

## **Senate How-To**

Hofstra University Senate (2025)

This is an informal introduction to Hofstra University’s University Senate, written especially to orient new senators. (This introduction does not itself constitute official policy but will point out where official policies can be found.)

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### **1 What is all this for?**

We joined the university, pretty much all of us, to work on things other than academic policy. But we all want to do well here, and we want the university to do well. Having a set of guidelines governing how we do things can help everyone do what they want to do here well. Ideally, those guidelines—those *policies*—set us up to teach and learn and engage with one another happily and productively, without onerous encumbrances. Moreover, ideally the policies are ones we can support, because we or our elected representatives had a hand in crafting them or in keeping them around.

## **2 Why is there a University Senate?**

Accordingly, Hofstra's Faculty Statute VII establishes "a University Senate, convened by the Faculty." Our Senate has "general powers of supervision over all academic matters concerning the University as a whole." And it can take up "any other matters referred to it by the Board of Trustees, the University President, or the Provost of the University" (FS VII).

## **3 What is "shared governance"?**

We sometimes refer to the ecosystem of activities, bodies, and procedures around the University Senate as Hofstra's "shared governance" apparatus. The term derives from principles developed in the 1960s concerning the governance of higher education.

A statement of core principles was written and adopted in 1966 by the American Association of University Professors (the national organization), the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. The statement proposes areas of responsibility for each of the interdependent parts of universities, including their boards, faculties, presidents, et al., highlighting the importance of communication among the parts. The statement mentions the idea of "a faculty-elected senate or council for larger divisions or the institution as a whole;" it brings that up as part of setting out ideals for faculty participation in institutional governance, in communication and collaboration with other parties.

Hofstra's Senate is faculty-convened (FS VII A.1), and faculty members structurally have a majority. But ours is not a "faculty senate," in that administrators, students, and staff also meaningfully participate and vote.

One might think of Hofstra's shared governance apparatus as including at least the Senate and its committees, the meetings of the full faculty, the process of transmitting resolutions between the faculty and the University President and Board of Trustees, the Chairs' Caucus, and ongoing consultation between the Faculty Leadership Group and the University President and Provost.

## **4 What are the Senate's areas of responsibility?**

Besides supervising "all academic matters concerning the University as a whole" and dealing with matters referred to it, the Senate is empowered to "review and provide recommendations on policies and initiatives impacting academic matters." And, besides, it can "generate initiatives regarding academic matters" (FS VII 3). So, it supervises, reviews, and initiates. And it does those things with both academic matters and anything impacting academic matters. The result can be policies, but also reports and other initiatives.

## 5 Which policies does the Senate work on?

The main institutional, academic and academic-related policies the Senate works on are in three places:

- **The Faculty Policy Series:** The FPS sets out policies and procedures for faculty members. There are currently about 62 of them, numbered between 1 and 99. More workaday than the Statutes—less fundamental and structural and more procedural—they range widely in topic, from instructional matters like handling academic integrity violations and grade appeals; to research matters like conflict of interest, copyright, and misconduct policies; to organizational matters like the responsibilities of department chairs and how adjunct faculty are hired; to employment matters like research leave and sick leave.
- **The Bulletins:** Published annually, the Bulletins come in several forms: Undergraduate, Graduate, and Law, with a new edition for each session. They are fully online. Besides course and program descriptions, each Bulletin outlines academic policies in a student-oriented way. The Bulletins tell students what they can expect from the university and what will be required of them.

Much of the work of the Senate involves supervising the FPS and the general, university-wide portions of the Bulletins. The FPS is the main place the Senate—with the approval of further levels—enshrines new and updated policies.

In addition, there are two other, more foundational bodies of policy that the Senate takes up less often:

- **The By-laws of the Hofstra University Senate:** This document establishes the Senate's own structure, especially its committee structure.
- **The Faculty Statutes:** These nine items (plus two more moved or withdrawn), numbered Roman I to XI, represent general, foundational policies. They establish the university's administrative structure, determine who is on the Faculty and how they're appointed to it, specify how faculty meetings shall be conducted, and create the Senate itself. Changes to the Statutes require approval of the university's Board of Trustees.

Most of the Senate's business concerns policies for Hofstra's schools *other than* the Zucker School of Medicine and the Deane School of Law. The medical school and the law school each have a representative on the Senate, and their faculty serve in committee roles—especially on Faculty Affairs and Planning & Budget, where business can affect them—but those schools enjoy autonomy for their academic policies.

