

# The Manual

The Basics of Being a Student Trustee

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# To the Student Trustee Cohort of 2010:

First off, I'd like to congratulate you on being elected or appointed to the position of Student Trustee in Illinois! You have begun a year that could potentially change the course of your life, and I hope you are excited about all of the opportunities and possibilities that will present themselves to you in the future.

Being a Community College Student Trustee puts you in a very small group of people - there are only 38 others like you in Illinois. By contrast, there are over 200 'regular' Trustees in the state. Moreover, the one-year shelf life of your new position means that every spring a whole new group of students take office. We begin this year like a group of freshmen in high school: we're outnumbered, inexperienced and lacking connections.

I've written this manual to share what I have learned about the job in my first term. I want us all (and those who will follow after) to start our terms on the same page. The sooner the cohort catches up on the basics of being a Student Trustee, the faster we can start forming connections amongst ourselves and the more effective we will all be at representing students. Having worked closely with your predecessors, I know that every cohort brings unbridled enthusiasm and energy to the boardroom. It just takes us all a few months to find our place at our institutions before we can assert the priorities of our respective student bodies.

Before you go any further, know this: 90 percent of your job as a Student Trustee is just being present! Someone once told me that the world is run by the people who show up, and I couldn't agree with this more strongly. If you want to do a good job, then make a point of being in your seat at every board and committee meeting and speak your mind. Really, that's all you need to know to be a good Student Trustee, and if that's all you hope for, then read no further. This manual was written for those that aren't satisfied with the simply satisfactory; this is for those who need to excel. I hope that includes you!

David M. Hobbs

## **Page Section**

1	I. Introduction
2	II. Table of Contents
3	III. Dress Code
9	IV. In the Boardroom
12	V. Representing Students
20	VI. Your Legacy

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# Dress Code

Q: Why put the dress code section first?

A: Because how you dress gives more than a first impression, it shows that you play for the same team as your fellow board members.

Like it or not, your college is a business institution whose primary product is education. As such, expect your fellow board members to dress in business attire (not business *casual*- mind you), and so should you. The transition from being a student who rolls out of bed and into the classroom in pajamas to a professional in a suit and tie may be difficult, but it is essential. Actually, I have confidence that you will have no trouble dressing appropriately, but there are a few finer points that I would like to touch on in this section.

## Your Uniform

Your suit (or pantsuit) is like your team jersey. There is an expectation of professionalism inside the boardroom, and wearing a suit can help dispel any lingering suspicion or doubts about your seriousness. This may just be a psychological hang up that doesn't really reflect the casual consumer culture of today, but you need to follow the convention anyway.

Imagine you play for the St. Louis Cardinals (who wants to be a Cub anyway...) and you take the field in a jersey with a big Nike swoosh on it. Sure, you may still play

ball just as well, but your team and fans won't like you much. And don't expect Fredbird to give you a high five or a free t-shirt either.

### **What Not to Wear**

What to wear is easy, a suit and tie will work for almost any situation. Just remember this: it is always better to be over-dressed than under. What you shouldn't wear is a little trickier, as everyone has their own taste and style. Exercise good judgment and an understanding of the context you will find yourself in, and you'll be fine. I'd like to outline for you a situation where judgment and context were ignored with disastrous results.

I had the chance to attend a conference of student leaders in Washington DC recently, and I met with like-minded students from around the country. I sat at a table with a group from a community college in southern California. They were a very nice group of intelligent people; well versed in both the California and federal budget situations and how that would affect their college funding.

The group had an appointment to meet with California Sen. Diane Feinstein the next day. The problem was that one of the students, we'll call him Johnny Socool from SoCal, was wearing a beanie on his head with the word 'Dysfunctional' on it. I'm sure the conversation he had with Sen. Feinstein played out something like this:

Johnny Socool: "Senator, it's so nice to meet you. Thank you for this opportunity! I'm really excited to speak with you about the DREAM Act, the Pell Grant and higher ed funding. My name's Johnny Socool and I'm the Student Trustee at XYZ Community College in Southern California."

Sen. Feinstein: “Student Trustee, huh? We’ll you’re a politician in the making, Johnny. You’ve got great timing, we’re about to vote on health care, and I’m sure you’re aware that we rolled Pell Grant reform into the legislation. I’m going to....what’s that say on your cap?”

