**Efficacy as a Member**

Wesleyan Student Assembly  
Wesleyan University  
Middletown, CT

The following is a collection of advice for use by members of the Wesleyan Student Assembly (hereafter denoted ‘WSA’ or simply ‘Assembly’) or by those considering or aspiring to comprise that body. While each member should and will develop their own personal style of service, these edicts are applicable to all methods and modes of membership and are independent of committee or ideology. Use them wisely.

**I. Typology of Service**

In studies of government, three archetypes are used to describe patterns of policy among elected representatives: the delegate, the trustee, and the politico. Each archetype characterizes how the role is performed, and each is distinctly different from the others (though there are points of commonality). Delegates voice opinions and vote purely and invariably on the basis of the constituency majority opinion, in this case that of the student body. Trustees, on the other hand, consider the opinions of their constituency but ultimately voice opinions and vote on the basis of personal judgment; trustees vote as they believe will best benefit the relevant community, in this case the student body and the University generally. Politicos act as delegates or as trustees depending on the issue at hand, sometimes following majority opinion over personal judgment and other times doing the reverse.

There are some common features between these three archetypes. Ideally, none should consider personal gain in decision-making. None should allow personal preferences to dominate either voice or vote in decision-making. All should take note of the constituency’s majority opinion and all should attempt to judge the best short- and long-term course of action. Once this is accomplished, however, ultimate decisions will be formed differently by each archetype and each may reach a different conclusion.

Performing the role of an elected representative via any of these three paths is *completely legitimate*. Members will follow different paths and will disagree with each other over the best course of action. This is *good*. Delegates, trustees, and politicos will all address controversial issues (or even straightforward issues) in different ways, and that difference in opinion enriches the process and ultimately leads to better decision-making.

**II. Respect Your Fellows**

Each and every member of the Assembly plays host to a vast collection of opinions and perspectives. These opinions and perspectives often clash, and the end result of debates and decisions are not always entirely satisfactory to every member. Nevertheless, it is a paramount responsibility of each member to respect the opinions,
thoughts, and modus operandi of all their fellows. Open criticism is necessary and beneficial, but it must always be coupled with respect. Without this element, the Assembly as a whole suffers and can be reduced to programmatic infighting rather than performance and service.

III. Get to Know Your Fellows

Most Assembly gatherings are centered around work, and members should make an effort to remain focused on the task at hand. However, there is a social aspect to membership in the Assembly. Our overall efficiency is greatly increased when all members feel comfortable around each other, and this required a degree of interaction outside of the workplace. Attendance at social gatherings of the Assembly, while not mandatory, is highly encouraged because they provide context for us as colleagues. This is extended to all students that have any involvement with the Assembly, whether through a particular committee or simply through being a member of the electorate.

In addition, each standing committee should seek to form an even closer bond. This can take the form of, among other things, scheduled social time during weekly meetings and occasional committee dinner (these should be funded by the chair or by members, never by the Student Activities Fund). Much of this is the responsibility of the committee chairs and the Executive Committee.

IV. Talk to People

This point cannot be emphasized enough. Every member has the fundamental duty to engage with the whole student body. Members must understand how the student body feels about particular issues, what new issues arise, and which issues are most important. This is not something to be done only by upper- or underclassmen, or only in the first month of the year, but is rather a constant responsibility of every member that literally cannot ever be truly fulfilled. The Assembly is not omniscient; it must seek to understand its purpose, its environment, and its mission.

Members should furthermore actively seek out unheard voices. Members should strive to awaken new voices and opinions. For any issue, some students will have strong and vocal opinions, some will have strong and silent opinions, some will not care, and some will be simply unaware. Members should aim to actively engage all of these populations rather than passively listening to the loudest.

This responsibility goes beyond the student body as well. Members should seek to understand the faculty’s and the administration’s positions and thought processes on all relevant issues. Such knowledge permits the Assembly to best navigate a course for the betterment of the student body and of Wesleyan as a whole.

V. Have Pet Project(s)

In addition to the ordinary duties of committee meetings, committee projects, and General Assembly, every member should have at least one personal project to work on. This project can take many forms and does not necessarily need to relate to your core committee. Pet projects can be anything from leadership in an ad-hoc task force to the
development of a new student group initiative to the writing of a proposal for a major change in University policy. The nature of the project is not critical, but it should always be something outside of basic committee requirements and expectations. Working on and completion of a personal project is often much more rewarding and fulfilling, and helps ensure that every member is working at full capacity. The Assembly is then collectively much more productive in fulfilling its mission.

VI. Commit

Service in the Assembly is a sizeable commitment. To perform their tasks adequately, members should expect a minimum of ten hours per week; members of the Executive Committee should expect a minimum of twenty hours per week. Unforeseeable circumstances will likely require the Assembly to function outside the routine capacity, and all members must be able to make unforeseeable sacrifices in time and energy. The Assembly should take precedence over most other commitments (aside from academics).

