

Handbook for Senators

Acadia University

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Handbook for Senators

Welcome to Acadia University's Senate! This book is intended as a guide and reference source, to make sure you have all the information you need to function effectively as a Senator. If you have questions or require additional information at any time, please do not hesitate to contact the Chair of Senate.

What is Senate?

Senate is the body responsible for educational policy at Acadia. Amongst other powers, it has the authority to establish faculties, schools, departments, institutes, and chairs; to set admissions standards; to determine appropriate courses of study and qualifications for degrees; to approve curriculum changes; to deal with all matters regarding scholarships and bursaries; and to confer degrees. Senate is the final authority on campus for all matters regarding educational or academic policies. However, it should be noted that Acadia operates under a bicameral system. The Board of Acadia University is the final authority for all financial matters. Where the academic and financial spheres intersect, Senate and the Board must work together. The detailed Terms of Reference of Senate are available at http://senate.acadiau.ca/Terms_of_Reference.html, and Senate's Constitution and By-laws are available at http://senate.acadiau.ca/Constitution_By-Laws.html.

Who is on Senate?

Senate is probably the most broadly-representative body on campus. It includes representation from administration, the Board, the library, students, faculty members from all Faculties, and lay members from the local community. Some members, mostly from administration, are members of Senate *ex officio* (meaning that whoever holds a certain position or office automatically becomes a member of Senate, without having to be elected). Most members of Senate are elected by the body they represent. For a detailed list of all members of Senate, and the procedures by which they are selected, see http://senate.acadiau.ca/tl_files/sites/senate/Committees%20and%20Membership/COM12-13.pdf.

How does Senate function?

Senate normally holds monthly meetings from September to May, usually from 4-6 p.m. on the second Monday of each month in BAC 132. For a schedule of the year's Senate meetings, see <http://senate.acadiau.ca/MeetingDates0910.html>. A detailed agenda is e-mailed to all Senators at least 7 days prior to each meeting, containing information on what topics will be discussed and/or what motions will be voted on, often with reference materials relevant to each topic provided in the appendices. Agendas from previous meetings are available for reference at <http://senate.acadiau.ca/Agendas.html>. At the meetings, issues will be discussed and motions

voted upon, in the order that they appear on the agenda. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that meetings run smoothly, that proper procedures are followed according to Robert's Rules of Order, and that all eligible members have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion and participate in the vote. Once a motion is passed at Senate, it becomes the active educational policy at Acadia. Minutes are taken at each meeting, and once they are approved (normally at the following meeting), they are posted on the Senate website as a permanent record of decisions made. Minutes from previous meetings are available at <http://senate.acadiau.ca/minutes.html>. Note that you can use the Google search bar to search minutes back to 1999, to find records of previous discussions and decisions.

Senate and its sub-committees

Much of the work of Senate is actually done through its subcommittees. For a description of all Senate subcommittees, with their terms of reference and current membership, see http://senate.acadiau.ca/Senate_Comm_Membership.html. In many cases, the motions Senate is voting on originate from a sub-committee. For example, the Curriculum Committee considers applications for curriculum changes from units on campus, and makes recommendations to Senate regarding which curriculum changes it believes should be approved. The final decision, however, rests with Senate.

The relationship between Senate and its sub-committees runs two ways. Sub-committees might identify an issue of concern, either on their own initiative or because it is brought to their attention by a member of the Acadia community. After consideration, sub-committees might act on the issue themselves if it is within their terms of reference, or else bring a recommendation for action to Senate, if the change might exceed the sub-committees' authority. Alternatively, Senate might identify an issue that requires further investigation or action, and ask one of its sub-committees to follow up.

Bringing issues to Senate for its consideration

If any members of the Acadia University community (including individual Senators) have concerns regarding particular educational policies, they should feel free to bring the matter to Senate's attention. If the matter falls within the domain of a particular sub-committee, it is generally advisable to begin by approaching the Chair of that sub-committee (again, see http://senate.acadiau.ca/Senate_Comm_Membership.html for current membership of each committee), as Senate will most likely refer the matter to the sub-committee for consideration or comment anyway. The sub-committee might be able to deal with the issue themselves, or provide additional relevant information. If it's not clear which sub-committee would be the most relevant for a given issue, consult the Chair of Senate for advice.

If no particular sub-committee is appropriate, or if the matter is not resolved satisfactorily at the sub-committee level, individuals can also bring the matter directly to Senate for consideration,

through their Senate representative(s). Senators may initially decide to put an item on the agenda simply for discussion, to bring the issue to Senate's attention, request further input, or decide on the most appropriate next steps. Individual Senators can also bring specific motions to Senate, asking that particular actions be taken by Senate or one of its sub-committees. If the motion is approved, the relevant policy can then be changed.