Johnny Socool: “Huh? Oh, my beanie, it says...”

Sen. Feinstein: “Dysfunctional! What’s that supposed to mean?”

Johnny Socool: “Nothing, it’s just a beanie I picked up at hot topic.”

Sen. Feinstein: “Right, well your face is looking pretty dysfunctional to me Johnny. Look, I’ve got some *actual* hot topics to tackle right now; you’ll have to come back another time.”

Johnny Socool: “But I’m leaving DC tomorrow...” \*Door slams in his face\*

This may be an overdramatized representation of events, but it can’t be that far off. I’m sure Johnny’s advisor pulled him aside and warned him not to dress like a clown the next day. Either way, let this be a lesson for the power of proper attire. It may seem an antiquated notion, but you won’t get on the field without the right jersey.

In summary:



Good to Go!



What are you thinking?

**The Manual**

**Dress Code**

## **Digital Dress**

Social networking websites have changed the way people communicate and interact with one another. True, but you know that cliché already; you *live* it. Let me introduce you to the flip side of instantly-on, always-connected hypermedia.

You know that birthday party you had two years ago? The one where you passed out head-over-toilet bowl at 3 a.m.? Your friends have at least 25 pictures of that moment posted to their wall or Photobucket right now. Some complete strangers who happened to be there that night keep another 15 floating circulating cyberspace. Oddly enough, that's not even your problem.

No, your problem is that your college is going through a difficult budget review, and jobs are on the line. With tension building, opponents of the board are arming with shovels, and they are about to go digging. Next thing you know, dirt on all the board members are being published in the local papers. Sooner or later a regional or national chain will pick up something controversial enough and run with it.

Because you had the temerity to speak out in favor of cutting faculty benefits instead of raising tuition, your name begins to circulate as a target. You always wanted to be front page news, but do you think your friends and colleagues will hold you in the same esteem now that they've seen you praying at the porcelain alter in the pages of the Chicago Tribune?

What does your personal moment of weakness have to do with budget cuts? Nothing. But in times of tension and tribulation, any negative press will be used like a hammer to bludgeon the board into submission. You are a public figure now, and it's a good idea that you begin to clean house before stepping too far into the limelight.

Here are some basic rules:

- 1) Keep your personal and professional Facebook, Myspace, etc. pages SEPARATE. If you only have one page for everything, establish a second and segregate the flow of information. Public messages for your constituents? They go to the professional page. Your musings on the skimpy outfits your best friend thinks are cute? Keep that private.
- 2) Be selective. Look, there is just no reason to publish your party pictures anywhere, public or private. They're not cool, and if you think they are now, ask yourself how lower back tattoos look on old people. Opinions change over time, but just like a bad tattoo, a lot of things that wind up online never fade. From the professional standpoint, some colleges are very protective of their logos and about things that are said in the public space about them. So choose your words carefully even when posting to your professional page.
- 3) Delete the unnecessary and keep what is private confidential. Find bad pictures and postings, and delete them if possible. Also, it's a good idea to set your 'for your friends only' page to a more exclusive privacy setting. This may seem obvious, but with many sites you actually have to adjust the settings it so that only your friends can see them. Otherwise, it's like you're putting every word and picture out there for the world to see: good, bad or indifferent.



I hope I haven't scared you away from social networking. It's a powerful tool that can certainly be used to your advantage. Reaching your constituents, exchanging information and holding virtual meetings are all made easier with the publishing power of the internet. But with all that power at your fingertips, it's easy to get burned. When I chose the subheading 'Digital Dress,' I was referring to the fact that your digital presence has as much of an impact on your public perception as the clothing you put on in the morning. If you won't go out in public in a ratty outfit, should you publish less than flattering pictures or words?

# In the Boardroom

## Showing Up

To get things done as Student Trustee, you must show up to board and committee meetings. Which ones? All of them. Almost the entirety of your job as Student Trustee is to be present and to voice the student opinion when important decisions are being made.

