

## A letter from the YSE Student Affairs Committee (SAC) – Fall 2020 accomplishments in the wake of COVID-19

Dear YSE Students and Community,

We'll go ahead and say it one more time - we're living in *unprecedented times*, but fortunately our YSE community was able to work hard towards building community in the wake of COVID-19 during the fall 2020 semester. We were proud to witness our community's resilience and creativity by hosting virtual conferences (Oceans and Climate Conference, Global Environmental Justice Conference to name a few), socially distanced gatherings, and more. Our YSE community continued to show up for one another by participating in weekly COVID-19 testing that ultimately increased our chances of eliminating the possibility of community spread through asymptomatic carriers. As a School, we saw approximately 70% of our students completing [voluntary testing](#) by the end of the semester. As your elected student leaders on the Student Affairs Committee (SAC) we are eager to carry forward the tradition of transparency in student government. Below we have outlined what we as the Student Life (Stud-Li) and Academic Affairs (AcAf) branches of SAC worked on this fall 2020 semester. We hope you all had a restful and restorative quiet period. We're eager to work with you all again this coming semester!

Be well and take care,  
YSE Student Affairs Committee

Below are some of the projects, programs, and initiatives we worked on and accomplished with input from and collaboration with the student body in Fall 2020.

### AcAf updates:

- Dean Drop-Ins
  - Facilitated 4 Dean drop in sessions with Dean Burke for students to directly voice concerns to the Administration.
- Quiet Period Kroon Access
  - Secured access for Kroon to stay open during the winter quiet period.
  - Kroon will be open from 9am-5pm, December 1st-February 1st as a safe space for students to continue to gather for work and to socialize.
- SAC Digest
  - Reinstated and appointed StudLi-AcAf administrative roles to increase communications between the two branches of SAC.
  - These revived roles are working to create a bi-weekly digest of meeting minutes to increase transparency and communication with the student body .
  - In Spring 2021, SAC will produce brief regular summaries of ongoing work to share in the student communication channels (like WhatsApp)
- Admissions Recommendations

- Currently working to direct recommendations to the Admissions Team regarding increasing student involvement in recruiting and engagement after prospective students are admitted.
  - Feedback from Learning Communities
    - To increase communication between the Administration and learning communities, we have begun to solicit regular feedback from LCs to bring to each MPC meeting.
    - From Academic Affairs: *“Through routine communication with the Learning Community Student Leads, SAC-AcAf highlighted some curriculum gaps with the MEM specializations. Learning Community Faculty Leads had been simultaneously discussing pathways to build more scaffolded learning opportunities to students, so when the Academic Affairs Team presented the SAC-AcAf data it provided important student perspective to the conversation. Plans are being developed to enable new multi-disciplinary courses to expand curricular depth in light of these efforts and discussions.”*
  - Spring Term Catch-Up Week
    - We worked with the Master Planning Committee (MPC) and Dean to propose a “Catch-Up Week” this coming Spring to help address burnout that many students experienced this fall.
    - The Catch-Up Week would entail a coordinated week of no assignments and light reading around midterms. It would differ from ‘break days’ to give students a week to decompress without having to alter the established academic calendar.
    - Though the academic calendar and syllabi had been finalized to the point where this catch-up week is no longer feasible, we are now working with the administration and Forestry Club to create in-person and virtual events on break days for students to decompress, connect or catch up on work.
  - Bylaw Revisions
    - Revised bylaws to make it possible for new AcAf members to attend Master Planning Committee meetings the first semester of their term.
    - Working to create an addition to the bylaws regarding SAC member conduct, processes for termination if in violation and eligibility requirements for running for student leadership positions.

**Stud-Li updates:**

- Adopted Bylaw revision to define and fund affinity groups at YSE:
  - SIGs may now self-select into being identified as an affinity group, in addition to being a SIG. Affinity group funding enables affinity groups to better support YSE students with a shared identity or lived-experience that has been historically discriminated against and/or underrepresented.
  - Collaborative effort with Roots, Out in the Woods, EQUID, Assistant Dean Sean Bogle and Assistant Dean Thomas Easley.

- Redid the SIG Leadership Training to have a great emphasis on Community and Inclusion with the help of the Office of Community and Inclusion.
- Staff Appreciation (nov. 10):
  - Historically done in-person coupled with baked goods, but this year we sent out e-thank you cards to all staff/faculty.
- 2020 Election:
  - SAC/EQUID co-hosted a Zoom “Safe Space” over election night.
- SIG approvals:
  - International SIG
    - Reminder of other regionally focused SIGs: Asia, Africa, Latin America SIGs, BUT - missing a European lens and creating a space for cultural exchange and community building among all international students and students interested in living and working internationally.
    - International SIG was born out of the need to build community especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Restructuring Recess SIG to include all extracurriculars activities.
- Wellness Survey:
  - General takeaways:
    - Almost everyone feels safe with YSE COVID standards.
    - Students seem to support mandatory testing, at least for anyone attending any in-person events.
    - There is a feeling of disconnect between classmates because of gathering restrictions but also because of schoolwork.
    - Students really appreciate coordinated small in-person gatherings (e.g. in-person TGIFs) but are hesitant to attend virtual social events (feeling “Zoomed out”).
    - Most people were not aware of wellbeing services available to them.
    - [Link](#) to survey summary graphs.
  - Action Items: Collaborating with the working wellness group and student affairs to work on wellness events to incorporate feedback received from the survey
- Wellness Event:
  - Hosted Joy Baldrige for a series of sessions aimed at reducing stress during the end of the fall 2020 semester.
  - Joy Baldrige Zoom Sessions (Nov. 5, 12, 19).
- Quiet Period Kroon Access
  - Working with Admin to provide pre-packaged snacks and drinks in Kroon kitchen for folks who will be accessing Kroon over break/quiet period.