
CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

PEABODY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH RACE

May 18, 2015

BECOMING AN OFFICIAL STUDENT ORGANIZATION

As many of you know, the work of *Crucial Conversations* this year has featured the consideration of our place on campus. In particular, we have been discussing whether *Crucial Conversations* should become an official student organization under the Peabody Office of Professional and Graduate Education (POPGE). After extensive discussion, the team has voted to move forward with becoming a student organization.

In this process, 55% of voters said to move forward now, and 36% said that we should become a student organization at some point, but not immediately (and the rest abstaining). In this vote, each eligible member received one vote and eligible members were defined in discussion with the entire core team as those students who have attended at least one planning meeting for *Crucial Conversations* or have participated in some other way beyond attending one of our events. Overall, enough people felt that being a student organization would help to protect the long-term interests of *Crucial Conversations* for this to be the majority decision. This vote is final, and, as is the case with any organization, we reserve the right to periodically revisit our status as a student organization as this initiative moves into the future.

Because of the complicated nature of this decision, we wish to be clear with the campus community about the implications of this decision and the responsibilities of all those involved. In addition, as a process note, we will be soliciting more feedback about those things that people (mainly, the 36% mentioned above) would have hoped to be in place before our move to becoming a student organization. We will take this feedback and use it to define some of our more immediate priorities.

In terms of the resources available to us, becoming a student organization means several things. We have access to facilities and POPGE events (e.g., orientation) in ways that we did not before because of our official status. In addition, we have guaranteed funding from POPGE, and we are also eligible to apply for additional funding from the student activity fee. Lastly, being an official student organization means that we have access to existing channels of communication to administrators as well as an institutional claim to making our needs known in administrative spaces. (We did have access to some of these items before when we were working through other student organizations, but (a) we found that these resources were usually given by POPGE through the other organizations anyway and (b) we felt that having more direct access would allow us more flexibility in our planning.) Altogether, this move allows us to communicate with the structures of administration in ways that make our work easier.

People ask what the Peabody administration sets for us in order for us in order to be a student organization. There are several concrete items that are required:

1. The development of a constitution, which would, among other things, define our succession plans and our membership. We had planned on developing such guiding documents anyway as a part of clarifying our group norms and structure.
2. The assignment of the roles of "President," "Vice President," "Treasurer," and "Secretary" to four individuals in the organization. We recognize that we historically organized ourselves differently, but administrators in POPGE have assured us that we can have any leadership configuration that we would

like and that these positions are simply nominal for the purpose of official paperwork that defines who to contact for things like budgetary questions.

3. A faculty or staff advisor, whose main function(s) can be defined by us as a team to be as involved or hands-off as we would like.

We acknowledge and are very conscious of the fact that concerns still exist, and that there are risks associated with this move. In particular, as an organization that has an explicit commitment to challenging the existing structure of Peabody College to become better, it is reasonable that many have expressed concern about our assumed-to-be-implied alignment with the structures that exist as communicated by this move. First, we have received explicit commitments from POPGE that they do not intend on policing or limiting our activism. Second, as an initiative led by students who are often subject to the power of administration already by virtue of their position as student, we understand the fear that individuals will grow to be complacent and acquiescent in an attempt to not cause any conflict. To combat this, we understand that we need to continuously reaffirm for team members the need to be conscious of the structures within which we exist and to avoid putting conflict avoidance, especially those related to our access to institutional resources, above doing what they feel is right.

We commit to remaining true to our original goals. We commit to being ever thoughtful about their work and how this official relationship affects that work. We ask that members of the community trust us as we traverse this new field, but more than that, we want individuals and our fellow student organizations to keep us accountable for our work and challenge us when they feel that the actions we are taking are not fulfilling the goals we have developed to address issues of race and ethnicity.

We look forward to exploring the possibilities that this new relationship can open in terms of making even more change here at Peabody College. Please feel free to contact us at peabodycrucialconversations@gmail.com if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

Thank you,
The Crucial Conversations Team