

# Plant Biology Graduate Student Organization Constitution

Initially Approved and Ratified: 13 December 2016

Most Recently Amended: 18 October 2017

## **Article 1. Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the Plant Biology (PLB) Graduate Student Organization (GSO) is to:

1. educate the Michigan State University (MSU) community and the broader public on plant biology and plant biology-related issues through the organization of public events;
2. organize social events as part of a larger effort to support and contribute to a strong and active PLB graduate student community;
3. serve as the voice of the graduate student body within the PLB program by providing a safe and confidential forum for students to raise concerns about ongoing program activity and act as a liaison between graduate students and faculty, when necessary;
4. recruit and elect PLB members to serve on the committees and positions listed in section 4.2 of this constitution, communicate relevant information between those committees and the GSO, and act as the intermediary between the PLB program, the Council of Graduate Students (COGS), and the University administration.

## **Article 2. Membership**

The PLB GSO is open to all graduate students admitted to the PLB graduate program, and all PLB graduate students are automatically members. The organization is focused primarily on graduate activity within the PLB program, but we are open to and appreciate the ideas and opinions of all MSU community members. Every effort will be made to ensure a diversity of representation on the PLB GSO executive board (section 3.1) and within all committees (section 4.2). The organization will not discriminate on the basis of age, color, sex, gender, gender identity, disability status, height, marital status, national origin, political persuasion, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, or weight. While we welcome participation from all MSU community members, only MSU students may be officers and/or voting members (per University rules and regulations).

## **Article 3. Officers**

The PLB GSO is intended to create a rich and open community comprising all PLB graduate students. The purpose of officers is to facilitate discussion and lead planning in specific areas. Importantly, the PLB GSO is horizontally structured—all members have an equal voice. As such, officers do not have additional voting rights or greater influence on decisions than any other member of the organization.

### **3.1 Positions & Responsibilities**

**President:** The President leads GSO meetings, schedules meeting times for each semester and checks in with officers and committee members to report on meetings they attended. The President also attends PLB faculty meetings and reports on what is discussed at the GSO meetings. The President also ensures that PLB activities and operations, including officer elections, are consistent with the Statement of Purpose and regulations herein. In the event that a sitting Treasurer steps down or their position is otherwise terminated and no incoming Treasurer is available, the duties of the Treasurer will be done by the President until such time as a new Treasurer has been elected (pursuant to Section 3.2 of this Constitution).

**Treasurer:** Manages finances for the PLB GSO. Responsibilities include keeping a budget of the organization's fundraising and spending, and facilitating reimbursements from the organization's financial account(s). The Treasurer will also comply with the responsibilities listed in Section 4.4 of this Constitution.

**Secretary:** Responsibilities include recording attendance and taking brief notes on topics discussed at GSO meetings. Meeting minutes will be made publicly available excluding all information that compromises the confidentiality of PLB GSO members. Minutes are to be typed up, e-mailed to all the of the PLB graduate students, and posted on the GSO website.

**Social Chair(s):** Leads social planning efforts. Responsibilities include scheduling events, determining event costs, seeking funds, identifying venues, advertising, and setting up events.

### **3.2 Elections & Term Limits**

#### **3.2.1 Election Procedures**

Elections for all positions will be held during the fall semester every year and will be voted on by all PLB graduate students. Any current member of the PLB GSO may run

for and be elected to one or more positions. All PLB graduate students will be notified of the upcoming elections at least seven calendar days prior to the start of the election; this notification will include a description of the officers' duties and a call for position nominations. Position nominations can be either self-nominations or the nomination of others. In the event that a candidate is nominated by someone else, the candidate can decline to run, if they so choose. At the PLB GSO elections meeting, any position which is uncontested (i.e., has only one person running) will automatically be filled with that person. In cases where there are multiple people running for a single position, an election will be held to allow for voting in of a single candidate or a committee can be proposed. After the conclusion of the elections, results will be announced to the PLB GSO, PLB graduate students, PLB GSO Advisor, and relevant PLB departmental personnel following the conclusion of the elections process, and officers will take office immediately and serve for one full academic year, until the time of the next election cycle.