Rights of Senators

Senators have the following rights:

- *To receive adequate notice of motions* to be made at Senate, to give you time to consult your constituents and to consider your response. At least the “purport” of any main motions must be circulated with the agenda, a minimum of seven days in advance of a Senate meeting. Changes to the By-law are an exception, requiring at least 30 days’ notice of motion. The basic gist of the motion should be clear when it is circulated; circulating the precise wording of the motion is highly desirable but not absolutely essential. Note that this rule regarding notice of motion applies to main motions, not to secondary motions that might arise from the discussion of main motions. For example, a main motion to change an educational policy would require the seven days’ notice of motion, but a motion to amend that main motion would not, nor would a motion to refer the issue to a sub-committee for further consideration. Notice of motion can be waived, but only if an absolute majority of the entire membership of Senate approves of doing so. If you believe that adequate notice of motion was not given in a particular instance, it is your right to bring your objection to the attention of Senate. If the Chair and/or a majority of Senators agree with you, discussion of the issue will be deferred until the next meeting, to allow more time for careful consideration of the issue.
- *To make and second motions in Senate* (including main motions, amendments, secondary motions, etc.), if you are a voting member. See “Tips for making effective motions”, “Tips for effective amendments” and “Useful procedural motions” for more details.
- *To participate fully in all discussions and votes in Senate.* Unless Senators vote to change the default rules, each Senator has the right to speak up to two times on every item (i.e., each main motion, each secondary motion, each amendment, etc.), for a maximum of 10 minutes per turn. If you are a voting member, you may also vote whenever applicable. See “Robert’s Rules of Order: The basics” and “Tips for debating and discussing effectively” for more details.
- *To be fully informed of what is happening at every stage of Senate’s proceedings, and of your options for the next steps.* It is essential that every Senator understands exactly what is being decided at every point during a meeting (e.g., what exactly is being voted on right now? What precisely would an “aye” vote indicate at this stage?). It is always your right to

ask for clarification on what exactly is happening. Also, if you want to do something but aren't sure exactly how to go about it, it is always your right to ask the Chair for guidance; he or she will explain how your objective can be achieved, if it is possible. See "Tips for getting clarification" for more details.

- *To object, when it is an option offered by the Chair.* Sometimes the Chair will make a statement like "Are there any objections to doing X?" or "Unless there are any objections, we will do Y." Often this phrasing is a time-saving device, used when the Chair senses that Senators wish to follow a particular course of action. For example, if an amendment to a motion seems very minor and non-contentious, the Chair might simply ask if there are any objections to making the proposed amendment. Remember, though, whenever the Chair asks "Is there any objection?", *it is absolutely your right to make an objection if desired.* Simply raise your hand and state "Objection, Madam / Mr. Chair", and once recognized, state the reason for your objection (if desired; a simple "I'd prefer a fuller discussion" is a perfectly fine justification). It is absolutely acceptable to make an objection even if you just have vague doubts, or sense some hesitation in other Senators, or simply wish to have a bit more time to think about the issue. Your objection will not derail the process completely; it will simply ensure that full and proper procedures are followed, which is never a bad thing. For instance, in the example given, the Chair would ask someone to formally propose the amendment, it would be seconded, debate and discussion would proceed, a full vote would be taken, etc. If there is any doubt at all in your mind as to whether a particular action is advisable, it is better to object and take the time to work through all the proper procedures, rather than possibly let a possibly ill-advised action slip past without due consideration.
- *To object, if you believe proper procedures are not being followed.* If you believe proper procedures are not being followed according to Robert's Rules of Order or Senate By-laws, it is your right to object. If the issue arises between meetings, or is an ongoing concern, it's best to contact the Chair of Senate to discuss the issue. He or she may acknowledge you are correct and change the procedures, or explain why the current procedures are in fact correct (citing relevant items from Robert's or the By-laws). If the issue is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can put it on the agenda for the next Senate meeting. The Chair will step aside and the Deputy Chair or another designate will assume the chair for that item. Both you and the Chair can present your cases, and Senate can decide. Similarly, if you believe proper procedure is not being followed in the course of a meeting, it is your right to object. Simply raise your hand and state "Point of order, Madam/ Mr. Chair". Once you are recognized, state your concern. If you suspect proper procedure is not being followed, but are not quite certain, you may prefer to use the softer "Point of inquiry, Madam / Mr. Chair", followed by stating your concern in the form of a question ("Shouldn't we do A before we do B?"). If the Chair was in fact in error (it happens!), he or she will correct the mistake. If the Chair believes that proper procedure was in fact being followed, he or she will explain the reasons, again citing

Robert's Rules or the By-laws. A brief recess may be necessary for the Chair, often in consultation with the Deputy Chair, to consult the necessary resources to decide. If you still disagree with the Chair's ruling after the reasons have been explained, then you may appeal the Chair's decision. Your motion to appeal must be seconded. It can then be debated, and if the majority of Senators agree with you, the Chair's decision will be overturned.

- *To invite guests to Senate, if desired.* If you wish, you may invite one or more guests to a meeting of Senate. The most common reasons for doing so are that you believe the guest has information that might be of value in moving forward a particular debate or discussion at Senate, or that the guest may be a future Senator, and would like some insight into how Senate functions. If you wish to invite a guest, please inform the Chair of Senate, preferably by e-mail in advance, but at the latest at the beginning of the meeting that the guest will attend. Clarify whether the guest wishes only to observe the meeting (i.e., will not be taking part in any discussion), or wishes to participate in the discussion. During Announcements, the Chair will announce your name, the name of your guest, the reason for the guest attending, and ask if there are any objections to the guest attending, and participating in discussion if applicable. Generally, there are no objections; however, any Senator does have the right to object if so desired. A vote would then be held regarding whether the guests can stay, and in what capacity, and the majority decision would apply.

