



Pi Sigma Alpha
Student Officer Handbook

2022-2023

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INTRODUCTION

Serving as a student officer of Pi Sigma Alpha is a great opportunity to develop skills that will be valuable in the next stage of your career, including leadership, communication, budgeting, event coordination, and more. As a full time student you already have a great deal on your plate. Pi Sigma Alpha would like to make things a bit easier by providing a bit of guidance on your year ahead. This is not designed to be a road map but rather a guide. The national office is always available to you as a resource. Our email is office@pisigmaalpha.org.

CONNECT VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

The best means to stay connected with Pi Sigma Alpha news and updates is through our social media channels. Be sure that you as an officer follow us but also encourage all your chapter members to follow as well.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PiSigmaAlphaNational/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/PSANational>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/pisigmaalpha/>

LinkedIn:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/pi-sigma-alpha-the-national-political-science-honor-society>

LinkedIn group: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/2800071/>

UNIVERSITY STANDING

Maintaining an active chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha on your campus may mean a number of different things. If your chapter is officially recognized as a student organization you may be required to complete paperwork or be part of a training session each year to maintain active status. By maintaining active status you may be eligible for access to grants or other financial opportunities to support chapter activities.

If your chapter requires an annual renewal for active status, we recommend maintaining a file with details on previous renewals. Most institutions have two registration windows for student organizations: one in the fall and one in the spring. Keeping good records and a transition document for future officers is the best way to make sure your chapter is always in good standing on campus.

Some campuses require student officers to sit through an officer training session.

ACTIVE STATUS WITH THE NATIONAL OFFICE

In terms of standing with the national office, all we ask is that you induct new members. This means submitting names and dues for membership. Having an active chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha can mean any number of things. Some chapters have events through the year and create a community around it. Others simply initiate new students at one point during the year and offer them the recognition tied to the honor. It is all tied to how much bandwidth student leaders have to design programs.

CHAPTER BYLAWS

Each active chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha must maintain a set of bylaws. The bylaws are your guiding document to the official management of the chapter. If your chapter advisor does not have a current set of bylaws available you should reach out to the national office for examples. The development of chapter bylaws is a fantastic means to bring student members together and engage in discussion about what the chapter should be. Bylaws outline membership requirements, officer elections, and more. If you develop a new or updated set of bylaws it is required that you share a copy with the national office.

ROLE OF THE FACULTY ADVISOR

The faculty advisor is the primary link between the national organization of Pi Sigma Alpha and student members. The national office relies on the professional standing of the faculty advisor to ensure the chapter meets all the official demands of the organization. While Pi Sigma Alpha encourages and supports the development of student leadership, the engagement of the advisor is necessary and a strong working relationship between student leaders and the chapter advisor is a key to success.

As a student officer it is your responsibility to keep the chapter faculty advisor informed of your activities and seek their guidance and consent when necessary. Only a faculty advisor has the authority to deem an individual eligible for membership. This is a critical component in maintaining the integrity of the organization.

Money is another area where the chapter advisor is the ultimate authority. If your chapter maintains its own bank account the faculty advisor must be listed as one of the “owners” of the account (or the primary user on the account, if possible).

ROLE OF STUDENT OFFICERS

Chapters of Pi Sigma Alpha are designed as a means for a department to recognize its highest achieving students and create a vehicle for those students to engage around politics and political science. For some chapters this simply means a membership induction event and the right to wear regalia during commencement. For other chapters, membership provides the unique opportunity to be part of an active, student-driven organization with peers who share a similar passion. For those chapters in the second category, the driving force is often elected student officers. Working with the faculty advisor and departmental leadership, student officers have a chance to take on leadership and organization skills that will sustain the chapter’s presence on campus.

Chapter bylaws should outline elected student officers and their role. For many chapters this roster would be President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary.

At a basic level these roles may look like this:

President: The chapter president shall: communicate with and brief the advisor on chapter activities; make decisions on matters that do not require consensus or input from other members; hold order and run chapter meetings; be the primary contact for students interested in Pi Sigma Alpha

Vice President: The chapter vice president shall: fill the president’s role when they are not available; advise the chapter president on issues concerning active members, faculty, and interested students

Secretary: The chapter secretary shall: submit a report every semester to the president and the chapter advisor containing information on chapter activity for that semester; keep minutes of all chapter meetings; notify members at least one week prior to official chapter meetings

The chapter may also choose to have positions such as social media coordinator, event coordinator, historian, etc.