### **3.2.2 Term Limits**

Officers are restricted to two consecutive terms (i.e., two academic years) in any one position, but may serve in a different position after consecutive terms. An officer may serve for more than two consecutive terms if no other member fills the position. Importantly, outgoing officers will make a commitment to pass on, to the best of their abilities, all institutional knowledge and any associated paperwork, online accounts, etc. regarding their role and responsibilities to newly elected officers.

### **3.2.3 Special Contingencies**

A special election will be held if an elected officer completes his/her degree, is no longer a current MSU student, resigns, moves away from the East Lansing/Kellogg Biological Station area, or is otherwise unable to fulfill his/her position's requirements. In the event that, during a normal election cycle, an officer position remains unfilled due to lack of nominations, or an officer resigns or is recalled from their position, the role and duties of the vacant position will revert to the President until such time as the position can be filled, either by a normal election, as outlined under Section 3.2.1, or via a special election, which will follow the same procedures as normal elections.

### **3.3 Termination of Position**

Officers may be voted out of a position if they are not meeting their duties, following the terms and conditions of Section 4.3.

## **Article 4. Operating Procedures**

### **4.1 Meetings**

The PLB GSO will meet once per month (during the spring and fall semesters) to discuss ongoing proceedings and future events. The PLB GSO will not meet over the summer semester or winter break unless special circumstances necessitate such a meeting. The meetings will be restricted to members and invited guests. Additional meetings may be scheduled as necessary.

### **4.2 Committees & Additional Positions**

Members will also assist the PLB program, the College of Natural Science (CNS), and Michigan State University by filling the following additional positions and/or serving as student representatives on departmental, college, or university permanent and ad-hoc faculty/student committees. These positions also include GSO-supporting roles. These include, but are not limited to:

**Representative to the CNS Student Advisory Committee:** The CNS Student Advisory Council (SAC) is an organization whose purpose is to advise the Dean on issues concerning undergraduate and graduate students within the college and to promote the interests of these students. Responsibilities for this position include going to one meeting per month with the Dean, Associate Deans, and Assistant Dean of the CNS and a graduate representative from each CNS department. The SAC representative will contribute to discussions of new changes to the sciences at MSU, and pass on this and other information to the GSO.

**Representative to the CNS Council on Diversity & Community:** The CNS Council on Diversity and Community (CDC) is charged with advising CNS on issues relevant to creating a supportive and diverse community. CDC activities include identifying tools and resources for handling work-life balance and creating environments where diversity in background and lifestyle are believed to be an asset in advancing the success of the college. Responsibilities for this position include going to one meeting per month, contributing toward CDC goals, and relaying concerns and opportunities between the GSO and CDC.

**Representative to the Graduate Employees Union:** The Graduate Employees Union (GEU) gives graduate students the support to work to the best of their abilities, holds the university accountable for its actions, and ensures that graduate employees will be treated like professionals. Responsibilities of the position include facilitating GEU

resource utilization if anyone has a grievance about work and/or feel that the university is not fulfilling our union contract. There are bi-weekly meetings with the GEU, but the PLB GEU representative is not expected to attend every one. This position is recommended for a graduate student with Teaching Assistant (TA) experience.

**Representative to the Council of Graduate Students:** The Council of Graduate Students (COGS) is the authorized student government for all graduate and professional students at Michigan State University. The full council meets once per month to discuss issues related graduate and professional students. COGS organizes campus wide events for graduate and professional students and also funds student events and research. Responsibilities of the position include attending the monthly meeting, working with the Social Chair(s) and Treasurer to obtain COGS funding for GSO events, and distributing COGS news and event information to PLB graduate students.

