

Orientation for New Senators

(Aug, 2020)

As defined in the Academic Senate [Constitution](#), the Academic Senate is the representative body of the faculty at large for University-wide issues.

Tasks

1. Enhance the University's intellectual vitality, research, teaching, libraries, and quality of academic programs.
2. Serve as a forum for faculty decision-making, and as the voice of the faculty in University policy and academic issues.
3. Carefully monitor University issues involving academic integrity, preservation of academic freedom, faculty rights and responsibilities, full academic due process, the tenure system, promotion of equality and pluralism, and safeguard the process for faculty appointment and promotion; conduct investigations on such issues, make findings or recommendations, and issue confidential (or, where necessary, public) reports.
4. Strengthen faculty participation in governance in each School through the elected Faculty Councils, and in governance at the University level through appropriate committees.
5. Ensure appropriate conditions for the retired faculty, faculty employment and remuneration, benefits of employment, faculty environment, student life, athletics, institutional advancement, and University public service.
6. Serve as the voice of the faculty in the development of the Faculty Handbook and in the selection of University administrators; develop guidelines for the review of administrators and conduct evaluations of their performance; issue confidential (or, when appropriate, public) reports; monitor and issue regular reports on the status of resolutions of the Academic Senate, showing which have not been implemented or acted upon by the administration.

Structure

- **Voting Members:** The Academic Senate is the representative body of the entire University faculty, consisting primarily of representatives elected by Faculty Councils at the various Schools. The Senate is made up of 44 voting members, including 9 Executive Board members (see below).
- **Non-Voting Members:** The Senate also includes non-voting members, primarily the faculty who chair the Senate's various task forces and committees (see below)
- **Executive Board:** The Senate's Executive Board in any given academic year consists of 9 members elected by those in the prior academic year's Senate: 4 officers (President, Academic Vice President, Administrative Vice President, and Secretary General), 4 at-large members, and the Immediate Past President. The Academic Vice President serves for one year prior to becoming President – and is, thus, also the President Elect.

- **Term Limits:** A person who has been a voting member of the Academic Senate for a continuous period of six years shall be ineligible for the two years following, except to complete an elected term as Executive Board officer.

Meetings

- **Attendance:** All interested USC faculty members can attend regular-session Senate meetings, either in-person or via video teleconference (VTC) – with access instructions for the latter provided to all interested Senate members and others several days in advance of each meeting. Attendees who are not current Senators or Senate staff are asked to introduce themselves at the beginning of each meeting. (In rare instances, the Senate may hold closed meetings.)
- **Frequency:** Academic Senate meetings typically take place on the third Wednesday of each month, September through May, from 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM. Meetings are usually held on the University Park Campus, though some meetings may take place on the Health Sciences Campus. The Senate's Executive Board meets weekly throughout the year, except during weeks in which a full Senate meeting is scheduled.
- **Voting:** Eligible members can vote on Senate issues either in person (preferred) or via VTC. Senate votes are taken synchronously, meaning that VTC votes require a Senator to be present on camera at the time of the vote. VTC votes are recognized when the voting Senator holds up a white card or sheet of paper on screen in response to the voting call.
- **Alternates:** Many Senate voting members have designated voting Alternates (or proxies) in case of scheduling conflicts. If an Alternate attends a meeting in lieu of the usual Senator, the Senate office must be notified in advance of the meeting (usually by contacting Connie Roque). Alternates can attend all meetings, but can only vote if they are sitting in for absent colleagues who they are officially designated to replace.
- **Meeting preparation:** A few days before each monthly meeting, the Senate's Administrative Coordinator will mail all Senate members a link to the meeting agenda and any documents to be reviewed. Agenda items may include scheduled votes; conversations with the University President, Provost, and/or other relevant members of the administration or USC community; discussions about important issues facing the University; presentations of reports from Senate committees and task forces; and discussions of possible changes to the Faculty Handbook.
- **Agenda:** Senators and other faculty are encouraged to submit items to the Senate President for possible inclusion on the agenda.
- **Minutes:** Shortly before the subsequent monthly meeting, draft minutes are posted to the Academic Senate's website for member review. These minutes are finalized and approved in that subsequent meeting. Senators should abstain from voting whether to approve the minutes for any meetings they have missed.
- **Procedures:** Approval of Senate documents (e.g., minutes, resolutions, endorsed reports) requires a quorum of 51% of the Senate's voting members.
- **Speaking at meetings:** Senators are given priority. Other participants will be recognized if there is time.

