

AN ORGANIZATION REIMAGINED:
2019 — 2020
YEAR IN REVIEW

Never could I have imagined when I stepped onto this campus two and half years ago, in January 2018, that my journey with Emerson College's student government would end here. I think I can speak for many student leaders within our organization and in the College that leadership can come to you unexpectedly and totally change your perspective. This fresh set of eyes on the world will drive you to do the impossible and push you beyond where you ever thought you could go. In just one semester, we did the unthinkable and turned our organization on its head to reimagine it in a way that had never been done before. In this closing 2019 - 2020 address, you'll see what SGA has worked hard on over the course of the year.

It's important to note that all of the work you read about here was not done single-handedly; our officers worked tirelessly over the past two semesters alongside our senior leadership team, including: **Raz Moayed** (Fall 2019 Executive President), **Melissa Bordelon** (Spring 2020 Executive Vice President), **Abigail Semple** (2019 - 2020 Executive Treasurer), **Julia Stanton** (2019 - 2020 Executive Secretary), **Gianna Gironda** (Spring 2020 Chief of Staff), and **Joseph Johnson** (2019 - 2020 Chief Justice).

I'd like to thank these members of our senior leadership team and all of the officers within our organization for their hard work throughout these past two unprecedented semesters. They have laid the foundation for a future that we all dream of: an Emerson that works for and benefits every single student. Through their efforts to create our new constitution, student governance at Emerson College will be forever reimaged with a new set of tools at its disposal. These "toolmakers" of the 2019 - 2020 SGA did not seek any glory of their own, instead they simply crafted the instruments and mechanisms that student leaders will use at the College for decades to come.

In closing, it is my hope that as this anomalous year comes to an end, we can look forward to the day when we join together in conversation again. A day will come when we are able to commemorate our triumphant victories as students in person once more. That glorious day will be marked with celebration and a restored sense of the kinship we all have as Emersonians. Together we will persevere till that day arrives. We've earned it.

Warm regards,

Will Palauskas

Executive President of the Student Government Association

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Academic Initiative

Now regarded as a yearly tradition in SGA, the seventh annual Academic Initiative was published in December of 2019. The Academic Initiative is traditionally seen as one of the largest student-led critiques on the overall status of education at Emerson College. The initiative provides a wide array of suggestions, questions, and concerns to academic administrators at the college. This year's initiative totaled more than 59 pages and 14,000 words of specific, detailed feedback. In collaboration with senior leadership within SGA, the academic senators took a rapid departure from prior initiatives by codifying the document in a new, unique way. Each action item is coded with a label: "New", "Ongoing", or "Resolved". These labels will help allow future academic senators to evaluate the status of important issues and prevent the cyclical nature of problems that occur as students graduate and new, unacquainted students take on their roles in SGA.

SGA Joint Session voted to approve the Academic Initiative in December. Following its approval, the document was sent to Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Michael Whelan, the Deans of the academic schools, and each department chair. The [2019-2020 Academic Initiative can be found here](#).

Academic Town Hall

The second annual Academic Town Hall was held in November of 2019 in the Lion's Den. Following the success of the inaugural Faculty & Student Town Hall, the academic senate and then-Executive Vice President Will Palauskas partnered with the college Provost, Michael Whelan, to host the largest single-day faculty and student conversation surrounding academics on campus.

Nearly two hundred faculty, staff, and students were in attendance, crowding the dining center and Lion's Den to discuss issues of importance regarding the academic experience at the College. These conversations were recorded thoroughly by notetakers, helping to shape this year's Academic Initiative.

Advisor

SGA's advisor of more than nineteen years, Sharon Duffy, was celebrated in the Fall semester and honored for her tireless commitment to student governance at the College. Sharon had resigned from her role to take on a new position at the College as Assistant Vice President of Student Success.

A new advisor, Jason Meier, was onboarded successfully during the Fall 2019 semester. Jason serves as the Director of Student Engagement & Leadership (SEAL) at the College. He has already provided an immeasurable amount of guidance to student leaders within the organization. He serves as advisor alongside existing SGA advisor, Jim Hoppe, Vice President and Dean of Campus Life.

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Appeal Requests

The Executive Treasurer and Financial Advisory Board (FAB) held weekly meetings on Thursdays throughout the Fall and Spring semester. These hearings allowed student organizations to appeal for additional funding for their organizations outside of their regular annual budget requests.

The Executive Treasurer and FAB approved 20 appeal requests this year, totaling \$141,022.92.

