



York University

Chairing Manual



University Secretariat

Updated: September 2020

Collegial Governance Structures at York

Senate and Committees



Faculty Councils and Committees



Department and Program Councils and Committees



The Role of Chairs

Chairs have special responsibilities when it comes to facilitating timely and effective deliberations, instilling confidence in members, fostering pride, promoting participation, and creating a positive, productive space for decision-making and information sharing. Collegial governance is a core value of York University, and chairs play an important part in affirming its centrality and vitality.

The position of chair does entail additional work but the tasks associated with chairing need not and should not be onerous or distracting. You are not alone. Other members and secretaries share a responsibility for maintaining collegiality and focus, fulfilling mandates, and achieving goals. Some tasks may be delegated to other members, who may appreciate being called on to lend their expertise to a project. There are also resources available to you, including this manual, online material found on the University Secretariat Website, and the staff of Faculty Councils and the Office of the University Secretary and General Counsel who are available to provide advice and support on matters related to rules and processes.

You may find these principles helpful in developing a successful approach to chairing:

- **Educate** yourself and others about applicable policies and procedures, and about best practices in governance. Take advantage of resources available to you.
- **Enable** decision-making by ensuring that agendas are clear and issued in a timely way, items are well-framed, and options are spelled out consistent with the authority given to the body. Strive to keep the group's focus on mandates and items of business. Strive, too, for consensus.
- **Empower** decision-makers by providing them with contexts and illuminating key issues and outcome options.
- **Enhance** governance by seeking feedback from members at regular intervals on the work of the body and staying alert for ways to make meetings both productive and less time-consuming.
- **Execute** the will of the body and ensure that communications, reports and record-keeping are consistent with legislative pathways, appropriate formats and, especially, the decisions that were made and why.

Preparing for the Position

Ideally, Chairs of Senate or Faculty Councils and their committees will have ample time to prepare to take up their duties. Some chairs are elected. Others serve in an *ex officio* capacity as the head of an academic unit. In either case, preparation should include acquaintance and facility with the following:

- the terms of reference or mandate of the group, along with distinctive responsibilities and limitations on the scope of action
- relations to other bodies, such as how programs and departments relate to Faculty Councils and how Faculty Councils relate to Senate and to external

bodies such as the Quality Council of Ontario and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

- rules and procedures governing the conduct of meetings – both general and specific to the body
- the sources, flow and timing of business
- ways to proactively identify items for consideration
- expectations about how decisions are reported along with the production and transmittal of other communications before and after meetings
- your partnership with the Secretary

Tips

Elect vice-chairs or chairs-elect well in advance of turnover dates so that they have opportunities to prepare for the job of chairing.

Take advantage of online resources or through Faculty Council and University Secretariat staff.

Senate's Rules, Procedures and Guidelines are comprehensive and may be used by Faculty Councils (and others) when their own rules are silent on some matter.

At the beginning of a governing cycle, take time for an orientation that provides plenty of opportunity to build cohesion and consensus about the work of the group.

Preparing for Meetings

Prior to meetings, the Chair works with the Secretary (and in some cases the Vice-Chair or key *ex officio* members) to finalize agendas. Schedule in-person preparation sessions. Investing care in advance of meetings helps ensure that items fall within mandates, are well and fully documented, and are framed in terms of desired or possible outcomes.

Creating an agenda involves the following steps:

- canvassing for agenda items
- identifying items that may be brought to the body for information by *ex officio* members
- determining which items of business are ready for consideration, and which require additional information
- ensuring that all the documents are clear and complete
- following a prescribed order in which items are dealt with on the agenda (bodies will benefit from having explicit rules about the customary order of items)
- identifying what action is requested (e.g. for action, for information)
- inviting individuals who will advocate for or speak to an item (often this is done by the secretary)
- drafting motions that are clear and concise

- allocating sufficient time for items and give them appropriate priority (it is increasingly common to suggest the time devoted to an item on the agenda page, adding a few minutes of flex time)

Tips

Create a look-ahead calendar of meetings that forecasts when items will come up during the year. Set priorities for the year and track progress. If progress has been slow, reflect with members on why this has been so.