Responsibilities of Senators

Senators have the following responsibilities:

- *To make sure you fully understand your rights and responsibilities, and to ask questions if unclear.* You cannot serve your constituents well if you don't understand what you're doing or how to do it. Familiarize yourself with the basics (i.e., read this Handbook; attend the Senate orientation session), and when in doubt, always feel free to ask questions or to consult the Chair for guidance.
- *To familiarize yourself with all the material relevant to the motions you will be debating.* You should enter each Senate meeting fully prepared, having read over and carefully considered all of the relevant material. The material is often quite lengthy, so be sure to set aside some time each month to do so, as part of your committee responsibilities. Don't wait until the last minute to review the material, as you may need time to consult your constituents or other Senators, or to develop proposed amendments, subsidiary motions, etc.
- *To keep your constituents informed regarding Senate decisions.* You should have some mechanism for making sure that the group you represent is kept informed of important

Senate decisions (both those already made, and important upcoming decisions). Possibilities include a standing report at department or faculty meetings, or e-mail summaries.

- *To represent your constituents, and Acadia, to the best of your abilities.* You should make sure that the group you represent has a mechanism for communicating their viewpoints on important Senate decisions to you, and feels comfortable doing so. You should be prepared to communicate your constituents' views accurately to Senate, if they become relevant to a particular discussion. Very often, your votes in Senate will also reflect the viewpoints of your constituents. However, sometimes your constituents will have mixed views; furthermore, only you will have access to the full discussion at Senate, and may therefore hear information or arguments of which your constituents are unaware. In the end, you must therefore attempt to make the best decisions regarding educational policies that you can, after listening to and carefully considering all of the available evidence. If your vote should differ from that of some your constituents, be prepared to justify your choice; if the constituents do not feel you are representing them adequately, they are free to replace you when your term is up.
- *To participate fully in Senate deliberations, and to make motions in Senate, when appropriate.* Senators should be prepared to participate in Senate discussions, whenever their input would be valuable. Senators should also be prepared to bring forward motions in Senate, when they or their constituents identify an issue that needs to be addressed. Finally, all Senators should be prepared to help move Senate business forward by making amendments, secondary motions, etc. where and when appropriate. See the subsequent sections of this handbook for tips on how to participate fully and effectively in Senate discussion.

Robert's Rules of Order: The basics

Procedures in Senate follow the latest edition (currently the 11th) of Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised. If you wish, you can pick up a copy at almost any bookstore; larger stores may also have a variety of simpler books that cover the basics. However, it is not really essential to buy these; reading this guide, attending a few Senate meetings, and asking for clarification when needed should give you everything you need.

An *agenda* is circulated before each Senate meeting that lays out what will be discussed at that meeting, in order. Occasionally, there will be discussion items on the agenda; these do not call for any particular action to be taken, but simply represent issues that someone wishes to bring to Senate's attention for discussion and consideration. Often after discussion, the matter will be taken away for further consideration, ultimately resulting in a motion being brought to Senate.

Most of the business of Senate, however, is conducted in the form of *motions*. One Senator *moves* that a certain action should be taken (e.g., that a particular policy be changed in a particular way; that the recommendation made by a particular sub-committee be approved, etc.). Another Senator must then *second* the motion before it can be discussed; if no one seconds it, the motion dies without further discussion. Once the motion is seconded, the person who made the motion is asked if he or she would like to speak to the motion. The mover then usually gives some background information, and/or a rationale as to why the motion should be supported. The motion is then opened up for debate and discussion. Any Senators who wish to do so may contribute to the discussion. They might indicate that they support the motion, and give their reasons why, or they might indicate that they oppose the motion, again justifying why. They might ask for more information or clarification to help them make their decision.

If a Senator believes that a motion under discussion can be improved, it can be done by offering an *amendment*. An amendment is a proposed change to the wording of the original motion. If an amendment is very minor, the Chair might simply ask if there are any objections to making the change; if there are none, it is made. Normally, however, an amendment, just like a main motion, must be seconded. The mover of the amendment can then explain why he or she believes it is an improvement; any other Senators who wish can then contribute to the discussion as to whether the amendment should be adopted or not. At this point, someone might even offer an amendment to the amendment. Amendments are made and voted upon, one at a time. Once an amendment has been adopted, discussion returns to whether or not the main motion, as amended, should be passed.

If you wish to speak to a motion or an amendment, raise your hand and catch the Chair's eye. The Chair will nod to acknowledge that you have been seen, and add your name to the *speaker's list*. (Once the Chair has done so, you can put your hand down again). When it is your turn to speak, the Chair will call your name. Every Senator is entitled to speak up to two times to each main motion and each amendment, for a maximum of 10 minutes per turn. However, people who have not yet spoken to a motion get priority over those who have already spoken once; therefore, if it is your second time speaking, others who put their hand up after you will still speak before you, if it is their first turn. Unless a motion is made to the contrary, discussion simply continues until there is no one left on the speaker's list.

When all amendments have been made and discussion on the main motion is complete, a *vote* is called, and if the majority approves, the motion goes into effect. Voting in Senate is most often done by voice vote. The Chair will make sure everyone is clear on what's being voted on (if you're ever unclear, do ask for clarification!), and will then state something like "All in favour of the motion, signify by saying 'aye'." If you support the motion, say "Aye" clearly. The Chair will then say "All opposed?" or "Contrary-minded?" If you do not support the motion, say "Nay" clearly. If you are completely undecided, or for some other reason you do not feel

comfortable voting on a particular question, you may abstain by remaining silent. Usually it is fairly apparent from the sound of the voices which side has the majority. If there is ever any doubt, the Chair will repeat the vote, calling for a show of hands of those in favour of the motion and those opposed, and counting each side. If you wish to abstain, do not raise your hand for either side. Finally, a very few votes in Senate (e.g., some elections) will be done by secret ballot. The Chair will instruct you how to mark the ballots to vote; you may abstain by leaving your ballot blank.