For those of you with jobs, children and other commitments, I know that finding the time to go to these meetings can be difficult. But I hope that now that the campaign is over, you stand ready to live up to the promises you have made to your student body. Most boards only meet for a few hours two or three times a month. If you feel this is going to be too much, I would ask you to consider resigning and making room for someone who has more time.

I do not suggest this lightly, nor do I look down at your other priorities as being less worthy. But at the end of the day, there is only one voice speaking directly for the hundreds or thousands of students at your college, and they deserve to have someone in this position that is willing and able to be there for them.

There are three important things that you need to take away from this subheading:

- 1) Most boards do all their work through committees. Although you may not have an official seat on any of the committees, you need to make a point of attending ALL of them. This is because at regular board meetings, often the consent agenda that is voted on follows an

approval process that has been worked on in committee for several months. If you want a say in the *actual* decision making process, you need to be at the relative committee, because that is where all debating and work is done. Speaking up at the regular meeting is usually too little, too late to make a difference.

- 2) If you are given the opportunity to attend meetings other than just your board and committee meetings, you should probably go. Whether it is ICCTA, ICCB or a different, non-board committee at your college, all will give you experience and a chance to network that is invaluable. You never know what you could do, or who you could meet if you aren't there.
- 3) Learn to pick and choose what is important. While the actual board probably won't eat up a lot of time, you will certainly get pulled into other functions and duties you can't expect or plan for. Although the second point I just made urges you to participate in everything you can, now I'm telling you to be selective. This requires discretion on your part, because only you know what is important. The bottom line is that if you take every opportunity to go to a meeting or an out-of-town function, you are going to burn yourself out and become less effective at your primary job – speaking for students.

### **Basic Rules of Order**

There's a great book called Robert's Rules of Order that will teach you in the ins and outs of parliamentary procedure for small boards. It is conveniently available online and is one of the most thorough works on the subject. If you wish to become an expert in the 'rules' or if your board rigidly enforces them, then this book is definitely worth a read. But if those two categories do not apply to you, then skip it.

*Heresy! The board lives and dies by the rules of order!*

I'm not against the rules of order, and they are definitely worth learning for future reference on their own merit. But for your year in office as a Student Trustee you will do fine if you only make a passing acquaintance with them.

Small boards tend to work more informally than larger groups, and by statute all Community College Boards are small. Moreover, as a full time student with no prior experience, no one is going to hold you over a barrel for forgetting things like the fact that a special committee is appointed for a select purpose but a standing committee is permanent. Here's the lowdown:

- 1) Raise your hand to speak. Yes, this may feel a bit pre-schoolish, but you can't just blurt out what you are thinking whenever you feel like it.
- 2) Direct your questions or comments to the appropriate person. You wouldn't ask the director of Public Safety about curriculum reform, would you? Make a point of figuring out who the relative Vice President or administrator is that you need to address *before* you speak.
- 3) Keep the conversation within the bounds of the committee. Just as you need to know who to address, you need to keep your comments relegated to the appropriate committee. This goes for any kind of meeting, whether it is a board function or not.
- 4) Cut back on the banter. Before or after a meeting are appropriate times to socialize, not during.
- 5) Be Polite. Do not speak out of turn, and never cut someone off. You may not agree with what is being said, but the person saying it has the right to get it out before you cut the notion down.

# Representing Students

## Clubs and Student Government

Before you start speaking for the student body at your college, you have to get to know them. You may already be Mr. or Ms. Popular at your campus, and that's great. But now that the popularity contest that is student body elections is over, you need to get acquainted with the large portion of the student body that *didn't* vote for you.

Your college's Student Government Association is a great place to begin. Although your term begins between the spring and fall semesters (a time when most SGA's go on hiatus), you should make a point of meeting all of the faculty advisors attached to your SGA. This group will certainly know the issues affecting the students at your school and also many of the big players that you will have to deal with. Make an appointment to sit down and pick their brains for any information you might find useful.

As for the actual student members of your SGA, there is at least a chance that some of them will be returning in the fall. If you know any of them, reach out to them as well. If you don't know anyone in the SGA, it's your faculty advisors who can point you in the right direction. There is one other student leader at your college that I hope you have already gotten to know well – the outgoing Student Trustee.

