Report on 2018 Referendum Petition Data

Policy Research and Development Commission
Office of the SGA Executive Vice President, AJ Tsang
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Introduction and Context

At the core of its Constitution, SGA's mission is to represent the voice of students and to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas. To this end, SGA engages students through a variety of channels and platforms — one-on-one meetings with constituents and student groups, listening sessions, fora — and brings forward their ideas and views to the University through meetings with administrators and passing legislation, especially resolutions.

However, the highest and most direct form of student voice at the University manifests in the form of an SGA referendum. Designed to have high vote thresholds to host and high thresholds to pass, the referendum allows the University to know with absolute certainty that a viewpoint is held by the student body. In the eyes of SGA, a successfully passed referendum is both statistically and democratically representative of the student body, such that it becomes "binding" to SGA.

As young people move to take their place in leading this nation's democracy, so too has the Johns Hopkins student body expressed a desire for itself and its SGA to have more influence over University governance. When the University moved to create a private police force in the spring of 2018, students expressed deep concerns about their exclusion from the University's proposal development process. In regards to the University's investments, students have expressed concern that their voice has only resulted in incremental change.
As such, the SGA moved to initiative a student referendum in Fall 2018.

Methodology

The referendum petition was created in late May 2018 and reviewed for legal neutrality by the SGA Judiciary. In June 2018, the SGA formed a referendum organizing team composed of Executive Vice President AJ Tsang, Executive Secretary Aspen Williams, and Sophomore Class President Sam Schatmeyer. As the summer progressed, Williams and Schatmeyer composed a video highlighting SGA's efforts during the 2017-2018 legislative session and how important it would be for students to petition to hold a referendum. The video was released in early July 2018, alongside the petition itself. Per the SGA Constitution, at least ⅙ of the undergraduate student body (900 students out of 5,500) was required to petition to hold a referendum.

Through consistent social media posts and personal messages from SGA members to their peers, the referendum petition reached approximately 500 signatures by late July 2018. In August 2018, a series of emails and additional messaging raised the number of signatures to

approximately 700, and by the end of the month, an all-school email and final social media push brought the referendum petition to 910 signatures.

The petition closed on August 31st, 2018. The data from the petition was then downloaded from Hopkins Groups as a .csv file and parsed into individual data columns. Names of petition signers were isolated from their responses, and re-alphabetized, to protect the privacy of students. The same re-alphabetization process was applied to the feedback given to the referendum petition feedback question.

The data was uploaded to Google Sheets for an analysis of what students most wanted SGA to pursue, most wanted the University to do or accomplish, and most wanted to have answered on the referendum. Data was analyzed based on keywords and/or phrases, which were grouped and calculated for comparative frequency (relative occurrence compared to other keywords/phrases) and population frequency (relative occurrence among all students who signed the petition). Keywords and phrases were analyzed only for raw frequency of occurrence, *not* for frequency of positive or negative occurrence, knowing that the latter depth of analysis might bias turnout within or eventual responses to the referendum itself.

Results

910 students signed the referendum petition. The following charts and tables summarize the issues most raised by the petition.

