



Senate of the Student Government Association of The Johns Hopkins University

{ S. Bill. 20-21, 10 }

A BILL TO IMPLEMENT A PEN PAL PROGRAM FOR THE UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENT BODY AT JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCED BY: SENATORS **ANANYA KALAHASTI** AND CONSIDERED THIS **8TH** DAY OF **DECEMBER** IN THE YEAR **2020**

SPONSORED BY: CLASS PRESIDENT **NATHAN MUDRAK** OF THE **2022** CLASS
SENATOR **GRACE WANG** OF THE **2022** CLASS
CLASS PRESIDENT **KOBI KHONG** OF THE **2024** CLASS
EXECUTIVE TREASURER **ADDY PERLMAN** OF THE **2021** CLASS

REFERRED TO THE SENATE BY THE **COMMITTEE ON STUDENT SERVICES** WHICH RECOMMENDS ITS **PASSAGE** BY A VOTE OF **6** TO **0**.

Be it enacted by the Senate of the Student Government Association of The Johns Hopkins University assembled that:

SECTION 1. TITLE.

This Act may be referred to as the “Handwritten Homewood Bill”

SECTION 2. DEFINITIONS.

- (a) SGA — The term “SGA” shall refer to the Student Government Association of The Johns Hopkins University.
- (b) JHU, Hopkins — The terms “JHU” and “Hopkins” shall refer to Johns Hopkins University.
- (c) HH, Handwritten Hopkins - The term “HH” and “Handwritten Hopkins” shall refer to the outlined pen pal program below by name/title.

SECTION 3. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.

(a) FINDINGS

- (1) Although SGA currently employs many methods to connect undergraduate students with each other through class council programming and other community building events, we currently don’t organize programming for individual students to meet new people either within or outside of their year.
 - a. There are few programs implemented by the university on a large scale seeking to connect individual students and form connections and friendships that aren’t exclusive to majors or organizations.
- (2) Hopkins, as a university, has relatively high rates of social isolation, with many reporting that they feel as though they haven’t been able to make friends with other students on campus, find other people they know in clubs or classes, or simply be able to discuss their experiences at Hopkins with peers.
 - a. Additionally, with the COVID-19 pandemic, and especially for freshmen, it has been difficult to form connections with other students, resulting in additional layers of social isolation that will be difficult to overcome after a semester of virtual education and at least one additional semester in a hybrid modality.
 - b. Additionally, in past surveys of students through the semester, social cohesion has been highlighted as a major concern, and many have even mentioned a pen pal program as a way to connect with other students.
- (3) Not only is it important for individual class councils to help foster community within their own class years, but it is important for SGA at large to help foster these social cohesions and give interested students an opportunity to meet other students they might not ordinarily meet through classes or student organizations.
 - a. Additionally, students, in a virtual or hybrid modality, do not have the same organic opportunities to meet other students in their class years.
 - b. Students already noted significant barriers to forming social connections, and many first year students have expressed concern around making friends at Hopkins either virtually or should they be in Baltimore in a virtual modality.

(b) PURPOSES

- a. The main goal of this initiative is to encourage the forming of social connections between students at Hopkins. There are currently few to no

programs that seek to dedicatedly connect students with each other in a fun, casual, and social way that are available to the student body at large and not limited by membership in certain clubs, or participation in certain majors or departments.

- b. Additionally, this project seeks to better social cohesion on campus in a hybrid or potentially fully online Spring 2021 semester and offer students an easy way to meet and get to know someone new, in a safe setting.
- c. Similar types of pen pal programs have been instituted following the start of the pandemic at peer institutions such as Georgetown University, as well as within student organizations at institutions like Columbia University.
 - i. Specifically in response to the pandemic, the University of South Florida St. Petersburg Campus COMPASS student experience office implemented “The College Pen Pal” initiative. 1,600 students from 227 institutions across the world were matched with the pen pal program.^{1,2}

