



## A Quick Guide to Academic Governance at MSU

Academic Governance at MSU aspires to the principle of shared governance. For this to be the reality, there must be sharing of ideas, responsibilities, and decision-making between administrators, faculty, students, and staff. This document was prepared to help guide faculty senators towards that goal, by helping to demystify the structure and processes of academic governance at our institution.

The primary goal of this document is to introduce academic governance to newly serving faculty. It is not a governing document, but an attempt to delineate processes in which faculty members have a range of powers.

### 1. Structure of Academic Governance at MSU

MSU academic governance is described by a set of amendable bylaws. MSU espouses a shared governance system, with the administration and the Board of Trustees holding executive power. Faculty power within the system is primarily advisory<sup>1</sup> and should be used for the betterment of the university. The university is stronger when faculty engage in academic governance, utilizing their wide range of expertise, and when university leaders and administrators foster and utilize participatory governance processes. In their advisory role, the faculty can influence university issues, programs, and values. All faculty members are expected to serve their colleagues and the University through participation in academic governance, while colleges and departments are expected to support and reward such service.

There are three overarching deliberative bodies in academic governance: the Faculty Senate, the University Council, and the Steering Committee. This section provides a brief description of these governance bodies.

#### a) Purpose of the Faculty Senate

The Faculty Senate is a representative body for the University's faculty. Faculty views, suggestions, and concerns are voiced to the administration through the Senate.

The Faculty Senate provides advice on curricular issues, faculty tenure and promotion, and faculty salary and benefits, and other key issues as described in Sections 3.3.4.1 and 3.3.4.6. of the *Bylaws*:

“The Faculty Senate is a deliberative, representative, and legislative body for Michigan State University faculty. As such, the Faculty Senate is the major, regularly meeting body in which curricular issues, faculty tenure and promotion

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<sup>1</sup> “Advisory” is a mode of participation in academic governance where a recommendation from a deliberative body is made to an administrator. The administrator is not bound by the recommendations and accepts responsibility for the decisions (Section 1.3.2. of the *Bylaws*). The four modes of faculty and student participation in governance are defined in Section 1.3. of the *Bylaws*.



issues, and faculty salary and benefits issues are presented... The Faculty Senate's role is to communicate its position to the administration on these issues."

"The Faculty Senate obtains and synthesizes the opinion of the faculty to form recommendations on key issues facing the University, and communicates those recommendations to the President and the Provost."

There are three University-level Standing Committees that report to the Faculty Senate. These include the University Committees on Faculty Affairs, Faculty Tenure and Curriculum.

1. The University Committee on Faculty Affairs (UCFA) makes recommendations on the University budget and advises on faculty-related policies. It has shared responsibility<sup>2</sup> with the provost in the formulation of faculty grievance procedures, rights, and responsibilities. Section 4.6. of the *Bylaws* lists a complete description of the committee's charge and functions.
2. The University Committee on Faculty Tenure (UCFT) advises on the rules for the award and revocation of tenure. It also hears and acts on cases for exceptions to the rules of tenure. Section 4.7 of the *Bylaws* lists a complete description of the committee's charge and functions.
3. University Committee on Curriculum (UCC) exercises the faculty's delegated authority<sup>3</sup> in reviewing, approving, or rejecting changes in undergraduate and graduate curricula and degree requirements. It also advises the provost on criteria for course and curriculum establishment or deletion. Section 4.5 of the *Bylaws* lists a complete description of the committee's charge and functions.

## **b) Purpose of the University Council**

The University Council is a forum for dialogue on matters of great importance to Michigan State University. The University Council addresses a wider scope of issues than the Faculty Senate. All faculty senators are also members of the University Council. Additionally, this body includes student representatives from the student governments and university administrators.

The University-level Standing Committees on Student Life and Engagement, Graduate Studies, the Libraries, and Academic Governance report to the University Council.

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<sup>2</sup> "Shared responsibility" is a mode of participation of faculty and students in academic governance where a deliberative body makes recommendations to an administrator. If the administrator and deliberative body cannot agree and action must be taken, the recommendations of the administrator and the deliberative body will be submitted in writing to the appropriate administrator at the next higher administrative level for decisions by that administrator (Section 1.3.3. of the *Bylaws*).