Note that abstentions are not counted/recorded under Robert's. Most motions can pass as long as they have a majority of those present and voting. So, if of the 43 Senators attending a given meeting, two Senators vote in favour of a motion, one votes against it, and 40 abstain, the motion would still pass (there are exceptions, but this statement is true for most main motions). Do vote, rather than abstain, whenever you feel qualified to do so.

Tips for getting clarification

It is important to understand exactly what you're voting on. Although discussion and voting is generally fairly straightforward, at times it can get very confusing, especially when there are amendments to amendments, etc. Always feel comfortable asking for clarification. There are technically different ways to get clarification, noted below, but don't worry if you can't remember them all. It's fine to simply raise your hand and call out "Question, Madam / Mr. Chair." When the Chair acknowledges you, state your question. The Chair will either answer the question, or if it is not the appropriate time to ask such a question, will tell you when and how you may ask it.

If you really want to get the lingo right, a *point of parliamentary inquiry*, or just a "point of inquiry" is what you ask when you want the Chair to explain the rules of procedure to you. For example, if you want to wrap up the current discussion and move on to the next item of business on the agenda, but aren't sure how to do so, just ask and the Chair will lay out the options available to you at a given point. A *point of information* is what you ask when you want clarification about the content of the motion itself. For example, you might want to know whether a particular proposed change to policy would go into effect immediately, or not until the next academic year. The Chair will ask the appropriate person to clarify. A *point of order* is used if you think there might be a procedural error being made (e.g., the Chair is opening up a motion for discussion without it having been seconded). The Chair will correct the error, or else explain why proper procedure is in fact being followed. A *point of privilege* is used if you want some change made to help you, and perhaps others, better participate in the discussion. For example, you might ask the speakers to speak up if you can't hear, or ask for lights to be dimmed if you can't read the projector screen, or ask for the heat to be turned up if you're freezing.

Again, though, it is not crucial to remember all of these specific terms – a simple “*Question*” will do. Use your common sense as to when to ask these. Some (like a point of order) may at times be extremely time-sensitive, and might require you to interrupt someone who is currently speaking, even the Chair. Most (like most points of inquiry or points of personal privilege) are a bit time-sensitive, but not extremely. Normally, you can and should wait until the current speaker is done his/ her turn; however, it’s fine to jump in between speakers – you don’t have to wait until your turn comes around on the speaker’s list. Points of information, asking for clarification on the current motion, can vary. If it’s a very quick question, and one that might prevent confusion in others, you can jump in between speakers. If it’s a lengthy or complicated question, it is generally best to put your hand up and wait until your turn comes around on the speaker’s list.

In general, none of these questions of clarification count as one of your two turns speaking to a motion. The exception might be if a lengthy “point of information” question seems to be used simply as a round-about way of expressing your own opinion (e.g., “Is it not true that...” followed by a long speech). Feel free to clarify the terms with the Chair, if applicable. For example, “Madam Chair, I want to ask a question of Mr. Y; will that count as one of my speaking turns?”; or, “Mr. Chair, may I ask a clarifying question first of Dr. X, and then I have a follow-up statement?” The Chair will generally not count the question itself as a speaking turn, unless you try to turn it into one!

Tips for debating and discussing effectively

Most of your time on Senate will be spent debating and discussing motions brought forward by others. Here are some suggestions to help your participation be as effective as possible:

- Remember, you generally have only two turns to speak to a motion, so make them count. *Think carefully about what you want to say.* It doesn’t hurt to jot down a few notes to help you remember what you were going to say, when the time comes. Although you technically have 10 minutes to speak each time, you will not be popular if you routinely speak much longer than you really need to. Choose a few of your strongest points, and make them in a clear, organized fashion. If you have many points to make, decide which ones are best delivered in your first turn, and which are better saved for your second turn.
- *Make your position clear,* when speaking to a motion. Begin by stating “I am in favour of this motion”, or “I would like to speak against this motion”. Follow up by giving your reasons for holding the position you do. If you are very uncertain how to vote, you are generally better off listening to others’ points, or asking clarifying questions that will help you to decide your position, rather than delivering a very mixed or uncertain message.

- *Really listen to what others are saying.* It is perfectly appropriate to find yourself swayed by the points others are making. It is not unusual to speak in favour of a motion early on, but then be persuaded by others' arguments, and end up voting against the motion (or vice versa).
- The point you wanted to make will sometimes be made by someone else before your turn comes around. If you don't have anything new to contribute to the discussion, *it is fine to say "pass"* when the Chair calls on you. You can then preserve your turn for later, when you think of a different point.
- *Don't feel that you have to speak to every motion.* If each of the 55 Senators used his or her fully allotted speaking time (i.e., 2 turns times 10 minutes per turn), it would take 18 hours to get through just one motion, even with no amendments or secondary motions. Even if you have a point that has not been made yet, if it is not a crucial one and it is pretty clear from the discussion of others that the vote is going to go in the direction you favour anyway, it's probably not essential to make the point.

