

SECTION I-A
THE CLASS PRESIDENT

Getting Started

A Princeton alumni class succeeds (or doesn't) for many reasons, but one of the major factors in making a class work is the steps the new leadership takes in its first few weeks.

It is almost axiomatic that a new class administration under the leadership of the President needs to get off to a fast start. This objective is complicated by the fact that the vast majority of Presidents (and other officers) are announced and begin their administrations during major Reunions in June, when everyone's attention is directed at less serious matters. Yet the summer doldrums from July 4 through Labor Day dictate that fast and effective starts must occur between Reunions and July 4th. Accordingly, some or all of the following steps need to be taken **in June** in order to "get started" without losing critical momentum. (Of course, since you may not receive this handbook until June is long past, it is even more important that these actions be taken immediately!)

MAY/JUNE During Reunions, attend the "New Class Officers" training presentation (Saturday morning from 8:30 - 9:30 at the Alumni Council Office in Maclean House -- Ouch!)

MAY/JUNE During Reunions or soon thereafter, visit or call the Alumni Council office and introduce yourself to the staff members who support class activities. Of immediate importance are the individuals responsible for class mailings and printing class stationery. Order your first consignment of class letterhead stationery within a week if you don't have enough inventory. You should also obtain the Alumni Council's calendar of events for the next academic year.

MAY/JUNE Call the first meeting of the new class officers to be held during Reunions (or shortly thereafter) to make decisions and take the actions outlined below.

JUNE Appoint the Class Agent (in consultation with the Annual Giving office), Reunions Chairs and Community Service Chair if they were not elected with you. This may not be possible during Reunions, but should be accomplished before July 4th in any case.

JUNE Decide with your officers on a tentative agenda/calendar for the year through the next Reunion if at all possible. Your agenda should include all tentative class activities and a schedule of regular meetings and/or conference calls for the executive committee or board. (A good time is when people will already be on campus).

- JUNE Decide on the first class event -- probably a tailgate before and/or a reception/dinner after a home football game -- and get the Vice President, Reunions Chair or a designee working on it.
- JULY Establish a dues rate and work with the Treasurer on the first class dues notice to be ready to go in the second half of July (normally included in the President's letter).
- JULY Draft a "President's letter" to introduce the new officers and outline your plans for the class to be sent with the first dues notice. The "camera-ready" copy for the entire package is due at the Alumni Council office in early August.
- JULY/AUGUST Ensure that the first dues notice and President's letter are mailed to the Alumni Council in early August. They will be mailed to classmates in late August or early September.
- AUGUST Heave a sigh of relief and wait for the leaves to turn. You can then turn to the matters outlined in the remainder of this manual, having "gotten started."

The President's Responsibilities

The President plays the central role in the life of each class. Although many classmates take part in the class' various activities, it is the President who serves as the primary leader, coordinator and inspiration for the class. As such, the President must be responsible for many key functions:

- Conducting class meetings
- Short- and long-term planning
- Setting and following a timetable
- Preparation of an annual report
- Appointing and overseeing class committee chairs
- Coordination with other class officers
- Promoting communication with classmates
- Promoting participation of classmates in class affairs
- Communicating with the Alumni Council and other classes
- Facilitating selection of and transition to new class officers.

The President should be fully knowledgeable about everything that is being done by or in the name of the Class. Be sure to read all sections of this handbook so you are familiar with all the various components of class leadership. The Vice President(s) may share this responsibility, but the basic responsibility is the President's. This requires that you maintain consistent lines of communication with the other officers -- both individually and as a group.

Among the first endeavors for every President should be reading the Class Constitution to understand the legal structure and operation of the class. Although it may come as a surprise -- even to long-time class activists -- every class has a constitution that was adopted when the class graduated (although sometimes the document is missing from the files). The constitution provides for the method of selecting class officers, class governance and the like. Class structures differ. Some classes provide for all officers to be elected, while others have several appointed officers (Class Agent and Reunions Chair, for example). Some classes are governed by an executive committee of officers, while others have an elected or voluntary board of governors that has primary policy responsibility. A careful review of the constitution will answer these questions and provide a firm grounding in these formalities. If you don't have a copy of your class constitution, please check with the Alumni Council to see if they have it on file. A copy of a sample constitution is presented in the Appendix.

Guidelines for Decision Making

In most classes, administrative decisions are the President's prerogative, with the Executive Committee or Class Board participating in major policy decisions. The President usually appoints special committees and their chairs, sets dates for class activities, and determines what communications will be sent to the class, usually after discussion with the Executive Committee. There is no set practice in this area; the division of duties is largely a matter of class precedent and common sense.

It is important, however, that decisions not be made in a vacuum. All officers of the class and members of the Executive Committee need to feel that their input is valued. Involving them in the decision-making process can have a positive impact on their sense of worth as volunteers and can often result in better decisions in the long run.