SECTION 4. LOGISTICS AND ROLLOUT

(a) PROCEDURE

- a. SGA shall send out an email at the beginning of intersession (January 2021) describing the following pen pal pairing process:
 - i. Attached to this preliminary email will be a Campus Groups form with the following anticipated questions:
 - 1. Name, Home State / Country
 - 2. Majors/Minors/Pre-Professional Interests
 - 3. Club Involvement / Anticipated Clubs
 - 4. Other Interests & Hobbies
 - 5. Factors students would like to be considered in student pairings, including but not limited to whether or not students would like to be paired with
 - a. Someone in their year
 - b. Someone from their home state / country
 - c. Someone in their major or in similar organizations
 - d. Someone in the same housing as them / also on campus or at home
 - e. How involved they would like to be in participating with their pen pal

¹<https://spcampus.usf.edu/home/2020/03/20/university-students-flock-to-new-usf-pen-pal-program-during-social-distancing/>

² <https://www.usf.edu/magazine/2020-summer/university-students-flock-to-pen-pal-program.aspx>

6. Additionally, students will be given the opportunity to decide between using email and/or snail mail to participate, and will be paired accordingly.
 - a. Students will be asked for their email address and an optional home/on campus address on the pairing form in accordance with the preferences they list on the form for communications
- b. From those who fill out the form, SGA will pair students together first based on common interests, years at Hopkins, and then taking into account other considerations outlined on the form.
 - i. Pairings will be made based on common interests, and then by taking into account other preferences submitted through forms.
- c. SGA will email participants the name and contact information of their pen pal by the end of the first week of classes of the Spring 2021 semester.
 - i. This email will also emphasize that there is no expectation for students to spend money on their pen pal program.

(b) TIMELINE & ROLLOUT

- a. Before the end of the first week of Intersession, the Student Services Committee shall vote to appoint no fewer than 5 members to a designated task force who will oversee and administer the program.
 - i. The task force will decide within themselves their meeting schedule.
 - ii. The task force must have at least one member from each class council.
 - iii. The task force will be responsible for overseeing the sign up / interest form, pen pal pairings, and monthly emails to participants.
- b. The sign up / interest form will be open throughout Intersession
 - i. During this time, SGA will market the program through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, and through its mailing lists
- c. Periodically, throughout the Spring 2021 semester, SGA will release prompts or suggestions for what students can write to their pen pals about to those enrolled in the program.
 - i. This might look like sharing how exams are going and self-care practices around mid-February, discussing club involvement in mid-March, finals studying plans & course registration in mid-April, and summer plans in mid-May.
- d. Feedback will be collected throughout the semester.
 - i. Midway through the semester, the 3rd week of March, a directed feedback survey will be released to all participants to solicit feedback on the program thus far and to seek any suggested modifications for the remaining few months of the semester.

- ii. At the end of the semester, directed feedback will be collected for modifications should the program be implemented for future semesters.
- iii. Throughout the semester, pen pal participants may submit feedback about their experience at any time by contacting sga@jhu.edu or through an anonymous feedback form that will be open all semester.
- e. There will be two times during which pen pals can be rematched
 - i. Should there be a conflict, whether it's that two participants strongly don't get along or are already really good friends, a new pen pal can be requested during the first two weeks of the school year through a rematch form
 - 1. These will be evaluated on a case by case basis, and rematches will take place based on number of participants requesting.
 - ii. If participants do not end up hearing from their assigned pen pal, participants can request to be rematched in mid-March and will receive a new pen pal by the end of the first week of April.

SECTION 5. SEVERABILITY.

Should any provision of this Act, an amendment made by this Act, or the application of such provision or amendment to any person or circumstance be held to be unconstitutional, the remainder of this Act, the amendments made by this Act, and the application of such provision or amendment to any person or circumstances shall not be affected thereby.

THE BILL HEREBY **PASSES** BY A VOTE OF **X** TO **X** WITH **X** ABSTENTIONS.

UPON PASSAGE, WE HAVE HEREUNTO SET OUR HANDS AND CAUSED THE SEAL OF THE SENATE TO BE AFFIXED TO THIS BILL INDICATING THE SENATE'S ASSENT AND THUS OFFICIALLY DESIGNATED THE BILL'S ADOPTION AS LAW.

Signatures of Enactment:

Sam Mollin
President of the Senate

Mehak Ali
Executive Vice President of the Johns Hopkins SGA

Breanna Soldatelli
Executive Secretary of the Johns Hopkins SGA

Addy Perlman
Executive Treasurer of the Johns Hopkins SGA

Signatures of Ceremony: