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Graduate Student Council of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

63.gsc.11: Amendment to the Bylaws concerning Council Meeting Procedures

Authors: GSC Secretary Orpheus Chatzivasileiou and GSC ARC Co-Chair Andrew Fiore

The Graduate Student Council of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, taking into consideration:

1. Article X.2 of the GSC Constitution
2. The need for clarification in how legislation may be reconsidered
3. The need for fairness and clarity in the voting procedure,

decides to amend the Bylaws as follows:

1. There is ambiguity into what it means to reconsider legislation that has already been voted on by the Council and how this is done. Therefore, Article V.C.2 is amended as follows:

An item of legislation already voted upon by the Council may be reconsidered if one of the following holds:

i. It is shown that there has been substantive change in either the wording of the legislation or related circumstances since the earlier vote

ii. The number of abstentions in the earlier vote was large enough to affect the outcome of the vote

iii. The current set of Council officers was not in place when the earlier vote was taken.

[To reconsider an item of legislation, Council can decide, by majority vote, to reintroduce this item to the legislative process, as per Article V.C.1..](#)

2. Currently, the Bylaws impose a very strict threshold for legislation passing or failing to pass and introduce a third option, of having legislation be tabled for further discussion at the next meeting. This third option is triggered if, during a vote, there are enough abstentions so that the sum of "yes" and "no" votes is below quorum. This strict threshold has a number of implications. It creates two different kinds of quorum. One kind is the one defined in Article V.C.3 (the majority of Council members has to be present) and another is the one defined in Article V.C.10 (the majority of Council members has to vote "yes" or "no"). As such, it eliminates the possibility of a Council member adopting a truly neutral stance with no effect, which is the effect that an abstention should have, given that an "abstention" can currently act as a more powerful

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version of "no". Furthermore, this can allow a small number of Council members to subvert the will of the Council, since, by strategically abstaining in votes that are close to quorum can cause legislation that is popular to be indefinitely tabled, or legislation that is unpopular to never be properly voted down and discarded. This constitutes a clear dysfunction in the voting procedure. Therefore, Article V.C. is amended as follows:

10. Unless specified otherwise in the Constitution or Bylaws, an article of legislation shall pass only if those votes cast in favor exceed those votes cast against, and if the amount of the total votes cast minus abstentions meets a half of quorum.
11. When the amount of the total votes cast minus abstentions does not meet a half of quorum, but a quorum is present at the meeting, the pending article of legislation shall be tabled and included as old business on the agenda for the next General Council Meeting.
- ~~12. Points 10 through 12 of this Section shall apply to all Main or Principal Motions, as defined in Robert's Rules of Order, and shall not apply to other types of motions.~~
- ~~13~~12. The Council may vote to temporarily suspend the process described in Article V, Section C, Point 1, allowing immediate action on a legislative item. Doing so shall require a majority vote of the full Council. This suspension shall only be used when following the prescribed legislative process can be shown to substantially diminish the utility of the vote due to external factors.
3. The Bylaws were recently amended (63.gsc.6) to replace the phrase "The President shall call monthly meetings of the Council." with "The President shall call regular meetings of the Council.". This makes the phrase "two-month cycle" in Article V.C.1 obsolete and potentially inaccurate, given that there may be months in which no Council meeting is held. Therefore, Article V.C.1 is amended as follows:

Issues to be voted on will be introduced ~~into a two-month cycle~~ using a process in which the subject is first brought up for an initial discussion at a Council meeting, and voted upon at the subsequent Council meeting. Representatives will be expected to discuss the matter with their constituencies in the intervening period between these Council meetings, and a venue for further discussion during this time will be provided if deemed necessary by the Executive Committee.

The above shall take effect immediately. The Secretary of the Graduate Student Council is ordered to publicize this document by any means appropriate.