ASGA National Conference

At the beginning of August 2019, SGA hosted the American Student Government Association (ASGA) Boston Conference at Emerson for the second time. Several dozen participants from a variety of different institutions gathered at Emerson on August 4th to attend workshops with professional presenters, share insight, and network with other student governments.

Board of Trustees Representative

An incredibly important role in SGA at Emerson College, an undergraduate member of Joint Session is appointed to attend the Board of Trustees tri-annual meetings. This officer serves as the voice of the concerns and opinions of the nearly 4,000 undergraduates at the College.

The most recent speech to the Board, made in February 2020, is [available here](#).

By-Law Review

SGA Joint Session unanimously approved to update the bylaws to the Constitution, as typically performed at the beginning of each academic year. Students can find up-to-date bylaws on the SGA website at emersonsga.org/by-laws.

With the ratification of a new constitution, a rough draft of bylaws was created to assist in the transition of powers from the 19-20 SGA to the 20-21 SGA. These new bylaws will be presented and ratified by the 20-21 SGA in the Fall of 2020.

Chief Justice Appointment

In the final meeting of the 19-20 academic year, Chief Justice Joseph Johnson formally resigned and suggested the appointment of Elections and Outreach Director Lilly Meehan-Egan to the position. Lilly was unanimously appointed to the role. She will serve as the new presiding officer of SGA's judiciary branch.

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Committees

SGA Officers traditionally sit as members on a variety of different committees, boards, task forces, and workgroups to help advise college administrators on key decisions from a representative perspective. This year, SGA Officers served on the following committees:

- Budgetary Priorities and Planning Advisory Committee
- COVID-19 Presidential Working Group
- ERA Awards committee
- Emerson Equity and Justice Committee
- Faculty Assembly
- Iwasaki Library
- Marketing Student Engagement Taskforce
- Senior Commencement Committee
- Spirit of Emerson committee
- Student Organization Affiliation Process committee
- Title IX Working Group
- Undergraduate Curriculum Committee

Constitutional Ratification

Considered the most monumental change to Emerson student government in twenty-one years, a new constitution was [ratified by the student body in a vote in April](#). The constitution was framed and approved by officers of the Student Government Association in a Zoom meeting prior to the ratification special election.

The Constitutional Changes Committee (C3) met regularly for two weeks via Zoom to edit and make changes to the constitution after senior leadership in the organization spent nearly four months in small meetings writing the new constitution. A subcommittee reviewed and copy-edited the constitution for twelve hours.

The new constitution helps lay the foundation for a more impactful, proactive system of student governance at Emerson College. Those who wish to learn more about the constitutional ratification [can read about it here](#). The full constitution is [available here](#).

Elections

In perhaps one of the most extraordinary circumstances of the year, four elections were held in one academic year to provide more opportunities for students to participate in the democratic process.

Fall 2019 Special Election: A special election was held in the Fall of 2019 to help fill seats in the academic senate and in the senior class council. Seniors Issel-Solano Sanchez and Connor McNinch were elected to senior class president and senior class vice president respectively. First year student Jehan Ayesha was elected to the position of journalism senator.

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Fall 2019 General Election: Traditionally held at the end of the semester to fill seats on the newly-created freshman class council and other empty seats in SGA. In this election cycle, 517 students voted, in comparison to 234 students who voted in the Fall 2018 election cycle. This is nearly a 121% increase in student participation. [The results of the election are available here.](#)

Constitutional Ratification Special Election: The ratification special election saw 240 students participate, with 90% voting yes in support of a new constitution for SGA. Full results of the election are [available here.](#)

Spring 2020 General Election: The final election of the Spring 2020 filled a number of seats across the executive branch, legislative, and class councils. The first fully virtual election in SGA history was run by a fully-staffed elections committee. 387 students voted in the election. The full results of the election are [available here.](#)

Prior to the Spring 2020 general election, officers of SGA voted unanimously to approve a change to elections bylaws striking the requirement for the traditionally-used elections packet which required 50 signatures to appear on the ballot. The packet was replaced with a simple EmConnect form alongside the existing standing check.

Events

Officers of the Student Government Association put on a wide variety of events, workshops, and meet & greets to meet members of the student body and connect them with administrators.

Some events included:

- Ghouls & Gabs (October 25)
- Performing Arts Forum (October 28)
- Candidate Press Night (December 5)
- Class of 2022 Cookies & Concerns (February 7)

These events ranged in variety, formality, and style, but all shared one goal: to make students' voices heard across campus.