Tips for making effective motions

You may at some point decide to bring a main motion to Senate for debate. It may be on your own initiative, to reflect a concern of one of your constituents, or as a representative of a Senate sub-committee. Here are some tips to make your main motion as effective as possible:

- Be sure to *clearly distinguish in your own mind whether you are simply bringing forward an issue for discussion, or whether you wish to make a specific motion* (i.e., propose a concrete course of action).
- If you are *bringing forward an issue for discussion only*, be sure to say so. It is a good idea to circulate a document with the agenda that gives some background information on the issue, lays out your reasons for bringing it to Senate for discussion, and possibly outlines some alternatives for future courses of action. The discussion at Senate will then be sort of a brainstorming session, discussing if any action should be taken, and making suggestions for logical next steps. Before you go to a lot of work bringing an issue to Senate for discussion, first try talking to the Chair of the relevant Senate sub-committee, if there is one. That committee will undoubtedly be consulted by Senate at some point, so it's a good idea to have them in the loop early on. Ideally, they will deal with the issue themselves, or else join you in bringing the need for action to Senate's attention. If there is no relevant sub-committee, or if they have been unresponsive, you may wish to speak to the Chair of Senate. The Chair might be able to suggest a different sub-committee, or get some action from the relevant sub-committee, or agree that the issue should come to Senate as a whole for discussion.

Generally, discussion items are most useful in the very early stages of exploring a potential policy change / action. At the end of the discussion, the issue may simply be left with you for further consideration / possible future motions, or a motion might possibly arise at Senate, instigated either by you or by someone else (e.g., someone might make a motion to refer the issue to a specific sub-committee for action, or to form an ad hoc committee to investigate the issue and report back to Senate).

- Generally, *motions are more effective than discussion items*; they lead to concrete action and move the issue forward, rather than simply talking about it. If you have identified a problem / issue and are pretty sure what the next step should be, go ahead and make a motion.
- *Be sure to separate out the background information from the actual motion you want passed.* The traditional way to do so in Robert's is to begin with a series of "Whereas" statements, that lay out your justifications as to why the motion should be passed, followed by a "Be it resolved that" statement, that makes the actual motion. Other formats are fine, though, as long as they are clear (e.g., have separate sections, labeled "Background" and "Motion").
- Only the motion itself is actually essential. Providing some background information as to why the motion is being brought forward, or why you believe it should be passed, is generally beneficial, however, because it provides context and helps Senators to enter the debate well-prepared. *Keep the written background material relatively brief and factual*, though. Remember that you can elaborate on it in your verbal statement when presenting the motion. Remember also that if people disagree with your reasoning or justification as presented in the background material, then they might be inclined to vote against the motion, even if they might have been inclined to support the motion had they been given a different justification. It is therefore generally to your benefit to keep the background material fairly brief, balanced, factual, and well-rounded.
- *Be very precise in the wording of your motion.* Read it over multiple times; have others read it over as well. Feel free to ask the Chair or the Deputy Chair to look it over, simply for clarity of wording. Pay attention to common oversights in other motions, and avoid making them in your own (e.g., is the word "Faculty" intended to include the Faculty of Theology, or not? Do you really mean "department", or do you mean "unit", which includes Schools as well as departments? How do multi-disciplinary programs fit into your proposal?). A great deal of time is spent in Senate word-smithing motions. Making yours as clear and precise as you can from the beginning will save time on the Senate floor.
- If you are part of a Senate sub-committee that has been investigating an issue (either on its own initiative, at the request of an individual, or at the request of Senate), *it is generally most effective to make any recommendations that arise from the sub-committee in the form of*

motions. The sub-committee should prepare a report that briefly outlines the issue they were asked to consider, how they investigated it, what their conclusions were, then concludes by recommending that Senate adopts a particular motion or set of motions. Having the recommendations in “motion-ready” form saves time spent on the floor of Senate turning the committee’s general recommendations into specific motions that can be voted on and acted upon.

- *Send all motions to both the Chair and the Recording Secretary of Senate by the deadline, preferably as Word documents.* The deadline for submitting materials for each Senate meeting are located here: <http://senate.acadiau.ca/MeetingDates0910.html>. If possible, it is desirable to submit motions even earlier, as it gives the Chair and Secretary more time to prepare the agenda, or to ask clarifying questions, if needed.

Tips for effective amendments

Sometimes you will wish to make changes to motions that are proposed by others. Here are some suggestions to help you do so most effectively:

- *Think about whether your amendment is really needed.* Will it definitely improve the motion? Amendments do take a fair bit of time on the floor of Senate, so should be used judiciously. If a motion is somewhat awkwardly phrased, but the intent is still clear, then it is probably wisest to let it go with the existing wording, even if you could have phrased it better yourself. However, if the meaning is unclear from the existing wording, then it becomes important to make a clarifying amendment. Remember, too, that only the motion itself has weight or causes future actions to occur. Background information, or “whereas” statements, simply provide context, but are not part of the motion itself. Spending time improving the phrasing of those portions is therefore not important. If there is a glaring factual error, you may wish to correct it, as the background material will be entered into the Senate record. In general, however, focus your attention and amendments on the motion itself.
- *Always figure out the exact wording of any amendment you wish to make, and WRITE IT DOWN.* Never try to compose an amendment in your head, on the fly. When presenting your proposed amendment to Senate, be very clear in describing it (e.g., “I move that the second sentence, beginning with ‘All students shall...’ be deleted completely. It would then be replaced with the following sentence:...”).
- *Technically, there is no such thing as a “friendly amendment” in Robert’s.* People seem to use the term to mean “no offense, I support the spirit of the motion and plan to vote in favour of it, but I think this amendment would improve it.” That’s fair enough, but really, an amendment is an amendment, and it doesn’t matter at all to the procedure that needs to be

followed whether you're friendly or hostile in making it. Just propose your amendment, and when you speak as to why you wish to make the amendment, you can make your intentions clear.