Prepare short cover sheets – or briefing notes – for each item, spelling out the nature of the item, the action requested (approval, information, discussion), further steps that must be taken, and confirmation that all necessary steps have been completed prior to consideration by the body.

Eliminate unnecessary items from the agenda – such as approval of the agenda (instead, determine at the beginning of a meeting if there is other business).

Enlist consent agendas for items that are unlikely to be controversial and need not take up meeting time (but allow for any one member to request that items be dealt with on the regular agenda). The consent agenda can include the minutes of previous meetings, as is true for York’s Board of Governors and Senate.

Conducting a Meeting: The Basics

There are certain essential tasks that are performed by the Chair in a collegial setting:

- ensuring that members with disabilities are accommodated (including physical access)
- establishing if quorum has been achieved and the meeting can proceed
- calling the meeting to order at the outset
- welcoming new members and guests, and facilitating round-the-table introductions
- advising if there has been a request to add other urgent business at the end of a meeting
- announcing if there is any change in the agenda (this can be done formally with 2/3 of those present and voting to alter the order, or, when occasions warrant, with the agreement by members to a chair’s suggestion; there should be little dissent if the order is changed because, for example, a guest has been delayed)
- announcing items of business in sequence
- in bodies where formal votes are required, seeking movers and seconders for motions, tallying and confirming the results of votes¹

¹ Senate committees strive for consensus, and the Chair will permit discussion until members are satisfied with an outcome. Discussion ends with a question: “Do we have consensus?”

- entertaining amendments, which must be moved and seconded (always ask for amendments to be written down; it is very difficult for groups to draft on-the-fly, and much better to work from text that can be freely shared)
- keeping a speakers' list and recognizing speakers in turn (on occasion the speaking order may be adjusted if a member is in "hot pursuit" of an item; discussions can be more free-flowing when presentations are being made but should still be equitable)
- when members are participating remotely by means of audio or audio-visual technology, pausing during each item to ask if they wish to speak
- determining when discussion has concluded on any item
- summarizing, for the benefit of the secretary and members, key outcomes
- applying rules and making rulings on points of order and points of privilege
- declaring that the meeting has ended (or, in some formal settings, seeking a mover and seconder for a motion to adjourn)

Meetings in a Digital Age: Quorum and Communications

A common quorum rule is that a majority of the members must be present to proceed. In some cases, certain members (e.g. *ex officio*) are excluded from the count. This majority can include members who are participating remotely or who have indicated that they will be delayed in arriving. Senate committees have lower quorum in the summer months. In the case of adjudicating committees, quorum may be higher than normal and must be attained to proceed.

Traditional concepts of quorum are complicated somewhat by the growing use of e-mail and other forms of balloting on proposals. Senate rules explicitly provide for this form of voting. It is a convenient and expeditious way of dealing with items, not least when the likelihood of attaining the in-person quorum threshold is diminished, such as the summer months. Members should be given a reasonable amount of time to record their votes or to register comments or questions. Be responsive to reservations: if action is not urgently needed or if many members are legitimately reluctant due to uncertainties about documentation or a desire to debate. It may be preferable to defer an item to the next in-person meeting.

As more governing bodies utilize widely available platforms for remote participation like Skype and Zoom, it is important to remind members that no audio or visual recordings are allowed. Such recordings are known to inhibit participation and can be edited to deleterious effect.

Conducting a Meeting: Beyond the Basics

Chairs often ask fundamental questions about the nature of their positions. Must they maintain absolute neutrality? Can they vote? Should they express opinions, and if so, at what point in debate or discussion should they intervene? Experience elsewhere is not always helpful. The Speaker of the House of Commons maintains strict impartiality,

shying from debate and only voting in the case of a tie. The Speaker of the US House of Representatives seldom presides but is very active on the floor in debate.

The answers to these questions vary somewhat according to the size and formality of a body. Senate and Faculty Councils have explicit rules on the circumstances in which chairs can vote (often, to break a tie). Vice-Chairs are normally able to vote on any matter, but many refrain from doing so given their roles. Secretaries do not vote, and some bodies have non-voting *ex officio* members or observers. Chairs and vice-chairs may be the principal presenters of reports from committees to a higher body, such as those from executive committees, and answer questions that are put to them. They have opportunities to weigh in on items at an earlier stage, and often refrain from actively participating in routine discussions or debates.