Occasionally, the Senate also passes items that don't fit neatly into the FPS or Bulletin, or even the By-laws or Statutes, like a communication to the University President or guidance to its Registrar.

## 6 What about university policies other than FPS/Bulletin/FS?

Unlike at some other institutions, an area Hofstra's Senate is *not* involved in is determining faculty, staff, or student-employee working conditions and compensation. Those are the domain of Hofstra's collective bargaining units/unions and administration. For faculty, Hofstra's chapter of the American Association of University Professors negotiates agreements that are codified in the current Collective Bargaining Agreement, available on the AAUP chapter website.

In practice, this distinction between the appropriate domain of the Senate and the appropriate domain of collective bargaining can be blurry because there are Faculty Policy Series documents on topics like "Work Above Base Load" and "Outside Employment for Faculty." However, AAUP and administration have negotiated that if there are any conflicts between the FPS and the CBA, the CBA "will control" (CBA 3.2). That is, the CBA always has precedence.

Note also that, separately, Hofstra University's Office of Community Standards (within the larger, administrative Division of Student Enrollment, Engagement, and Success) produces the *Guide to Pride* for students. It focuses on non-academic community standards but also pulls in academic policies from the Faculty Policy Series.

Hofstra also has a variety of other, non-academic policies like those listed here, including safety and security plans, record-retention policy, and the like. Many of these are beyond domain of the Senate, though in certain cases where they impinge on academics, it can be appropriate for the Senate to weigh in on them. For example, the Senate By-laws make the Chemical Hygiene Plan the responsibility of the Special Committee on Environmental Health and Safety.

## 7 How is the Senate structured?

The Senate has two main components: a deliberative assembly and a collection of committees.

Senate meetings—the gatherings of the assembled Senate itself—normally occur at least once a month during the academic year. These meetings of the full Senate normally focus on considering business passed to it by the Senate's committees via the Executive Committee.

Committees do the work of reviewing, analyzing, drafting, and deliberating over policies and initiatives. As of this writing, the Senate has 15 committees.

The Senate has three main kinds of permanent committees: standing committees, special committees, and subcommittees. (The Senate can also form temporary, ad hoc committees.)

**Standing committees** (other than the Executive Committee) cover general, main areas of Senate concern. Faculty Statute VII (D.1) establishes six standing committees:

- The Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee (UAAC)
- The Graduate Academic Affairs Committee (GAAC)
- The Planning and Budget Committee (P&B)
- The Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC)
- The Student Affairs Committee (SAC)
- The Senate Executive Committee (SEC)

The standing committees meet regularly; they are normally scheduled to meet at least once a month during the academic year, and they sometimes hold additional meetings.

One of these standing committees, the Senate Executive Committee, consists of the chairs of the other standing committees, along with the President of the Senate and the Provost (or their designate). It normally communicates with the other standing committees through their chairs. Its main role is to facilitate the Senate.

**Special committees** are permanent committees appointed by the Senate or by one of its standing committees. They are charged with undertaking investigations or recommending policy or action in specific areas of Senate concern. Special committees appointed by the Senate report to the Senate through the Executive Committee (SEC). They may be asked by the Executive Committee to report on specific items directly to the Senate. As of this writing, the By-laws specify five special committees:

- Communications, Outreach, and Election Committee (COEC)
- Special Committee on Grievances
- Special Committee on Athletic Policy
- Special Committee on the Academic Calendar
- Special Committee on Environmental Health and Safety

**Subcommittees** are effectively special committees constituted by one of the standing committees; accordingly, they report to their parent standing committees rather than directly to the SEC, usually once per semester. There are currently four subcommittees listed in the By-laws:

- Academic Review Committee (reports to UAAC)
- Committee on the Library (reports to P&B)
- Committee on Environmental Priorities (reports to P&B)
- Committee on Education and Research Technology (reports to P&B)

## 8 What is the Senate's main workflow?

The Senate's work is nearly all done by its committees and therefore by the voting members of the committees.

The committees review policies and keep an eye out for issues. The issues they take up can come from a lot of different sources: from committee members, from the committee's chair, from a subcommittee, as a referral from the Senate Executive Committee or the Senate itself, from the committee's adviser or another administrator, or from anyone else on campus. The possible sources are unlimited. However, the committee's chair sets the agenda for the committee, and the committee itself determines what issues it will take up and not take up.