Figure 1: Referendum Feedback Keywords by Comparative Frequency

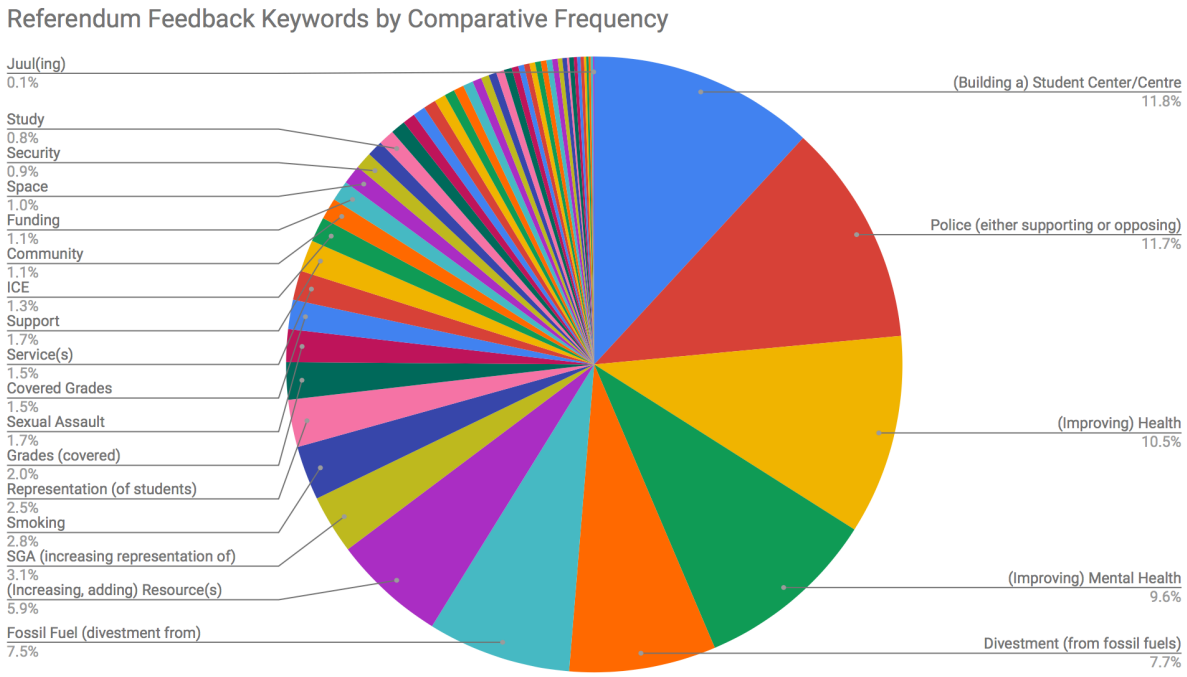

Figure 2: Referendum Feedback Keywords by Population Frequency

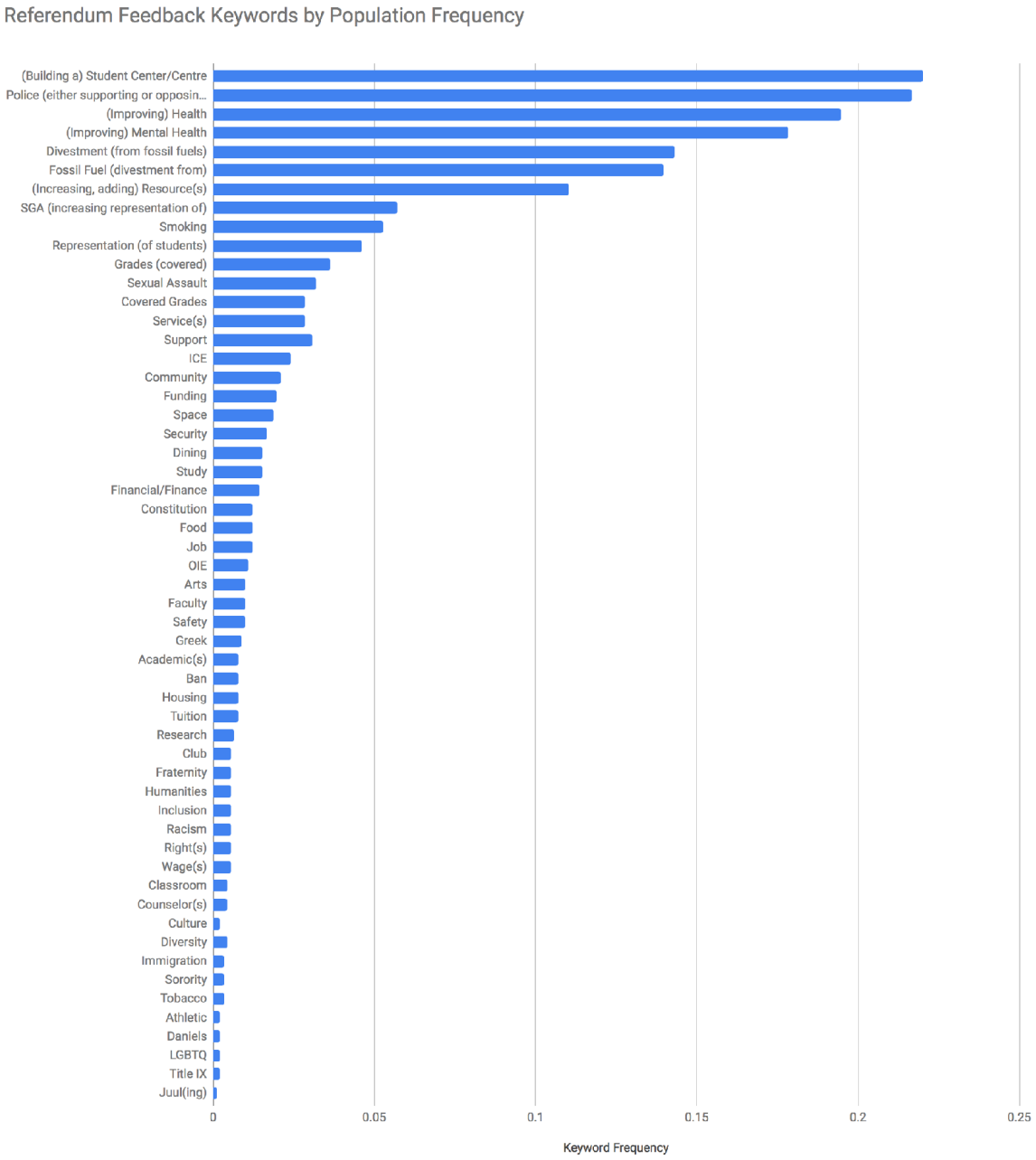

Figure 3: Full Table of Keywords or Phrases Analyzed
(Keywords occurring more than average are bolded)

