA budgeted funds or items derived from these funds to off campus organizations; such donations may only occur out of moneys which have been fundraised.

Section 20: Organization Partnerships

- A. Organization Partnerships shall be groups of organizations with similar purposes working together to coordinate their efforts.
- B. Organization Partnerships shall be established by the VSA Council upon recommendation of the VSA Vice President for Activities.
- C. Organizations shall choose which Organizations Partnership(s) they wish to be a member of, if any.
- D. Each Organization Partnership shall set its own meeting schedule and report to their members' groups and the VSA Vice President for Activities upon the request of either. Organizations shall choose from their respective executive boards a representative to their Organization Partnership(s).
- E. Each Organization Partnership shall choose its own chair, who shall be responsible for calling meetings and making applicable reports.
- F. The Community Oriented Organizations Partnership (COOP) shall be composed of organizations which share the mission of doing work in the community.

Section 21: Publications

- A. Student publications must submit bylaws stipulating the mission and purpose of the publication, the roles of the editor, the process for the inclusion of submissions including, but not limited to, letters to the editor and other responses to published material
- B. Publications shall enjoy the full right to publish without prior review or editorial control by the VSA Council.
- C. Libel and other forms of defamation will not be tolerated by the VSA.
- D. Publications shall be considered open source, allowing for the copy and redistribution of printed content with proper citation.
- E. Editors in Chief shall assume responsibility for articles published in their respective publication.
- F. Publications are defined as published written documents with editors, not including flyers.

Section 22: Organization Review Process

All VSA Certified organizations shall be reviewed on an annual basis according to the following procedure.

- A. All VSA Certified organizations are under obligation to submit a copy of their organization's constitution and any bylaws on a yearly basis, such that:
 - 1. The updated copy of the organization's constitution must include names and signatures of all executive members of the organization and any editor(s)-in-chief for any publication associated with that organization.
- B. 50% of organizations shall be reviewed each semester. Each organization shall be designated to either A or B semester. Residence Hall and classes are exempt from this process.

C. A leader of the organization shall meet with the VSA Vice President for Activities to discuss the activities of the organization. He/she may request to meet with any member of the organization's executive board or editor(s)-in-chief.

1. If deemed necessary by the VSA Vice President for Activities disciplinary action may be advised at this time. Including a recommendation of no annual budget or de-Certification.

D. If an organization fails to resubmit a constitution or meet with the Vice President for Activities for the process by the date set, he/she shall discuss the matter with the Executive Board and disciplinary action shall be recommended to the VSA Council.

Section 23: Disciplinary Action

A. At any time, the VSA Council may at the recommendation of the VSA Vice President for Activities:

1. Revoke Certification of any VSA Organization.
2. Freeze or revoke the funds of any VSA Organization.
3. Issue an official reprimand or censure of any VSA Organization.
4. Removal of an officer through the proceedings stipulated in Article X.
5. Referral to the Judicial Board for organizational financial improprieties.
6. Referral to the College Regulations Panel for personal financial improprieties.
7. The VSA Council may use the above measures to force compliance with the VSA Audit Committee.
8. The VSA Council may suspend the activity of an organization, including access to funds, approval of programming, tabling, and reservation of rooms.

B. Grounds for disciplinary action include, but are not limited to:

1. Failure to comply with the Organization Review Process.
2. Non-compliance with VSA Vice President for Activities' or VSA Vice President for Finance's requests, including attending meetings
3. Non-compliance with these Bylaws.

C. When a motion is made to censure, de-Certify, Fine an organization more than either 5% of its budget or \$100, whichever is less, freeze funds, or revoke funds of an organization or to censure an officer of an organization, the motion shall be referred to the VSA Activities Committee. A referral may be overridden by a 3/4 majority of Council.

1. The Activities Committee shall gather information from the offended party, the organization in question, and any other relevant third-party sources. The Activities Committee shall consult with the VSA Vice President for Operations and the Chair of the Judicial Board. If any member of the Activities Committee has a direct conflict of interest, an alternate from the VSA Council shall be chosen randomly.

2. The Activities Committee shall consider the VSA Constitution, Bylaws and the organization's Constitution and Bylaws, if any. Any alleged infraction of College Regulations shall be referred to the Dean of Students and the College Regulations Panel. This does not preclude action by the VSA Council.

3. In one week's time, the Activities Committee shall make a final report to VSA Council outlining the results of the inquiry and any recommended disciplinary action. After the Activities Committee makes their report, Council shall deliberate on the issue and vote on any motion recommended by the Activities Committee. Any motion made while deliberating on this issue shall not trigger another referral to the Activities Committee. The Activities Committee may request additional time from the VSA Executive Board before making a report.

4. Appeals may be made to the VSA Judicial Board within one week's time if evidence of procedural errors, lack of due process, or imposition of excessive penalty is presented. The decision of the first appeal is final.

Section 24: Lack of Activity

- A. If there is no organizational activity for two consecutive semesters, an organization may be de-certified at the discretion of the VSA Executive Board.
- B. If there is no organizational activity for three consecutive semesters, there shall be a mandatory de-certified.
- C. Organizations whose certification is revoked may re-apply for certification under normal procedures.