Probably there are a lot of clubs at your college. Aside from the SGA, they are your best go-to resource for taking the pulse of the student body. Because of the nature of student elections, SGA's are not always as representative of the student body at large as they could be. Club members do not have to face an election cycle, and

because there are so many of them, clubs often closely reflect the actual diversity at community colleges.

Many Clubs will also be inactive over the summer, but most will not evaporate like a puddle in the sun between semesters. Do your best to find out which clubs there are and reach out to their faculty advisors for the same reason you did for the SGA. That way when everything starts back up, you will have already begun the process of starting a dialogue that will help you represent your constituents.

You should make a point of going out and being seen by students. It's a good idea to travel to all of the campuses at your college (if it has more than one) and set up a booth to talk to your new constituents. You may have difficulty getting students to just walk up and talk to you; and that's ok – it is just as important that students see you and know that you are available to listen to them as it is to actually strike up a conversation. You can't possibly talk to every student anyway. But if they never see you, they will automatically assume you are doing a bad job. You should get out to each campus regularly, as you should also meet with clubs and the SGA.

The other people you should talk to are current board members, the college president and the secretary of the board. While meeting with the board and president outside of regular meetings is probably a no-brainer, I think that striking up a conversation with the board secretary is even more important. He or she is the gatekeeper at your institution, and all information will flow through their office at one point or another.

As a matter of fact, the secretary probably does have an actual set of keys to the college. Besides that, he or she also knows *every* issue, *everyone's* past and how the board works together. Trust me on this point: you need to get to know your board secretary and do everything you can to make him or her like you. If you do, you'll find a lot of doors will open for you. Get on his or her bad side and doors won't just slam in your face; you'll never know they existed to begin with.

Here's the shortlist of who to talk to after taking the oath of office:

- 1) Student Government Association members, attached faculty advisors and the outgoing Student Trustee.
- 2) Club members and faculty advisors.
- 3) Current board members and the president.
- 4) The board secretary. (He or she is important enough to get a separate bullet point!)
- 5) The student body at large. Go out and meet them, making a point of going to every campus as well.

### **Building Coalitions and a Support Network**

You should do your best to build consensus among students at your campus. If you follow my advice in the previous subheading, you will see that many different groups and clubs will have similar agendas. Now that you have established your own personal connections between disparate groups, take the time to link them directly.

Everyone appreciates help tackling their own problems; if you can put two or more like minded but separate groups of students together for the same issue, they will remember it. There will come a point when you find yourself outgunned and in over

your head. That is when you will be able to call on the coalitions you have worked to establish. Better yet, if you do a good enough job laying down crossroads between groups, they will come find you in your time of need and offer support.

## **Leadership**

Being a Student Trustee has thrust you into a unique position of leadership at your college. The experiences you gain while exercising management skills this year are going to pop up again and again in different situations throughout the rest of your life. The suggestions I have given out in **The Manual** thus far are meant to prepare you to actually step into this new role.

I know how enthusiastic you must be to get out and assert yourself. You now know how you should conduct yourself, how you should present yourself and the kinds of personal alliances you need to form. But as I stated in the introduction, the position of Student Trustee is distinct and comes with its own set of limitations that will shape your leadership style.

One area that you may need to rethink your position on is the utilization of delegation. Although it is often said that great leaders know how to delegate well. Those leaders have something you lack: a budget. When you start or sign on to projects, it is very tempting to try and enlist the help of others to share the workload. This is all well and good, but until you can afford to pay people for their services, you should dial back your expectations.

