

Columbia Atheists and Agnostics Constitution

Part 1—Preamble

Columbia Atheists and Agnostics exists to promote secular thought. To further that goal it engages in activities including but not limited to discussions of secular and religious ideas in politics, philosophy, morality, science, and the social sciences; events airing secular and skeptical views or reaching out to the general public; and social and campus activism.

The group is committed to providing nonreligious people with a safe space where they can air their views without fear of harassment.

Article 2 notwithstanding, the group welcomes people regardless of whether they are religious or not. This applies especially but not only to discussions of secular ideas, movements, and publications, in which the group seeks to have as diverse a range of views as practically possible.

The group maintains affiliation with the Center for Inquiry, as well as with other umbrella organizations whose agendas align with Columbia Atheists and Agnostics'.

The group does not discriminate on the basis of personal characteristics including but not limited to religion, gender, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, age, political beliefs, disability, and marital status.

Part 2—Membership

Any person may become a member by expressing a wish to join the group, and giving the Secretary his or her contact information. Current or former Columbia students should also give their school and year of graduation.

There is no membership fee.

The group keeps a list of current and former members. Members may not publicize the list or give it to anyone outside the group, except as required by Columbia University and the law.

Members may leave the group at any time through written notice or verbally at a formal meeting.

A voting member is a member who is a current student of Columbia University, at any of its schools.

Members are expected to adhere to a code of conduct, which forbids discrimination, excessively abusive language, and the use of political or other violence. For the purposes of this article, harassment is considered a form of discrimination, and threats are considered a form of violence.

The group may expel or suspend members only in cases of violations of the code of conduct. In that case, whoever wishes to remove the member in question must draw a list of charges as well as the recommended penalty—suspension or expulsion—and submit it to the entire group for review. The member must then have the opportunity to contest the charges. In any case, the President must hold a referendum on whether to take action against the accused member, in which people have up to two weeks from when the charges are submitted to vote, and a majority of two thirds is necessary to expel or suspend. In case of very serious infractions, the President and Vice President may decide together to suspend the accused member until the vote is complete.

Part 3—Meetings

The group has two sessions per year, beginning on the first day of classes during each semester and ending on the day of the last final. It is not in session between semesters and during the summer sessions.

Informal meetings may be held at any time and with a notice of any length, and may be closed to

the public. However, the only binding decisions that may be reached at such meetings are those about the agenda at a formal or informal meeting.

Formal meetings may be held only when the group is in session and require at least one week's notice. At those meetings, a quorum of a quarter of the membership is required to do business, and the Secretary must take minutes; if there is a quorum, members may reach any decision about the group's operation that does not conflict with this Constitution by majority vote. Members should but are not required to attend formal meetings. A majority of members present at a formal meeting may call for a deadwood check, in which members are asked whether they wish to remain in the group or leave.

At the discretion of both the President and the Vice President, the group may hold an emergency meeting, concerning a topic too urgent for a week's notice. Such a meeting must still have at least 24 hours' notice, and all of its decisions subsequently brought to a referendum.

Group-wide meetings for discussion or debate, or for event planning, are normally part formal and part informal. They should be announced at least a week before they take place, and start with a brief formal introduction outlining the purpose of the meeting, but are subsequently treated as if they are informal, requiring no quorum or minutes.

There are at least two formal meetings per session.

As soon as possible, the Secretary must make a formal meeting's minutes public or otherwise distribute them to the membership.

Every decision reached by majority vote, whether at a meeting or by referendum, must be publicized as soon as possible.

Every year, toward the end of the Spring Semester, there is a formal annual meeting, whose agenda includes a year-in-review report by the President, a financial report by the Treasurer, and elections for officers. The meeting is normally held during the last week of classes, and counts toward the minimum of two meetings per session.

Part 4—Officers

All officer positions are voluntary.

The President is the official head of the group, responsible for the overall direction of the group.

His or her specific duties include ensuring the other officers perform theirs effectively; resolving conflicts; chairing every meeting; and delegating any responsibility not expressly mentioned in this Constitution to the appropriate member or officer. Together with the Treasurer, the President holds the group's bank account.

The Vice President exercises the office of the President whenever the President is unable to attend. In his or her own right, the Vice President is responsible to the day-to-day planning of group activities.

The Treasurer oversees the group's budget and, together with the President, holds its bank account. The Treasurer must provide regular financial updates to the membership, especially following major events.

The Secretary is responsible to the technical management of the group. This includes taking and retaining minutes every formal meeting, keeping copies of all decisions and communications readily available, booking rooms and equipment whenever necessary, and maintaining and updating the membership list.

Other officer positions may be created at the discretion of either the President or the membership.

Part 5—Elections for Officers

Elections for President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and every officer position created by the membership take place during each annual meeting, and are for a term of one year.

All candidates must be voting members; in addition, as per University regulations, the President

and Treasurer must be current undergraduate students. All voting members may nominate themselves or others as candidates. Nominations open two weeks before the annual meeting, and close a week before the meeting.

The election is conducted by secret ballot deposited in a box, by majority vote. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, an immediate runoff takes place between the two candidates who received the highest numbers of vote. Ballots are drawn from the box in sequence; in case of ties, the candidate whose first vote was drawn first is considered to have more votes.

If a position is uncontested, the sole candidate wins by default.

Transfer of power takes place after the Spring Semester session is over.

Part 6—Removing Officers

Officers may resign at any time. If an officer other than the President resigns, the President may either appoint an interim successor or exercise the officer's responsibilities, but at any rate announce a referendum to take place, following the procedures of regular elections. If the President resigns, the Vice President becomes President, and subsequent procedures are the same as if the Vice President had resigned.

Officers are expected to attend every meeting, or, failing that, give a satisfactory reason with adequate notice. An officer who misses two successive formal meetings without a satisfactory reason is considered to have resigned.

The code of conduct applies especially stringently to officers. If they fail to respect it, or if they show willful neglect of duties or consistent incompetence, they may be removed from their positions. The procedures for removing an officer from power are thence the same as for removing a member, except that the Vice President is in charge of the referendum if the accused officer is the President. While officers are held to higher standards than members, the group may only remove an officer from the group if his or her actions would have been enough to expel a member; otherwise, it may only demote the officer to the position of a regular member.

Part 7—Referendum and Amendment

This Constitution may be amended by a majority of two thirds, except when the amendment conflicts with University policies. Any voting member may propose an amendment, or propose to modify a proposed amendment. The vote is open for two weeks after the announcement of the amendment's final version.

Members may propose a referendum at any time, including on decisions reached at formal meetings; in that case, voting is open for a week after the announcement of the referendum.

With the exception of secret ballot elections at the annual meeting, votes do not require a formal meeting. As such, they may be held electronically even when the group is not in session. If the President does not have the necessary Internet access to oversee a vote held out of session, he or she may delegate the task to the Vice President or another officer ahead of time.

A vote is considered to have a majority if the number of people voting yea is higher than the number of people voting nay; it is considered to have a two-thirds majority if the number voting yea is at least twice as much as the number voting nay. No vote requires an absolute majority of all members.