

# **Mississauga Freethought Association – Constitution**

*Dated: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012*

## **1. Name**

The organization will be known as the "Mississauga Freethought Association." The organization may be referred to as the "MFA." The MFA will be affiliated with the community and student groups whose overall goals and values are in line with those of the MFA.

## **2. Purpose**

The concept of freethinking is founded on a method of addressing the validity of any and all statements or knowledge put forth as truth. Freethinking means that one should approach a problem (or dogmatic principle) through the use of logical principles, scientific inquiry and the accumulation of facts assessed by these means. In particular, through such efforts, a conscious effort is made to avoid depending on the constraints imposed by cultural bias, conventional wisdom, prejudice, sectarianism and other similar fallacious principles.

The primary aim of the MFA is to create a community of conscientious citizens who gather to discuss current local and/or global issues from the perspective of a freethinker, irrespective of religious or cultural affiliation or lack thereof. Issues can range from socio-political to science and technology to the pure arts. Particular emphasis will be applied to how secularism can be a tool for inter-faith dialogue, seeking to resolve pertinent issues such as faith-based extremism and the environmental crisis. The ultimate goal is to create a community of individuals who are interested in approaching the resolution of current issues from non-conventional perspectives, always being critical of socially acceptable norms. The MFA will be allied with similar groups locally and abroad and members will be encouraged to participate in the initiatives of said groups should the need arise.

The primary activity of the MFA will focus around discussions, talks and documentary/movie screenings. Lectures will also be given by invited guests. Social events and political activism will also be part of the mandate, involving collaborations with other groups with similar visions.

## **3. Membership**

3.1. Member status: Any University of Toronto community member (student, staff, Faculty and alumni) who wishes to join the MFA will be granted full member status. Full voting rights are granted to all members. These rights include the ability to nominate and run for executive positions at specified times and the ability to propose and vote on constitutional amendments. Others outside of the U of T community are eligible for

associate member status but are not granted full voting privileges, and may not nominate or run in any executive positions, or propose constitutional amendments. Membership in the MFA confers each individual with inclusion in an electronic mailing list, to be maintained by the Secretary.

3.2 Membership fee: There is no membership fee.

3.3. Member agreement: Given the often controversial nature of the topics to be explored, appropriate etiquette shall be demanded during all meetings and in all communication related to the MFA. Members must agree to show respect for each other's opinions and to refrain from expletives, insults and threatening or humiliating language. Participation in demonstrations opposing the general purpose and mandate of the MFA may result in the removal of members involved in said actions from the MFA. The general membership may remove members from the MFA who fail to comply with this agreement after repeated warnings via a voting process. If a termination does result, the member in question may appeal the decision. In this situation, the member may provide a defense for the appeal, and allow the general members to vote on whether the appeal should/should not be granted.

## **4. Meetings**

### 4.1. Executive Meetings

a. There will be no fewer than four executive meetings each year. Notice of the meeting will be given at least four days in advance. Emergency meetings will be allowed, provided 24 hour notice is given to all executives.

b. Executive meetings will be called by the President or Vice President or by a petition signed by 3 members of the executive. Quorum will be established by the presence of at least 3 members, including the President or Vice President.

c. Executive meetings will be open to all members, unless explicitly decided by the executive to go in camera.

d. The President will chair executive meetings and have the responsibility of drawing up an agenda to be presented to the executive at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

e. All executives and officers are expected to make brief progress reports at every general meeting on projects which they have been assigned.

f. Decisions will be made with support of a majority of present executives.

g. The executive may choose to bring an issue to a referendum of the membership either at a general meeting or over the electronic listserv. Referenda brought to the general membership will be decided by the majority of responding members within a

week and such decisions will be immediately binding. Once brought to referenda, the decision is binding.

h. A representative from the MFA will be assigned to attend Club Information Meetings hosted by the University of Toronto at Mississauga Student Union.

#### 4.2. Discussion Meetings:

a. There will be discussion-based meetings as frequently as the membership and executive deems appropriate. Notice of the meeting will be given at least 7 days in advance.

b. Discussion meetings are open to everyone.

c. Discussion meetings shall conform to the mandate as outlined in Purpose (see 2)

d. A chair will be assigned for each discussion meeting. The chair will keep brief, informal minutes at discussion meetings. Minutes of each meeting will be made available on the MFA website and to the electronic group within a reasonable time following the meeting.

#### 4.3. Annual General Meeting (AGM):

a. The AGM will take place before the end of each scholastic year. The AGM will be open to everyone. Quorum will be established by the presence of at least 5 registered members.

b. Proxies will not be allowed at the AGM.

c. Decisions shall be made by a majority of registered members and such decisions will be immediately binding.

d. A Chair shall be appointed by the executive and responsible for leading the meeting in an efficient, reasonable manner.

e. Activities should include a year-in-review presented by the President, a year-end financial report presented by the Treasurer and adopted through the support of a majority of registered members, and executive elections, to be governed by Article 6.

f. Activities may include constitutional amendments, which are binding immediately if passed by a majority of registered members.