Conducting Meetings

The President presides over the meetings of the entire class, as well as of the Class Board and/or Executive Committee. The President prepares the agenda, assigns time limits to discussion of each point and informs those who will attend well in advance so that proper forethought can be devoted to the agenda. Meetings may be held in person, by conference call or via TigerNet. For conference call meetings, it is often useful to use a commercial conference service provider. This allows the call to continue, even if members need to come on to the call late or leave early. Several classes have begun using the Internet to conduct virtual class meetings. Such discussion groups help people stay connected and can be easily set up through TigerNet.

The most important rule in running a meeting is to start and end it on time. Stick to the agenda and the schedule; be firm in conducting the business of the meeting. One of the obvious enjoyments of participating in the planning of class activities is the fun and informality of the endeavor. Nevertheless, a happy compromise must be reached so that good-natured joking or long-winded speeches do not delay the progress of the meeting and thereby interrupt the business of the class.

Board or committee meetings are usually easier to run than whole class meetings, yet most constitutions provide that an annual class meeting be held and that certain questions (constitutional amendments, for example) can only be decided at such general meetings (normally held during Reunions when the greatest number is present). It takes a high order of planning, full cooperation from fellow officers and all the wit and skill the President can muster to carry off a successful class meeting during a festive Reunion. Still, Reunions continue to be the best time -- and in most cases the only practical time -- to attempt such meetings. Other opportunities might be on a Fall Football Weekend or Alumni Day. These gatherings should generally be regarded like stockholders' meetings, where proceedings are reported to the class and formal requirements for approval are met, but no real discussion is attempted.

Short-Term Planning

The President establishes a timetable -- a permanent agenda of class activities each year. He or she should study the University and Alumni Council calendars to plan class activities. Certain activities take place at approximately the same time each year. For example, the class dues campaign takes place annually in the fall (It usually begins with a letter mailed in August or September as part of the President's letter to the class); the Annual Giving effort begins later in the fall and runs through the end of June. The President should work with the Treasurer and the Class Agent on plans for their campaigns so that scheduling issues may be resolved well in advance. It is important to coordinate these activities to make sure that, as much as possible, class dues notices and Annual Giving appeals do not conflict (or arrive the same week). The President will also want to schedule class dinners, mini-reunions, Board and committee meetings and other events for the entire year as part of the annual timetable.

With careful planning and coordination, the class can save money and increase its communications about upcoming events and other matters of interest. Letters and reports to the class sent out in the same envelope as dues notices save postage and handling costs. These mailings can -- and should -- be accompanied by a financial report, President's report, etc.

With adequate foresight and planning, the class can combine class and University functions to boost attendance and save money. If it is known in advance that the University will provide a location for a class party on a football weekend (as is traditionally done on the Harvard or Yale weekend), the class may choose that option rather than selecting a more expensive location elsewhere or a different date.

Meetings of the Executive and other class committees can be scheduled in connection with Reunions, class dinners, Alumni Council functions and other Princeton activities, such as football games. In this way, they draw upon the attendance at these University events and capitalize on the availability of University representatives and resources.

The President's Annual Report

It should be a general rule with every class that the President issue an annual report prepared personally or in conjunction with other class officers and project chairs. The entire previous year's activities should be capsuled and plans for the future should be announced. This is one of the main vehicles for disseminating information to every classmate and often takes the form of a "State of the Class" letter. The best time to send out the President's annual report is usually in the early fall, soon after the close of the class fiscal year. It is often included in the first class dues mailing, which is usually the first mailing the classmates receive in the academic year. (Combining the report with the dues mailing saves money, as well.)

The annual report can be an opportunity to announce any class prizes, describe Reunions and class events and summarize the work of committees. If the class has a scholarship fund, the President can give a profile of the current recipient(s). If the class has won any interclass competition (Reunions attendance, dues paying percentages, Annual Giving dollars or participation awards), the President can use this opportunity to highlight those achievements. By the same token, the President can use the annual report to discuss problems within the class, such as low Annual Giving returns, Reunions deficits and/or low attendance or participation.

Many Presidents include as many names of classmates as possible in the report, being sure to cite especially the achievements of those who have worked hard on behalf of the class.

The President's report has the effect of suggesting a sense of class unity and identity. Classmates are once again reminded that they belong to an organization that, despite its far-flung nature, still functions actively and is alive and well. Interim reports may supplement the annual report if desired, but at all costs, the President must keep the class informed.

One additional report that the President prepares is the report to the Alumni Council on class activities and participation. This report is extremely important, as it is used to determine class awards. If the information is not received from a class who would have won an award (for example, participation at an off-campus event), that award may be given to a class with less magnificent results, but who did return the report. Once the awards are given, they are not rescinded should information be updated. It is therefore very important to inform the Alumni Council of your class' activities through the annual Class Activity Report.

