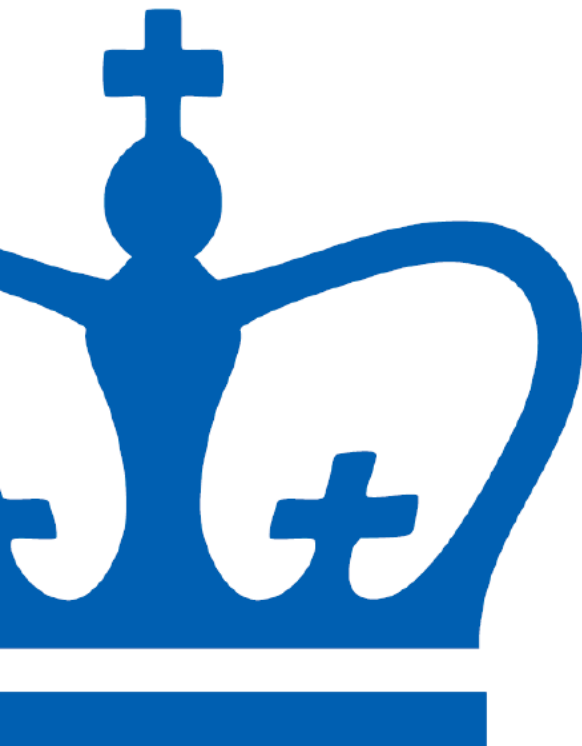


A GUIDE TO THE UNIVERSITY SENATE



AUGUST 19, 2025

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A Guide To The University Senate

About the University Senate

The University Senate is a University-wide policy-making body and a key institution in the architecture of Columbia University's shared governance, alongside the Office of the President and the 24-member Board of Trustees.

Established by the Trustees in 1969 following a University-wide referendum, the University Senate succeeded the University Council, which was created in 1890 as a body of faculty, deans, and other administrators to regulate inter-faculty affairs and consider issues of University-wide concern. The duties, general policies, and powers of the University Senate are set in Chapter II of the [University Statutes](#).

§22. Duties:

- a. to report to the Trustees its opinion as to any exercise of power proposed by a Faculty under Section 35;
- b. to submit such proposals to the Trustees or to the President or to the several Faculties as in its judgment may serve to increase the efficiency of University work;
- c. to consider any question that may arise as to the conduct or efficiency of any officer of administration or instruction, and to report thereon to the Trustees through the President.

§23. General policies: Subject to the reserve power of the Trustees and the provisions of Section 25, the University Senate shall be a policy-making body which may consider all matters of University-wide concern, all matters affecting more than one Faculty or school, and all matters pertaining to the implementation and execution of agreements with the other educational institutions that are now or may hereafter become affiliated with the University. Without limitation by enumeration the University Senate shall

- a. develop and review plans and policies to strengthen the educational system of the University;
- b. work on the long-range master plan for the physical development of the University; recommend ways in which it can be improved; and keep the same under continuing review;
- c. work for the advancement of academic freedom and the protection of faculty interests;

- d. work for the promotion of student welfare and the enhancement of student life;
- e. initiate and review policies to govern the University's relations with outside agencies for research, instruction, and related purposes;
- f. foster policies for cooperative and mutually beneficial relations with the neighboring community;
- g. review by broad categories the annual budget of the University after its adoption and advise the Trustees as to its general conformity with the goals of the University;
- h. consider and recommend policies relating to the awarding of University prizes and honors, and assist the Trustees in the selection of recipients of such prizes and honors;
- i. promulgate a code of conduct for faculty, students, and staff and provide for its enforcement;
- j. initiate proposed changes in Chapter II of these Statutes which have been passed by a vote of at least three-fifths of all incumbent members of the University Senate.

§24. **Powers** The University Senate, subject to the reserve power of the Trustees and the provisions of Section 25, shall have power, and it shall be its duty:

- a. Academic correlation: to secure the correlation of courses offered by the several Faculties and Administrative Boards; to adjust all questions involving more than one Faculty or Administrative Board;
- b. Degrees: to prescribe, by concurrent action with the appropriate Faculty or Administrative Board, the conditions upon which the following degrees shall be conferred and to recommend candidates for such degrees; [see [University Statutes](#) for full list]
- c. Certificates: to prescribe the conditions upon which certificates and such other certificates as the University Senate may from time to time approve, shall be awarded upon recommendation of the several Faculties, Administrative Boards, or committees;
- d. College courses: to prescribe, by concurrent action with the Faculties of Columbia College, Barnard College, and General Studies, severally, the extent to which courses offered by other Faculties and leading to graduate or professional degrees or diplomas shall be included in the programs of studies under those

