

Freedom of Information Policy

Carnegie Mellon University Undergraduate Student Senate

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1 Preamble

These rules were conceived to address the rights of students to know how their activities fee is being used, while protecting student organizations from unfair competition.

2 Application of these rules

2.1 Application to Undergraduate Student Senate

These rules shall cover all records available to the Undergraduate Student Senate that do not fall under an exception explicitly listed in this document.

2.2 Application to Student Organizations and Special Allocations

Only student organizations that accept funding from the Activities Fee shall be asked to release detailed information about their budgets. If an organization receives a special allocation, that organization shall be asked to release all information relating to that special allocation's use.

2.3 Who can request information

Information covered by this document shall be available for all activities-fee paying members of the Student Body.

2.4 Supremacy of this Policy

This policy shall nullify all provisions of all previously adopted policies that conflict with this policy.

3 Definitions

3.1 Record

A record shall be defined as any recording, paper or electronic, made of the business of Undergraduate Student Senate.

4 Preferred publishing methods

4.1 Online publishing

All digital records that are covered by this policy should, by default, be available online in a secured format on the respective Undergraduate Student Senate website. In general, these records should be available in the most usable form. This should include ability to search the records for specific information, where possible. If the records cover a large set of data, summary reports should also be made available online, employing the same guidelines.

4.2 Availability upon request

All information that is available on request, but is not published by default, should be provided in a format that the requester can be reasonably expected to find useful. For example, if the document contains formatted data, the "source" for the formatted document should be made available if possible. If it is a text document, it should be made available in plain text format. If the document contains a large set of data, a format readable by most spreadsheet software (eg, Comma Separated Value format) should be used. Print-ready portable documents, specifically PDF or PS files, should also be provided upon request.

5 "Shall issue" policy

5.1 What should be released

Senate was started with the basic principle that information should be released unless a compelling reason can be found for not releasing it. Senate shall take any and all reasonable steps to ensure that the following

information is released. Therefore, any document that falls under the definition of a “record” given above shall be released unless an explicit exception is given. This includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Minutes of all public meetings of the Undergraduate Student Senate and any committees that it forms, by itself or jointly with another organization, for the purpose of executing the business of Student Government. Senate shall publish a collective compressed file of a semester’s minutes at the semester’s end.
- Information about Student Organizations in possession of Undergraduate Student Senate Internal policy documents
- Student Organization budgets, including line items, where each line item contains the total expenditure for that funding category and a description of the expenses
- The records of who has requested what information under this policy.

5.2 When it should be released

Information requests must be responded to within five (5) school days of the body that the information is requested from, either with the information itself, or with an explanation of why the information is not being released.

5.3 Who to contact with requests

Student Senate shall be ultimately responsible for responding to requests for information following the timeline contained in this document, not an individual student organization. When the information is available in a published form, Student Senate or its agents may refer the requester to the published information.

5.4 What should not be released

5.4.1 Executive session exception

Where a provision exists for Student Senate to hold an executive session of its bodies or committees, the committee may, with a two-thirds (2/3rds) vote, close the session to allow for unfettered discussion on sensitive topics. In the failure of such a vote, the session is to be considered open and any minutes must be published accordingly. The vote itself is to be recorded at each session.

5.4.2 Sensitive information

Information that is generally considered sensitive or whose release would violate the privacy of an individual shall not be released. A two-thirds vote of Student Senate may classify any information as sensitive.

5.4.3 Buggy

Information about the specific purchases of an organization for buggy, or information that would allow an individual to determine the specific purchases of an organization for buggy, shall not be released. Aggregate information about the total expenditures of an organization that participates in buggy shall not be considered to fall under this exception, nor shall information about the organization’s budget that does not relate directly to purchases for the construction of their buggy.

5.4.4 Salary information

Information about individual student salaries is considered private, except for salaries paid to elected members of Student Senate, which includes only the salaries received for services rendered to Student Senate and the salaries received from organizations funded by Student Senate.

6 Appeals

6.1 Appeal of information withheld

6.1.1 Filing of Petition to Appeal

If Senate withholds any information from a student, that student may submit a signed petition at any regular meeting of Student Senate. It shall be validated before the following regular meeting of Student Senate.

6.1.2 Rejection of Petition to Appeal

A motion may be made at any time to reject a Petition to Appeal. This motion shall require a vote of three-fourths (3/4ths) of all Senators and shall not be open to debate. A petition may also be rejected should it be determined to be invalid by the Chair of Student Senate. Should a petition be rejected, no Meeting to Consider an Appeal shall be held, however the Chair must report the rejection to the Senate General Body.

6.1.3 Meeting to Consider an Appeal

Senate shall hold a special meeting immediately after the first regular meeting that occurs after the Petition to Appeal has been validated. This meeting shall be open only to voting Senators. This meeting shall be chaired by the Senate Chair and will consider exactly one item: a motion to release the information that has been requested. This motion shall require a majority vote.

6.2 Appeal of information already released

A student organization may request that released information regarding their organization be withheld from further distribution. To do so, the organization must present an appeal at any regular meeting of Senate. Senate shall then consider a motion to classify the information as sensitive at their next regular meeting.