Faculty Senate
Ammerman Campus
Suffolk County Community College

Senatorial Guide & Handbook
WHO WE ARE

The Ammerman Senate is a representative governance body. Who is being represented? Here’s what our constitution has to say:

The Faculty of the Ammerman Campus of Suffolk County Community College shall consist of all persons holding full-time appointments of Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Instructor, Professional Assistant (P1, P2 and Specialists), Chair, and Assistant Chair on the Ammerman Campus.

The very name of this body might be a bit confusing for those who wonder who this body represents. Although the first word in the name is “Faculty”, the Senate does not represent all, nor only classroom instructors. It does not represent part time, adjunct faculty members, but it does represent some whose full-time duties do not include classroom instruction. For example, the Senate represents librarians, counselors, TLC staff, and those who work in the computing center. In short, all those whose positions reside on the Ammerman Campus (including those who are designated as Central) and whose positions are designated “Faculty” are represented in the Senate. (It also includes department chairs who do not cease to be represented just because they are members of the Guild, which is the union for non-exempt administrators).

The second word in our name, “Senate”, may also be a little confusing. Unlike the United States Senate, in which states with wildly different populations are represented equally, there are departmental areas which are represented according to the number of members. According to Article IV, Section 4 of the Constitution,

Each area shall be eligible to have at least one Senator... Areas with more than 12 faculty (full-time faculty and Professional Assistants) shall be eligible to have one additional Senator for each additional 12 faculty or part thereof.
Departments that have 1-12 members have one Senator, those that have 13-24 members have two Senators, and those that have 25-36 members have three Senators.

There are roughly 35 Senators at any given time, depending on the total number of faculty in all the academic areas.

Although the Senate primarily consists of Senators, it also includes Representatives. Representatives are selected by departments (or the Senate Executive Committee) to serve on specific Senate committees. They are welcome to attend Senate meetings, but are not bound to do so, and do not have voting rights. They do, however, play an important role in the deliberations and activities of the Committees on which they serve.

**WHAT WE DO: CURRICULUM AND BEYOND**

It’s best to begin with our charge, as specified in the Constitution:

> The Senate, in accordance with the regulations of the State University of New York and the Board of Trustees of the College, will deliberate and recommend policies and procedures concerning academic policies and standards, curriculum, planning, institutional research, faculty quality of life, and aspects of student life that relate to the educational process.

We are a deliberative and recommending body, focused especially but not exclusively on things that take place in the classroom. On the core issues of curriculum and academic standards, the considered judgment of the faculty (in accord with SUNY regulations) holds considerable weight in the establishment and development of policies.

Every new course, every major course revision, and every curriculum change **must** go through the critical assessment and approval processes of Governance. The members of the Campus Curriculum Committee and the College Curriculum Committee help to ensure that all courses and curricula abide by SUNY
guidelines and fit into the structure of the College.

But the Senate is also concerned with issues that affect the quality of life of the faculty, especially as they relate to our professional success and instructional effectiveness. The issues we take up, discuss, and pursue are as varied as the mission of each of the standing committees: Ways and Means, Quality of Life, Academic Affairs, Campus Relations, Student Liaison, Campus Curriculum. As examples of the variety of issues we’ve pursued, deliberated about, and recommended to the College: renouncing the Academic Bill of Rights movement that threatened several important components of academic freedom; creating an ongoing and rotating showcase of faculty professional accomplishments; the development of Ammermania; advocating for the repair of stairs and sidewalks outside of buildings; improving traffic safety on internal roads; and making information about and process for conference reimbursement more effective and efficient.

In short, the Senate takes up issues relevant to the life of the faculty, the campus, and the College. Curriculum and standards are the issues about which we are continuously and fastidiously focused. In addition to those (excepting issues regarding salary, promotion, and tenure, which are contractual and come under the purview of the Faculty Association) there is little that cannot become a legitimate issue for the faculty to consider and issue a recommendation for the consideration of the administration.

**How we do what we do**

There are two principle ways the Senate exerts influence at the College: by having Senators participate on campus and college committees that shape college policies, and by passing resolutions. Senators, for example, are on many committees that include Campus and College Deans, as well as Vice Presidents and even the President. By reflecting the voice, commitments, and sympathies of the Senate, the Senators on these bodies help shape policies that govern us all at the College.