Faculties, and the conditions upon which such courses may be elected by candidates for a nonprofessional first degree;

- e. Barnard College: to prescribe the manner in which the degree of bachelor of arts conferred upon graduates of Barnard College shall be maintained at all times as a degree of equal value with the degree of bachelor of arts conferred upon the graduates of Columbia College;
- f. Other institutions: to adopt regulations, subject to approval by the Trustees, providing for the proper execution, as regards educational matters, of agreements that are now in existence or that may hereafter be made between the University and such other educational institutions as are now or may hereafter become affiliated with the University, and to prescribe what degrees, diplomas, and certificates may be granted by said institutions and the conditions for granting the same;
- g. Summer Session: to adopt regulations governing the relation of instruction in the Summer Session to the other work of the University;
- h. Fellowships and scholarships: to determine the conditions upon which fellowships and University scholarships shall be awarded, to appoint all fellows and University scholars, and to make rules for their government, subject to such restrictions as may be prescribed by the Statutes or by the terms upon which the several fellowships and University scholarships are established;
- i. Academic Calendar: to fix, annually in advance the Academic Calendar, the dates for entrance and final examinations, the date of Commencement, and the order of Commencement exercises;
- j. Research bureaus: to encourage original research and to authorize the establishment of research bureaus to be conducted by a Faculty or by one or more departments under such terms as the University Senate may prescribe;
- k. Libraries: to advise in such matters pertaining to the administration of the libraries as may be laid before it by the Provost or Provosts or by the University Librarian;

Primary Documents

[University Statutes](#) | Chapter II of the University Statutes sets out the duties, general policies, and powers of the University Senate.

[University Senate By-Laws](#) | The Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York, by their Resolution of May 13, 1969, have authorized the Executive Committee of the Faculty “to promulgate such initial By-Laws of the University Senate as shall not contravene the Charter or Statutes of the University and which By-Laws may thereafter be amended as provided in Section 26 of the Statutes of the University.

[Rules of Procedure of the University Senate](#) | The Columbia University Senate is governed by the current edition of Robert’s Rules of Order, and, in addition, by the rules appearing below which have a particular application to this body.

[University Senate Rules for Electronic Meetings](#) | In November 2020, the University Senate adopted a set of rules for electronic meetings.

[University Senate Guidelines on Confidentiality](#) | In general, the records of plenary meetings of the University Senate are public in order to involve the largest number of University Community members and further self-government and records of committees are confidential in order to most fruitfully advance the work of these committees. It is intended that, in general, these committee records will remain confidential for 50 years. Additionally, a procedure is set forth in the event that a request is made for scholarly use of this material before this confidentiality period is over.

[University Senate Elections Code](#) | The Elections Code provides a comprehensive set of rules and regulations to all parties concerning the conduct of University Senate elections. For such elections, these rules and regulations take precedence over any rules, regulations, policies, or practices adopted or followed by the various Divisional Elections Commissions established under this Code.

University Senators

There are 111 seats in the University Senate. University Senators are elected in direct elections to 102 seats and the 9 administration seats are held by 4 ex officio and 5 appointed members. Each of the 111 University Senators has a vote in the monthly plenary.

The 111 University Senators represent the full range of University constituents:

- 65 faculty
- 25 students
- 9 senior administrators, including the President, the presiding officer
- 6 officers of research
- 2 administrative staff
- 2 librarians
- 2 alumni

Faculty and Student Senators represent the 17 schools of Columbia, and Barnard College, Teachers College, and Union Theological Seminary.