Executive Cabinet

For the first time in SGA history, in the Spring 2020 semester an executive cabinet was created to help support the internal structure of the organization and provide assistance to the representative officers of SGA.

The five positions created in the inaugural cabinet were completely filled. The inaugural position holders included: **Gianna Gironda** (Chief of Staff), **Hannah Flaherty** (Communications Director), **Thea Nagle** (Social and Events Director), **Lilly Meehan-Egan** (Elections and Outreach Director), and **Jay Rosato** (History and Education Director).

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Guest Speakers

A wide variety of administrators, staff, and students were hosted as guest speakers during the second hour of SGA's weekly joint session meetings held from 2PM to 3:45PM on Tuesdays. These guests included:

October 1: Jason Meier and Andy Donahue (SEAL)

Jason and Andy presented a comprehensive review on the use of EmConnect at the College, including analytics on usership by students at the College. SGA officers voiced their opinions on EmConnect and its continued use at the College.

October 8: Jill Naimo (Voice Your Choice)

Associate Director of Student & Young Alumni Engagement Jill Naimo spoke at a meeting regarding the status of Voice Your Choice and a commitment to partnership for the Fall 2020 election. SGA officers provided feedback regarding Voice Your Choice and changes to be made.

October 15: Cheryl McGrath (Library)

SGA officers welcomed the new director of the Iwasaki Library, Cheryl McGrath, to SGA. They provided feedback about Cheryl's plan for the library. An officer of SGA, Madi Doelling, was selected during the meeting as a representative to the Library.

October 22: Berkeley Beacon staff

The executive team from the Berkeley Beacon attended a meeting to offer a proposal for SGA's examination regarding their funding status.

October 29: Tuesda Roberts (Academic Affairs) and Public Art Think Tank

Three special guests attended the 10/29 meeting. Tuesda Roberts, the new Director for Faculty Development and Diversity, spoke regarding the College's heightened commitment to diversity and equity training and heard feedback from SGA officers regarding their thoughts on faculty's commitment to training.

Two guests from the Public Art Think Tank, Cher Knight, Professor of Visual and Media Arts, and Leonie Bradbury, Distinguished Curator-in-Residence, spoke regarding the public art think tank, a new public art initiative on Emerson's campus to bring more public art installations to spaces across campus. SGA officers provided suggestions on underutilized spaces to use on campus.

November 11: Brian Basgen (IT)

Brian Basgen, Assistant Vice President of IT, spoke at the meeting regarding changes to IT at the College. Basgen specifically outlined an investigation into recent server crashes during course registration in the Fall. He also answered questions regarding SGA officers' concerns with the college's new financial software, Workday.

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December 3: Jim Hoppe (Campus Life)

Vice President and Dean of Campus Life, Jim Hoppe, spoke at a meeting regarding SGA's concerns with the sidewalk expansion project, including lack of accessibility and narrow entryways causing congestion. Hoppe also showed proposals for the new Student Performance Production Center housed in the Little Building to officers.

January 28: Julie Avis-Rogers and Jake Freedman (Spiritual Life)

After the anti-semitic graffiti found in the Piano Row building, SGA officers invited Julie Avis-Rogers, director of Spiritual Life, and Jake Freedman, advisor for Hillel, to attend a meeting to discuss the College's response to the incident. Also in attendance were Chris Daly, assistant dean of Campus Life, and Jim Hoppe, Vice President and Dean of Campus Life, who heard comments and suggestions from SGA officers regarding the response.

February 4: Michael Whelan (Academic Affairs)

The College's Chief Academic Officer and Provost, Michael Whelan, attended a meeting to discuss mid-semester course feedback, faculty awards, and bias reporting. SGA officers provided an immense amount of constructive criticism surrounding bias reporting at the College.

Following the Provost's appearance, SGA senior leadership members alongside advisors Jason Meier and Jim Hoppe met with VP of Equity and Social Justice, Dr. Sylvia Spears, in a closed meeting to discuss further examination into the bias reporting process at the College and an incident of anti-Asian hate speech graffiti in the Little Building.

February 11: Heather May (ECCAAUP)

Heather May, representative for the full time faculty union, ECCAAUP, attended a meeting to discuss an ongoing situation regarding faculty pay for directed studies. SGA officers pledged to stand in solidarity with the union and [authored a resolution in support of full-time faculty members](#).

