



8.3 SLC Formation and Purpose

8.3.1 Forming the SLC

The formation of a Student Leadership Council is required by NSF's Cooperative Agreement with all ERCs. In most centers, this council must be comprised of representatives from both undergraduate and graduate programs. SLC members are thus a subset of the entire ERC student body, but one with an important role in the center. The SLC consists of students who have a leadership position as students in the ERC--including the leaders of the SLC itself and others with specific roles and responsibilities. A typical SLC consists of the following positions (although these vary): President, Vice President, Education & Outreach Coordinator, Industrial Liaison, and SLC rep (one for each partner institution who oversees activities at that university). Sometimes chair positions are created for major ongoing tasks to be handled by the ERC--for example, Web Chair or Seminar/Lectures Chair.

SLC members are usually students who volunteer for these positions. If no one volunteers for a role that is needed, then the ERC's Education and Outreach Director typically will reach out to students who are deemed to be a good fit. Usually these are students who are active in the center and have demonstrated a willingness to take on extracurricular activities in addition to research.

Contractually, the primary responsibility of an SLC is for the organization of student activities. Further, they are responsible for carrying out a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis and communicating the results to the center director and leadership team, and to the NSF site visit team. Communication of SWOT results to the NSF site visit team is conducted in a private session. However, most SLCs see their role as broader than what is contractually specified.

NSF does not specify guidelines for the organizational structure or required activities of an SLC, except for the SWOT analysis. Therefore, it is important that an SLC establish its mission and organizational structure to best suit the research being conducted by its center, the university or universities it represents, the size of its student body, and the age of its center. Further, the manner in which the center is organized may influence the organization of the SLC. Developing SLC bylaws or an organizational charter is an excellent mechanism for tailoring the SLC to meet the organizational needs of center students.

8.3.2 Mission

A previous survey of SLCs indicated that they see their primary mission as (in order of frequency):

- *Representation and Communication* - The SLC is seen as a liaison between the student community and the center administration, and should facilitate communication among staff, students, the NSF, faculty, and industry partners on center research, organization, and function. Further, the SLC is seen as a vehicle to promote communication outside the center and provide an entry point for students wishing to get involved in the center.
- *Service* - The SLC is seen as a formal mechanism for students to contribute to the center above and beyond their research, activities facilitating outreach activities with students outside the center, such as entertaining and educational projects to excite K-12 students in engineering, and undergraduate recruitment to graduate programs.
- *Broaden the Student Experience* - The SLC is seen as providing a well-rounded experience for students through seminars/workshops, outreach, and social functions. This includes facilitation of engineering education beyond traditional methods; providing a social setting (social club) in which students from different disciplines and backgrounds within the center can network, collaborate, and build friendships with people outside individual labs; and providing an opportunity for students to have presentations and papers reviewed by their peers.
- *Organization* - The SLC is seen as a governmental entity that facilitates the organization of students working within a center to plan, coordinate, and execute activities that reflect student interests. While noted specifically as a mission, this is a really a means for performing the other missions.
- *Leadership* - The SLC is seen as providing students with a unique opportunity to develop leadership and management skills that may not be part of their curriculum.



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The survey indicated that SLCs see one or more of the following as what their main functions are or should be in fulfilling their primary mission.

Representation and Communication -

- Communication with the center administration concerning student needs and perspectives on the academic and work environment, research, curricula, and outreach development.
- Facilitate the interaction between faculty and student members of the center.
- Sponsor events such as meetings, seminars, and networking opportunities with industrial affiliates and center visitors.

Service -

- Promote engineering education outreach through support of the center's education director or coordinator and participation in educational events to encourage an interest in science and technology.
- Serve as mentors for undergraduate students selected into the summer research programs through the center.
- Assist in student recruitment for the university, the center, and the SLC.
- Promote awareness of the center (what it is and how to get involved).

Broaden the Student Experience -

- Encourage social interaction among center students through planned events. Usually, there is one "team-building" event planned for each major multi-institution meeting.
- Encourage students to initiate collaborations with students from other universities by providing travel grants.

Organization -

- Aid in the development and administration of planned responsibilities of center students, including social and professional activities.

Leadership -

- Provide a student government entity where leadership experience can be obtained.
- In many centers a student's tenure on the SLC is limited to a year to ensure that there is turnover and that the maximum number of students benefit from holding a leadership position.
- Act as an advisory council for input to major center and faculty decisions.

8.3.3 Bylaws

SLC bylaws or an organizational charter can play a significant role in good SLC practice. While there seems to be a strong positive correlation between having bylaws and a good organizational structure, the lack of bylaws does not necessarily imply the absence of an efficient SLC organization.

Based on the survey, bylaws typically provide officers with guidelines on the mission of the SLC, roles and responsibilities of the officers, membership rules, voting rights and procedures, meetings, and amendments.

Examples of bylaws are provided in 8.15.1 Appendix A: Bylaws of Selected SLCs.

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