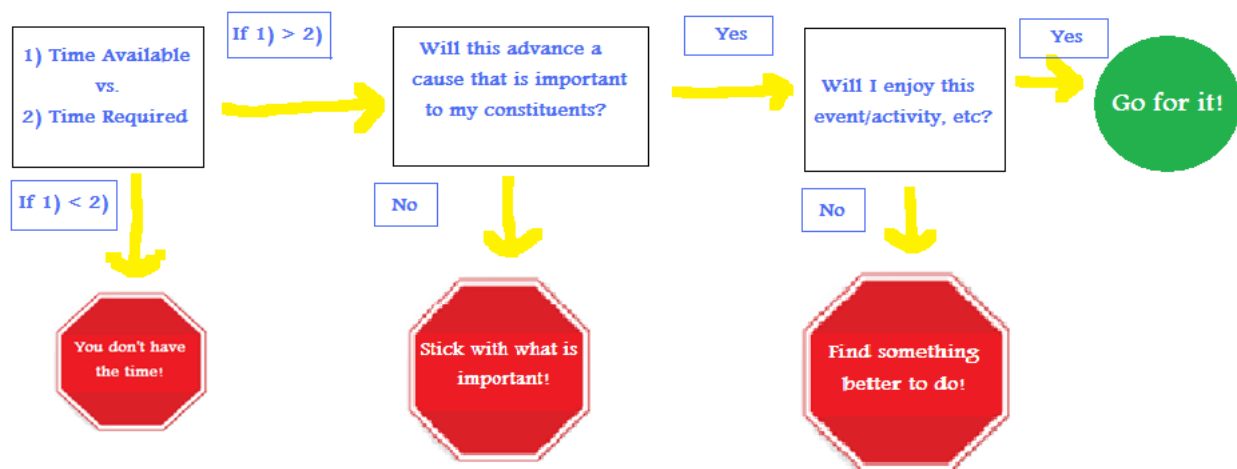


Of course, it can be very frustrating when people volunteer to help out with something, only to see them back out soon after. This will almost certainly happen to you, and you will be justifiably angry about it. But you have to let it go. Yes, this person may be in a position where they have volunteered to work for you, but they are not *employed* by you. Therein lays an important distinction. What this means is that you will have to take on much of the work load yourself.

Once you have come to terms with the fact that you are mostly on your own, you will also need to reassess your level of involvement. I touched on this in the subheading **Showing Up**. You cannot be everywhere all the time. It is essential that you prioritize and learn to pass on certain meetings, functions and projects.

Here is a basic criterion to determine what is worth your time: Does it (function, meeting, project, etc.) help me represent students?

If the answer to that question is yes, then go ahead and jump in. Otherwise, you can use this chart to help organize your event calendar:



It may seem odd that I placed 'Will I enjoy this' as a criteria. Always be cognizant of the fact that you are a full-time student, and you have enough stressful situations to worry about. Being Student Trustee should not become so difficult that you cannot stand doing it. Try and keep it fun; there will be plenty of time for stress and worry when you become a trustee on the board of a company that actually pays you. ;-)

As a leader, you are going to find that almost every workgroup contains naysayers and yes-men. A good leader knows how to manage both groups effectively.

Naysayers will tell you no and disagree with everything you say. This is especially true if you are the chair of a committee or otherwise in charge. They seem to relish in standing up to the boss. This can be harmful to group moral and progress if you indulge every argument they send your way. Don't be afraid to shut down a conversation that is going in circles or veered off on a tangent.

Of course, you can still disagree without being disagreeable. There is no reason to taunt or antagonize someone you disagree with. Once you have burned a bridge, you will never be able to cross the river when the tide comes in. However you handle the situation, do not fall into the childish game of Internet flame wars. You do not need to post negative comments about people you do not like. Harsh words are better at escaping than any convicts you'll ever meet; even a highly private 'friends only' facebook page will not contain them.

Naysayers do play a very important role, however. They look at your situation from the outside and critique and prod and point out flaws that only an outsider can see. Essentially, they poke holes that need to be poked. Just don't let them run the rodeo or they'll poke holes till there's nothing left.

Yes-men, on the other hand, have almost no redeeming merit. It is one thing to have an assembly reach a genuine consensus, but when they lose the ability to think critically you get what is called 'groupthink'. Groupthink is when everyone goes along with what everyone else says; each member of the group employing great jumps of logic to explain away what is obviously wrong. Yes-men are the foundation of this problem, and groupthink will destroy your hard work and best laid plans. Ignore yes-men and learn to deconstruct your own schemes or you will pay in the long run.

### **Things to Avoid**

To stay effective, you should try and avoid situations and factions that will not help you represent students. I will use one party that you should avoid as a stand-in to demonstrate the concept.

As a Student Trustee, you have no business whatsoever getting involved with any of your college's faculty unions. This is not an attack on unions – they play an important and vital role in keeping the higher education system alive and well. But they are simply not your concern. You represent students first, last and always.