Prospective members should not make this commitment lightly and should consider carefully before running for office. A single member that cannot fulfill this commitment does significant damage to the Assembly’s efficacy because others are forced to pick up the slack rather than focusing on their own projects.

VII. Know What You’re Talking About, Learn the History

Do your homework. Members should research all subjects relevant to their projects such that all presentations and arguments are well informed and well supported. This is especially critical when working with administrators, faculty, and staff. Spend some time preparing for each committee or other meeting and find evidence to support any points you will make. Such support should not consist of personal anecdotes – these alone are not indicative of any general problem or trend.

The Assembly is relatively effective at hearing issues raised by students and typically attempts to address those issues within a few weeks. The Assembly also deals with a vast host of other issues each and every year. There is a fair likelihood, especially if you are new to the Assembly, that your issue or idea is not very original, and has been explored in the past. Seek out some more experienced members (or contact former members) and do some research to learn the history of your topic before deciding to raise the issue again. Faculty and administrators generally possess a good understanding of the history of an issue as well.

VIII. Never Be Late

Plain and simple. Never be late for meetings or for deadlines. Lateness either reflects poorly on the Assembly or limits our productivity or both.

IX. Working with Administrators

The administration is, by definition, the body that runs and controls almost all areas of Wesleyan University. While students, faculty, and staff do hold considerable
power, few goals can be easily accomplished without some measure of support from the administration. Generally speaking, administrators are reasonable people, and will usually support a well-reasoned argument or suggestion. However, administrators often have additional interests beyond those of the WSA – legal considerations, broad fiscal considerations, long-term University considerations, et cetera. Members should plan for these considerations before presenting any case. Ideally, the Assembly and the administration should engage in substantive discourse that drives toward the fulfillment of our mutual interests. Even if the two parties strongly disagree on a subject, consulting administrators for their opinions will always be beneficial (regardless of heed); to ignore the administration completely invites subsequent stalemate. Never be afraid to ask questions of administrators, to challenge their opinions, or to broach any subject, but always be polite and respectful while doing so.

Never be late to meetings with administrators, and always do your research before making any arguments or suggestions. See Sections VII and VIII.

Always respond to an email from an administrator within one day. If you do not have time for a full reply, send a note stating when you will have time to reply. If you have emailed an administrator and they have not replied, wait one week before sending a reminder email (unless the subject is time-sensitive). Most administrators are available if you knock on their door, and all are available through an appointment (up to and including President Roth); if email is not working, go in person.

X. Working with Faculty

Wesleyan’s faculty is an extremely intellectual body, and, like the administration, often has a slightly different set of interests from those of the students. Also like administrators, faculty are generally reasonable people and will listen to and support reasonable proposals. However, it must be considered that faculty, who are usually at Wesleyan much longer than students and often longer than administrators, form the mainstay of tradition at this University. The faculty is sluggish (if not outright opposed) to institute major academic reform; such proposals must therefore demonstrate significant pedagogical rationale. More broadly, any proposition to faculty on any subject must be well thought-out and well-reasoned: professors are very smart, very eloquent, and very good at making you look stupid. Think carefully before you say anything in meetings with faculty and do not say anything that does not need to be said. Doing your research ahead of time is extremely important (see Section VII). Punctuality is less important with faculty, but be on time anyway (see Section VIII).

When working on academics-related projects, consult a few relevant faculty. Professors will generally know the history of that subject quite well and may have a number of useful suggestions. As with administrators, always be polite and respectful. See Section IX for details regarding emails/appointments.

XI. Know Parliamentary Procedure

Read up on Robert’s Rules of Order and understand the Assembly’s parliamentary procedure. While nobody needs to obstruct progress based on procedure, procedure is designed to help us make progress. Following parliamentary procedure
ensures that everyone gets equal opportunity to voice their opinions and allows for more enriched, productive overall conversation. Members should also be familiar with standards for writing resolutions.

XII. Worrying about Structure is Wasted Time

In the course of Constitutional Review each year, the Assembly will dedicate an inordinate amount of time to discussing optimum Assembly structure. While good structure is important for overall efficacy, the Assembly’s productivity ultimately rests in its members and leaders and their efficacy. Be careful about spending too much time and energy tweaking seats and positions – we need strong members and stronger leaders much more than we need strong structure.

XIII. When to Speak Up, and When Not To

People will disagree with you. People will also agree with you. If you have an original, inventive, innovative, or otherwise not-previously-mentioned thought, point, or idea, then voice it. However, if someone else has already made your point, then do not make it again. At most, say that you agree or echo basic ideas (you do not need a detailed explanation of why you agree or of the basic ideas). Or, if you have already made your point and someone else has disagreed with it, then you do not need to repeat your first point. Speak up only if something remains yet unspoken and unmentioned. You do not need to win every argument (and you won’t).