Relationship with Faculty Councils

- The Faculty Councils of each School play a vital role in governance at USC. They function both as the elected representatives for their School's faculty and as arms of the Senate. They therefore have the responsibility of representing their School's faculty both with respect to their School's administration and to the Academic Senate.
- Senators are expected to be members of their Faculty Councils. Although the Chair or President of the Faculty Council often represents the School as Senator, specific rules of representation are determined by each School, and another elected member of the Faculty Council can instead serve as the Senator from that School.
- It is crucial that Senators promote robust two-way communication between the Senate and their Schools. Every Senator is therefore asked to keep their School's Faculty Council — and the faculty in their School more broadly — apprised of Senate meeting and Retreat activities. To do that, Senators should, for example, send the Senate meeting notes to their full Faculty Councils after each Senate meeting, hold regular faculty listening sessions in their Schools, and present Senate updates at faculty/department meetings.
- It is equally important for Senators to keep the Senate informed of significant issues arising in their respective Schools. In deciding what issues should be brought to the attention of the full Senate, Senators should try to balance the needs of the University faculty as a whole with the needs of their School's faculty. When in doubt as to whether an issue needs to be brought to the Senate, Senators should consult with the Senate's Executive Board.

Committees and Task Forces

- The Academic Senate is involved in staffing and overseeing a variety of committees and task forces. These are broadly defined below, with detailed descriptions provided on the Senate's website:
 - **Standing Committees** focus on areas of continuing concern; examples include Faculty Rights and Responsibilities, Campus Climate, and Sustainability.
 - **Task Forces** are limited-term groups set up to address unusual or urgent issues.
 - The Senate's Executive Board takes the lead in staffing and overseeing all **Senate committees and task forces**.
 - The Senate works with the Provost's office in staffing and overseeing the **Joint Provost/Senate committees and task forces**.
 - The Senate recommends faculty members for inclusion on **University committees and task forces**.
- **Charges:** Each committee and task force is given a charge that defines its general role and duties; this charge is listed on each committee's or task force's website. Standing committee charges are revisited each year based on the past charge, suggestions made by the previous year's committee, and issues raised by the Executive Board. Committees often produce reports, typically by the end of the academic year, and submit recommendations to those who staffed and charged them. For Senate committees and task forces, the Senate

may choose to vote on whether to endorse the reports and may write and pass resolutions based on committee recommendations.

Senate Retreats

Each year, the Executive Board plans and holds two Senate retreats:

- **Fall Senate Planning Retreat:** In late August, shortly before the semester begins, the Senate holds a one-day retreat to discuss topics likely to be of interest to the faculty community in the coming year. All Senators (voting and non-voting) are invited to attend. The Executive Board also extends invitations to some members of the Administration, such as the President and Provost, as well as other guests relevant to the retreat topics. Senators will receive the retreat agenda in advance.
- **Spring Joint Provost/Academic Senate Retreat:** In mid-February, the Senate and Provost hold a joint retreat, often beginning on a Friday afternoon and concluding at lunch time Saturday. The retreat is typically held off-campus, and lodging is provided for any two-day attending Senator who desires it. Attendance at this retreat includes all voting and non-voting members of the Senate plus many members of the Administration, as well as other strategic partners who may be invited.

Communications

- The Executive Board distributes a Newsletter to all faculty after each Senate meeting, summarizing the main themes of the discussion.
- The Executive Board communicates directly with Senators through a listserv.
- We encourage Senators and Faculty Council chairs to use the Senate's Slack channel *academicsenate.slack.com* to communicate among themselves and with the Executive Committee.
- The Senate President can be reached by email at *acsenate@usc.edu*.