February 18: Erik Müürisepp (Campus Life)

Erik Müürisepp, Assistant VP for Campus Life, spoke regarding the College's U.S. Census project and how SGA could engage in promoting it across campus. He also provided information surrounding the college laundry plan for on-campus students, to which SGA officers provided input.

February 25: Jill Naimo (Voice Your Choice)

Jill Naimo, Associate Director of Student & Young Alumni Engagement, attended her second SGA meeting of the year as a guest speaker to announce a continued

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partnership with SGA. SGA officers provided feedback on how Voice Your Choice went in the Fall 2019 General Election.

March 10: Raul Reis (School of Communication)

Dean Raul Reis of the School of Communication attended a meeting to announce the second annual Communication Days to SGA officers. SGA officers provided feedback on events and partnership on advertising the event to students.

Although the semester was cut short, planned guests for the remainder of the semester originally had included **Dean Rob Sabal** (School of Arts) to discuss co-curriculars at the College, **Dean Amy Ansell** (Institute of Liberal Arts) to discuss the academics following impending Marlboro College merger, **Dr. Sylvia Spears** (Social Justice Center) to discuss identity-based harm and bias reporting, **Paul Dworkis** (Finance) to discuss financial equity at the College, and **Sharon Duffy** (Student Success) to discuss food insecurity at the College.

History and Archiving

As part of an executive cabinet initiative to chronicle SGA's 112 year history, History and Education Director Jay Rosato met with the Emerson Archives multiple times throughout the Spring semester to assemble together a motley of information on SGA into a timeline.

Jay created a first draft of the official SGA timeline, [available here](#). *(Note: This is an incomplete and living document.)*

Lead365 National Conference

In late October, SGA Executive President Raz Moayed, Executive Vice President Will Palauskas, Executive Treasurer Abby Semple, Class of 2022 President Cassie Shelley, and Advisors Sharon Duffy and Jason Meier attended the annual Lead365 National Conference. SGA sent delegates to this conference to network with students and staff from other institutions, hear from recognized speakers and presenters, and develop their leadership and professional skills.

Minutes

Full written meeting records for the entire year were taken by Executive Secretary Julia Stanton. These minutes contained exact wording from SGA officers, guests, and other parties during Joint Session meetings. Meeting recordings for Zoom Joint Sessions were also taken for member record and sent to the press when asked. [All minutes are available here](#).

Open Position Appointments

The SGA filled a number of open appointed positions this year. A number of students were appointed to the Executive Board and other support positions, including

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- Melissa Bordelon (Executive Vice President, fall semester)
- Joseph Johnson (Chief Justice, 2019 - 2020)
- Lilly Meehan Egan (Chief Justice, 2020 -)
- Julia Stanton (Executive Secretary)
- Jehan Ayesha (Executive Assistant, fall semester)
- Ariane Ivanier (Executive Assistant, fall semester)
- Gianna Girona (Chief of Staff, spring semester)

Additionally, the following were appointed to open senator, commissioner, cabinet, class council, and chair positions:

- Naomi Jones (Class of 2021 President)
- Ali Michalak (Writing, Literature & Publishing Senator)
- Jake Apitz (Communication Sciences & Disorders Senator)
- Jay Liu (International Students Commissioner, fall semester)
- Gianna Girona (Sustainability Commissioner)
- Tatiana Melendez (FSL Commissioner, fall semester)
- Maximo Lawlor (FSL Commissioner, spring semester)
- Caroline Rodriguez (POWER Commissioner, fall semester)
- Eryn McCallum (POWER Commissioner, spring semester)
- Harper McKenzie (Accessibility Commissioner)
- Annie Kew (Transfer Student Commissioner, spring semester)
- Lily Fitzherbert (LGBTQIA+ Commissioner, fall semester)
- Anthony Allocca (LGBTQIA+ Commissioner, spring semester)
- Arasha Lalani (Board of Trustees representative, fall semester)
- Lindsay Debrosse (Board of Trustees representative, fall semester)
- Hannah Flaherty (Communications Director, spring semester)
- Jay Rosato (History and Education Director, spring semester)
- Thea Nagle (Social and Events Director, spring semester)
- Lilly Meehan-Egan (Elections and Outreach Director, spring semester)
- Meredith Stisser (PR Chair, fall semester)

Organization Affiliation Process

As part of a new change to how student organizations are affiliated on campus, the Office of Student Engagement & Leadership (SEAL) and SGA partnered together on affiliating organizations on campus via the Student Organization Affiliation Process. In the fall semester, Executive Vice President Will Palauskas and CSD Senator Melissa Bordelon served on the committee. In the spring semester, Executive Vice President Melissa Bordelon and Class of 2022 Senator Lindsay Debrosse served on the committee.

