

Resolutions: A field guide

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1.0 What are resolutions?

Senates exist to allow a group with different views to speak / act with one voice. Resolutions are the means by which a senate speaks / acts.¹ All resolutions require a majority (more than 50% of votes cast) to be adopted.

2.0 Flavors

CSUN's Senate resolutions come in several varieties.² There are no official distinctions but here is a rough taxonomy based on practice.

2.1 Policy recommendations

Like any large bureaucratic organization, CSUN's operations are governed by official policies. Some of these policies must be developed by the Faculty.³ From our Bylaws:

Shared governance gives to faculty the primary responsibility for the educational functions of the University, consistent with basic policy as set by the Board of Trustees. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to: design and implementation of curricula of the highest academic quality; setting and maintaining academic and professional standards, including admission and degree requirements; facilitating and insuring the free conduct of creative and scholarly activities; determining faculty personnel policies, procedures, and criteria and overseeing their implementation; exercising major influence over decisions on hiring, tenure, and promotion; and participating meaningfully in budgetary decisions, especially when they directly affect the academic mission of the University. [I.2]⁴

¹ Resolutions are technically motions. Or, if you like, a resolution implicitly comes forward within a motion which says something like "That the CSUN Faculty Senate assert ____". Thus a resolution introduced from the floor by an individual requires a second, whereas one placed on the agenda by Senate Exec does not (Exec has the power to set the agenda [IV.3.1]) nor does one introduced on the floor from a Standing Committee (at least 2 people on that committee endorsed its consideration).

² The Faculty Senate archives all resolutions here: <https://www.csun.edu/faculty-senate/policies>

³ If you've noticed that our personnel policies are in documents called Section 600 and Section 700 and lay awake wondering what is in Sections 100 – 500, they are the policies which govern other divisions of the university (IT, Advancement, Student Affairs, et al). You're welcome.

⁴ References to the Bylaws are in square brackets throughout. The Bylaws are here: <http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/Bylaws.pdf>

The occasional ad hoc committee notwithstanding, policy recommendations are developed by the Faculty Senate Standing Committees in consultation with their executive secretary who acts as a liaison to the administration.

Policy recommendations come to the Senate in standardized form.⁵ Normally, a draft of the recommendation is presented to the Senate for feedback at one meeting before being introduced for amendment, debate, and formal approval at a subsequent meeting.

Once a policy recommendation is approved by the Faculty Senate, it goes to the President of the University [III.10]. If the President signs the policy recommendation, it becomes an official policy of the university.

2.2 Other resolutions

As the official voice of all CSUN faculty⁶, the Faculty Senate often has reason to take actions which do not propose policy.⁷

While there is no official requirement, standing committees or senators wishing to introduce resolutions should consult with Senate Exec in advance. When a resolution is complex or contentious, Senate Exec may elect to have it presented for feedback as a first reading before being debated/amended and voted upon at a subsequent meeting.

There are two ways these resolutions can come before the Senate. First, Senate Exec may make it an agenda item. If so, it requires no second in order to be considered. Second, any senator may introduce the resolution during the 'New Business' agenda item. This requires another member to second the motion before it may be considered.

Here is a non-exhaustive rough taxonomy with some examples.

⁵ <https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/policy-template.docx>

⁶ This is strictly speaking false. The aforementioned responsibilities reside in the Faculty. The capital 'F' Faculty is the organization which (lowercase 'f') faculty members comprise. Thus we have a Faculty President whose duties include chairing the Senate (other CSU's just have a Senate Chair because their Bylaws aren't as awesome as ours). The Faculty delegates decision making on almost everything to the Faculty Senate [II.5]. It is possible to call a meeting of the Faculty and overrule a decision of the Faculty Senate [III.2].

⁷ The distinction between policy and non-policy is roughly that policy obligates employees to act; you can get in trouble for violating a policy.

2.2.1 Commendations

The Senate occasionally honors a colleague (faculty, staff, administrator, or community member) with a resolution of commendation. These are usually drafted in consultation with Senate Exec and usually appear as formal agenda items. The resolution is read by the Chair or author and passed by acclamation (applause). Often a framed copy is then presented to the honoree or their family.

<http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/JLV-resolution-2016.pdf>

https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/resolution-faculty%20senate%20in%20honor-wolfbauer051718_0.pdf

<http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/frehlich-resolution-101515.pdf>

<http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/honoring-hellenbrand-resolution.pdf>

2.2.2 Requests / responses

The Senate may make a formal request or response to campus or CSU administration, or another organization such as the ASCSU through a resolution.

https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/ResolutionSolidaritywithFacultyDuringPandemic-2_050621.pdf

<https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/CSUN%20GETF%20Resolution.pdf>

<http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/support-for-undocumented-students-resolution.pdf>

2.2.3 Statements

The Senate may make articulate the official position of the Faculty⁸ on a pressing issue.

