



8.5 Organizational Structure

8.5.1 Motivation

The organizational structure of an SLC is often an excellent pointer to its activities. The way an SLC is structured provides important information on how it is equipped to meet the mission and goals outlined in its charter, and whether it is able to meet those goals.

8.5.2 Different SLC Types

SLCs may be broadly classified into two categories. A few schools have open membership in the SLC for the entire ERC student body. Such membership may be either mandatory or voluntary. Subsequently, SLC leadership councils and committees may be formed to provide direction to the students, and to provide the impetus for various activities. The more traditional type of SLC is one in which a small percentage of ERC students are elected or volunteer to serve on a leadership council to represent the interests of the students.

8.5.3 More about SLCs

The size of SLCs varies greatly. In a couple of centers, the entire ERC student body is automatically part of the SLC, while in most centers, they are made up of about 5-10 members representing an overall ERC student body of 50-100. Since an ERC involves participation from different universities, the SLC should be formed such that there is a proportionate representation from different schools.

The motivation for SLC membership can be in the form of monetary incentive, in the form of an increase in salary to serve on the SLC, bookstore gift certificates, or even reimbursement for travel. In most cases, however, recognition and appreciation and greater involvement in the center are what motivates people to serve.

Most of the well-established centers are making special efforts to encourage undergraduate participation on the SLC. In some centers, it is a requirement of the administration or their bylaws that some undergraduates be members of the SLC. Some centers could be constrained by their relatively small student body, or even the fact that undergraduate students are present only during the summer, making them unavailable to serve in a leadership role. But most places seem to make a sincere effort to recruit undergraduates to the SLC.

Most of the SLCs hold elections for SLC officers. In smaller or newer centers with fewer overall students, members tend to be appointed or volunteered, while the more established centers with a sizeable study body hold elections. If elections are held, then this is done by email, voice vote, or secret ballot. Nomination periods range from 1 week to 1 day. In the case where elections are conducted, the nominees can be asked to share their details and their plan of action for the SLC in the year with the entire ERC student body. This approach can help the students choose their representatives.

Most SLCs have titles and specific responsibilities for their officers, but in some cases, officers simply get together on various projects on an as-needed basis. In some other cases, officers are elected for each research thrust area in addition to holding other positions such as social activities, outreach efforts, etc. Nearly all SLCs have a designated person or committee to focus on outreach efforts. There might be cases where responsibilities could also be shared if two people are assigned to each role/committee.

In centers where the entire student body constitutes the SLC, meetings are held only a few times a term, though the leadership meets more often. In other centers, the SLC meets weekly, every two weeks, or monthly. Since the SLC has members from different universities, the meetings could be conducted via Skype, telecon, Webex, etc. Most SLCs have a meeting at the start of the term, in which they decide what they need to accomplish that term. Most centers have someone from administration attending SLC meetings, by invitation.

Several SLCs have bylaws that govern their SLC's functioning. There seems to be no correlation between having bylaws and having a good organizational structure. But in general, those centers that do have bylaws tend to have a strong SLC organization. See Appendix A for sample SLC bylaws.

Communication between the SLC and the rest of the ERC student body could be via a variety of methods: email, questionnaires, mass meetings, newsletters, etc. Some SLCs also have their LinkedIn and Facebook pages to keep



everyone informed about upcoming events, research and development activities, and upcoming seminars and conferences. At a few ERCs, the SLC also undertakes the task of updating the ERC website.

8.5.4 Best Practices and Conclusions

Create bylaws and follow them in both letter and spirit

The absence of bylaws does not necessarily imply a weak organizational structure, but the converse is invariably true: Bylaws give structure to an organization's activities and lend weight and substance to its decision-making process. Bylaws may typically include (but are not limited to) information on officers' roles and responsibilities, membership rules, voting rights (if elections are held), amendments, and meetings.

Have an outreach coordinator

Most ERCs have an outreach coordinator on their SLC. This appears to be a very desirable practice. Experience has shown that outreach efforts are usually very challenging in terms of time, logistics, and the effort involved in motivating students to participate. Given the importance of outreach activities to the center, it is an excellent idea to designate an SLC officer to handle all outreach activities and to liaise with the center leadership in all such efforts.

Invite center leadership to SLC meetings

Inviting a representative from the center's administration, such as the education director, to SLC meetings is a desirable practice. The presence of such a person provides an opportunity for better communication between the students and the administration, avoids potential communication gaps, can provide information about money matters and budget allocation, and expedites decision-making.

Other suggestions

Some SLCs reported that they do not assign roles for their officers, but rather allow them to work on projects they are interested in, as this motivates them to do a better job. While this practice may work in some cases, another idea may be to pair up officers in committees, so that they may motivate each other and share the responsibilities.

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