Guide to Being a Senator

Welcome (or welcome back) to the Faculty Senate! This promises to be a full year, as we welcome a new Presidential administration. In order to use our time effectively please review the information below. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the President or Senate administrator at any time. We can be reached by email at faculty-senate@northwestern.edu or by phone at (847) 467-6629. Our website has additional resources, including minutes of past meetings, resolutions we have adopted, and a link to the Faculty Handbook.

Senate meetings

Attendance at the monthly Senate meetings is essential, as we need a quorum in order to conduct most of our business. Attendance in person is preferable, but it is also possible to attend online. The time and location of these meetings can be found on our website. An agenda will be distributed in advance of the meeting; details on how to connect online will be sent with the agenda and a separate online calendar invitation.

The agendas are set by the President in consultation with the Executive Committee. Agenda items may be suggested to the President via private correspondence at any time, or introduced at the Senate meetings during New Business or via formal motions. Meetings typically are used for initial and final discussion of those matters brought before it. For many issues, more extended investigation and deliberation is conducted by the relevant Standing Committee(s), prior to being brought back to the Senate for final consideration.

The meetings use Robert’s Rules of Order. A brief summary of the essential rules is included on the Senate website. When you speak at a meeting, please begin your remarks by stating your name and the department or school you represent. Senators present at the meeting in Evanston must use a microphone so that senators online can hear what they are saying. Please raise your hand (in person or virtually) if wish you to speak so that you may be recognized. The meetings are recorded to aid with the taking of minutes. Written minutes will be distributed electronically for approval prior to the next meeting.
Committee assignments

The Senate has twelve standing committees; see the description of the Senate and its committees included in the description of the Faculty Senate. Every senator is expected to serve on at least one of these committees. Much of the work of the Senate begins with careful consideration by one or more of these committees, which provide reports to the Senate as a whole. Committee chairs will work with committee members and the Senate staff to hold regular meetings, online or in person, throughout the year.

Communication with departments

One of the essential functions of the Senate is to facilitate communication between faculty and administration. To this end, it is important that Senators regularly obtain the input of colleagues in their home departments. Please speak to your chair about including Senate business as a regular feature of department meetings, if this is not already the practice in your department. With some rare exceptions, the issues discussed in the meetings of the full Senate are a matter of public record. Your colleagues are welcome to attend any of these, though only Senators have the privilege of participating without seeking prior permission to speak.

Special events

In addition to meetings of the full Senate and its standing committees, there are a few special occasions for which attendance is expected. The Senate annually has a luncheon with the Board of Trustees. There are also two meetings of the Faculty Assembly, at which the university President reports on the state of the university and answers faculty questions.