I don't mean that if you talk to a union representative you will catch on fire. Rather, I am warning you that during even the best of times (and the current economic crisis is anything but ideal) some faculty unions may have complex, if not contentious, relationships with college boards. So union connections you establish could prove problematic under certain circumstances.

Take this example and apply it to any situation that you are unsure of. If the group in question doesn't help your constituents, avoid them.

# Your Legacy

## Leaving Your Mark

I know you want to be so good at being a Student Trustee that you will become a legend on your campus. I personally would like to see a marble bust of my head installed on the front lawn of my college. This kind of thinking tends to lead people into trying to accomplish one big ‘thing’, that project or agenda item that will be remembered forever. I need to dissuade you from the one big ‘thing’.

From a logistical perspective, you only have a one-year term, no budget and are without even a vote at the board. I know you are already scheming to find ways to overcome these limitations; I did during my first term. Let me share with you the story of a cafeteria that will not and cannot ever exist.

Establishing a cafeteria at my college’s smallest campus was a lofty ideal I came into office with. It was my one big ‘thing’. I tackled the problem with plans and statistics. I even had a group of administrators who were willing and able to help me. Then the budget of the state of Illinois imploded like a depth-charged submarine and my college went from surplus to crisis, dashing my hopes for a new cafeteria.

I still think it was a worthy goal. But with all the work that I put into the project, and even if the state hadn’t gone on life support, I still don’t think it would have come to fruition. Looking back, I realize it was beyond my purview. What I have learned since then is that it is truly much more important to focus on my primary mission – the one

that I have spent much of the **The Manual** talking about. That is the job of representing students.

In this time of uncertainty in the economy, my constituents (and yours as well) need me to be in the board room speaking out more than ever. We must ensure that the decisions that are made that will affect their collegiate careers are in their best interest. Our voice is the student body's voice, and we cannot hesitate to do everything we can to help them.

The mark you leave behind must be a record of coalition building and deep involvement in the issues of your college. This is the job you were elected to do, and nothing else will matter at the end of your term.

### **Preparing the Next Student Trustee**

Next year on April 15<sup>th</sup>, someone else will have your job. Your final act as Student Trustee should be to prepare that person for the challenges that lay ahead. This manual was written in that spirit; but only you know the peculiarities of your college. It is imperative that you pass along what you have learned so that what your legacy can be built on and not forgotten. I will leave you with a few tips on how best to prepare your successor:

- 1) Meet with them. So many of us finish our term and disappear without saying hello to the next person in line for the job. This is a real tragedy and a terrible brain drain. Don't continue the cycle.

- 2) Create a permanent email address. Your college has an internal email system with addresses like [bob.student@yourcollege.edu](mailto:bob.student@yourcollege.edu). You should create a new email address (suggestion: [student.trustee@yourcollege.edu](mailto:student.trustee@yourcollege.edu)) that you can pass on to the next person. This way, all of the contacts within and without your school that you have made are already in the address book, waiting to be found. This will also save administrators the hassle of trying to find out how to reach the new guy/gal. After you have handed off the address, make sure they change the password.
- 3) Move the election date for Student Trustee at your college. The Illinois Public Community College Act stipulates that Student Trustee terms begin on April 15<sup>th</sup>, but it does not say when elections should be held. What this means is that a lot of schools have their elections very close to April 15<sup>th</sup>, leaving no time for a proper transition. Lobby to have the election at your college moved up to the first week of March if possible. This will give new Student Trustees a month in which they can meet with you, convene with the SGA and clubs before they go inactive for the summer and prepare for the job.
- 4) Make sure the new Student Trustee meets your coalition. Whether or not you are able to move the election date up, you owe it to the new person to introduce them to the groups and people you have worked with over the last year. If you don't do this, then they will have to build up the office of Student Trustee all over again.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read **The Manual**. I hope that you find it helpful enough to pass on a copy to your successor. I have tried, to the best of my ability, to distill what I have learned into an accessible format. I can't wait to look back in time at the accomplishments that each of you will achieve both as Student Trustees and in your future endeavors. Who knows, maybe you'll even get a statue like this on the front lawn of your college:



Although I think I'd still rather have a cafeteria....

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