Committees then draft or revise policy proposals and other items they want to put before the Senate. When the committee determines that an item is ready to go forward, the committee votes on it.

An item passed by a committee goes to the Senate Executive Committee. The committee's chair brings it to the SEC. The SEC then also votes on whether to take the item forward to the Senate—perhaps with modifications—or to return it to the committee, or something else.

Then, at Senate meetings, the Chair of the SEC (who also serves as the Senate President) presents items the SEC has passed to the Senate. These items arrive already moved and seconded from the committee, so they do not need to be seconded at Senate. The Senate may discuss proposals and then vote on approving them (see FS VII A.5).

As the Senate is a deliberative assembly, members can debate, raise questions about, and even suggest adjustments to proposals that come from committees. However, if it is to work efficiently, the Senate cannot also be a good venue for extended debate or policy-writing. Moreover, it is too easy for sentences written by large groups on the fly to have unintended consequences or oversights. So, if many questions or objections are raised, or substantial suggestions for revisions are made, it can be appropriate for the Senate to send an item back to committee instead of approving it.

When items are passed by the Senate, they normally go to the full faculty as action items. (They may go forward as “information items” instead if they do not require a vote at a higher level; for example: reports and Senate By-laws changes).

## **9 What happens to items passed by the Senate?**

Action items passed by the Senate normally go to the full faculty for its approval at one of its four annual working meetings (see FS IX).

Items passed by the full faculty are then sent, via intermediate review by the Provost and the Office of General Counsel, to the University President and Board of Trustees. Items passed by the Senate only become policies when approved and signed by the University President.

The standard approval sequence for Senate proposals is therefore: (subcommittee →) standing or special committee → Senate Executive Committee → University Senate → Faculty → General Counsel → Provost → University President ( → Board of Trustees).

However, the flow of passed motions is not always linear; items are sometimes returned to previous stages, including all the way back to the originating committees.

The Senate President and the Speaker of the Faculty normally notify the Senate and full faculty when they receive notice that the University President has signed something passed by the Senate and full faculty.

## **10 Must all Senate items come from its committees?**

Though it is not the standard workflow for fully reviewing initiatives, sometimes items are introduced at Senate or full faculty meetings as motions (subject to guidelines in FS VII, FS X, and *Robert's Rules*). In other words, it's not *required* that items coming before the Senate have their origin in a committee. But because the Senate isn't equipped to evaluate the full implications or complexities of many proposals at a glance, new business introduced at Senate may often be referred to the appropriate committee for analysis, or at least to the Executive Committee.

But also, the Senate's rules specify that "before a vote may be taken on an item presented for action, senators must have had at least two working days published notice" (FS VII C.2.a). So, action items must be circulated in advance. The Senate's Senior Support Specialist usually finalizes and circulates the Senate's agenda on the Thursday before Monday Senate meetings. So, items that need "published notice" need to go to the Senior Support Specialist before then. Ideally, they would also go to the Senate Executive Committee, which sets the meeting agenda; it normally meets one week before Senate meetings.

Motions introduced at a Senate meeting, including in the New Business section that is usually near the end of the meeting, must be seconded to become Senate business. A senator can second a motion by saying "Second." Seconding a motion does not imply approval of the motion, just an interest in having it debated and voted on.

## **11 What rules govern the Senate?**

The University Senate is established and primarily governed by Faculty Statute VII, "The University Senate." A current copy of all the Statutes including FS VII is linked here and available on the Senate website.

The Senate's By-laws (thus titled) mostly concern its individual committees, though Section I ("General") also lists a handful of broader rules.

Faculty Statute VII also stipulates that except in matters covered by the Statute, the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* shall be considered binding. In practice, the Senate relaxes some requirements like that speakers must stand up, but the meeting structure and proceedings generally conform to the *Rules*.

Of course, in the background, Hofstra's general policies, including those in the Faculty Policy Series related to community standards and professional conduct, continue to apply,

as do laws.

## **12 When does the Senate meet?**

The Senate normally meets once a month during the academic year, typically on Monday afternoons at 1 PM. The Senate may also have special meetings, though that hasn't happened in recent memory. (See FS VII C.2.) Recently, meetings have been hybrid; participants are encouraged to attend in person but may attend online, displayed on a screen in the meeting room. The current year's meeting schedule is available through the Senate website. Invitees will receive Outlook calendar invitations well in advance, by email, from the Senate's Senior Support Specialist.