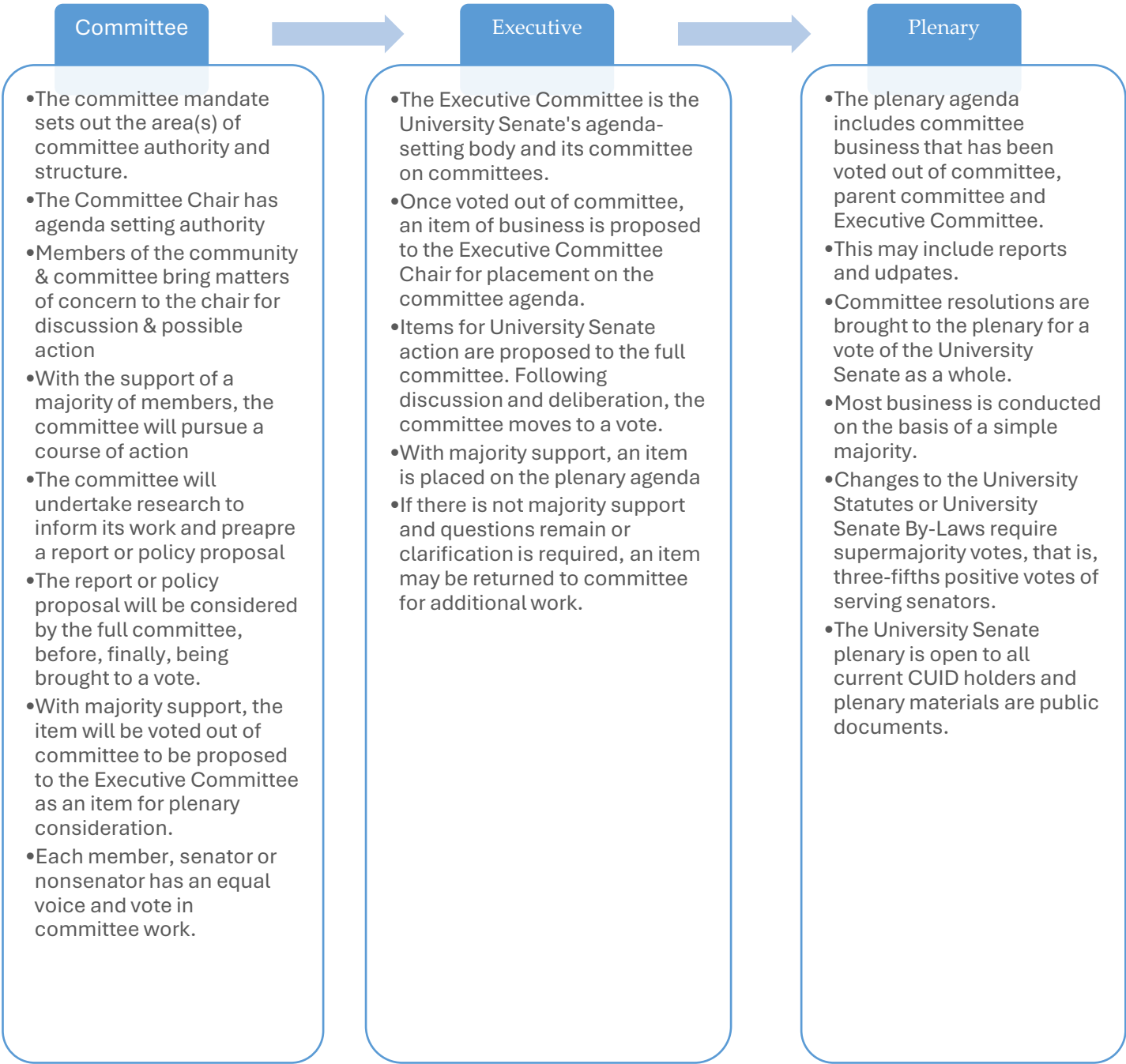
The Role of University Senator

University senators lead policy-making at the highest level of the University through their committee service. Each University Senator serves on at least one committee, participating fully in its meetings and attending the monthly plenary, where the full University Senate votes on policy proposals. The University Senate's vital work is carried out in committee session and University Senators are expected to attend each monthly meetings of their committee(s). Committee eligibility is summarized in the Committee Structure (see page 13). University Senators are elected to terms lasting two years or until their affiliation with Columbia ends, whichever comes first.

The University Senate affords its members a view across the University, enabling them to understand better its workings and facilitating collaboration with colleagues.

Making Policy

University Senate business is conducted through its standing committees and commissions, moving from committee to Executive to Plenary, as follows:



Voting and Floor Privileges

Voting and floor privileges for members, Senator and Nonsenator, can be summarized as follows:

Venue	Action	Role	
		Member-Senator Members hold seats set out in Sec. 4.k. of the University Senate By-Laws, detailing committee composition and jurisdiction.	Member-Nonsenator Members hold seats set out in Sec. 4.k. of the University Senate By-Laws, detailing committee composition and jurisdiction.
Committee	Voice	√	√
	Vote	√	√
Plenary	Voice	√	√ When the Senate considers the report of any standing committee of the Senate, or of any additional committees as defined in Section 4(b) of the By-Laws, committee members who are not members of the Senate shall have all the technical capabilities that Senators have, but shall not have the right to vote or to make motions (Rules for Electronic Meetings (16. Floor Privileges)
	Vote	√	no

The Committees and Commissions of the University Senate

There are 15 standing committees and 5 commissions of the University Senate (a commission is a standing subcommittee of the Executive Committee):

- Executive Committee
 - Commission on Benefits
 - Commission on Diversity
 - Commission on Elections
 - Commission on the Status of Health Sciences
 - Commission on the Status of Women
- Alumni Relations
- Budget
- Campus Planning and Physical Development
- 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

Committees meet monthly in fall and spring semesters (meetings lasting 60 minutes to two hours). Meetings are scheduled for the year and members receive materials in advance of meeting.

University Senate committees follow a policy on confidentiality intended to allow the freest discussion possible (see Guidelines on Confidentiality and Release of Information by Senate Committees). Committee deliberations are confidential and the committee chair alone can speak on behalf of the committee to the campus press or others groups.

Committee chairs, co-chairs, and vice chairs, elected for two-year terms, give direction and leadership to committees. The University Senate Office supports committee chairs in preparing meeting materials, undertaking research, including benchmarking and University-wide surveys, and assisting in preparation of reports.

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

University Senate – Trustee Ties

Six committees of the University Senate are paired with the corresponding committee of the Board of Trustees, and send representatives to the quarterly meetings of the Board of Trustees, reporting to the committee on actions taken and topics under discussion.

- Budget - Trustees Committee on Finance
- Campus Planning and Physical Development - Trustees Committee on Physical Assets
- Education/Faculty Affairs, Academic Freedom and Tenure/Student Affairs - Trustees Committee on Academic Affairs
- External Relations and Research Policy - Trustees Committee on Public Affairs
- Student Affairs - Trustees Committee on Student Life
- Executive Committee and the Business Meeting of the Board of Trustees

In addition, the Trustees consult with the Executive Committee on the selection of the President, the Provost, and nominations to the six Senate-Consulted Trusteeships (six seats on the Board of Trustees). The Executive Committee also participates in the appointment of University Professors. If a special need arises, there is provision for the Executive Committee to have a meeting with an appropriate group of Trustees.

With the exception of the Executive, Budget, and Student Affairs Committees, and provided that committee membership remains majority senator, nonsenators may serve on committees, bringing to deliberations their technical expertise on a subject relevant to the committee's work. Committee members, senator and nonsenator, have an equal voice and vote in committee discussions. Nonsenator committee members do not, however, have a vote in the plenary.

The Caucuses of the University Senate

The Tenured Faculty Caucus, Tenure-Track and Off-Track (TTOT) Faculty Caucus, Research Officers Caucus and Student Caucus exist to perform certain organizational tasks, including the election of members to the Executive Committee and other standing committees. University Senators are automatically members of the caucus of the group they represent.

The Structure of the University Senate

(Updated to reflect Climate School Faculty & Student representation)

MEMBERSHIP OF THE UNIVERSITY SENATE (as of 7/1/2022)													
Faculties / Affiliates	Administration		Administrative Staff		Faculty		Students	Research Officers			Libraries	Alumni	TOTAL VOTING SEATS
	Ex Officio	Appointees	Morningside/Lamont	CUIMC	Tenured	Tenure-Track and Off-Track		Professional	Staff	Postdoc.			
Columbia	4	5	1	1	43	17	23	4	1	1	2	2	104
Barnard						2	1						3
Teachers College						2	1						3
Union Theological Seminary						1	observer						1
TOTAL	9	5	2	2	65	17	25	6	1	1	2	2	111
FACULTY and STUDENT SEAT APPORTIONMENT													
Architecture					1	1	1						3
Arts					1	1	1						3
A&S/Humanities					5	1	1						7
A&S/Natural Sciences					5	1	1						7
A&S/Social Sciences					4	1	1						6
Barnard						2	1						3
Business					3	1	2						6
Climate School					1	1	1						3
Columbia College							3						3
Professional Studies						1	1						2
Dental Medicine					1	1	1						3
Engineering ¹					5	1	2						8
General Studies							1						1
Journalism					1	1	1						3
Law					2	1	1						4
Nursing					1	1	1						3
P&S					9	1	1						11
Public Health					2	1	1						4
SIPA					1	1	1						3
Social Work					1	1	1						3
Teachers College						2	1						3
Union Theological Seminary ²						1	observer						1
TOTAL					65		25						90

Notes 1. Student Engineering seats are allocated as follows: One graduate student and one undergraduate student 2. Union Theological has one student observer (non-voting)

3. Spring 2020 reapportionment, apportioned one additional tenured faculty seat to Engineering and one less seat to Arts and Sciences/ Natural Sciences.

4. Climate School representation: 1 Tenured Faculty Seat, 1 TTOT Faculty Seat, 1 Student seat (see Resolution adopted by University Senate in October 2021).

The Structure of University Senate Committees

UNIVERSITY SENATE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP (updated February 7, 2025)												
	Total Membership	Faculty Tenured	Faculty Tenure Track & Off-Track	Students	UTS Student Observer	Librarians	Administrative Staff	Research Officers	Administrators	Alums	Executive Chair / Designee	Notes
Executive Committee	15	7	2	3				1	2			All shall be members of the Senate, with faculty, student and research officer seats filled by caucus nominations. The chair and vice chair shall be elected from among the tenured faculty senators by the University Senate as a whole.
Alumni Relations Committee	7	1	1	1				1	1	2		
Budget Review Committee	12	5	2	2				1		1	1	All shall be members of the Senate
Campus Planning and Physical Development Committee	16	5	2	3		1	1	1	2	1		
Education Committee	19	8	3	4		1			2	1		One student member shall be a graduate student
External Relations and Research Policy Committee	18	7	2	3		1		2	2	1		
Faculty Affairs, Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee	17	13	4									One member shall also be a member of the Rules Committee
Honors and Prizes Committee	15	6	2	2		1		1	2	1		
Housing Policy Committee	11	4	2	2				1	2			
Information and Communications Technology Committee	13	5		2		1	1	1	2	1		One student member shall be a graduate student
Libraries and Digital Resources Committee	17	6	2	3		2		1	2	1		One student member shall be a graduate student
Research Officers Committee	9							9				Six elected senators and three other officers of research nominated by the research senators and approved by the Executive Committee
Rules Committee	16	4	2	5		1	1	1	2			One member shall be a member of the Faculty Affairs Committee. One member shall be a member of the Student Affairs Committee.
Structure and Operations Committee	13	6	1	2			1	1	2			
Student Affairs Committee	26			25	1							With the exception of the UTS Student Observer (non-voting), all shall be members of the Senate. One member shall also be a member of the Rules Committee
Commission on the Status of Women*	15	7		4			4					Faculty seats: 3 Tenured, 2 TTOT, 2 Faculty (without designation of rank)
Commission on Diversity*	12	4		5			1		2			12 members + one non-voting student observer
Elections Commission	5	1	1	1			1		1			Appointed by Executive Committee, may or may not be senators

Based on review of mandates, Statutes & By-laws. *Updated October 2016 to include one seat for non-instructional officers on the Commission on Diversity & updated in Sept, 2021, to reflect the expanded Commission on the Status of Women.

The expansion of the Commission on the Status of Women increased membership from 11 to 15, with two additional faculty seats (for a total of 7 - 3 tenured, 2 TTOT, and 2 faculty), one additional student seat and 1 additional seat for non-instructional officers

The creation of the Faculty of Climate added one seat to the Student Affairs Committee

The Feb. 7, 2025 By-Laws amendment added two seats to the Executive Committee: 1 Tenured Faculty Vice Chair and 1 Research Officer.

Elections to the University Senate

Elections to the University Senate are organized by the University Senate Office and elections commissioners in each school or division in early fall and spring, under the framework of the University Senate Elections Code.

Below is an outline of the different election steps election and please contact us at senate@columbia.edu with any questions.

Step	Stage	Details
1	Announcement	Announce election to the entire constituency.
2	Nomination period	A minimum 7-day nomination period. When the nomination period closes, the campaign period begins.
3	Campaign period	A reasonable campaign period. When the campaign period closes, the voting period begins.
4	Voting period	A minimum 7-day voting period. Preferential voting avoids the need for a run-off election.
5	Results announcement & certification	Announce results to the entire constituency and provide a completed election certification form to the University Senate at senate@columbia.edu , announcing the results to the entire constituency.

Other Aspects of University Governance and Ways to Become Involved

The University Senate, and the Student Affairs Committee in particular, works closely with a number of other University governance structures, some of which are listed below. To become involved in Columbia's enterprise of shared governance, please contact us at senate@columbia.edu, and look out for the University-wide mailings with details of calls for nominations.

- The [Advisory Committee on Socially Responsible Investing \(ACSRI\)](#) advises the University Trustees on ethical and social issues that may arise in the management of investments in the University's endowment. Following a University-wide call for applications in early spring, the Student Affairs Committee nominates four student members. Members of ACSRI serve two-year terms, meeting monthly from September to February and weekly from March to early-May.
- The [Presidential Advisory Committee on Sexual Assault \(PACSA\)](#) is charged with advising the president on issues related to the prevention of and response to gender-based misconduct, including sexual assault. The Student Affairs Committee nominates three student members - one student senator, one undergraduate student and one graduate student - following a University-wide call for nominations early in the fall semester. Members serve two-year terms.

Contact Us

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