Resolutions from the committees are formal statements that are voted on and
accepted by the Senate as a whole. Collectively these are the public word of the body. The influence of these resolutions varies. In some cases, they are exhortative and advisory. We hope and expect that the President, the Administration, and the Board of Trustees take into serious consideration our determinations as they decide policies that govern us. The only resolutions that are directly and immediately binding are those that are related to the work of the Senate itself (for example, our bylaws and constitutional amendments). In between the strength of these two sorts of resolution is that which, relating to curriculum and academic standards, the administration pays very close attention. In the great majority of cases of this sort, the determination of our resolutions is eventually implemented by the administration.

COMMITTEES:

There are many different campus and college committees that have at least one Senator:

**Senate standing committees** (permanent committees that exist in our constitution):

- Campus Curriculum Committee (8 members)
- Ways & Means Committee (7 members)
- Quality of Life Committee (11 members)
- Academic Affairs Committee (9 members)
- Student Liaison Committee (13 members)
- Campus Relations Committee (11 members)
- College Computing Council (9 members)
- Executive Committee (13 members)

You might notice that the total number of members of these committees is larger than the total number of Ammerman Senators, which is 38. This is because some committees have senators, representatives, and “ex officio” members. Ex officio means that they are on the committee by virtue of the position they occupy in the College that makes them relevant for that committee. For example, the
Director of Plant Operations is on the Quality of Life Committee, which is concerned with (among other things) the physical condition of the Campus. Ex officio members are advisory and non-voting members of the Committee.

The Executive Committee is different from the others in that its members are the chairs of the other committees, plus the Vice President, Secretary, and one Ad Hoc member. This committee is the principle advisory committee for the President of the Senate, and among other things, determines Senatorial appointments to committees.

*Senate ad hoc committees* (temporary committees created to address one or more issues, and that may either be dissolved upon resolving the issue or converted to a standing committee):

- Ad-hoc Technology Committee

*College-wide governance committees* (permanent committees that deal with issues and policies which impact all three campuses and that have members from all three bodies – Ammerman Senate, East Congress, and Grant Assembly):

- College Curriculum
- Academic Standards Committee
- College Governance Council

*College-wide non-governance committees* that have at least one member of the Senate. Among these are:

- Distance Education Committee
- Class Enrollment Committee
- College Computing Council Planning Subcommittee
- Strategic Planning Council
- Commencement Committee
Democratic principles of governance

As a Senator, you must not be merely a spectator. This isn’t the place for someone who sits on the sidelines waiting to be chosen. Just as democracy works best for communities whose members take an interest in how they are collectively governed, so the Senate works best (most wisely and most effectively) when the insights and concerns of all faculty (i.e. those the Senate represents) are sought.

This idea of deliberative democracy provides an illuminating ideal that democratic institutions strive for. According to this view, democracy isn’t merely a structure for electing people into offices where they enact policies that guide the community. Rather, a genuinely democratic community is deeper and broader than any political mechanism. In deliberative democratic communities, every stakeholder is an informed, thoughtful, critical, engaged agent, taken up with influencing the process and product of self-government.

To break that down: In deliberative democratic communities everyone is involved, or at least no one is ignored. To be an effective participant, it is essential to be informed about the facts on the ground and the issues of concern. For example, procedures and policy making must be transparent to the community. In addition, each person should be vigilant, anticipating how their actions might impact others, and how the actions of others (both inside and outside their immediate community) might impact them. Citizens can, of course, ignore the processes and policies by which they are governed, but doing so is unwise for their own long-term interest, and a threat, when widespread, to the health of the democratic community. According to these principles of deliberative democracy, those responsible for the health of the institutions that govern the community are in a singularly responsible position to ensure that everyone is encouraged to participate in their own governance, and that no voice is ignored, no idea squelched for being inconvenient.

All this may sound nice, but it’s neither simple nor easy to live out effectively. Here are some principles that flow from this ideal of deliberative democracy, as
they are implemented here on campus.