Beyond the title, it is incredibly important for incoming officers to understand their responsibility to the chapter and to the members. Pressures from competing demands – academic, professional, and work – can impact a student officer’s ability to fulfill their duty. Communication is crucial.

STUDENT OFFICER ELECTIONS

Each chapter may have their own style for annual officer elections. The national office only requests that the process is open, fair, and transparent. Students should consult their chapter bylaws and use the faculty advisor as a resource throughout the process. What follows are examples and suggestions for operating an election.

The national office encourages chapters to conduct their elections in the spring following the induction of new members. By holding elections in the spring the outgoing officers are available to play a role in the transition process. The chance for outgoing officers to sit and talk about the role with incoming officers is often a critical part of success. By holding spring elections it also provides the new officers a chance to begin planning for the year ahead over the summer months. It also gives the chapter the ability to jump right into on campus activities once students return in the fall.

The process should begin early with an open call for nominations and a deadline for member response. The chapter should provide a list of open positions and brief description of the roles (as outlined in your bylaws). An individual may self-nominate or be nominated by a fellow member.

Candidates should submit a brief statement of interest and detail their qualifications and interest for the position. This information can be shared with chapter members via email. Some chapters do this with short video clips from the prospective officers. Others do it with written statements.

The election may be conducted in person or digitally. On some campuses the election is held during a chapter meeting and this provides candidates an opportunity to say a few words about their desire for a role. The election should then be conducted via secret ballot. The responsibility for counting ballots should be held by the current chapter secretary, with participation by the faculty advisor. Chapter bylaws should speak to actions in the case of a tie or challenged election. For some chapters the current president does not vote, except in the case of a tie.

In the case college or university offers a digital tool to handle elections please ensure that all current members have access to the system. This may involve verifying with each member their current email address. Other chapters create a digital tool through Google Docs (or something similar) to coordinate full member voting.

GETTING STARTED IN THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR

The arrival of the new school year comes with a great amount of energy across campus. This is the time to harness that energy and develop a plan for the year ahead.

- Talk, plan, and schedule. If officers for the new year were elected in the spring, don't let summer go by without talking – even via email. Throw out ideas. If a Chapter Annual Report was created in the previous year, be sure to review and see what worked and what can be done again. Talk with officers from the previous year about how they operated. Find those things that worked well and try to do them again.
- Don't wait! Schedule a meeting or two with your faculty advisor right out the gate. Develop a plan to communicate through the course of the year. Think about setting up a weekly, biweekly, or monthly meeting.
- Make a calendar. Think about the big activities on campus and in your department that you want the chapter to be involved with. This could include setting up a table for your campus student activity fair or something similar. If there is a major and minor fair or something around political science, be sure to be part of such events. What about homecoming? Think about how you want to be part of your department's event.
- Hold a kick off meeting early. Try to get as many members to this first meeting as possible. Have pizza or sandwiches or cookies. Be sure the chapter advisor can take part! Share your calendar and talk about opportunities from the national office.
- Think about your induction event (fall or spring or both). How can you make it special? Plan ahead. The deadline for national office Chapter Activity Grant proposals is October 31. Do you want to spend money to invite an out of town speaker or could you find a local alum who would be interesting to your members and faculty?

MEMBERSHIP AND RECRUITMENT

The size of a Pi Sigma Alpha chapter can vary widely. In a small department with only a few majors it may be that only one or two members are inducted each year. A large department may induct 100 or

more students a year. Either way, membership should be a group effort with student officers investing time in the process and communicating widely.

Membership recruitment is not just focused on those students who are eligible to join, it is a concentrated effort to inform all students about what Pi Sigma Alpha is and what it means.

How can you get the word out?

- Be visible on campus. Take part in any institution sponsored events where the chapter can have a table. This might be for a general student organization fair or something sponsored by the department. This will allow you to reach everyone from freshmen to upperclassmen.
- Be active in the department. Find a way for the chapter to take part in department events. This might involve cosponsoring an existing program or developing something new that is valuable for the department. Does your department have a Best Professor Award or something similar? How about inquiring if your chapter can sponsor the prize. How about a beginning of the semester welcome back reception? If your department hosts such an event, see what role your chapter can play in making it successful. Perhaps help with set up and cleanup. This can be a bonus for your chapter members as they get more access to faculty.
- Ask faculty if officers can say a few words about Pi Sigma Alpha at the beginning of a class. If you know a professor is a member of Pi Sigma Alpha from their undergraduate or graduate school days be sure to recognize them as such in front of the class. If a student sees that their professor felt there was a good reason to join, they might also!
- Set up a table one day in the department office or in the main building where political science classes are held and invite people to stop by to learn more. Have a bowl of candy or some other little treat to entice people to stop. Come up with a game or quiz that creates some opportunity for engagement.

