

Constitution

Marine Ecology Research Society

University of West Florida

Article 1 Scope and Authority

The purpose of this constitution is to convey the overall intentions and objectives for the University of West Florida Marine Ecology Research Society (M.E.R.S.). This constitution will merely be a guideline for the organization and operation of the group, and can be altered as appropriate by two-thirds majority by officers of M.E.R.S.

The purpose of M.E.R.S. is as follows:

To promote ecological research amongst the undergraduate and graduate students of the University of West Florida,

To promote undergraduate retention, facilitate learning, and encourage the pursuit of education within the UWF student body.

To encourage students to explore the scientific community outside of the University.

To interact with and educate the community regarding issues pertaining to science and the environment.

To actively pursue and promote conservation of our marine resources and ecosystems, and to support local and international conservation societies.

Article 2 Membership

Membership of M.E.R.S. will be granted to students of UWF who meet the following criteria.

- A. The student must be currently enrolled in either an undergraduate or graduate degree-seeking program at UWF.
- B. The student must maintain good academic standing.

- C. The student must pay initial membership dues in the amount of \$20. This will be a one-time payment if the student maintains active status in MERS.
- D. Active status can only be maintained by acquiring at least one (1) activity point each semester. Activity points are given for participation in sanctioned MERS events.
- E. If students fail to follow any of the criteria above they will become inactive, and will be required to pay dues again to reactivate their membership.

Article 3 Officers of M.E.R.S.

Section I. Elections

- A. Officers of M.E.R.S. will be elected by the members of M.E.R.S.
- B. Elected officers will serve a term of one year, beginning each Fall semester.
- C. Nominations for new officers will open at the beginning of each Spring semester, and will remain open until one week prior to elections. Elections will be held prior to the last meeting of the Spring semester.
- D. During the nomination period, members may nominate themselves, or other members for specific positions. Members are allowed to create new positions, if approved with a 2/3 vote by the residing officers.
- E. The faculty advisor will approve the candidates for each position.
- F. The members of M.E.R.S. will cast ballots to decide the final officer appointments.

Section II. Officer Positions: Faculty Advisor

Faculty advisors must be a professor (adjunct, assistant, associate, or full) in the Biology Department at UWF. The duties of the faculty advisor are as follows:

1. Meet with Officers for regular updates on organization status.
2. Oversee and finalize *all* decisions made by M.E.R.S.
3. Approve all officer candidates.

Section III. Officer Positions: Executive Board

The following positions (President, Vice-President, Treasurer) are *Executive Board* positions. At least one graduate student must reside on the officers board as an Executive officer. Graduate students must always be given priority if nominated for these positions. Undergraduates may reside on the Executive Board, only if they have been an active member in MERS for at least two (2) years, or have been an officer for at least one (1) year. The duties of the Executive Board are as follows:

President Duties:

1. Preside at all meetings.
2. Oversee all activity and finance decisions.
3. Create and maintain agendas for each meeting, and provide if necessary.
4. Appoint officers and encourage members to assist with events.
5. Attend SGA meetings, as necessary.
6. Keep all members up-to-date on MERS activities through:
 - Email through MERS Gmail account
 - MERS meetings
 - MERS website
 - ArgoPulse
 - Facebook

Vice-President Duties:

1. Perform the duties of the president in his/her absence.
2. Assist in activity and finance decisions.
3. Assist in agenda writing for each meeting.
4. Assist officers and members with scheduled events.
5. Attend SGA meetings, as necessary.

Treasurer Duties:

1. Manage all financial responsibilities pertaining to M.E.R.S.
2. Help allocate funds to different activities.
3. Write proposals for monetary awards and grants.
4. Report financial status at each meeting.
5. Preside in the absence of the president and vice-president
6. Collect dues, keep all receipts, bank statements, and financial records.

Section IV. Officer Positions: Standard Officers

The following positions are *standard officer* positions, and are typically held by undergraduate members of MERS. Graduate students may be nominated for these positions, but undergraduates are given priority. Members who have not been officers previously are also given priority for these positions, to encourage greater involvement by new members. Standard officers are encouraged to seek Executive Board positions after their term.

Secretary:

1. Maintain and organize all records, agendas, and minutes of all activities and all meetings.
2. Provide these documents to officers and members as needed.
3. Inform all members of meeting and activity dates and times.
4. Organize meeting-room reservations for meetings and events.

Historian:

1. Attend events to create and maintain Photographic records of all activities.
2. Update and maintain club photographic records on ArgoPulse.
3. Update and Maintain MERS displays.
4. Provide photographic materials to be used for promotional/recruitment purposes.

Public Relations:

1. Create flyers and displays to be posted around UWF for M.E.R.S. recruitment and meeting activities
2. Plan, develop, and implement innovative PR programs
3. Actively improve the public image of MERS within the student body.
4. Act as liaison with school media (Newspaper, Nautilus News, etc.)
5. Maintain and routinely update the M.E.R.S. website (www.uwf.edu/mers)

Community Service:

1. Ensure that all community service hours are logged and submitted to the volunteer coordinator at Volunteer!UWF.
2. Assist in discovering, organizing, and implementing volunteer events
3. Keep records of all community service events

Article 4 Meetings

Section I. Officer Meetings

Officers will schedule bi-weekly meetings to discuss the functional aspects of the organization, to vote on important decisions, and to plan major events. Regular members are welcome to attend officer meetings, and are encouraged to do so. The location and time of officer meetings will be agreed upon at the first meeting each semester. Officers will be contacted or notified of meeting information via email, if needed. All officers must preside during meetings, especially in the instance that a vote is in order. The agenda of each meeting will be prepared by the President and approved by all other officers. In the event an emergency meeting is needed, it will be announced at least 24 hours prior to.

Section II. Member Meetings

Members of MERS are invited to meet once a month to go over news and updates concerning the organization. The Executive Board must attend all member meetings, as this presents a time of highest member contact, and will allow for smooth dissemination of information. All officers should attend member meetings, for the same reason as above. Member meeting times and locations will be agreed upon at the first officer meeting of each semester. Members will be contacted or notified of meeting information via email prior to each meeting. Meetings may consist of any of the following: a) introduction to MERS for new members (every first meeting of Fall semester); b) topic seminars presented by MERS members or guest speakers; c) updates on upcoming events; d) Q&A panel discussions with officers; e) student career enrichment discussions (C.V., Grad School, Jobs, etc.); f) conservation charity events.

Article 5 Mandatory Events/Opportunities Provided to MERS Members

The following events will be provided to MERS member each semester, and simply represents a minimum of opportunities presented to achieve our organizational goals and mission statements.

Section I. Research Opportunities

These opportunities will be provided each semester in the following ways:

- a) Assistance with Graduate Thesis projects
- b) Assistance with Undergraduate projects
- c) Volunteer events with local state/federal agencies (eg. FWC, USFWS, EPA)
- d) Field collection of marine specimens used in research/display

Section II. Field Trips

These trips will allow students to experience avenues of education and career opportunities outside of the University. These experiences may come in the following ways:

- a) Behind-the-scenes tours and discussions with staff at regional public aquaria.
- b) Visits to regional marine research laboratories, and meeting with research scientists
- c) Extended field excursions to explore and investigate regional marine ecosystems and habitats.
- d) Attending regional scientific conferences.

Section III. Conservation Charity Events

These events will provide the opportunity to learn about contemporary issues in conservation science, and creates a portal for assisting charities through collected donations and/or volunteer opportunities. These events are typically held at the last member meeting of each semester, and are affectionately dubbed "Conservation Night". These events include fundraising for a local, regional, national, or international charity agreed upon by the officers at the beginning of each year. One topic is chosen for each Conservation Night as a focus point, and includes screenings of documentaries (open-access or "free"), discussion sessions, trivia, and/or guest speakers. Donations are collected, and proceeds from raffles, food, and merchandise are all sent directly to the charity of choice.