It is more common for chairs to vote at Senate and Faculty Council committee meetings or at department and program meetings. If this is so, make it explicit in your rules.

Effective chairs often open discussion of items by providing some context such as why the matter is on the agenda, where it originated, what actions are possible, or if any issues have been identified in advance by members (including those unable to attend). This constitutes an important framing function.

Substantive points chairs wish to make are normally held until other members have an opportunity to address the item. Chairs may also point to aspects that have not surfaced in a discussion to promote an appropriately thorough discussion.

There are times when chairs must let others preside:

- When there is a real or apprehended conflict of interest (for example, when a chair has been nominated for an award to be adjudicated by the committee they chair).
- When the chair is participating remotely and is unable to recognize those wishing to speak.

Much like a university classroom, the committee setting can be intimidating for some. Make efforts to draw members out and allow time for them to gather their thoughts. Chairs should be sensitive to gendered dynamics and prevent marginalization of voices.

Tips

Connect with members in casual settings to discuss expectations, approaches and the conduct of meetings.

Consider the use of online survey programs to elicit anonymized input on operational matters and suggestions about the conduct of meetings.

If you do not have formal rules, consider committing to writing basic understandings about the conduct of meetings or making explicit reference to Senate rules.

Pointers about “Points”: Promoting Plain Language

Robert’s Rules of Order? Bourinot? Duschene? Where to turn in a pinch? There are numerous authorities on rules and procedures available to assist with the running of a meeting. Bear in mind, however, the language of Canadian parliamentary tradition differs from that of American terminology. To take but one example, to “table” a document means something entirely different in the House of Commons (to present) and Congress (to set aside). York’s Senate does not use the term at all, preferring everyday usage. Documents are “received” or “noted,” motions are “deferred” or “referred.”

There are other usages in these authorities that are arcane or confusing. For this reason, the Senate of York University has a comprehensive set of rules that are created and approved by Senate and do not require appeals to the standard guides like Robert’s and Bourinot. To an increasing extent, Faculty Council rules reflect those of Senate. When their own rules are silent on a matter, Councils can also refer to Senate rules.

Senate encourages the use of plain language. Consequently, Senators can simply state that they have a question rather than a “point of information” or a “point of clarification.” The points that are recognized involve an allegation that a rule has been violated – a point of order – or that the rights of an individual or the body have been undermined in some fashion – a point of privilege. The fewer the points, the greater the consistency of terminology and the less stress for chairs and secretaries.

There is a parallel with the framing of motions. The University Secretariat works with drafters of motions to transform a “whereas / be it resolved” formulation to a “recommendation / rationale” construction. When a motion precedes the rationale in the body of a recommendation it provides members with a clearer sense of what is being proposed and makes it easier to propose amendments to the motion *per se*.

Some collegial bodies are composed of individuals who know one another well from their shared disciplinary interests and proximity in departments and programs. The atmosphere is likely to be less formal. Chairs should continue to ensure that proceedings are orderly and equitable.

Working with Secretaries

Most collegial governance bodies are supported by a secretary who is a staff colleague. There are scores of staff members at York who devote some or all their time to governance duties. Secretary duties may differ but tend to include the following:

- managing records and ensuring that they are accessible
- collecting and distributing documents
- working with the Chair to ensure that materials for a meeting are complete and accurate
- alerting the Chair to issues associated with an item
- advising the Chair on rules and procedures

- helping to frame items for action or information
- inviting guests such as proponents of proposals
- taking notes at meetings that will be used for minutes and other purposes
- drafting correspondence and reports for the chair

It is part of the University Secretariat's mission to foster professionalism within the community and help individuals through educational outreach. This is done by:

- maintaining a listserv through which Senate secretaries and their Faculty Council counterparts can share information and holding frequent meetings to explore topics in governance
- leading workshops, some sponsored by Human Resources, on matters related to governance, minute taking, and processes for student appeals, tenure and promotion, curriculum review and approval, and other facets of governance
- hosting "Red Bag" sessions on special topics (some of which are open to the community and have attracted chairs as well as secretaries)

Tips

Encourage secretaries to take advantage of professional development opportunities. Attend them yourself.