The following organizations were affiliated by the committee:

Fall 2019

- Hip Hop Society

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- Theyta
- Camp Kesem Emerson
- CHUANG Stage
- Mystic
- Emerson Quidditch
- SkinTones

Spring 2020

- Hidden Lanterns
- Wack Mag

Outreach and Social Media

SGA committed to continue to promote its efforts and outreach to students through a number of different channels. SGA social media pages were used more frequently and more heavily to allow more communication

Staff

In the spring semester, as part of the Executive Cabinet proposal, two new positions were created to aid in communication to the student body. These positions included the Communication Director and Elections and Outreach Director, who oversaw social media and member recruitment respectively.

Instagram

A total of 75 posts were made by the 2019-20 SGA Officers. The total Instagram audience grew more than 250 hundred followers during the academic year, with more than 400 now following the [@emersonstudentgov](#) account.

Updates

As part of a commitment by Executive President Will Palauskas to communicate more directly to the student body, seven executive updates were published to the SGA website in the Spring semester. [The updates are available to read here.](#)

Takeovers

Two Instagram takeovers of the Emerson College Instagram story occurred, one to promote the Academic Town Hall and the other to promote the constitutional ratification special election. Through the takeovers, hundreds of students were redirected to the SGA website where hundreds of students were able to learn more about

Website

As part of an effort to make SGA more accessible to the student body, the entire website was overhauled and completely redesigned to provide more visual interest

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as well as organization. The new website replaces one created more than five years ago.

After the website was redesigned, from August 1 to May 1, there were more than 4,200 unique visitors to the website. There was also a total of 11,094 page views in the same period.

Class Councils

Class Presidents used social media to promote SGA happenings and events. The [Class Council of 2023 Instagram](#), which was created in the spring semester, now has over 466 followers and posts regular correspondence with the class.

Class Presidents also corresponded regularly via mass emails to their class to inform them about ongoing happenings, events, and SGA proceedings.

Resolutions

For the first time in recent SGA history, two pieces of legislation were authored by SGA officers. In what was effectively a trial of a new system, these two resolutions written helped prove that a legislative model could work effectively. Both resolutions help set a new benchmark for the caliber of legislation written going forward.

A Resolution Regarding Fair Compensation For Faculty

Authored by Senator Ali Michalak, this resolution was written in support of the full-time faculty union on campus. SGA officers encouraged college administrators to pay faculty members for directed studies. The full resolution is [available here](#).

A Resolution Regarding The Loss Of In-Person Learning Due To COVID-19

Authored by Executive Treasurer Abigail Semple, this resolution detailed the importance of experiential learning and expressed students' concerns surrounding a lack of clarity around the issue. [The full resolution is available here](#).

Treasury Summary

Major achievements include 100% of student organizations attending treasury training, a newly introduced paperless process, and proposed the Financial Equity Committee which was included in the newly ratified Constitution. SGA has put a focus on reimbursements becoming faster by encouraging more students to enroll in direct deposit payment options and pushed student leaders towards using payment-to-vendor options to avoid placing any financial burdens upon students.

Treasury Process

The new paperless process has saved Emerson hundreds of dollars and prevented thousands of carbon copies (which cannot be recycled) from being printed, and has been

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crucial for students to be able to continue to utilize their organization funding during quarantine, which would not have been possible with the previous paper system.

Also the new system is now fully automated, so whereas previously about a half a dozen students worked with the former Executive Treasurer doing data entry for about 10 hours every week. The new paperless process is now able to complete that task in about 10 minutes and only requires one person. We have continued enhancing the paperless system throughout the year to allow future student leaders to spend more time doing the important work advocating for the student body, instead of being buried under a pile of paperwork.

Zoom Meetings

Following an unprecedented shortened ending to the semester, officers of SGA committed to continue meeting via Zoom to help serve their constituents. A total of four joint sessions were held via Zoom in from late March to early May, with roughly 20 to 30 members of SGA attending each.

Meetings were fully recorded and transcribed by Executive Secretary Julia Stanton. All votes were performed asynchronously and virtually to allow officers who were unable to attend the opportunity to represent their constituents' voices through democratic action.