## **13 Who is in the Senate?**

There are currently about 41 members of the Senate. There are two categories of voting members of the Senate: elected and ex officio members.

Various constituencies get to elect senators to represent them on the Senate: regular professors from each of the schools, adjunct faculty as a unit, the Chairs' Caucus, staff/Local 153, and students. Some of the faculty elections are managed by the Senate through its Communications, Outreach, and Election Committee. (See FS VII B.2.)

Other people have a role in the Senate because of their roles elsewhere. These "ex officio" members include the Provost, one academic dean, the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, a representative designated by the Vice President of Student Enrollment, Engagement and Success, the Speaker and Vice Speaker of the Faculty, and the student who is President of the Student Government Association. By virtue of serving in their roles, they are full voting members of the Senate. (See FS VII B.1.)

## **14 Who may attend Senate meetings?**

Elected, ex officio senators, and senators-at-large are invited to attend. Only elected and ex officio senators vote at Senate meetings; senators-at-large may not. Other members of the faculty, administrators, chairpersons, students, and staff may also observe meetings of the Senate. These others may, at the invitation of the Senate President, and with the consent of the body, participate in its deliberations, but they may not vote. (See FS VII C.2.d.) The Senate has a quorum only when at least half its *elected* members are present (FS VII C.2.c).

## **15 Who coordinates the Senate?**

Most of the logistical work required to operate the Senate is performed by the Senate's Senior Support Specialist. They send the invitations, organize the agendas, put out the



name placards, coordinate the Zoom during meetings, and lots else. Contact information for the Senate's current Senior Support Specialist is near the top of the Senate website main page.

In collaboration with the Senate Executive Committee, the President of the University Senate runs it. The Senate President is a faculty member who is an elected senator subsequently elected president by the Senate (FS VII C.1.a). The President of the Senate also chairs the Senate's Executive Committee. (Until 2023, the University Provost presided over the Senate, while the SEC was chaired by a faculty member.) Contact information for the current President of the Senate/SEC Chair is at the bottom of the Senate website main page.

## **16 What are senators-at-large?**

The Senate appoints to Senate committees others who are *not* voting members of the Senate. These appointed participants are called "senators-at-large" (styled thus in the Statute), and they can be faculty, administration, chairpersons, or staff. Senators-at-large serve for two year terms, with renewal possibilities (FS VII B.3.a). The purpose of having this role is that the Senate have well-populated committees that are capable of doing the main work of the Senate without making the Senate itself, as a deliberative body, huge and unwieldy. Senators-at-large may participate in the deliberations of the Senate, even though they only vote in committee. (See FS VII B.3.) They play a crucial role in the productivity of the Senate's committees.

## **17 Who is on Senate committees, and in what capacities?**

The membership of each Senate committee is specified by its page in the Senate By-laws, and the current members of each committee are listed on the Senate website, on the committees page.

It is important to recognize, as a committee participant, that not everyone who attends committee meetings attends in the same capacity or has the same responsibilities there. Committees include elected senators and appointed senators-at-large, and they are responsible for doing the work of the committee. The senators and senators-at-large also elect a full-time faculty member from the committee to be the committee's chair. The committee sections of the By-laws also specify an advisor for many of the committees who is usually a member of the Provost's office. And many committees have regular guests who also attend in an advisory capacity, people like the Registrar or the Dean of Graduate Admissions.

## 18 What do committee chairs do?

Each committee's chair is responsible for working with the Senate's Senior Support Specialist to schedule the committee's meetings—ideally at a time when as many members as possible can attend. The chair sets and circulates the agenda for each meeting, keeps records on each meeting in the form of minutes, and generally coordinates the work of the committee.

Committee chairs take the lead in identifying issues and projects relevant to their committee's areas of responsibility in the Senate By-laws. They bring to committee meetings issues they identify independently, issues that arise in discussion with others including committee advisers, and issues referred to them by the Senate or the Senate Executive Committee. Besides reviewing their committee's mandate in the By-laws, committee chairs may find it useful to consult with others around campus to identify possible issues.

Committee chairs also run meetings, ensuring there is a quorum (of at least half of the elected and at-large members), coordinating discussion, delegating tasks, and ultimately moving items to a vote when they're ready.

