

	Recommendation to the University Senate Executive Committee on University Senate Committee Membership: Advancing Transparency and Representation	Last revised: April 10, 2026
		Approved: May 1, 2026
		Effective: Committee Membership 2026-27

Proponent: Structure and Operations (S&O) Committee

Purpose: To improve transparency and representation in University Senate (Senate) committee assignments while preserving the University Senate’s role as a faculty-led governance body.

Preamble

Section 4(e) of the By-Laws provides the governing framework for committee membership. In substance, each senator submits to the Executive Committee their first three choices for committee service in order of preference; the Executive Committee then nominates the membership of each committee so that, to the fullest extent possible, no senator is nominated to a committee that is not among their first three choices; and the Senate elects committee members by majority vote. The By-Laws further provide that, unless otherwise expressly stated, non-senators may serve on Senate committees, provided that at least a majority of every committee consists of senators.

This policy is intended to guide the implementation of that By-Laws framework by making the nomination process more transparent, more responsive to patterns of underrepresentation and oversubscription, and more supportive of broad Senate participation over time. It does not alter the By-Laws allocation of authority to the Executive Committee as the Senate’s committee on committees, nor the Senate’s authority to elect committee members.

In practice, the Senate staff supports the development of proposed committee slates while the Executive Committee exercises formal oversight and approval consistent with its By-Laws role.

Background

This proposal is in response to a petition brought to the Senate that raised concerns about the perceived lack of university-wide representation on Senate committees, particularly the concentration of faculty from specific schools/departments (e.g., Arts and Sciences, Physicians and Surgeons, Law) on influential committees such as the Rules of University Conduct Committee. The petition further questioned the transparency of the committee assignment process and called for greater attention to representation across University Senate bodies. To clarify, Senate seats are apportioned for students and officers of instruction

by schools. The Structure and Operations Committee has reviewed existing practices and developed a proposed policy to address concerns regarding the breadth of school and department representation, increase transparency, and encourage broader participation. We are not addressing issues of term limits here. We recognize that the Senate is not structured as a legislative “House of Representatives”. The purpose of the Senate is to ensure shared governance that includes all university constituents by title and by school, and to foreground faculty governance, recognizing that faculty, particularly tenured faculty, hold specific protections that enable them to advocate freely for the university’s interests. We affirm the Senate’s commitment to broad participation. We also recognize the practical reality that committee membership challenges are uneven: some committees are consistently oversubscribed, while others are undersubscribed and struggle to recruit members. This policy is intended to address both fair access to high-demand committees and sustainable staffing across committees.

Current practice

Under the By-Laws, membership on committees other than the Executive Committee is structured through senator preferences, Executive Committee nominations, and election by the full Senate. Non-senators may also serve on committees unless the By-Laws provide otherwise, but senators must remain the majority. Committee chairs, other than the Executive Committee chair and vice chair, are elected by each committee from among its members, and no person may chair more than two standing committees. Members with more than two consecutive unexcused absences may have their seats deemed vacant, with the Executive Committee recommending whether the member continues or a replacement is nominated. The current process for populating Senate committees relies on a self-nomination process with structured balancing¹ and for representative committee membership. The current practice includes:

- Senators complete a survey, on an annual basis, to rank their top committee preferences.
- Senate staff facilitates the committee preference and matching process and prepares the proposed committee slates based on senator preferences, committee needs, and By-Laws requirements regarding committee composition.
- Senate By-Laws and committee composition describe mandated membership by title/stakeholder group. Some committees have all title/stakeholder groups represented (e.g., Campus Planning and Physical Development), while others comprise only one type (e.g., Student Affairs Committee) depending on the committee’s charge.
- Senators are expected to serve on at least one committee; however, the assignments may vary depending on the number of available senators, committee vacancies, and senators’ availability for Senate work.

¹ Structured balancing refers to honoring preferences by Senators while assuring needed expertise and experience for a Committee’s mission and work. The Senate By-Laws describe the current committee structure and composition (i.e., the number of members and by title [e.g. officer of instruction, officer of research, officer of administration, student, administrative staff, librarian, and alumnus/alumna])

- Where permitted by the By-Laws, non-senators may also serve on committees: this can broaden participation, strengthen committees with specialized expertise, and support committee staffing when Senate membership is limited.