- That being said, there is one distinction that may be helpful, that being the distinction between *very minor amendments that clearly do not change the intended meaning of the motion at all*, and more substantive amendments that may change the meaning of the motion somewhat. At the discretion of the Chair, these two types of amendments can be dealt with differently. Therefore, if you believe your motion falls into the former category, you may wish to signal it to the Chair by referring to it as a “minor amendment” or even a “minor, friendly amendment”. For example, if you noticed that the motion used the term “departments”, but suspected that the mover really meant to include Schools as well, you might say “Mr. Chair, I suspect the mover meant to include Schools as well as departments in this motion. If so, may I offer a minor, friendly amendment to change the word ‘department’ to ‘unit’ throughout the motion?” The Chair will then decide whether the change you are proposing represents a substantive change to the motion. If the Chair believes it does not, he will check with the mover or seconder to make sure they have no objections to the change, and that it does in fact represent their original intention when making the motion. If so, the Chair may decide to expedite the process by simply asking whether there are any objections to making the change. If none are heard, the change can proceed immediately. If anyone does object to that process, the amendment can still be made more formally (i.e., moved, seconded, debated, voted upon). Remember that after a motion has been made, seconded, and opened up to debate, the mover no longer “owns” it, the assembly as a whole does. Even if an amendment is a “friendly” one, and is fully supported by both the mover and seconder, it could still be defeated when put to a vote, if that is the way the majority of Senators wished to proceed.
- Keep in mind that *your amendment must be “germane” to the original motion*. You can't offer an amendment that is so extreme that it completely changes the meaning/ intent of the original motion. For example, say an ad hoc committee was being struck to investigate admissions standards and policies. You believe that admissions standards are perfectly fine as they are; however, you believe more work must be done to retain students once admitted. It would be perfectly appropriate to offer an amendment to broaden the terms of reference of the original committee, asking it to investigate retention issues as well as admissions policies. That is adding on to the original intent of the motion, but not changing it. However, it would not be appropriate to offer an amendment that removes the original terms of reference of the committee regarding investigating admissions, and replaces them with completely new terms of reference regarding investigating retention. That amendment would completely change the intent of the original motion, and it should therefore be ruled out of order by the Chair. (If you ever believe an amendment is completely changing the intent of an original motion, feel

free to ask for a ruling from the Chair, if one is not offered spontaneously). If you did wish to create the new and different committee instead of the proposed one, you should urge people to vote against the original motion, and as part of your argument, explain why retention is the more important issue, and give notice of motion that you will be bringing forward a proposal to form a committee to investigate retention at the next meeting.

- Sometimes an amendment does not completely change the meaning of the original motion, but the *changes are so extensive that it is easier to start fresh*, rather than make a long list of amendments to the original motion. For example, say instead of the original motion to form a committee to investigate admissions policies alone, you want to propose a broader committee that will investigate policies surrounding both admissions and retention. It will have broader terms of reference and a somewhat different membership from the original committee. Rather than proposing a whole series of amendments to the original motion, you could instead make a motion to *substitute* your proposed new wording for the original motion. If the movers of the original motion agree that your version is better, they might offer to withdraw their original motion in favour of yours; if there are no objections, debate moves directly to your version of the motion. If some still favour the original version of the motion, debate moves to whether your new version should replace the original version, or not. If the motion to substitute passes, your new motion replaces the original motion, and discussion continues.
- If you notice the need for amendments to a motion when the agenda is circulated, do *feel free to get in touch with the mover before the meeting to discuss them*. Before the motion is formally moved, it still “belongs” to the mover. Therefore, if the mover agrees with your amendments, she could make them before the motion is even presented to Senate, saving a great deal of time on the Senate floor. So, the mover could say something like “Mr. Chair, I wish to make the motion as circulated, with one minor change: I would like to replace the word “department” with the word “unit” throughout the motion”, or “Madam Chair, after discussing the issue with so-and-so, we wish to propose a modified version of this committee, one that will investigate issues surrounding retention as well as admissions.” If any amendments are agreed upon ahead of time, be sure to share them with the Chair and the Recording Secretary. If deemed necessary, they will make sure all Senators have access to the amended motion (e.g., by circulating a version via e-mail before the meeting, or by projecting it on the screen during the meeting).
- Even if you don’t feel comfortable discussing your proposed amendments with the mover ahead of time (e.g., you know the mover will disagree, and don’t want to give her the opportunity to prepare), do consider *sharing the wording of your amendments with the Chair and the Recording Secretary before the meeting*. They will keep them confidential until the meeting if requested to do so. Especially if the amendments are extensive, having a version

prepared to share with Senators at the meeting (e.g., projecting the amended motion, circulating hard copies) will save a great deal of time and confusion on the Senate floor. The Chair and Recording Secretary can most easily prepare these materials; however, if you are not comfortable sharing your amendments with them, prepare the relevant materials yourself.

