

October 25, 2024 University Senate Plenary Summary

On October 25, 2024, the University Senate held its second plenary for the 2024-2025 academic year. As a reminder, all Plenary material can be accessed through [this link](#) for the University community.

Senator Jeanine D'Armiento, Chair of the Executive Committee, welcomed all Senators and guests to the second plenary of the year. Sen. D'Armiento turned over the meeting to Interim University President Katrina Armstrong.

Updates from Interim University President Armstrong

Interim President Armstrong began her welcoming remarks by discussing campus access and the restructuring of Public Safety in response to feedback from members of the University. President Armstrong emphasized working toward a full open campus while in communication from all stakeholders of the University, including student representatives and faculty. President Armstrong discussed the [Campus Climate Collaborative](#) led by Vice Provost Dennis Mitchell, as well as the hope to expand this work into academic and research opportunities in alignment with the University's mission.

President Armstrong took a question from the Senate about the updates and composition of the President's Advisory Committee on Institutional Voice. President Armstrong stated that the administration has a draft charge for the Advisory Committee and hopes to give more information soon, while adding that the administration is working to evaluate how task forces and commissions can have effective input from University members.

Establishment of the Office of Institutional Equity

Provost Angela Olinto lead a [presentation](#) on the newly established [Office of Institutional Equity](#) (OIE) run by Vice Provost Laura Kirschstein. Provost Olinto outlined the mission of the Office: "supporting an inclusive non-discriminatory environment for a vibrant academic community, the Vice Provost and her staff oversee compliance with policies and federal, state, and local laws concerning all forms of discrimination." Provost Olinto then went over the history, changes, and structure of OIE, directing University members to look at the website for more detailed information.

Provost Olinto took questions from Senators, including concerns from faculty about resources and policies that given to the faculty versus the students under the new structure of OIE. Senators also asked clarifying questions about transparent reporting, the delineation between [student conduct policies](#) and the [Rules of University Conduct](#), improving existing trainings and policies run by OIE, and the relationship between OIE and task forces commissioned by the University such as the Task Force on Antisemitism. Provost Olinto mentioned feedback between University constituencies on the new office, clarified questions from Senators, mentioned that Vice Provost Kirschstein is meeting regularly with Rules Administrator Gregory Wawro to

distinguish between student conduct and Rules violations, and that OIE does not oversee commissioned task forces of the University.

Establishing a Dual Degree Linking the Master of Science in Climate and the Master of Science in Architecture and Urban Design (Climate, Architecture, Planning & Preservation)

Senator James Applegate, Co-Chair of the Senate Education Committee, gave an overview of the newly established [Dual Degree between the Master of Science in Climate \(Climate School\) and the Master of Science in Architecture and Urban Design \(Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation\)](#). The Dual Degree program consists of 77 points: 32 in the Climate School and 45 in the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP). Students interested in the Dual Degree must apply independently to the two programs and be admitted. Both degrees already exist and have been approved by the University and New York State.

A concern was raised about coordination and oversight of the Dual Degree in order to ensure students are getting clear advisement by the respective Schools, and Sen. Applegate addressed the role of the Education Committee in giving suggestions to the Schools offering the Dual Degrees but that it is ultimately up to them to effectively run the program.

Proposed Update to the University Senate By-Laws (Structure and Operations)

Structure and Operations member and Professor of Social Work Susan Witte presented on the proposal amendments to the University Senate By-Laws. Witte explained the reasoning behind the proposed amendments and went over the five main components of the proposed amendments: 1) Revised format for the Senate Executive Committee By-Laws; 2) Adding a Vice Chair to the Executive Committee; 3) Changing the composition of the Executive Committee; 4) Clarifying the Chair term limits; and 5) Adjustment to the timing of Chair and proposed Vice Chair terms.

Questions were raised from Senators both in favor and opposed to the proposed changes to the By-Laws regarding whether clarifications to the term limits for the Chair position were appropriate and whether the current conversations around the Chair position should be considered. Senators debated about the purpose of the Vice Chair role and whether this would lead to a problem in assumed succession between the Vice Chair and Chair roles, although both roles are voted by the whole Senate and do not automatically assume any succession or continuity. Multiple Senators mentioned that allowing the current Chair to train the new Vice Chair would be beneficial for the Senate at this time.

Senator Letty Moss-Salentijn and Sen. Applegate gave a presentation of the [Education Committee Annual Report for 2023-2024](#). Sen. Moss-Salentijn explained that the report is an annual document summarizing the yearly work done by the Senate Education Committee.

Petition Under Section 1.m. of the University Senate By-Laws

Sen. D'Armiento discussed a petition submitted to the University Senate under Senate By-Laws 1.m. and explained that, once the Executive Committee validates the petition, it will be sent to the appropriate Senate Committee for review and that questions about this process can be directed to the Senate Parliamentarian.

Annual Officers' Benefits Update 2025

Executive Director for Benefits Sara Leupp and Associate Vice President for Benefits Michael Bloom presented on the Officers' Benefits Plan for 2025 (humanresources.columbia.edu/oe), which has open enrollment between November 4 and November 22. Executive Director Leupp summarized the messaging and opportunities to learn more about the Benefits plan. Executive Director Leupp then detailed what is new for 2025: increases to HDHP deductible and out-of-pocket maximums, health savings accounts, support for menopause, additional caregiving resources, enrollment in Identity Theft insurance, Calm Health app, retirement contribution changes, special enrollment opportunity, and new contribution rates. She ended with a discussion of the medical plan contribution increases between 2023 and 2025.

Senators raised questions about the responsibility of the University to cover the increasing cost of healthcare and how that relates to recent salary freezes, the comparison in increases of salary deductions for Columbia versus similar institutions like New York University, and concerns around the displayed vs. actual cost for the life insurance plan given by the University to employees. Executive Director Leupp and Associate Vice President Bloom explained some of the increased costs and agreed to communicate further with the Senate Benefits Committee to address some of these issues.