

AY 2022-2023

# Board of Visitors SGA Report

## Beginning of the Semester, Spring 2023

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Presented by Joey Zeldin, SGA President, 2022-2023

*Presented at the Board of Visitors' third meeting of the 2022-2023 Academic Year  
on February 17th, 2023.*

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## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Constitution Reform</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Our Initiatives</b>	<b>4</b>
Digital Collection Database	5
Increasing Social Media Engagement	5
Expanding our Partnerships	6
<b>Spring Elections</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>7</b>

## Dedication

As a school rooted in rich history, there are many traditions, organizations, pieces of literature, and important people that define the history of Mary Washington. Our Student Government Association is one of those important defining figures. Recently, I had the inkling to dig through old Mary Washington records in our library, where I stumbled across many editions of *The Battlefield*, an annual yearbook filled with the people, organizations, and traditions of the State Normal and Industrial School for Women at Fredericksburg and Mary Washington College, spanning from the first few years of the Normal School to the 60s, when MWC was apart of the University of Virginia system.

In the 1915 edition of *The Battlefield*, I found the first ever documented Student Government Association. The SGA of the State Normal School looked very different from what we have today, filled entirely with women, only having a formal Executive Committee filled with class representatives, and guided by a President, two Vice Presidents, and a secretary. The first ever documented Student Government President was Theresa Inez Lynch. Although no records seem to exist of Ms. Lynch, the page documenting all the members of the first SGA reads a statement that says “Each girl, having the welfare of the school at heart, has contributed to its success, and it promises to become a permanent factor in the school.” And over 100 years later, they were correct, although our organization has expanded to all people because we represent everyone who calls UMW home, regardless of gender, race, or sexuality.

This report honors our roots as the only governing body to represent Mary Washington students since 1915 and I dedicate this report to my predecessor of over 100 years, Theresa Inez Lynch. May our SGA go further and grow better than they ever could have imagined and also reflect an organization that has grown over the years in thinking, ideals, diversity, and tradition while holding our status as the premier representative body for all University of Mary Washington students.

## Constitution Reform

Our Student Government had not done a Constitution Review since 2019, which would have been the last time our constitution had been revised. Needless to say, we made sure a constitution review would be a key agenda item, and we successfully completed the review just before the winter break started. Important items we considered included reforming some of our committees, redefining some of the responsibilities of our roles, and discarding unnecessary language. Constitution reviews are incredibly important to any functioning body if they wish to run at optimal performance. A few members of SGA have been with the organization for 2+ years and some have been a part of the organization for less than a semester, so our input varied and was diverse, which is critical to a good discussion.

Consequently, now that we've done a review, our Senate will take up the task of proposing amendments that will change this language, as well as talking with UMW students to see what they want from SGA and how we can incorporate this into our constitution and our legislation. It will be a large task, but I am absolutely sure that our Senate will exceed expectations and create a constitution that will allow our organization to continue to flourish. In addition, we have talked about adding language that would expand our membership, as we anticipate the involvement gap due to the pandemic is starting to close as the classes of 2023 and 2024 are set to graduate this year and next year, respectively. Talks have included expansions of class seats, adding seats for each academic college, and reforming/expanding the roles of our appointed positions.

## Our Initiatives

Now that our Senate has taken a strong step in the right direction since the pandemic and has been actively doing important work, I have shifted my focus to executive business for the SGA, largely centered around logistics. As I stated in my first report, I believe investments are crucial to a healthy institution, and the SGA is certainly not excused from that. The two primary goals our branch will be investing in this semester are listed below:

### Digital Collection Database

Over the years, our SGA has had a sparse and limited method of collecting documentation, legislation, and information. This semester, I will be directing my Director of Administration to start a digital collection through the Simpson Library. The importance of this digital collection lies in historical recordkeeping, easier access for our organization to find legislation and documents, and, most importantly, easier student access. Currently, our SGA website is no longer updated due to the pandemic and a lack of continuity. We are currently exploring the possibility of an SGA website hosted through UMW servers to permanently establish continuity for future SGAs, but our first step in continuity is the archival of all of our documents we currently have on record, which are all in paper (with some dating back to 1984).