**Representative to the PLB Department Advisory Council:** The Department Advisory Council (DAC) meets once per month to discuss departmental concerns and provide feedback to the department Chair. The DAC representative attends the monthly meetings, relays graduate student concerns to the DAC, and reports to the GSO on DAC activities.

**Representative to the PLB Graduate Committee:** The PLB Graduate Committee proposes changes to the PLB graduate program, including changes to requirements concerning student evaluations and comprehensive exams. These changes will be reflected in the Graduate Student Handbook. In addition, this committee reviews applications to the PLB graduate program and recommends prospective students for fellowship funding from the Plant Science Fellowship committee, CNS, and university fellowships. The committee also approves prospective students for Research Assistant (RA) and TA funding. Responsibilities for this position include attending committee meetings, relaying concerns and responses between the Graduate Director and the GSO, contributing to discussions and decisions concerning admittance of new students, and participating as needed in Plant Sciences recruitment events.

**Representative to the PLB Seminar Committee:** The Seminar Committee selects speakers for the PLB Seminar Series for the upcoming academic year, including one student-invited speaker. This position organizes the student nominations and votes for the student-invited speaker, and organizes the graduate student and post-doc lunches with the speakers.

**Representative to the PLB Faculty Search Committee (ad hoc):** This committee handles all aspects of hiring PLB-appointed faculty, including drafting a job solicitation, reviewing applicants, organizing visits, and evaluating candidates. The representative will participate in these activities, organize student lunches with candidates, and collect student evaluations of the candidates. This position is only available as needed by the department.

**Outreach Coordinator(s):** In order to further the PLB GSO's outreach mission, the Outreach Coordinator(s) will organize public outreach events as well as facilitate PLB participation in broader campus outreach events. Responsibilities include distributing outreach opportunities to PLB GSO members, organizing events to be hosted by the GSO, and interfacing with the PLB Communications Coordinator to publicly advertise such efforts.

**T-shirt Coordinator:** The PLB GSO designs and prints t-shirts for the department once per year. This position organizes design submissions, collects votes for the favored design, and coordinates with the t-shirt supplier and GSO Treasurer to order the t-shirts. It is recommended that the T-shirt Coordinator collaborate with the Social Chair(s) to arrange opportunities to sell t-shirts to non-PLB members and/or the public.

**Webmaster:** The PLB GSO has a webpage through the PLB department page. This position maintains the PLB GSO webpage by posting the GSO meeting minutes and announcements, and keeping the event and officer listings updated.

**Student Lecture Series Coordinator:** The Student Lecture Series (SLS) is a series of weekly seminars intended for presentations by graduate students and post-docs, but other presenters may be considered (e.g., recent graduates). Presenters should be part of or otherwise associated with PLB. This position organizes the time and location of the seminar series each semester, solicits the PLB community for speakers, manages the speaker schedule, and e-mails advertisements for the speaker(s) of that week. It is recommended that steps be taken toward establishing a permanent time and location for the SLS.

**Grad Lounge Soda & GSO Meeting Snacks Coordinator:** The PLB Grad Lounge is kept stocked with cans of soda that can be purchased by PLB or non-PLB members. This provides a funding source for the GSO. GSO meetings are accompanied with snacks and any extra snacks are left in the Grad Lounge with the intent of being consumed by PLB graduate students. This position coordinates with the GSO Treasurer to keep the Grad Lounge stocked with soda, return the soda cans for deposit as needed, and purchase the snacks for the monthly GSO meetings

**KBS Liaison(s) to the PLB GSO:** The Kellogg Biological Station (KBS) is an important component of the PLB department and a number of PLB graduate students reside at KBS. The KBS Liaison sets up online streaming of GSO meetings to facilitate inclusion of PLB graduate students stationed at KBS. In addition, this position relays suggestions and updates between Plant Biology students at KBS and those on the main campus.