<sup>3</sup> "Delegated authority" is a mode of participation of faculty or students where a deliberative body is authorized to make decisions on specific matters (Section 1.3.4. of the *Bylaws*).



1. The University Committee on Student Life and Engagement (UCSLE) advises the Senior Vice President for Student Life and Engagement on policies affecting student life and academic achievement. The committee also reviews amendments to Student Rights and Responsibilities. Section 4.9 of the *Bylaws* lists a complete description of the committee's charge and functions.
2. The University Committee on Undergraduate Education (UCUE) exercises the faculty's delegated authority on grading policy for undergraduate students. It reviews changes in undergraduate academic programs and consults<sup>4</sup> with the provost on undergraduate program policies and on policies related to admission, retention, and financial aid. Section 4.4 of the *Bylaws* lists a complete description of the committee's charge and functions.
3. The University Committee on Graduate Studies (UCGS) exercises the faculty's delegated authority on grading policy for graduate students. It also reviews changes in graduate and professional programs and consults with the provost on graduate program policies. Section 4.8 of the *Bylaws* lists a complete description of the committee's charge and functions.
4. The University Committee on the Libraries (UCL) provides for broad-based participation in policymaking relating to the libraries. Section 4.10. of the *Bylaws* lists a complete description of the committee's charge and functions.
5. The University Committee on Academic Governance (UCAG) interprets, reviews, and recommends amendments to the *Bylaws for Academic Governance*. It is also responsible for reviewing college bylaws for consistency with university-level bylaws. Section 4.3 of the *Bylaws* lists a complete description of the committee's charge and functions.

### **c) Purpose of the Steering Committee**

The Steering Committee is responsible for “steering” proposed action items to university-level governance bodies for consideration. This committee is comprised of five faculty members elected at-large to represent the entire faculty (also known as At-Large Members of the Steering Committee or At-Large Members), the chairs of the University-level Standing Committees, the president, provost, the secretary for academic governance, and representatives from student governments. The Steering Committee sets the agendas for meetings of the Faculty Senate and University Council.

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<sup>4</sup> “Consultation” is a mode of participation of faculty and students in academic governance where individual members express their views to inform an administrator’s decision (Section 1.3.1. of the *Bylaws*).



## 2. Expectations for Faculty Senators

Faculty senators are expected to facilitate a three-way communication channel to relay concerns from their constituents to the Senate. They should disseminate information from the Faculty Senate to their constituents, bring concerns from their constituents to the attention of Faculty Senate, and coordinate with the other faculty senators within their college or non-college unit in these efforts. The effectiveness of the Faculty Senate relies on each senator fostering dialogue in these ways.

At the beginning of each academic year, senators should introduce themselves to their constituents and set expectations for how they will disseminate information from academic governance and request feedback.

Faculty Senators should actively participate during meetings of the Senate and University Council, voicing views, concerns, and feedback from their constituents. For feedback unrelated to the agenda items, senators may raise issues during the “Comments from the Floor” portion at the end of each meeting. While no official action can be taken on items brought up discussed during this portion of the meeting, it can initiate the process of formally considering these issues in the shared governance space. Alternatively, senators can submit items for consideration to the Steering Committee by emailing the Office of Academic Governance ([acadgov@msu.edu](mailto:acadgov@msu.edu)).

*A note on attendance:* Faculty senators must attend all Faculty Senate and University Council meetings. Missing more than three meetings of a governance body during the academic year makes a senator eligible for removal. The Office of Academic Governance will inform the body responsible for electing the member (e.g. College Advisory Council) in such cases<sup>5</sup>. Senators can appoint designees<sup>6</sup> to attend meetings on their behalf if they have unavoidable conflicts but must notify the Office of Academic Governance when doing so. A senator’s attendance remains unaffected if a designee attends in their stead.

## 5. Rules and Parliamentary Procedure

Meetings of academic governance bodies outlined in the *Bylaws for Academic Governance* follow Robert’s Rules of Order. A guide to Robert’s Rules of Order and parliamentary procedure can be found [here](#).

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<sup>5</sup> See Section 1.4.3. of the *Bylaws* for more complete information on absences and the removal process.

<sup>6</sup> Designees must have the same eligibility and constituency as the replaced member (Section 1.4.2. of the *Bylaws*).