KEYWORD OR PHRASE	RAW NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES	COMPARATIVE FREQUENCY	POPULATION FREQUENCY

(Building a) Student Center/Centre	**200**	**0.1184834123**	**0.2200220022**
Police (either supporting or opposing)	**197**	**0.1167061611**	**0.2167216722**
(Improving) Health	**177**	**0.1048578199**	**0.1947194719**
(Improving) Mental Health	**162**	**0.09597156398**	**0.1782178218**
Divestment (from fossil fuels)	**130**	**0.07701421801**	**0.1430143014**
Fossil Fuel (divestment from)	**127**	**0.07523696682**	**0.1397139714**
(Increasing, adding) Resource(s)	**100**	**0.05924170616**	**0.1100110011**
SGA (increasing representation of)	**52**	**0.0308056872**	**0.05720572057**
Smoking	**48**	**0.02843601896**	**0.05280528053**
Representation (of students)	**42**	**0.02488151659**	**0.04620462046**
Grades (covered)	**33**	**0.01954976303**	**0.03630363036**
Sexual Assault	29	0.01718009479	0.03190319032
Covered Grades	26	0.0154028436	0.02860286029
Service(s)	26	0.0154028436	0.02860286029
Support	28	0.01658767773	0.03080308031
ICE	22	0.01303317536	0.02420242024
Community	19	0.01125592417	0.02090209021
Funding	18	0.01066350711	0.0198019802
Space	17	0.01007109005	0.01870187019
Security	15	0.008886255924	0.01650165017
Dining	14	0.008293838863	0.01540154015
Study	14	0.008293838863	0.01540154015
Financial/Finance	13	0.007701421801	0.01430143014
Constitution	11	0.006516587678	0.01210121012
Food	11	0.006516587678	0.01210121012
Job	11	0.006516587678	0.01210121012
OIE	10	0.005924170616	0.01100110011
Arts	9	0.005331753555	0.009900990099
Faculty	9	0.005331753555	0.009900990099
Safety	9	0.005331753555	0.009900990099
Greek	8	0.004739336493	0.008800880088

Academic(s)	7	0.004146919431	0.007700770077
Ban	7	0.004146919431	0.007700770077
Housing	7	0.004146919431	0.007700770077
Tuition	7	0.004146919431	0.007700770077
Research	6	0.00355450237	0.006600660066
Club	5	0.002962085308	0.005500550055
Fraternity	5	0.002962085308	0.005500550055
Humanities	5	0.002962085308	0.005500550055
Inclusion	5	0.002962085308	0.005500550055
Racism	5	0.002962085308	0.005500550055
Right(s)	5	0.002962085308	0.005500550055
Wage(s)	5	0.002962085308	0.005500550055
Classroom	4	0.002369668246	0.004400440044
Counselor(s)	4	0.002369668246	0.004400440044
Culture	2	0.001184834123	0.002200220022
Diversity	4	0.002369668246	0.004400440044
Immigration	3	0.001777251185	0.003300330033
Sorority	3	0.001777251185	0.003300330033
Tobacco	3	0.001777251185	0.003300330033
Athletic	2	0.001184834123	0.002200220022
Daniels	2	0.001184834123	0.002200220022
LGBTQ	2	0.001184834123	0.002200220022
Title IX	2	0.001184834123	0.002200220022
Juul(ing)	1	0.000592417061	0.001100110011

In sum, over 1688 potential referendum ideas were submitted among the 910 student responses (meaning that on average, each student submitted an average of 1.85 questions to be asked on the referendum). The average occurrence of a potential idea or question to be asked was 31 times (with a standard deviation of 51), and the median occurrence of a potential idea or question to be asked was 9 times.

The most common issues that students sought to see as a question on the referendum include:

- Building a student center;
- Whether to create or not create a private police force;
- Means to improve health and mental health on campus;
- Divestment from fossil fuels;
- Increasing resources/services for students;
- Smoking policy on campus;

- Student representation in University decisions; and
- Covered grades.

It is the recommendation of the PRDC and the Office of the Vice President that the Senate ratify the petition as valid, move to hold a referendum, and include at least five of the above issues as questions on the referendum.

AJ Tsang
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Chair, Policy Research & Development Commission