Long-Term Planning

The President should project a five-year plan for his or her entire administration, culminating in the next major reunion year. The plan should address the major activities that will take place over the period, allowing flexibility for changes. Some activities, such as a major reunion and a class year book, require more than one year of advance planning. Some class committees are charged with projects that can have a multi-year mandate, such as establishing a class foundation or community service program. If a class President inherits a difficult dues or Annual Giving problem, that, too, may require more than a single year of advance planning. Although a long-term plan does not have to be highly detailed or firmly adhered to in all cases, it can provide an important road map for several years to come.

Promoting Participation

The President must encourage maximum participation in class affairs. If classmates see the same names cropping up as committee chairs or committee members year after year, they soon get the impression that a small group of classmates run the class and will continue to do so. By trying to enlist the active participation of as many classmates as possible, the President generates new ideas, new techniques and new enthusiasm. If certain problems seem to persist, the President should call for volunteers from among those who are not perennial workers.

The most direct way for the President to encourage participation by a diverse group of classmates is through appointments to committees and other groups undertaking class projects. In these appointments, the President should be mindful not only of those who have traditionally been involved in class activities, but should seek out those who might bring special skills, interests or enthusiasms to particular projects. For example, if a class is considering a tangible gift to the University, the committee could include architects, museum professionals, educators or others who could bring different perspectives to the project. And remember, many people do not get involved in class and university activities for a simple reason: they've never been asked. Many classmates would gladly participate -- indeed they would be flattered -- were they to be asked by the Class President to assume important class responsibility.

The President also is asked to select a classmate to participate in the annual Service of Remembrance that takes place on Alumni Day. This is a wonderful opportunity to invite a classmate in the Princeton area to perform a very meaningful role for the Class.

The more personal the contact that the President has with classmates, the better. The President should take a little extra time to add handwritten personal notes to form letters. Secretaries often send personal birthday greetings to members with good results. Treasurers have found that a personal word helps encourage dues payments, and Reunion Chairs have beefed up attendance by supplementing regular mailings with personal notes and telethons. Some Class Presidents plan meetings, phone calls and/or visits with classmates when they travel on business, thereby promoting connections with classmates for no other motivation than that they are classmates. This can help build a sense of class community, as well as encourage participation in both dues paying and Annual Giving.

Representing the Class and Staying in Touch

In addition to all of the President's functions within the class administration, the President is also the primary representative of the class to the University. He or she should seek out key personnel of the Alumni Council and should feel free to make known the views of the class board or Executive Committee to the Alumni Council staff and University administration.

It is also a good idea for the President to initiate contact with other class presidents. There are many terrific ideas out there that can be gleaned by periodic conversations with counterparts in other classes. There can also be joint projects that classes can undertake with related classes. One of the best places to speak with other class presidents and officers is at the Alumni Council's Leadership Assembly -- a convocation usually held the Thursday and Friday before Alumni Day. The assembly contains workshops specifically created for this purpose.

The Class President is automatically a member of the Alumni Council (formerly the "Council of Presidents"). The Council is responsible for electing the Executive Committee and convenes once or twice each year -- at Leadership Assembly and at the Annual Awards Luncheon on Friday of Reunions. The Executive Committee is comprised of elected class and regional officers, committee chairs and other elected and appointed members. As Class President, you may have an opportunity to represent your class and class affairs on the Executive Committee.

The Class President will have a liaison on the Class Affairs Committee, a committee comprised of class officers (many of whom are Executive Committee or Alumni Council Members) and *ex officio* members (such as Alumni Council and *PAW* staff members). The CAC liaison can be of great assistance and can also serve as a sounding board for new ideas.

Turnover of Officers

The Class Constitution outlines the requirements and procedures for selection of new class officers once the term of the current members expire. Most terms officially begin and end with the fiscal year (July 1 - June 30), however, common practice has been for the new officers to begin their terms immediately after Reunions. The President should make sure that the class election process is begun far enough in advance so that there is sufficient time allowed for identifying and nominating candidates, conducting that actual elections and so on. **It is important to remind all candidates about the New Class Officers' Training on Saturday morning of Reunions (8:30 - 9:30 in Maclean House), so that those who win will be prepared to attend.** Some classes have begun the election process early enough to involve the new officers in managing Reunions -- this transition period can be very useful!

An outgoing President may breathe a sigh of relief as the term of office ends, but if the class is not to suffer, *the President must counsel the successor.* The retiring President is best qualified to brief the new one. *The President should also encourage other outgoing officers to work with their successors!* Sometimes it is helpful to hold a joint meeting or conference call to facilitate this. New Class Presidents should monitor whether their officers are receiving adequate "mentoring" and, if not, contact the former officers and ask for further help.

The outgoing President should turn over all records to the new President. The outgoing President should also make sure that the Secretary notifies Alumni Records in the Helm Building and the Alumni Council Staff at Maclean House of all changes in officers and key class leaders.