Each chair of a standing committee of the Senate (UAAC, GAAC, FAC, P&B, and SAC) also automatically becomes a member of the Senate Executive Committee (SEC), which coordinates the Senate's work and refers business to committees as appropriate. As the SEC normally meets once a month during the academic year, standing committee chairs regularly report on their committee's work to the SEC.

Chairs of special and subcommittees report regularly as specified in the By-laws. The chairs of subcommittees (ARC, CoL, CEP, CERT) normally report to their parent committees at least once each semester. The chairs of special committees (COEC, SCAP, SCAC, SCEHS) normally report once a semester in writing to the Senate Executive Committee; they may also be asked by the Senate Executive Committee to report on specific items directly to the Senate.

## 19 What rules govern Senate committees?

Senate committees are governed by the same rules as the Senate, but in particular by the sections of the Senate By-laws establishing their committee. The By-laws set out the membership and the mandate for each committee and sometimes other guidance. Reading one's committee's brief By-laws carefully helps a lot when the question arises, What are we doing here again?

Similarly, Senate committees are governed by *Robert's Rules of Order*. Some awkwardness in committee meetings and grumbling about rules can be due to confusions about what *Robert's Rules* involves. It is widely overlooked that the *Rules* acknowledges that in committees "some of the formality that is necessary in a large assembly would hinder business" (*RRO* 49:21).

Specifically, in committee meetings, *Robert's Rules* indicates: "motions need not be

seconded;” “informal discussion of a subject is permitted while no motion is pending;” “when a proposal is perfectly clear to all present, a vote can be taken without a motion’s having been introduced;” generally, “a vote can be taken initially by a show of hands;” and the chair “may, without leaving the chair, speak in informal discussions and in debate, and vote on all questions” (*RRO* 49:21). That is, the *formal* guidelines for committees are pretty casual. Confidently eschew excess formality.

Note that Hofstra Library makes available ebooks of both *Robert’s Rules of Order: Newly Revised* and the very helpful, official summary/overview version *Robert’s Rules of Order: Newly Revised in Brief*. (Incidentally, Hofstra Associate Professor of Mathematics Daniel Seabold is a co-author of both!) A little familiarity with procedure can help one make things happen—not only for committee chairs but also for participants.

## **20 What is the Faculty Leadership Group?**

“Faculty Leadership Group” refers to two overlapping, small groups of faculty whose members are elected by the full faculty, the Senate, Chairs, and the AAUP.

In 2013 a resolution was passed specifying that “the [University] President shall meet regularly (preferably at the beginning and the end of the fall and spring semesters,) with the Speaker of the Faculty, the Chair of the Senate Executive Committee, the Chair of the Chairs’ Caucus and when appropriate, other shared governance leadership, to provide informational updates on developments concerning University strategies and policies.”

Then, separately, in 2020 that small group of elected faculty leaders plus the AAUP chapter president began meeting regularly with the Provost to address the COVID crisis, and they have continued to meet. This “FLG” also meets with the Provost at least twice each semester to discuss concerns, issues and ideas.

In these two configurations, elected representatives meet with the University President or Provost at least eight times per year, and often more often. Sometimes issues raised in these forums are referred to Senate committees, while others are referred to appropriate administrators.

## **21 How can elected senators communicate with their constituents?**

The Senate operates “course” sites on Hofstra’s Canvas learning management system for each of the faculty units that elect senators. These sites aim to facilitate democratic engagement with the Senate and raise awareness of Senate initiatives. Ideally, senators will share key items of Senate business and news with constituents. In turn, constituents will be reminded who their senators are and may think of senators as potential recipients for items of concern or promising ideas.

Senators are made “teachers” in of these Canvas courses, and all the faculty in the unit are invited to the “student” role. This allows senators to send (a) messages to their constituents by email or (b) announcements on the course site that may also go out as

emails (depending on users' preference settings). Senators can open announcements to constituent comments, and constituents can reply to messages or announcements by email.

The membership of these sites should be refreshed every year. Participants must opt in on Canvas to participate, and they must also have “receive announcements as emails” turned on in their Canvas settings to receive *announcements* by email (though *messages* should go out by email to anyone in the course).

For non-faculty senators (students, staff, and administrators), communication channels vary by group. (Senators should coordinate with the Senate President and Senior Support Specialist if they need help.)