Section IV. Local Area Clean-up Events

Keeping the local areas within and around Pensacola is a service and duty of any resident. As a University student organization, we must be dedicated to cleaning up after others, as a small step towards conservation and maintaining the environment. Each semester, MERS must conduct at least one major clean-up event within Escambia County. MERS will provide gloves and trashbags to all members involved. MERS will also provide transportation to clean-up sites for members that require it. MERS will contact the proper authorities prior to cleaning up a public area, if needed.

Article 6 Grants

MERS offers small student funding opportunities through three separate grant processes. These grants allow for a wide variety of practical uses by both the undergraduate and graduate student body at UWF. Grants are funded primarily by monies provided by the SGA (see Article 7, Section I). Grants are

offered each semester, with a maximum of three grants per type (see below) awarded during the course of an academic year. Students must apply for grants, and will be awarded based on Executive Board and Faculty Advisor approval.

The grants offered are outlined as follows:

Section I. Grant Type I – Research

Research grants are offered to graduate/undergraduate students that are in need of startup or supplementary funding for a project. Three grants of up to \$300 will be awarded each year. Undergraduate applicants are given priority, as their avenues of funding are exceedingly limited, and will encourage the pursuit of graduate degrees if the research proves successful.

Section II. Grant Type II – Travel

Travel grants are offered to graduate/undergraduate students that wish to present the results of their research at a scientific conference. Three grants of up to \$150 will be awarded each year. These funds may also be used to assist students that simply wish to attend a conference to expand their science network, and explore new avenues of research and/or education. Conference registration fees are often prohibitively expensive for students, and these funds make students more amenable to attending.

Section III. Grant Type III – Technical Advancement

Technical advancement grants are offered to graduate/undergraduate students that wish to pursue a certification for a technical skill that will improve their chances of success in a scientific and/or educational career. Three grants of up to \$150 will be awarded each year. These funds may be applied as a reimbursement after receipt of the certification course has been received by MERS officers. Certification course may include SCUBA, Boat Captain licensure, GIS certification, Science Education Workshops, etc.

Article 7 Funds and Finances

The officers of M.E.R.S shall govern all finances. The treasurer shall be responsible for maintaining all financial information. All money shall be earned as described in the following sections, and will be accepted by MERS officers only.

Section I. SGA Funding

This funding is provided by the University Student Government Association (SGA), and is a privilege that our organization is able to complement

their funding through this opportunity. This funding source will typically consist of 50% or more of the MERS annual budget. Funds can only be acquired from the SGA by submitting annual proposals of the organizations entire budget, which will be written by the Treasurer, edited by the Executive Board, and approved by all officers of MERS. This funding will typically be used for Grant disbursements (see Article 6), guest speakers, consumables during member meetings, annual MERS calendars, and field trips.

Section II. Dissection Kits

Dissection Kits are ordered annually from Nasco Corp., and are provided to UWF Biology students at a low cost (\$20). Funds acquired from this source will be maintained in the MERS bank account at Coastal Bank & Trust. The majority of these funds will pay for the next year's dissection kits, and any profits accrued will go towards complementing the SGA funds for various events and organizational merchandise such as T-shirts.

Section III. Dues

Dues will be collected from new members throughout the year, and will be deposited into the MERS bank account at Coastal Bank & Trust. Dues will be used primarily for MERS merchandise and to provide fun extracurricular activities for active MERS members.

Section IV. Merchandise

Funds collected from MERS merchandise sold to students will be deposited into the MERS bank account at Coastal Bank & Trust. These funds will be used primarily to purchase future merchandise and to provide fun extracurricular activities for active MERS members.

Section V. Fundraisers and Donations

Fundraisers will be organized solely for the purpose of providing a specific activity or benefit to MERS members, or to donate to conservation charities. Donations given to MERS will also go directly to charity, or towards a specific activity or benefit, as agreed upon by the MERS officers.