<https://www.csun.edu/faculty-senate/csun-faculty-statement-solidarity-black-lives-matter>

<https://www.csun.edu/faculty-senate/csun-faculty-senate-statement-against-anti-asian-violence-racism-and-sexism>

<https://www.csun.edu/faculty-senate/csun-faculty-statement-solidarity-armenians-csun-and-republic-artsakh>

2.2.4 Recommendations

The Senate may make recommendations to the faculty. These resolutions often articulate best practices. They are not binding. The Faculty President will normally distribute such resolutions to all faculty via email.

<https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/resolution-syllabilang021821.pdf>

⁸ NB, x being the official position of the Faculty does not entail that x is the position of every individual faculty member. Indeed, it is possible, though unlikely, that x be the position of the Faculty but not the position of any individual faculty member. See <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-institutions/>

<https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/electronic-submission-of-coursework-resolution-final.pdf>

2.2.5 Procedures

The Senate may establish Standing Rules of Order, ad hoc committees, or otherwise make decisions which affect how it operates through resolutions.

https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/gecertification_resolution.pdf

https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/ge_reform.pdf

2.2.6 No confidence

The Senate may ask the appropriate authority (usually the University President or CSU Board of Trustees) to remove an administrator from their job.

https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/1resolution_no%20confidence%20chancellor%20white.pdf

3.0 Format

3.1 Policy recommendations

Policy recommendations use a standard template:

<https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/policy-template.docx>

3.2 Other resolutions

Resolutions have 2 parts. The resolved clauses comprise the action being taken, the request being made, the position being articulated, et cetera. The rationale explains, ahem, the reasons for the action.

When a resolution is considered, the rationale is not amended until after the process of amending the resolved clauses is complete. It is procedurally cleaner to first decide what to say and then what reasons to give for it. Senates vary in adherence to this rule (due to workload, the ASCSU does not amend the rationale; any adjustments are made by the sponsoring Standing Committee).

There are two formats a non-policy recommending resolution can take. These differ in the format of the rationale.

3.2.1 Old-school

The traditional format breaks the rationale into a series of clauses each beginning with 'WHEREAS' which each articulate one reason for the action being taken. These precede the resolved clauses. Thus such resolutions have the format

[Title]
WHEREAS, [reason #1]; and
WHEREAS, [reason #2]; and
WHEREAS, [reason #3];
Therefore, be it
RESOLVED, That [thing we want #1]; and be it
RESOLVED, That [thing we want #2].

3.2.2 New-school

The old-school format has drawbacks. It is often difficult to fit the reasoning behind a resolution into the stilted language required and to break the rationale into discrete clauses each articulating one reason. When the rationale is long, the actual action may be lost on the reader. Hence while the old-school format is preferred for some resolutions such as commendations (2.2.1), many Senates move the resolved clauses to the top and write the rationale in plain English paragraphs. This makes the rationale easier to read (and write), especially when issues are complicated or when citations and references are required. Thus such resolutions have the format

[Title]

RESOLVED, That [thing we want #1]; and be it
RESOLVED, That [thing we want #2].

Rationale
[Plain English paragraphs laying out the reasons, giving references et cetera]

3.0 Language

Two final things about resolution format. I save them for last because, personally, I would be happy to be rid of them. But, you know, tradition.

3.1 Subjunctives

The verbs in a resolved clause always use the subjunctive case. For example,

Wrong: RESOLVED, That the Senate asks the administration to provide tacos.

Correct: RESOLVED, That the Senate ask the administration to provide tacos.

This is frequently annoying. It imbues pedants with an intense need to scrutinize each verb. It annoys the rest of us via pedants.

Why is this required? Tradition.⁹ Why is it traditional? I'm unsure. I asked a linguist friend who is also a parliamentarian. He said "Because it sounds like you're really serious."

3.2 Punctuation

There are also various conventions around punctuation. Oddly, if using the old-school format for a resolution, there should be no periods in the whereas clauses (See Robz p.107ff). Periods at the end of each resolved clause are okay under Robz, though some pedants disagree. Robz' grudgingly accepts periods in the middle of resolved clauses.

⁹ Indeed, Roberts does not require it. Try telling this to your local pedant.