

THE UNIVERSITY SENATE'S STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITY AND DUTY TO OVERSEE AND REVIEW
UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS

On February 3, 2026, following a review of Columbia's regional studies programs, the Provost announced a set of initial recommendations developed by the Vice Provost for Academic Initiatives and the Provost's Regional Review Committee. A link to a website outlining these initial recommendations includes one recommendation that reads:

Build on the offerings and faculty hiring discussed to create an undergraduate minor and/or major focused on social science and policy analysis of the Middle East. As stated, this program would be differentiated from existing offerings, and its final designation and administrative location would be determined at a later date. A logical initial – and potentially long-term – location would be as a track within the SIPA undergraduate major or minor, which has received conditional approval from the Committee on Instruction (COI).

Since a new program that crosses multiple schools at Columbia fundamentally changes the structure of undergraduate education within our institution, the assessment and approval of such a new program should come under the purview of the University Senate and not simply the CC-GS COI, which reviews educational offerings within the School of Arts and Sciences.

For a number of reasons, the new SIPA undergraduate major requires review from the University Senate's Education Committee. Most importantly, the new undergraduate program involves multiple schools and would be the first of its kind in a professional school at Columbia. Thus, the CC-GS COI is not the only relevant review body. Because the Senate Education Committee draws on knowledge and expertise of faculty, students, staff, and administrators from across the University, it brings a more holistic perspective to educational matters that affect the institution as a whole.

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The Education Committee and the University Senate have both statutory and historical responsibilities and authority in overseeing educational programs for undergraduate students:

Past Actions:

The Education Committee has approved and moved through the University Senate both joint Bachelor's/Master's degree programs (Biomedical Engineering, 2016; Mechanical Engineering, 2009; Electrical Engineering, 2007) and standalone Bachelor's degree programs (Computer Engineering, 1995).

Statutory Authority:

Chapter II of the statutes gives the University Senate a broad mandate to review educational policies:

- §23.a states that the Senate shall “develop and review plans and policies to strengthen the educational system of University”
- §24.a (“Powers”) states that the University Senate has a *duty* to “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
- §24.b elaborates the *duty* to “prescribe, by concurrent action with the appropriate Faculty or Administrative Board, the conditions upon which the following degrees shall be conferred...”
- Among the degrees listed under §24.b are three Bachelor of Arts degrees and three Bachelor of Science degrees.

Overseeing Undergraduate College Courses:

§24.d (“College Courses”) also arguably mandates University Senate approval for certain aspects of the program. The section outlines the Senate’s duty,

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.

The section indicates that the University Senate has a responsibility to prescribe the conditions under which undergraduate students in programs under the Faculties of Columbia College, Barnard College, and General Studies (the three schools with Bachelor of Arts degrees under Senate jurisdiction as outlined in 24.b) can take courses under other Faculties.

Therefore, the Senate concludes that it has a statutory *duty* to review the proposal for a new undergraduate major to be taught outside the Faculties of Columbia College, Barnard College, and General Studies.