Consider periodic retreats when chairs and secretaries can talk about how well the body is functioning and consider ways to enhance the work of bodies, including streamlining to reduce time commitments and maximize effectiveness.

Stay alert to trends in research, curriculum, pedagogy and governance. Two useful sources of information and context are the Academics Group's "Top Ten," a daily digest of news stories about postsecondary developments, and the morning blog "One Thought to Start Your Day" by Alex Usher of the Higher Education Strategy Associates on hot university topics. You can easily subscribe or unsubscribe via these URLs:

<https://www.academica.ca/topten>

<http://higheredstrategy.com/blog/>

Watch for the release of agendas and synopses of Board and Senate meetings to stay abreast of internal governance decisions. Y-File and Faculty Council listservs will let you know when agendas and synopses are issued.

Minutes, Not Minutiae: The York Standard

Yes, minutes matter. They are a permanent record of proceedings that fulfill important governance obligations. They are also frequently misunderstood or magnified. Consequently, many bodies err by routinely dealing with minutes that are overly long and unnecessarily detailed.

There *is* a York standard, the style commonly referred to as "executive minutes." This style is used for the Board of Governors and Senate, and is being adopted by an

increasing number of Faculty Councils and departments. The term “executive” reinforces an understanding that minutes are an accurate record of actions “executed” and a summation rather than a re-creation.

Executive minutes are less subject to interpretation and for this reason help reduce distractions and tensions. They complement chairs’ efforts to remain focused on mandates, agenda items and outcomes. There are other benefits to executive minutes. They are less time consuming for the secretary, are easily indexed, and have the virtue of concision and focus.

Capturing the outcomes is all that is required. Minutes need only consist of the following elements:

- motions and their outcome
- items for which there are actions such as *noting, receiving, sharing*
- procedural motions
- points of order and privilege and the ruling of the chair
- members in attendance (which may be necessary for quorum attestation) and guests (listed under “Also Attending”)
- the outcome of items as they appeared on the agenda (not in the order in which they were dealt with unless there was a formal change in the agenda prior to or during the meeting)
- the names of the presiding officer and secretary as attestors of accuracy and fullness
- location, date and start time (end times are not required)

No names, attributions or quotes are included in the body of the minutes. Presenters of reports or guests (who are identified by their title and last name) may be referenced. Minutes may include, after the Secretary’s name at the end, a list of follow-up items. The to-do list itself is not subject to approval. In any event, be sure to flag items suggested for future consideration. What should be recorded for a lengthy or lively discussion? Some text may be included if it is important to retain a record that will inform further actions or decision-making. Point form is an acceptable and often preferable means of rendering such text.

Minutes are not required for most sub-committees and all task forces and ad hoc groups. In these cases, their reports constitute the formal record of the group’s proceedings.

Spend some time at the inaugural meeting to discuss minutes and advocate for the executive style. When you shift to executive minutes, there may be some concern about reduced length or other changes. Emphasize the real value and growing adoption of this style.

Draft minutes should be produced as quickly as possible after a meeting, along with the necessary memoranda and reports that are required. Meeting notes should then be

disposed. Maintain a list of items suggested by members for future consideration and work with those who made a suggestion to determine how and when to proceed with an item.

Minutes are dealt with as consent agenda items for the University's Board and Senate along with their committees. They are deemed to be approved unless one or more members ask that they be dealt with during the meeting with a vote. Require that any amendment be communicated in advance and in writing. A minor correction to the minutes, such as adding a name omitted from the list of those attending, can be made and communicated in advance rather than made the subject of a motion or discussion. If you become aware of a minor correction, simply announce it.

The University Secretariat has prepared a tip-sheet on minutes accessible at

<http://ipo.info.yorku.ca/tool-and-tips/tip-sheet-12-minute-taking-tips-and-techniques/>

Senate's first minutes are a model of the executive style.

The first meeting of the Senate was held in the President's Office, Falconer Hall, Monday, November 14th, 1960, at 2:00 p.m.

