

Common Questions About How The Senate Operates

Q: What is a quorum?

A quorum is the minimum number of Senators needed to begin a meeting and hold votes. The minimum quorum in the Senate is 50% of the existing membership (vacant seats effectively reduce the size of the Senate for the purposes of a quorum). The Senate members are the 3 chairs (Present, Past, and Elect), the Archivist, 8 senators from the School of Arts and Sciences, 5 senators from the School of Educational and Behavioral Sciences, 3 senators from the John Massey School of Business, and 1 from the Library. This is a total of 21 senators, so if all the seats are filled a quorum is a 11 members. Proxies do not count towards a quorum, and if a quorum is not met within a reasonable interval after the announced start time the meeting is cancelled. If a quorum is lost after the beginning of a meeting the Chair may elect to continue or adjourn the meeting. If the meeting continues, the Senate can conduct official business except for items that require votes (so for example discussion items and taking of minutes can continue).

Q: How are items brought before the Senate?

Items can be brought before the Senate in several ways, some depending on exactly what is being brought to the Senate:

- Items can be sent to the Senate Chair to be considered for the agenda. If an item requires a vote, when possible senators must be notified in writing (or via e-mail) 48 hours in advance of the meeting, with supporting documentation and specific language provided when possible (documentation and pre-written proposals are typically sent to the Chair in advance and distributed with the agenda).
- Items can be brought up as part of the “New Business” part of the agenda.
- Items can come up as part of the discussion of another agenda item (typically these items are brought up spontaneously and are related to what is being discussed). These are typically worked on when the current item is finished.
- Amendments to the Senate constitution can be proposed by either a senator or by an initiative election signed by 20% or more of the faculty (in this case, voting on the amendment is still done by the Senate).

Q: Are items ever voted on by the general faculty?

Yes, although this is exceedingly rare in practice (the only faculty-wide vote that comes to mind is the vote to approve becoming a tobacco-free campus in 2012). Items can be referred to a vote of the entire faculty on the demand of one-third of the Senate (if there are no vacant seats, this would be 7 or more senators). Items can also be referred to a vote of the entire faculty by a petition of 20% or more of the faculty.

Q: What is the procedure for making a motion?

Any senator (including the Chair) can make a motion if a quorum is present. They do so after being recognized by the Chair to speak. The process is:

- A senator makes the initial motion (the “first”).
- Another senator supports the motion (the “second”).

If a motion does not gain a second it effectively dies. Once a motion has been seconded, the motion no longer “belongs” to the original senator but rather to the Senate itself. This is why there is technically no such thing as a “friendly amendment” to a motion - while you can ask the originating senator if they consider a potential change friendly to their intent, amendments still require official votes. Once a motion is seconded, the process then moves to the Discussion phase. If no one wants to continue discussion after some point, the Chair calls for a vote on the existing motion. Unless otherwise specified, a majority (more than half) of the senators present is sufficient for a motion to pass provided there is still a quorum. If a quorum is lost prior to the final vote, the process is resumed as the first item under Old Business at the next meeting.

Several related motions can be made during Discussion (each of which requires recognition by the chair, a new “first” and “second”, and can only take place when there is a quorum):

- **Motion to Amend:** The current motion under consideration can be amended by this motion, even in a manner against the wishes of the original “first” and “second”. If a motion to amend passes (which requires a majority of the senators present), the amended motion is read by the Recorder before returning to Discussion.
- **Motion to Table:** A Motion to Table (which requires a majority of the senators present), contrary to common usage, is an ideally brief and temporary suspension of discussion - typically to address an unexpected urgent matter that has arisen. The Motion to Table is reversed by a motion to Take off the Table.
- **Motion to Postpone to a Future Date:** This motion (which requires a majority of the senators present) suspends the current process by postponing it. The date set is typically for a specific future meeting, and it is automatically added to that agenda.
- **Motion to Postpone Indefinitely:** This motion (which requires a majority of the senators present) effectively kills a motion without it coming up for a formal vote. This is typically used to avoid having an official record of a vote count for and against a motion.
- **Motion to Call the Question:** This is a motion to terminate ongoing debate and vote on the current motion. This requires the support of at least two-thirds of the senators present. If a motion to Call the Question fails, it cannot be made again until a substantially different point in the discussion (as determined by the Parliamentarian).

Note that amendments to the Senate Constitution follow this process but the requirements are different (a written or equivalent secret ballot is needed, and the threshold for passage is higher).

Q: If I have to miss a meeting, can I give another Senator my proxy?

The Senate bylaws allow for voting by proxy. Proxies may be given either on a specific topic or be unrestricted but may last no longer than a single meeting. Notice of a proxy must be sent to the Senate Chair and the Parliamentarian prior to the start of a given meeting, and proxies do not count towards a quorum.

Q: How does a Senate meeting end?

Ending a meeting typically requires a Motion to Adjourn (which any senator can make). A Motion to Adjourn by itself cannot interrupt the current business under consideration. The Senate Chair usually makes a motion to Adjourn if all agenda items have been exhausted, and the Parliamentarian routinely makes motions to both Postpone business and (if that is successful) to Adjourn roughly 90 minutes into a meeting. A Motion to Adjourn requires a majority, moves remaining items to the next agenda, and is one of the only motions that does not require a quorum.

Q: What are Senate committees and their basic functions?

There are six Senate committees: University Affairs, the Personnel Policies Committee, the Planning Committee, the Budget Committee, the Committee on Committees, and the Executive Committee. With the exception of the Chairs (whose positions on certain committees is mandated by the constitution) most senators serve on two committees.

- University Affairs: The University Affairs committee deals with communication between the student body and the faculty and works on issues relating to the physical condition of the University. University Affairs is also a contact point for adjunct faculty to have their concerns brought to the Senate.
- Personnel Policies Committee: The Personnel Policies Committee focuses on matters of University policy, including those related to salary, insurance, tenure, promotion, and post-tenure review.
- Planning Committee: The Planning Committee oversees the Faculty Senate awards and also assists with the development of long-term curricular goals of the academic departments.
- Budget Committee: The Budget committee advises the administration on budgetary matters and relates budget information back to the faculty. It also periodically surveys the faculty to see what their budgetary priorities are.
- Committee on Committees: The Committee on Committees appoints faculty to the general University committees, subject to the approval of the full Faculty Senate.
- Executive Committee: Consisting of the officers of the Senate, the Executive committee oversees the joint forums, administers the annual faculty survey, presents charges to other Senate committees, and meets regularly with President (and other

administrators as needed). The members of the Executive Committee are the Chair, Chair Elect, Past Chair, Archivist, Recorder, Treasurer, and Parliamentarian.

All Senate Committees automatically have a place on each agenda to present any business, and also provides a year-end report of their activities.

Q: How is the Shared Governance Forum topic chosen?

When it is the Senate's turn to host the Shared Governance Forum, the Senate Chair determines the topic (typically in consultation with the general Senate). When it is the Administration's turn to host the Shared Governance Forum, the President chooses the topic. The topic must be sent to the general faculty at least two weeks in advance of the Forum. The purposes of the Forums are to further communication between the Administration and the faculty, to share information on topics of common concern, and to try to resolve specific issues - so topics are typically chosen with those purposes in mind.