Student officers should work with the chapter advisor to request a list of eligible students each fall and each spring. This list can be drawn from the registrar's office and is your single best recruiting tool. Please note: the chapter advisor has the final say on determining eligibility.

Membership does not stop there. Once you have the list of eligible students there are a lot of possibilities. The exposure of the chapter to students is key.

- Have the faculty advisor send a note to all eligible students introducing them to Pi Sigma Alpha and why they should join. If your faculty advisor is a member of Pi Sigma Alpha be sure they note this! If there are other faculty in the department who are members, make note of them as well.
- Make personal connections. Ask your current members who they know from the eligible list. Then have that student reach out to the prospective member and encourage them to join. Have the student share details about what they have taken away from the experience of membership.

Explaining the value of membership ...

Membership is first and foremost an honor. It is recognition of academic achievement. As a result, some members' interest may decline once they are initiated. For them it is simply another line to have on their resume. Pi Sigma Alpha chapters can't put requirements for attendance but they can absolutely work to create a vibrant organization where students don't want to miss out on an opportunity that is only available to Pi Sigma Alpha members. Your chapter may be invited to take part in departmental or university sponsored events because they see these student members as the highest quality students on campus.

COORDINATING MEMBERSHIP WITH NATIONAL OFFICE

There are a few ways to invite eligible students to join. After identifying eligible students, the chapter advisor may create an invitation group in the My Honor Society database, including a note that you can personalize. This invitation allows students to follow a link and pay their dues. They may also order graduation regalia. At the end of the invitation window, we send all membership certificates to the chapter for distribution, while graduation regalia is shipped directly to members.

The chapter advisor (or a chapter officer, with permission from the advisor) can also send the national office a full list of eligible members and we can generate email invitations that allow students to follow a link and pay their dues. Officers may also order graduation regalia. At the end of the invitation window we send all membership certificates to the chapter for distribution, and all regalia items directly to the student members.

Another option is to conduct all outreach to eligible students and collect dues yourself. Once you do this, you can send the national office an email order form and payment for dues of newly inducted

members. This option can be helpful if your chapter chooses to collect local dues. Please note that when ordering directly from the chapter in bulk, all items (including regalia) are shipped directly to the chapter for distribution.

PROGRAMMING

Pi Sigma Alpha was founded 100 years ago and today there are nearly 850 chapters. All of this is to say there have been a lot of very successful programs developed by chapters. You don't need to reinvent the wheel! As an officer you should think about what would be valuable to your members, to students in your department, or students at your institution. Perhaps your chapter has an annual program that is very successful. Focus on that. Keep up the strong tradition and you will find that program helps define the success of your chapter – and how students and faculty view the organization on campus. As officers, be open to suggestions from across your membership. By communicating with your chapter members – and holding frequent meetings – you can be sure all voices are heard and that members feel like part of the process.

At a minimum, we hope your chapter will host an induction event. This provides the opportunity for members to be recognized in a public forum

Top 5 Suggestions for a Successful Event

- Don't bite off more than you can chew. If your officer group is already stretched thin with other responsibilities (internship, course load, GRE prep) don't overdo it. A modest event that goes off smoothly is what you want, not an event that is canceled last minute.
- Assign jobs. Make use of your full team. Your treasurer should lead the way with the budget and your communications specialist should help make sure that word gets out through the right channels (to members, to the department, to the university).
- Write it all down. Make sure to keep great records on the how, the when, and the how much. This will be a great resource for those who follow behind you. Be sure to take photos!
- Ask for help when you need it. Your chapter advisor and the national office can help when you need advice or support.

- Find a partner on campus. You don't have to do it all by yourself. By working with another student organization you can combine resources – both student work and financial resources.

NATIONAL OFFICE PROGRAMS

Each year the national office of Pi Sigma Alpha offers a number of programs for chapters. The national office will communicate details on these opportunities through the course of the year to student officers and the faculty advisor. Details will also be on the Pi Sigma Alpha website and on social media channels. Officers should keep chapter members informed about these opportunities as best they can. For all of these programs, coordination with the chapter faculty advisor is required.