Present: Murray G. Ross, President (in the Chair); I. R. Pounder; Edgar W. McInnis; George Tatham; W. W. Small

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCE

In accordance with the powers vested in the Senate under Section 13 of the York University Act 1959,

On motion, duly made and seconded,

RESOLVED that, for the purposes of its affiliation with the University of Toronto, a Faculty of Arts and Science be established in York University, to be known as "York College"

Meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Murray G. Ross, President.

W. W. Small, Secretary of the Meeting

Dealing with Documents

Distributing agendas in hard copy formats is, of course, mostly passé. Documents are generally gathered and compiled for agendas in electronic formats and housed in folders and files on websites. There are some lingering exceptions. Adjudicative committees often receive (voluminous) paper dossiers and do not make them available to members electronically for reasons of confidentiality even when there are safeguards in place such as those provided by password-protected programs

Documentation should be distributed well in advance. The agendas for York's Board of Governors and Senate are normally posted approximately one week in advance of meetings. Committees strive to emulate this.

The distribution of documents at meetings is often unavoidable but should be limited. Encourage those who transmit material to do so in advance so that members have opportunities to reflect and prepare their input. PowerPoints are common ways of presenting ideas. Whenever possible, slide decks should also be passed along before meetings to enlarge the space for dialogue.

Collect confidential documents distributed at a meeting.

Be sure that the Common Records Schedule is followed. Consult the online guidance prepared by the Information and Privacy Office or contact staff of that office with questions.

Tips

Dispose of meeting notes as soon as minutes have been approved and related tasks have been completed.

Do not specify the source of a remark. Instead of writing the initials of a speaker use symbols such as: ? for a question / C for a comment / A for an answer.

Confidentiality

Adjudicating committees often deal with confidential documents that must not be released beyond the membership. Minutes of those committees and others are also confidential and should be trimmed to a bare minimum – item (or name associated with a case) and outcome. Confidential material should be stamped as such with a watermark whenever possible. Other staff with access to computerized records should be made aware of protocols. All or part of a meeting may take place *in camera*. When described in minutes, *in camera* discussions should indicate only that they occurred (or perhaps a general statement such as “for the purpose of reviewing a confidential communication”).

Tips for Different Types of Committees

Adjudicating Committees

Be sure to follow conflict-of-interest rules and determine if any member is in a conflict when dealing with nominations.

Be scrupulous in applying the University’s policies and procedures, and take pains to avoid any deviations or irregularities. Ensure that documentation is in order before presenting a file.

At meetings, ensure that deliberations are full and fair. Communicate decisions within the defined time frame that respects appellants’ rights and the due dates for appeals.

Conform to University standards in recording decisions. Mindful that there may be subsequent appeals of decisions, be clear about the basis of decisions rendered without being so fine-grained that petitioners or appellants are in doubt about the decision.

Senate Appeals Committee Procedures

<http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/files/SAC-Procedures-2018.pdf>

Tenure and Promotions and Appeals Policy, Criteria and Procedures

http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/files/TandP_Policy_Criteria_Procedures.pdf

Senate Policy on Academic Honesty

<http://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/policies/academic-honesty-senate-policy-on/>

Awards Committees

Be sure to follow conflict-of-interest rules and determine if any member is in a conflict when dealing with nominations.

Encourage unconscious bias training.

In 2017, the Chair of Senate's Sub-Committee on Honorary Degrees and Ceremonials urged awards committees throughout the university to help expand and diversify the pool of prospective honorary degree recipients. Consider adding this to your agenda. There are many other Faculty and University awards for students and faculty members. What part can your committee play in encouraging or facilitating nominations?

Curriculum Committees

It is imperative that curriculum committees play their part in upholding the University's Quality Assurance Policy. Processes can be smoothed by ensuring that proponents and committees have adhered to the York University Quality Assurance Procedures (YUQAP), including:

- providing notice of intentions
- using the correct template for different sorts of proposals
- dealing with proposals in the correct sequence
- fully addressing the stipulations of the YUQAP

The York University Quality Assurance Procedures and other forms and documents can be accessed from the dedicated Website at <http://yuqap.info.yorku.ca/>