

## Why Run for the University Senate?

### What is the University Senate?

The Senate is a University-wide policy-making body representing faculty, researchers, students, administration, administrative staff, librarians, and alumni. It makes policy on a range of issues that affect the entire University or more than one school. These include all general faculty and student affairs, most issues that fall under the responsibility of the central administration, all areas under the jurisdiction of any Senate committee, including educational programs and priorities, the budget, academic freedom and tenure, the conduct of research, the libraries, information technology, campus planning, and rules governing demonstrations.

The Senate has 108 voting seats, with 63 reserved for faculty, 24 for students, 6 for officers of research, 2 each for administrative staff, librarians, and alumni, and 9 for senior administration including the President, who chairs the monthly plenaries. Acts of the Senate under section 24 of Chapter II of the University Statutes become final on passage, except in those cases where Trustee concurrence is required in matters involving a change in budgetary appropriations, acquisition or disposition of real property, and contractual obligations of the University.

### The Workings of the University Senate

Most Senate business is transacted by its 15 standing committees and two special committees. When a committee decides a specific course of action is required, it drafts a resolution around this, accompanied by a report summing up the background information and arguments examined by the committee.

The resolution is passed to the Executive Committee, which meets one week before the plenary and sets the plenary agenda. The Executive Committee determines whether the resolution is correct as to form, and it is free to agree or disagree with the goals of the resolution or the methods proposed to attain them, and to state its position to the full Senate. The Executive Committee, if it has serious objections, may try informally to persuade a standing committee to amend its resolution, or to withdraw and reconsider it. It may also recommend tabling a measure to allow for consultation with other Senate committees. In some cases, it may even decide to introduce its own substitute resolution.

From the Executive Committee, a resolution is presented to the Senate plenary to be voted upon. The vote of the Senate as a whole is decisive.

### Senate Committees

Committees meet monthly during fall and spring semesters, for a total of eight meetings over a year, each meeting lasting one to two hours. Committee meetings are scheduled in advance for the year, and Committee members can expect to receive the agenda and other materials one week before the meeting.

Senate committees follow a policy on confidentiality intended to allow the freest discussion possible. The policy makes all committee deliberations confidential, and designates the chair as the only member able to speak on behalf of the committee to the campus press or other outsiders.

Committee chairs, customarily faculty members, are elected for two-year terms and are responsible for giving direction and leadership to committees. The Senate Office assists committee chairs in preparing agendas, minutes and other materials for committee meetings, including undertaking research related to the work of committees and assisting in preparation of the committee's annual report.

Several committees have duties largely independent of the full Senate: Faculty Affairs, for example, is empowered to hear grievances related to discrimination in faculty hiring and promotion, while Honors and Prizes works jointly with the Trustees to select honorary degree recipients. Some committees regularly produce resolutions for action by the full Senate, while others serve primarily as venues for the exchange of information and opinion among students, faculty, and administrators.

Four Senate committees enjoy a special link with related Trustee committees, each sending representatives to meetings of the related Trustee committee. The representatives, who receive full documentation and have a voice but not a vote, are then able to report back to the committees and to the full Senate on actions taken and topics under discussion in Trustee committees. In addition, the President consults with the Senate Executive Committee on the selection of the President, the Provost, University Professors, and the six Senate Consulted Trustees. If a special need arises, there is provision for the Executive Committee to have a meeting with an appropriate group of Trustees.

**The 15 standing committees and three special committees of the Senate:**

- Executive Committee
- Alumni Relations
- Budget Review
- Campus Planning and Physical Development of the University
- Education
- External Relations and Research Policy
- Faculty Affairs, Academic Freedom, and Tenure
- Honors and Prizes
- Housing Policy
- Information and Communications Technology
- Libraries and Digital Resources
- Research Officers
- Rules of University Conduct
- Senate Structure and Operations
- Student Affairs Committee
- Commission on the Status of Women
- Commission on Elections
- Commission on Diversity

## Caucuses

Student, nontenured, and tenured caucuses, each with a chairman, exist to perform certain organizational tasks, including the nomination of members to the Executive Committee and other standing committees. Senators are automatically members of the caucus of the group they represent. Occasionally the caucuses also meet for discussion of common interests.

## The Role of Senator

Senators are elected to terms lasting two years or until such time as their affiliation with Columbia ends, whichever comes first. Each Senator is expected to serve on at least one committee, participating fully in the committees' meetings and attending the monthly Senate plenary.

Since much of the Senate's vital work is carried out in committee session, senators are expected to attend all meetings of their committee(s), and when this is not possible, should notify the Senate Office in advance. Committee eligibility is summarized in the Committee Structure and Membership page.

Senators are permitted to send mass emails concerning Senate business to their constituencies using listservs provided by the Senate. We request that the Senate staff be copied on any such emails.

## Why Run for the Senate?

Senators lead policy change at the highest level of the University. The Senate affords members a view across the University, enabling them to better understand how the University works and facilitating collaboration with colleagues from other schools, divisions, and affiliates; other departments and campuses; and those with different responsibilities and areas of expertise. Being a Senator is the opportunity to serve the greater Columbia community, both on campus and beyond.

*This introduction is intended to provide new senators with practical information about Senate operations, to help them understand what the Senate can do and so prepare them to contribute rapidly to its work. Senate procedures are governed by the [By-Laws, Statutes and Rules](#), the latest edition of which is dated April 2, 2010.*