

SC-CÉ Guide to Establishing Student Sections
Within Member Organizations of the International Association of Gerontology

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Student Connection – Connexion Étudiante (SC-CÉ)



SC-CÉ website: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~ccvictor/>

of the

Canadian Association on Gerontology – Association canadienne de gérontologie

CAG-ACG website: www.cagacg.ca

Introduction:

This document is a guide for International Association of Gerontology (IAG) member organizations that wish to establish student sections. The guidelines are based on the experiences of Student Connection – Connexion Étudiante (SC-CÉ). We are an organization within the Canadian Association on Gerontology – Association canadienne de gérontologie (CAG-ACG). SC-CÉ has been developing for over six years. We are a product of:

- 1) On-going mentorship and support from CAG-ACG Board members
- 2) Student initiative, and
- 3) A shared championing of the cause.

We are currently focused on increasing the number of CAG-ACG students who actively participate in our section and in the Association.

In this document, we share the steps that resulted in the formal recognition of SC-CÉ within CAG-ACG. We suggest Action Points for IAG member organizations and their students to support the establishment of student sections. We invite you to visit our website to learn more about our progress and to log on and participate:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~ccvictor/> .

Note: The term, Association, refers to ‘parent’ gerontological organizations, like the CAG-ACG. The term, general members, refers to non-student members of an Association.

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Why establish a student section?

Students are a specific 'market' of members within Associations. In addition to interests in gerontological research, practice, and policymaking, students have interests and concerns specific to developing careers in gerontology. Students are a potential resource for Associations, for the present and the future.

A student section will serve to engage this 'market' by serving as:

- A **medium** through which students may support the Association's interests and objectives
- A **resource** through which students may learn the issues, practices, and the 'culture' of gerontology
- A **voice**, representing student issues and concerns towards contributing to Association activities, optimizing benefits for students, and facilitating student participation
- A **forum** for students' discussion of issues, exchange of relevant information, and sharing of resources
- A **strategy** for recruiting student members and retaining them as general members after they graduate.

Action Point:

Decide to establish a student section. It can foster a sense of student pride in the Association that will serve not only the present but also the future.

Anything you can conceive and believe, you can achieve!

--Unknown¹

Why establish a student section, NOW?

Today's students are the next generation of gerontologists. They want to be involved and to learn from current gerontologists. Students are also eager to contribute their diverse experiences to the Association. A tremendous mentorship opportunity exists for Associations and members to share their experiences. The development of a formal relationship between student members and general members is a way to capture this opportunity.

Action Point:

Create opportunities to discuss this shared interest and enthusiasm. Start now, because student members are short-term members. They are eligible for student status only for a few years. If Associations can engage individuals while they are students, Associations are investing in the future!

Getting Started

An individual or two must have an idea that an organization will be useful. 'Grow' the critical mass of students who are eager and prepared to join the cause of promoting the study of aging-related issues and gerontology, in general.

¹ Retrieved on October 3, 2003 from:

<http://www.greatmotivationalquotes.com/quotes/success-quotes.htm>

The Story of SC-CÉ

CAG-ACG has long offered reduced membership and conference fees for students. Several years ago, a student presented the CAG-ACG President with a request for student representation on the CAG-ACG Board of Directors. The President responded by suggesting that the student demonstrate that a critical mass of students existed and needed a 'voice' in the Association. The student talked with fellow students suggesting that they organize themselves informally as a group, Student Connection. They elected a President and set up a website to demonstrate a 'virtual' presence. The Association agreed to link the CAG-ACG website to the student website with the qualification that the Association was not responsible for the views expressed on the student website. Over the course of four years, the student group met during the Association's annual conferences and developed a set of terms of reference. At each conference, the CAG-ACG funded a student networking session. Upon the graduation of the student with the original vision, the group members held their second set of executive position elections.

Over time, students and general members began to see the potential for student input in Association activities and issues. During the 2001 IAG World Congress during which the CAG-ACG held its annual conference, the third informal set of elections was held. Recognizing a growing student presence in the Association, the new student President, Vice-President, and Website Manager set an objective to have the student group formally recognized within the Association as the Student Connection – Connexion Étudiante. The intent was to do this by establishing a Student position on the CAG-ACG's Board of Directors.

The SC-CÉ President met with the CAG-ACG President and learned that SC-CÉ would have to propose a motion to the CAG-ACG Board. The motion was drafted and submitted to the Board in October 2001. The Board responded by inviting the SC-CÉ President to sit as an Observer for the two Board meetings of 2002. The Board covered the Student Observer's travel expenses for those meetings. It was agreed that the motion would be presented to the general membership in 2002. In the meantime, the students recognized that they had to continue to build their presence and continue to organize their section. They recruited a Secretary/Treasurer, Newsletter Coordinator, and Distribution List Manager. They began to develop a Student Representative program in parallel to the CAG-ACG Faculty Campus Representative program. SC-CÉ contributed to the development of the CAG-ACG Division-Student Mentorship program. Information on these programs is available on the SC-CÉ and CAG-ACG websites. The SC-CÉ Executive Committee established a monthly, electronic meeting schedule and continued to develop their website as a dynamic resource.

By October 2002, the students' motion was presented to the general membership. The membership voted in favour of a student section. As a result, students are now represented on the CAG-ACG Board of Directors. We continue to develop our Constitution and will present it to the Board for approval in the near future. We have drafted a Strategic Plan, which we will present to the Board for Directors' information. We have an Executive Committee of six positions, two sub-committees (Nominations; Book Display), and 13 Student Representatives on local campuses. We have contributed to the CAG-ACG 'revitalization of membership' initiative (Membership Recruitment and Re-engagement Task Force). We have a bilingual website and are developing our membership as a francophone, Anglophone, graduate, and undergraduate student body.

Action Point:

The ‘seed’ for ‘growing’ a student section lies in the relationship between at least one student and one Association member who recognize a need for a student forum and ‘voice’ within the Association.

How to Build a Strong Section

Always do your best. What you plant now, you will harvest later.
--Og Mandino²

The development of a strong foundation for a student section is critical not just for current students, but also for future gerontology students. The groundwork that is done in the present will serve as a base upon which the student section can grow. As partners, the Association and the student section must understand that their coordinated effort ‘today’ is an investment in support of future gerontologists.

Action Point:

Draft a proposal for establishing a student section. Lay out the rationale for developing and formalizing a relationship between the student section and the Association. Identify the *mutual* benefits to each partner. Demonstrate:

- Current student activities, if they exist
- An annual student section budget
- How the Association will gain from formal student involvement:
 - For example:
 - Life-long memberships
 - Active participation in and on behalf of the Association, as in Student Representation on local campuses
- What the Association’s Board can offer the student section:
 - For example:
 - A budget for student networking and activities
 - Reduced membership and conference fees for students
 - Support for accessing travel subsidies to conferences

Action Point:

The subsequent sections of this guide are organized around five key words. Use them as a guide for building your student section:

1. Structure
2. Processes
3. Communication
4. Evaluation
5. Celebration

Build a Structure

Action Point:

1. Involve students:

² Retrieved on October 3, 2003 from:
<http://www.greatmotivationalquotes.com/quotes/success-quotes.htm>

- Know who they are. Define the category of student broadly (e.g., including undergraduate and graduate).
 - Ask students: What are the socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts of students at their various campuses? What issues do they face? How might the section's structure be designed with these issues and contexts in mind (e.g., bilingual structure for SC-CÉ)?
2. Establish executive positions by which to govern the section:
 - For example: President, Vice-President, Secretary/Treasurer; and positions with special areas of responsibility (e.g., Website Manager, Distribution List Manager, Newsletter Coordinator).
 3. Establish sub-committees as the number of projects increases:
 - Recruit students into active roles and delegate responsibilities: e.g., Book Display Sub-Committee, Nominations Sub-Committee (involving Past-Presidents of the student section), Student Representatives on local campuses
 4. Establish the position of Faculty Advisor to the student section:
 - Recruit long-time contributing members of the Association to fill this mentoring position (e.g., Past-Presidents of the Association). Invite the Advisor to provide insight on issues of organization, processes, professional issues within the broader Association, etc.
 5. Look to available resources:
 - As a non-profit organization, foster a volunteer culture. Together, general and student members can pool their resources. For example, through a university, a faculty and a student member can apply for access to a web communication platform, e.g., WebCT, for on-line member discussions. Or, request permission to create a website for a student section through a university website.

Action Point – Draft a Constitution:

1. Think of a Constitution as a 'map' for determining who among the student section executive members will do what, where, how, when, and why.
2. Use the Association's constitution as a point of reference.
 - The vision and mission of the Association should be the first point of reference for the student section. For example: "The members of the Student Connection-Connection Étudiante (SC-CÉ) of the Canadian Association on Gerontology-Association canadienne de gérontologie (CAG-ACG) enthusiastically embrace the national, multidisciplinary scope of the CAG-ACG and efforts '...to foster research, education, and policy aimed at improving the quality of life of the elderly in Canada'. (CAG website, August 29, 2001)."
3. Consider including the following sections in the student Constitution:
 - Name (of the student section), Statement of Purpose (with goals and objectives), Languages (what languages will be used by the section, e.g., French and English), Membership (eligibility), Executive Committee (positions, responsibilities, terms of office, vacancies, removal from office), Elections, Finances, Meetings, Ratifications and Amendments to the Constitution, Parliamentary Procedure, Affiliations (of the student section).

Tip: Visit the SC-CÉ website to see our draft Constitution:

http://www.ucalgary.ca/~ccvictor/SC_Constitution.htm

4. Draft the Constitution over time, to accommodate issues as they arise.
 - At some point, the Constitution must be finalized, but future amendments may be made. Establish an amendment process. By doing so, the Constitution becomes an emerging structure that reflects the evolving section and its contexts.³

Establish Processes

Action Point:

1. Establish a strategy for meetings:
 - Develop organizational templates for meetings, minutes, and formal reports. Use subject headings and identify action points and goals. Decide on a schedule and structure of meetings, e.g., frequency, length, responsibility to 'chair' meetings. Designate a person to take meeting minutes. Have these minutes available to members by filing the minutes in an accessible location. Minutes are critical for tracking decisions and action points. Be consistent.
 - Use these templates for each area of section activity.
 - If in-person meetings are not possible, use available media to communicate, e.g., letters, e-mail, Web-based communication platforms, or teleconferences.
2. Make informed decisions:
 - Use the student Constitution to frame decisions.
 - Consult student section members on issues and drafts of key documents.
3. Draft a Strategic Plan for long and short-term goals and objectives:
 - Use the document as a plan of action for a specified period of time. Develop outcome measures to determine when objectives are achieved. Be specific and realistic. For example: Over each of the next three years, the section will seek to increase membership by 10%.
4. Draft an annual budget:

Demonstrate a need for and responsible management of the Association's funds to further student activities and contributions. Consider including the following budget lines:

 - Student section annual general meeting, held during the Association's annual conference
 - Promotional materials (e.g., posters)
 - Other:
 - Consider the specific nature of a student section and its context. For example, Canada is a bilingual country. As a national Association, the CAG-ACG and the SC-CÉ are bilingual. As a result, the SC-CÉ has a budget line for translating the SC-CÉ website.
5. Develop and formalize an election process for executive positions:
 - Draft an election protocol following the Association's election protocol.

³ Mintzberg, H. (1987). Crafting strategy. *Harvard Business Review*, 65(4), 66-75.

- Use innovative ways to hold elections if voting in person is not possible. Try using annual Association conferences as a venue for elections, or use electronic or mail-in ballots.
- Establish a Nominations Sub-Committee to oversee the election process.
- Inform student members of the nominations call, the time and place of the election, and the outcomes.
- Include the election protocol in the student Constitution.

Communicate

Action Point:

1. Be visible:
 - Design a logo to represent your organization. If possible, develop your logo to reflect the colours and symbols of the Association.
 - Use posters to promote your organization and flyers for conferences, and educational and scientific meetings.
 - Provide a contact person on posters for acquiring additional information.
2. Communicate with student members on a regular basis:
 - Establish a process for communicating with members.
 - Designate responsibility to an executive position for maintaining an electronic mailing list. Keep the list up to date.
 - Report regularly on executive and section activities.
 - Consult members on key decisions.
 - Invite members' input.
3. Communicate with the Association's Board of Directors:
 - Report formally and systematically on student activities, issues, and concerns.
 - Demonstrate how the student section is using its Board-approved budget.
 - Establish a process by which the section receives regular membership updates from the Association.
4. Create a presence on university and college campuses:
 - Recruit students to represent the national student section on local campuses. Student Reps can serve the purpose of liaising between the executive committee and local students. Campuses need not have a gerontology department. Recruit Student Reps who are studying aging across various faculties and departments, and encourage Reps to be 'aging studies advocates' on their campuses.
 - Support Student Reps as they promote the visibility of the student section and of the Association and recruit new members.
5. Develop a website:
 - Create a website for student members and others in the Association.
 - Provide information on the field of gerontology and related studies; grants, scholarships, and fellowships; job opportunities; and conferences.
 - Create a virtual meeting place for discussion of relevant issues, members' interests, and current research and prospects.
 - Designate an executive position with the responsibility of managing the website and keeping it up to date. Track the number of visits to the website and use this as an outcome measure in the Strategic Plan.

6. Maintain an active profile in the Association:

- Look for and develop opportunities for students to be involved with Association members and others.
- Offer student input where appropriate.
- Volunteer to contribute to the development of Association programs (e.g., Division-Student Mentorship Program; Faculty Campus and Student Representative Programs).

Evaluate

Action Point:

1. Use the Strategic Plan's outcome measures to gauge progress.
 - For example:
 - Goal: Recruit Student Reps.
 - Indicator: Ten Student Reps recruited in 2003.
2. Develop an on-going evaluation process. For example:
 - Survey members on their experiences of the section's activities. Seek to determine how the section is meeting students' needs.
 - Act on the evaluation results to develop the student section and to update the Strategic Plan.
 - Provide regular progress reports to student members and the Association.
3. Keep the list of benefits to student members current.
 - With the Association, revisit the list on a regular basis to ensure that the benefits are meaningful for students. Use the list as promotional material to recruit new members.
4. Monitor the student section's relationship with the Association.
 - Conduct on-going 'checks' to determine how the relationship might be further developed in mutually beneficial ways.

Celebrate

Action Point:

1. Be proud of your progress and achievements! Building an organization from the ground up is not an easy endeavor. Acknowledge the individuals who have contributed to the on-going development of the student section. Keep track of your history – learn it from the founding members, write it down, and celebrate anniversaries.
2. Keep the momentum going. Learn from past experience. Contribute to the present. Share strengths and weakness with the future. Here's to the next generation of gerontologists.