- If you have extensive amendments to one portion of a long motion, but no amendments to other portions, *consider using the “division of the question” or “consider by paragraph” motions below to help focus the discussion on the key portions of the motion.* If you’re comfortable doing so, consult with the Chair ahead of time, who can suggest the best procedure for dealing with your amendments.

Useful procedural motions

The following motions are useful *if you feel further debate on a particular issue is not productive, and wish to move on.*

- *Withdraw a motion.* Before a motion is made, it “belongs” to the mover, who can withdraw it without anyone else’s permission. That can be done if you decide the motion is no longer a good idea, or that you need to go away and work on it some more. Once a motion has been seconded, it “belongs” to both the mover and seconder, and the seconder must agree to withdrawing the motion (if the seconder disagrees, the issue goes to a vote). Once the Chair has opened the issue up to the full Senate and discussion has begun, the motion “belongs” to the assembly as a whole, and the mover cannot withdraw it without the permission of the assembly. The mover could ask that the motion be withdrawn (or, someone else might suggest that withdrawing it would be a logical course of action, and the mover agrees). Generally, the Chair will ask if there are any objections to the mover withdrawing the motion. If there are none, it is withdrawn; if there is an objection, it goes to a vote. When a motion is withdrawn, it is as if it had never been made, and it is brought forward as a brand new motion at a later date (i.e., new Notice of Motion must be given if necessary; the wording of the motion can change; the mover is not bound by any amendments that were passed the first time, etc.).
- *Refer to committee.* If a motion clearly needs much more work before it is ready to proceed (e.g., the wording needs extensive revision; there were substantive issues that were not adequately considered in the original motion), it often makes sense to refer the motion to a committee for further work, rather than trying to fix it all on the floor of Senate. The committee can then go away and consider the issues raised at Senate, and come back with a recommendation (e.g., recommend amendments to the original motion; recommend that a new motion be substituted for the original one; recommend that Senate vote against the original motion as being fatally flawed, etc.). Most often, the motion would be referred back to the individual or committee that made the original motion. However, it could also be

referred to another standing sub-committee of Senate, or to an ad hoc committee created on the fly for such a purpose. Any Senator is free to make a specific motion to refer the issue to a particular committee, if desired. Any Senator is also free to make the relatively vague motion, “I move to refer this matter to committee”. The Chair is then responsible for *filling in the blanks* in that motion. The Chair asks for suggestions as to which committee the matter should be referred to. If there is only one committee suggested, it goes to that committee; if multiple committees are suggested, a vote is taken to decide which. If an ad hoc committee is suggested, the Chair takes suggestions as to how many should be on the committee, how they should be selected, etc., and again takes votes if there are multiple suggestions. The motion can also be amended to add specific instructions to the committee, or give a date to report back to Senate. With a bit of practice, a wide variety of committees can be assigned specific tasks by Senate relatively efficiently with this method.

- *Motion to limit debate.* As already noted, the default is for discussion on any issue to proceed until every Senator who wishes to do so has had the opportunity to speak two times, for up to 10 minutes each time. If debate seems to be dragging on, any Senator may introduce a motion to limit debate (on a particular motion, or for the duration of the meeting). The motion might restrict the number of speaking turns (e.g., only one turn each, not two), or the time available to speak each turn (e.g., 5 minutes, not 10 minutes), or the number of remaining speakers (e.g., allow those on the existing speaker’s list to take their turns, but not add any more), or the total amount of time allotted to the issue (e.g., discussion will continue for 10 more minutes, at which time a vote will be taken). This motion must be seconded. It can be amended, to adjust the restrictions, but it cannot be debated. If 2/3 of those voting agree, the restrictions go into place. Note you can also make a *motion to extend debate*, to allow additional turns or a longer time to speak, if needed.
- *Add a special order of the day.* A special order of the day is an instruction that Senate shall consider a particular issue on the agenda at a particular time. These special orders are most often added by the Chair when making up the agenda; however, individual Senators might also request that special orders be added to the agenda. For example, a Senator who believes it is crucial to get to item #6 on the agenda at a given meeting might request that a special order of the day be added to item #6, for 5:30. To do so, the Senator could make a request of the Chair before the agenda is circulated, or could request an amendment when the agenda is being approved, or could make a motion to that effect in between other items on the agenda. If the special order is arranged with the Chair ahead of time, it simply becomes part of approving the agenda; if the special order is added at the meeting, it requires 2/3 majority approval. Adding a special order to an item will ensure that Senate will get to it on a given day, even if other items before it on the agenda take longer than expected. For example, say that a special order has been added to agenda item #6, for 5:30. It is now approaching 5:30, and Senate is still discussing item #4 on the agenda. The Chair will ask if Senate is ready to

vote on item #4; if not, the Chair will ask for a motion to postpone or table the discussion of item #4 (see below). At 5:30 precisely, Senate will move to consideration of item #6. When discussion of item #6 is concluded, Senate will then return to discussion of item #4, if appropriate, or proceed to item #5, if item #4 was already voted on.

