

University Senate Chair Report
February 9, 2021

Submitted to the University Senate
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Taking the Mystery out of Rules of Order

I received feedback that folks appreciate that, as we move through senate dialogue and actions that are informed by more formal protocols, the Senate Chair with the support of others verbalizes what is happening and how senators and meeting guests may engage. This process of stating the protocols serves at least three purposes:

1) it takes the mystery or uncertainty out of a given situation, and 2) it helps folks learn about common ways of ordering our dialogue and actions, and 3) it makes the Senate floor a learning space: knowledge from Senate can support engagement in other arenas from system-level meetings to the local city or county governance. As we learned from our Senate October 27, 2020 Senate Dialogue on Race, parliamentary procedure is often experienced as exclusionary. We will continue to work toward adopting practices for dialogue and action that move us toward equity. To that extent, thank you in advance for supporting our collective efforts toward this goal -- remind me if I forget to articulate what is happening.

Calendaring Action Items and Feedback on Prioritization

Thanks to all who engaged in January 26, 2021 Breakout Groups providing input on adding and prioritizing Senate action items. That process itself addressed a question about the process of agenda setting (see below). Most of the current running list of possible agenda items were noted as important in at least one or more groups. The Senate Executive will continue to work with committees and working groups to calendar business across the six remaining 2021 Senate calendar dates. We are working to avoid the traffic jam at the end!

The Senate Agenda Process

It is the responsibility of the University Senate Chair, in consultation with the Senate Executive Committee (SenEx), to plan and prioritize senate work, and plan agendas. Committee Chairs, in consultation with SenEx, prioritize a slate of potential action. Action includes both formal policy, as well as discussion items that leverage the public forum of the Senate floor for information sharing and input. SenEx can also generate agenda items directly. Our running list of action items is created from prior years' governance unfinished business, direct requests from the campus community, as well as individual senator and collective body priorities and initiatives for a given year.

Identity, Power, and Titling

You may have noticed that I adopted this academic year a practice of titling all senators during our engagement on the University Senate floor, and titling guests when I can. As we learned just a few weeks ago from the national news around “Dr. Jill Biden” -- as well as years of social science research on identity, race, class, and gender -- titles matter. And there are inequitable variations and implications in how and when folks are titled.

The meaning of titling is contextual and varies with positionality. Some folks might argue that while titling is one small step in leveling the field among senators, it may work against our efforts to be inclusive and create a space that feels open to guests.

Our institution and the University Senate itself are setting goals to move toward race and gender parity in representation and leadership. Those changes require preparing our institution for changes and opportunities that come with diverse leadership. Intentional and critical thinking about many of our everyday “taken for granted” ways of working together are part of our process of growing into the institution we aspire to be. Looking forward to continuing the conversation.