Proposed changes

Recognizing that committee needs are specific and not general, we propose the following:

1. Preference Rankings to Support Committee Membership Choice over Time

How it would work:

- The Senate will continue to use the existing By-Laws process under which senators rank their top 3 committee choices. Within that framework, Senate staff will continue to facilitate the preparation of proposed committee slates for Executive Committee review and approval, with the goal of honoring first choices preferences where possible while also considering broader participation and overall distribution of committee opportunities.
- Senators already serving on a committee, who indicate that committee again as a top choice may receive preference for continuity where continuity is important to the committee's work.
- When certain committees (e.g., Rules of University Conduct; Faculty Affairs, Academic Freedom, and Tenure; and Education) are oversubscribed, the proposed slate should take into account whether a senator's school or title group has lacked recent representation on that committee. Senators representing schools who identify that they would like to be represented but have not been, would receive priority for top-choice placement as new positions open.
- A senator whose top choice is unavailable should be considered for their second or third choice and placed on a waiting list and given priority the following year for their top choice.
- Senators who already serve on two or more committees may receive lower priority for additional assignments on oversubscribed committees to ensure broader participation and reduce concentration of committee opportunities.
- After preliminary matching, there should be a brief service-balance review to identify whether a small number of senators are occupying a disproportionate number of highly sought-after committee seats.
- To address undersubscribed committees, Senate staff may use second and third-choice preferences and targeted outreach to fill seats while maintaining the required By-Laws composition.

2. More Intentional Use of Non-Senator Membership and Observer Participation

Because the By-Laws already permit non-senators to serve on Senate committees, committees and the Executive Committee should make more intentional use of non-senator members where that would

broaden participation, add needed expertise, or reduce service burdens on small constituencies, while preserving the By-Laws requirement that senators remain a majority of each committee.

In addition:

- For high-impact or consistently over-subscribed committees, committee chairs may invite one or more non-voting observers from schools or title groups that are not currently represented.
- Observer participation should be used to increase voice, build familiarity with committee work, and support leadership development without expanding voting membership.
- Where permitted by committee rules and By-Laws, committees may also recruit non-senator members through open calls, especially in cases where a small constituency is otherwise repeatedly asked to fill multiple seats.

3. Transparency and Monitoring

Structure and Operations should publish an annual summary each spring reflecting on how the process works, and promote transparency and accountability. This summary should include:

- Committee composition by school and title group,
- A demand-supply snapshot for each committee (e.g., number of first choice requests, number of open seats, and final assignments),
- A brief narrative about over- and under-subscription patterns and steps taken to address them,
- A brief leadership transparency element in the annual survey (e.g., committee chairs and vice-chairs, and years served in leadership roles) to support leadership development and distributed participation while preserving continuity where needed.
- Establish an annual “Committee Opportunities Bulletin” at the start of the academic year listing open seats (senator and non-senator eligible where permitted), expected workload/meeting requirements, and desired expertise, paired with a brief outreach period to support recruitment across constituencies.

Consider adding the following message to the form that is sent to senators each year as they make their top choices: “To promote inclusive participation and ensure a diversity of perspectives across committees, senators are encouraged to periodically reassess their committee preferences, especially after serving four consecutive years on the same committee. While continued service is possible where continuity is important, rotation helps foster new leadership and broaden engagement.”

Implementation tools

Implementation of this policy should be supported by:

- A senator tracking spreadsheet showing school, title, committee history, leadership roles, and current assignments
- Committee level demand-supply-outcome tracking,
- Annual committee preference survey
- Representation monitoring data (Senate web page)
- Annual Committee Opportunities Bulletin (open seats + eligibility + expected workload + desired expertise) circulated at the start of each academic year
- Simple tracking of the over- and undersubscribed committees year to year.

Next Steps

- Pilot the framework during the 2026–2027 committee cycle.
- Review outcomes and refine the process through annual Structure and Operations oversight.