### **4.3 Termination of Position**

The loss of current MSU student status will result in the immediate termination of any currently held position within PLB GSO. In addition, officers, committee representatives, and other GSO-related positions may be voted out of a position if they are not meeting their duties, including attending PLB GSO meetings, actively participating in relevant events, and meeting the specific responsibilities of their position (as described in Section 3.1 or 4.2). In order to remove an individual from a position, a formal complaint, including an explicit description of the offenses, must be submitted to the PLB GSO Advisor and GSO President to be reviewed in conjunction with the GSO officers (i.e., President, Treasurer, and Secretary). The PLB GSO Advisor or GSO officers will give guidance on how to improve performance to the individual in the complaint. The individual must be given at least one month's notice to provide an opportunity for improved participation. At the end of this period, the PLB GSO Advisor and GSO officers will meet to discuss whether the satisfactory improvement has been made. If sufficient performance is still lacking, removal of the individual from the position will be by a two-thirds vote of attending members at an official PLB GSO meeting if members have been informed of the meeting and the situation at least seven calendar days prior to the removal vote.

### **4.4 Accountability of Treasurer**

#### **4.4.1 Financial Meetings: Treasurer Remains in Position**

At both the beginning and conclusion of each academic year, the sitting Treasurer will hold a meeting with a minimum of one additional officer. This meeting will entail the Treasurer listing all transactions that have been made on the PLB GSO financial account(s) since the time of the previous Financial Meeting, as well as the current balance and status of the PLB GSO financial account(s). At the conclusion of this meeting, both the Treasurer and the other officer(s) in attendance will sign a form indicating that the meeting has taken place as well as the balance of the financial account(s) at that date.

In the event that the sitting Treasurer is stepping down from his/her position at the time this meeting would take place, this meeting will be cancelled, and the Treasurer Turnover meeting will be held instead (see Section 4.4.2, below).

#### **4.4.2 Financial Meetings: Treasurer Turnover**

If a sitting Treasurer is stepping down at the time of one of the regularly scheduled Financial Meetings, a Financial Meeting is still required to occur. Additionally, if the sitting Treasurer's position has been terminated, a Financial Meeting is required to occur, regardless of when during the academic or calendar year such an event occurs. At this meeting, those required to attend are the outgoing Treasurer, the incoming Treasurer, and one additional officer. If there is no available incoming Treasurer at the time of the meeting, the responsibility of the incoming Treasurer will be filled by the sitting President, in which case, at least one additional officer is still required beyond the outgoing Treasurer and the sitting President, for a minimum of three officers. This meeting will entail the Treasurer listing all transactions that have been made on the PLB GSO financial account(s) since the time of the previous Financial Meeting, as well as the current balance and status of the PLB GSO financial account(s). At the conclusion of this meeting, all of the three or more officer(s) in attendance will sign a form indicating that the meeting has taken place as well as the balance of the financial account(s) at that date.

#### **4.4.3 Transparency of Financial Account(s)**

The Treasurer is required to maintain a record of the PLB GSO financial account(s) in a location that is available such that all members of the PLB GSO can view the record. Only the Treasurer has the ability and responsibility to edit record. This record is required to display the starting balance of the account(s) at each term, as well as a record of all transactions to the account(s) for a minimum of three previous years and a maximum of seven previous years. The location of this record is at the discretion of the sitting Treasurer, but it must be available such that all members of the PLB GSO may view it at any time.

#### **4.4.4 Maintenance of Financial Records**

The Treasurer is required to maintain a physical record of all transactions on any and all of the PLB GSO financial account(s). This record must include all transactions made on the behalf of the PLB GSO and must include all financial records for seven calendar years prior to the current calendar year. All records older than seven calendar years prior to the current calendar year are to be removed from the record and disposed of in a secure manner.

### **Article 5. Amendments**

Any member may propose an amendment to the PLB GSO constitution. An amendment must be approved by a two-thirds vote of attending members at an official PLB GSO meeting if members have been informed of the meeting and the amendment at least seven calendar days prior.