- **Chapter Activity Grants.** Each year the national office budgets \$60,000-\$80,000 to support chapters and their program development. Any chapter that inducted new members in the previous year may apply for funding (up to \$2,000) to support one program. The proposal system opens in September with an October 31 deadline. Successful proposals must include a detailed narrative and budget. The national office will not fund general ideas. We want to see a descriptive proposal that shows some advance planning and thought. The proposals are reviewed by a faculty committee and decisions are released in mid-to-late November via email. Checks are mailed in early December. For a list of sample proposals, please visit the Pi Sigma Alpha web site.
- **National Student Research Conference.** This event is an outlet for students to present their research in a professional setting. The conference is held each year in Washington, DC in February over President's Day Weekend on the campus of George Washington University. Students who are not presenting are also welcome to attend. *The proposal deadline is December 1 annually. Acceptance emails are delivered by mid-December.*
- **Penniman Graduate Scholarship.** Penniman Scholarships are awarded annually to up to 5 members entering graduate school in political science in the upcoming academic year. Nominations must come from chapter advisors, accompanied by an official application and supporting documents as specified in the program announcement. Each scholarship is \$2,000. *Nominations are due May 1. The recipients are notified by mid July.*
- **McManus Washington Internship Scholarships.** McManus Washington Internship Scholarships are awarded annually to up to 5 members participating in political science

internship programs in Washington, DC, for the summer term, fall semester, or the following spring semester. Each scholarship is \$2,000. More funding may be available for recipients with demonstrated financial need. *Nominations are due May 1. The recipients are notified by mid July.*

- **Best Undergraduate Class Paper and Best Undergraduate Honors Thesis Award.** Each chapter advisor may nominate one per year in each category. Only Pi Sigma Alpha members are eligible to participate. The cash awards are \$250 for each first-place winner and \$100 each for runners-up. *Nominations are due on June 1; winners are notified by mid August.*

- **Best Chapter Awards.** At the end of each academic year, the chapter submits a chapter annual report detailing the state of the chapter and chapter activities from the previous year. This report submits the chapter into consideration for recognition as one of several “best chapters”. There are categories for chapters with undergraduate enrollment under 5,000, undergraduate enrollment between 5,000 and 15,000, undergraduate enrollment between 15,000 and 25,000, and undergraduate enrollment over 25,000. Each chapter recipient wins \$500 to be put toward programming in the following year.

- **Undergraduate Journal of Politics.** Developed in 2004, the Pi Sigma Alpha journal is a vehicle for the best research produced by undergraduate students. It is led by a student editorial board hosted by a Pi Sigma Alpha chapter for a three year window. Currently the chapter at Elon University is the host. The Journal welcomes submissions from undergraduates of any class or major; submissions from Pi Sigma Alpha members are especially encouraged. The Editorial Board routinely receives honors theses, senior seminar projects, capstone projects, and research methods papers. Submission deadlines are October 1 for the Fall issue and February 1 for the Spring issue. Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis, so earlier submissions are encouraged. Learn more at psajournal.org.

At one of your first officer meetings, think about a schedule for the year. Look at the deadlines for Pi Sigma Alpha national programs and establish what your chapter can take advantage of. Have new officers identify their individual goals as office holders and discuss organizational goals for the full year.

COMMUNICATION

Think about the channels you will use to communicate as officers and with the entire membership. For some, email will be best. Others will use GroupMe or Slack. Social media may also be a key means for you to reach your current chapter members, alumni members, and interested members. Find out what works best and stick to that!

CHAPTER REPORTS

The National Office requires that each chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha submit an Annual Report at the conclusion of the academic year. This is an opportunity for the chapter to summarize its activities. This is not designed to be a burdensome activity but is an important one for a number of reasons.

1. These reports are used by the national office to select Best Chapter Awards. By taking the time to submit a report your chapter will be considered for the \$500 prize and the recognition that comes with being named a Best Chapter.
2. The previous annual reports provide an immediate resource on where the chapter has found success for incoming officers. One of the first things an incoming officer group should do is review annual reports from the previous few years.
3. The report becomes a useful piece in developing the history of the chapter. Fifty years from now your success will be visible for future members to review. Creating a digital archive for all chapter materials – one that can be accessible by students and faculty – is a critical means to maintain these records.
4. The success of a chapter may be tied to the ability for one leadership team to transition to another. In any given year the chapter may have a down period. Fewer members, a faculty advisor away on sabbatical, or any number of other challenges. Creating a means for continuity is critical. These reports are key.

REMAINING QUESTIONS

If you have any remaining questions or concerns that have not been addressed by this guide, be sure to reach out to office@pisigmaalpha.org at any time and we will try our best to provide a helpful answer!