This digital collection will allow future SGAs to be able to build upon the backs of past SGAs and have access to any and all notes, ideas, meeting minutes, and legislation created by SGA as a whole. It will also elevate the executive goal of transparency to another level, as any member of the UMW community, not just students, can access this database and look through records. In order for our organization to be as successful as possible, it is critical we invest our time right now in helping future generations have everything they need to benefit students. This will also hopefully provide a more thorough historical look at the accomplishments of SGA throughout the years, ranging from more access to newspapers to focus groups on allowing birth control in the student health center in the 80s.

## **Increasing Social Media Engagement**

Social media is one of the most important tools any organization can use to boost their image and their brand. Our social media has seen growth in engagement and in followers, but we want to shift our focus to becoming a space where students can receive information and be in the loop about SGA, as well as our partners we work with. We'll be introducing weekly meeting alerts so students know when SGA meetings are, a weekly update of what SGA has been working on, and allowing any of our members to utilize our social media to promote their projects or efforts that they are currently working on.

Our social media portfolio includes our Instagram account and our UMW domain email, with our Twitter and Facebook accounts remaining active, but not used. Our most successful channel is our Instagram, where we encourage students to message us with any concerns or ideas they may have for improving aspects of campus. Our hope is that once our Instagram reaches consistent engagement, we can possibly look at restoring our Twitter and Facebook accounts to help further improve our chances of reaching the community. We also wish to expand our efforts of engaging with students through a website that is hosted by the UMW website, allowing students to be able to easily access their student government digitally. We hope to continue talks with various partners to be able to make this goal happen, as our social media would help to compliment our website well.

## **Expanding our Partnerships**

The SGA Senate will look to increase community and campus engagement through a variety of partnerships. For example, the SGA is entering a partnership with the Women and Gender Studies Club on an event to expand the amount of feminine products offered across campus. This partnership looks to expand the amount of bathrooms campus-wide to include bathrooms outside of the Cedric Rucker Center and the Hurley Convergence Center. In addition, this partnership looks to extend the placement of these feminine products beyond womens' restrooms to include gender neutral bathrooms. This partnership will be in the form of a drive during Women History Month, and is just the beginning of our outreach and partnership with campus clubs.

## Spring Elections

The election season for 2023-2024 elected positions approaches fast. We look to improve our organization's numbers by promoting our positions heavily and improving information about the election process. Currently, our elections are dictated by the bylaws and rules of the Universal Elections Committee, made up of members of each elected group on campus. When this group convenes in early March to prepare for the election cycle, I hope to work with members of all elected groups to revise some of the mundane and unnecessary text within these laws to encourage more students to actively participate in these elections, as well as get more students involved in our organizations.

Our SGA is slated to have a complete change in leadership, with some members discussing potential runs for higher positions. I am personally excited for this, as our members have grown the past two years under the leadership of our past president, Brianna Reaves, and myself. We have taken careful steps to foster an environment of growth, accountability, and confidence, encouraging members to take on responsibilities, pursue their interest, and create dialogue over politics. I predict not just a growth in membership for the SGA, but a shift in our practices in the right way, striving to continue our goal of proper student representation.

We often see that students do not get out to vote in our universal elections. A statistic released by the Weekly Ringer showed that only 204 students voted in the Fall elections, a number that does not reflect representation. Proposals that I as the SGA President hope to introduce into this committee include in-person voting stations, a longer campaign cycle, and the allowance of endorsements of candidates. This would help bring more students out to vote, as well as allow for student candidates to properly show their achievements as students and for their organizations they've been a part of to properly support them. I add this section into my report, because while the Universal Elections Committee does not fall under SGA, it is a critical organization that affects how we govern and affects how students engage with our community. I encourage you to reflect and talk with students you encounter about their elected student leaders, as I believe it will give you insight as to how important our elections are and the impact that they can have.

## Conclusion

As you can see, our SGA is focused on engaging more with our community. Our Senate is engaging with organizations that already have a goal to help make the student experience better at UMW, so that we can work together to achieve a common goal. Our Executive Branch continues to pursue and expand the internal endeavors to spread awareness of the SGA's goals, activities, and projects, as well as promote the SGA as a whole. Our two arms working together has started to help propel the organization back to its status as the premier organization at UMW that represents students and their interests. We hope to accomplish much more this semester, and I look forward to delivering my final report to you, the esteemed Board of Visitors, showing you just what this SGA has accomplished and what it will be able to accomplish come next year.

My Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joey Zeldin', with a large, stylized initial 'J' and a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joey Zeldin, President, Student Government Association

*This report was approved unanimously by the SGA Senate on January 30th, 2023.*