- *Call the question.* If a debate on a given issue seems to be going in circles, with the same points being repeated, or if it is clear that the large majority favour a particular course of action and there's no need to belabor the point, it might be time for any Senator to *call the question*, i.e., ask that discussion on the issue be stopped, and that a vote be taken, immediately. The motion to call the question must be seconded, but it cannot be debated or amended, it simply proceeds immediately to a vote. If 2/3 of those voting agree to call the question, then the vote on the main motion is taken right away, and Senate moves along to the next item on the agenda.
- *Postpone definitely.* If a particular discussion is a productive one, but it is running long and there are other matters on the agenda that still require more immediate attention at that meeting, any Senator may make a motion to “postpone definitely”. This motion asks that the discussion on the current issue be postponed temporarily, to be continued at a particular point later on (e.g., “at 5:30 p.m.”; “after item 4 on today’s agenda”; “as the first item on the agenda of the next meeting”). It requires a majority vote, or a 2/3 majority if a “special order” is attached to the motion at its new time. If the motion to postpone definitely is passed, discussion of the current issue stops, and Senate proceeds to the next item on the agenda. When the appropriate time comes, discussion of the original issue picks up precisely where it left off (i.e., the Chair will continue on with the speaker’s list from the original motion).
- *Table a motion.* Sometimes the time is not quite right for discussing a particular motion, but it is not obvious what would be the optimal time for discussing it (for example, when it becomes clear that a decision on one motion may or may not be affected by the outcome of a later item on the agenda). In these cases, any Senator may make a motion that the current motion be *tabled* or *laid on the table*. The issue is then set aside temporarily, and can be *called back from the table* by any Senator at any point in the agenda for the rest of that meeting, or at any point in the agenda of the next meeting. If no one calls the issue back from the table by the end of the next meeting, it is assumed it is no longer relevant and the motion dies. If you know you definitely want to continue discussion of a topic at a later point, use postpone definitely. If you know now is not the best time to discuss a topic, but you’re not quite certain whether you want to continue the discussion later or not, use tabling.
- *Kill a motion.* Generally, if you disagree strongly with a motion and believe many others in Senate feel the same way, your best course of action is to allow the motion to be debated

openly, urge for it to be defeated, call the question if appropriate, and allow the motion to be defeated directly. Sometimes, though, a motion might be so ill-considered that you consider it a waste of time to even discuss it, or else for some reason it would be awkward or embarrassing for Senate to vote on the issue one way or the other. In these cases, the best course of action is generally to explain your concerns to the mover before the meeting, and encourage the mover to withdraw the motion. If the mover refuses to do so, however, you could *object to consideration of the question*. This motion must be made right away, as soon as the mover makes the motion, before discussion of the issue even begins. It must be seconded, but is not debated or amended; a vote is simply taken immediately as to whether the main motion should be discussed. If 2/3 of Senators agree (i.e., they also object to consideration of the question), the main motion dies immediately. Once discussion of the main motion has begun, you could also make a motion to *postpone indefinitely* as a means of killing the motion. This motion must be seconded and can be debated, and requires a majority to pass. If passed, the motion kills the main motion without requiring a direct vote on it. Robert's describes it as useful in "disposing of a badly chosen main motion that cannot either be adopted or expressly rejected without possibly undesirable consequences." Motions that have been postponed indefinitely do not automatically come back to Senate at any particular time; however, the mover is perfectly free to put the motion back on the agenda at a later session. Again, the best strategy to truly kill a motion is generally to take a direct vote and defeat it fair and square.

The following motions are useful if you *wish to focus amendments or discussion on only one portion of a lengthy motion*:

- *Division of the question*. This motion can be used to divide a long motion up into a series of smaller motions. For example, the set of curriculum changes for the Faculty of Science could be divided up into separate motions for each unit within Science. That strategy can be useful if you, say, wish to vote in favour of one part of a motion, and against another. It can also be useful if some portions of a motion are non-controversial and can pass as is, whereas other portions requires extensive amendments, or perhaps need to be referred back to a committee for further work. The Chair may mention this option as an alternative before introducing a long motion. However, any Senator may also request it at any time, but preferably as early as possible in the discussion of a motion. In a break between speakers, catch the Chair's attention and ask for a division of the question; once you've been acknowledged, explain how you would like the motion to be divided up. It must be possible for the motion to be broken up into a series of natural, stand-alone motions. The motion to divide the question can be amended (e.g., if someone else can propose a more logical way to split up the main motion), but it cannot be debated; it simply proceeds to a vote. If the majority agrees, the main motion is divided up into smaller motions, which are then dealt with one at a time.

- *Consider by paragraph* (or serially, or seriatum). This motion can be used to request that the Chair work through a lengthy motion paragraph by paragraph (or section by section, or page by page, whatever is most natural). The Chair would then call for any amendments to the first paragraph before moving on to the second, etc. This technique helps to keep people from becoming confused when there are a large number of amendments to be made, and they are sprinkled throughout a lengthy document. Unlike Division of the Question, the motion still remains a single entity, and only one vote is taken at the end to pass or fail to pass the entire motion, after all of the amendments have been made. The motion to consider by paragraph is amendable (e.g., if someone wants to suggest different-sized “chunks” to divide up the main motion), but is not debatable. It requires a majority vote.

There are other, more obscure, motions to be found within Robert’s. In general, though, those covered in this handbook should be more than enough to allow you to function effectively at Senate. And remember, if at any point you want to do something but aren’t quite sure how to do it, simply raise your hand, call out “Question, Madam/ Mr. Chair”, and the Chair will gladly explain the available options to you.