## **5. MFA Executive**

### 5.1. Executive Positions:

a. **President:** The President shall be responsible for the overall direction of the MFA. The President shall ensure the executives perform their duties and work together effectively, including active conflict resolution and guidance. The President shall be a signing officer of the organization for all purposes including the bank account. The President is the official representative of the organization at all occasions.

b. **Vice President:** The VP will take over all Presidential responsibilities at any meeting where the President is unable to attend. His/her main responsibility is to oversee MFA relations with external organizations, especially in the context of political and social advocacy. In the absence of an assigned Treasurer, the VP will be the second signing officer and will take over the responsibilities of the Treasurer.

c. **Treasurer:** The Treasurer is the second signing officer in financial matters and holds the MFA's bank account with the President. As Treasurer, he/she shall be responsible for providing financial updates and reports following major events and as requested by the executive and performing a year-end annual report at the AGM.

d. **Secretary:** The Secretary is to retain the minutes of all executive meetings, establish and maintain the electronic mailing list and the separate discussion group, maintain the membership list, keep copies of all communications publicly available online, and maintain the official website and presence on other online communities.

e. **Publicity and Media Relations:** This individual shall oversee promotions and publicity of all events and initiatives. He/she shall have knowledge of relevant philosophy, policies and the views of the membership. He/she shall be responsible for creating and maintaining liaison with all levels of media. He/she shall be responsible for ensuring press releases are issued on relevant issues and shall bring any requests to the immediate attention of the executive.

f. **Community Relations:** This individual shall be responsible for public relations, community outreach, and for building up a freethought community in Mississauga, by networking with other groups and interested individuals, helping run MFA intergroup activities, participating in other organizations' intergroup activities. This individual is tasked with overseeing the building of a secular freethought community through intergroup initiatives such as humanitarian and environmental causes.

### 5.2 Officer Positions

Officer positions will be appointed as required by the executive at any time. The executive will formalize the role of the position and the jurisdiction under which it falls. An officer does not have voting privileges at executive meetings.

### 5. 3. Procedure:

- a. The executive will be elected at the Annual General Meeting by the registered members. All candidates must be registered members.
- b. Advertising for elections can take place over a period of at least 2 weeks. Following this period a nomination period of at least one week will be held. Following this period a campaign week will be held.
- c. Elections will take place at a location designated by the current executive over a period of 3 days.
- d. Candidates may be nominated by themselves or others.
- e. Short speeches may be given by each candidate, followed by a short question and answer period. Elections shall be conducted by secret ballot, to be overseen by an impartial observer to be agreed upon by all candidates.
- f. In the event of a candidate desiring re-election for an undisputed position, a vote of continued confidence will be conducted by the general membership, overseen by an impartial observer agreed upon by all candidates, to determine if the individual shall remain in position.
- g. All bi-elections shall follow an analogous format
- h. The executive will fill or appoint vacant positions as needed. This decision must be validated by a vote from the general members. The President will assume any remaining positions.
- i. Transfer of power will take place immediately following the AGM.
- j. Outgoing executive members shall be highly encouraged to attend the next 2 meetings.

### 5.4. Removal from Office

- a. Any executive member absent for two consecutive meetings will be given a warning, unless a satisfactory reason is communicated to the executive at least 24 hours prior to each meeting.
- b. An executive shall be put forth for dismissal to general membership if, following a warning from the executive, there is continued use of slander, profanity, or derogatory or discriminatory language in relation to other members or in the course of MFA dialogue at any time. General membership will vote for dismissal of said executive and dismissal will pass by 2/3 majority.

c. An executive shall be subject to dismissal for continued incompetence or willful negligence of duty. General membership will vote for dismissal of said executive and dismissal will pass by 2/3 majority.

d. The President or a Vice President shall investigate cases of a), b) or c) above and draw up a list of charges against the executive member in question. This list will be presented to him/her no later than 7 days prior to an executive meeting. Failure to settle the situation will result in a vote for dismissal at the next executive meeting, requiring a 2/3 majority to pass. In the case of an impeachment, the member in question may appeal the decision. In this situation, the member may provide a defense for the appeal, and allow the general members to vote on whether the appeal should/should not be granted.

## **6. Finances**

The President and Treasurer will be signing officers for the MFA's fiscal affairs and hold the MFA's bank account. The Treasurer will maintain a chronicle of all transactions. The treasurer will prepare a financial report for the Annual General Meeting.

## **7. Amendments**

Amendments to this document may be proposed in person at executive or general meetings. All amendments to the constitution must be approved by the general membership. A written copy of an amendment must be presented to any executive officer. Two-thirds of respondents must approve the changes for ratification within one week of notification. The constitution may also be amended at the Annual General Meeting through support of a majority of attendant members.

## **8. Affiliations**

The MFA supports and holds formal/informal affiliation with the following organizations:

1. Centre for Inquiry
2. Halton Peel Humanist Community
3. Café Scientifique Mississauga