The Senate should endeavor:

- to embody democratic principles more deeply in our own governance;
- to promote democratic engagement on campus;
- to illustrate for students what it means to become a democratic community;
- to encourage multiple perspectives;
- to provide an appropriate venue and structure for managing conflicting opinion;
- to create conditions conducive to informed, reflective discussion, inclusive and respectful dialogue;
- to better inform individual faculty members regarding governance issues and decisions;
- to solicit ideas from faculty members about issues that concern them as members of the college community, and which they would like to see the Senate address;
- to increase faculty engagement and participation in the governance deliberative process.

**How to be an effective Senator**

*Communication*

The Senator is the center of communication between his/her department and the Senate. This is a two way street; it requires communication to the department about what's going on in the Senate, and it requires communicating concerns and ideas from departmental faculty back to the Senate. Depending on which department you represent, this can be a challenge.

What's less obvious is *how* to be an effective center of communication, and this depends significantly on the department that you represent. Does your
department have four or forty-five faculty members? Does the Academic Chair hold regular meetings? Does the Chair regularly include Governance issues as an item on the agenda? What is the mood of departmental meetings? Do members want to clear out ASAP and so ignore any presentation that doesn’t directly and immediately impact them? Or are they open to discussions that concern issues that affect the college and not just their own department?

Your challenge is to determine effective ways to inform departmental members about the projects and issues that the Senate is taking up, and to fish out their constructive ideas, criticisms, complaints, and visions. If there is no space on the agenda or in the mood of the department for fruitful discussion of Governance issues, then you’ll need to be creative in your communication task. Here are some suggestions for communicating with members of your department:

**Departmental meetings**: Draft a brief handout, with bulleted items of the Senate. Be sure to ask for feedback – encourage colleagues to raise issues they would like their Governance body to take up, research, advocate for, etc.

**Ad hoc meetings called by you**: Your Chair is not the only one who may request a departmental gathering.

**Email announcements**:  
- that the Senate has met and that you’d like to update them and get their feedback;  
- with a summary of issues being taken up by the Senate, and with request for faculty input and suggestions.  

**Informal gatherings**: This could be a very good way to get ideas from them, but is typically unreliable for regular communication with the entire department.

**Purposeful, individual visits**: Even if you have departmental meetings, not everyone will be able to attend. Seek out those with whom you haven’t been able to communicate in more formal ways.

**Seek input from those less vocal**: If it’s true and important that the Senate
works most wisely and most effectively when the insights and concerns of all fac-
ulty (i.e. those the Senate represents) are sought, then it ought to be part of our
Senate culture and Senatorial communicative practice to actively seek out the
opinions of all our faculty colleagues.

There are many reasons why faculty members might not contribute actively to
conversations over important governance issues. Some may be introverted; oth-
ers might have opinions that would not be well received by others in the depart-
ment. But those ideas are important; progress often comes from the unexpected
and unorthodox voices and we cannot afford to be inattentive to them, or allow
them to be lost in silence. Engage the unengaged! Dissenting and minority opin-
ions should not merely be permitted, but solicited and encouraged.

Familiarity With the Ways of the Senate
Being a new Senator can be intimidating. With its numerous committees and
functional roles, it is a complicated body. It takes effort and time to learn how
things work. There are two main ways to learn how things get done: first, ask
questions of people who have been here a while, and second, study the Gover-
nance website. The Governance website contains the Senatate’s official docu-
mentation. Among the important documents you will find there are the minutes
of past Senate meetings, the Constitution and by-laws, the memberships of the
committees, and the curriculum proposals that you will have to read and vote on
in Senate meetings. In addition, you will find there the (downloadable) docu-
ments that faculty members need in order to propose new courses.

Committee Participation
Senate success is directly linked to the work of the Committees; this is where the
heavy lifting takes place. Committee chairs spend a lot of time setting the agen-
da, preparing resources, organizing membership, and coordinating with rele-
vant constituencies. It’s disappointing to be part of a committee (not to mention
chairing one) in which colleagues do not show up or are disengaged. So come to
your committee meetings prepared. If you have committed to do some research
or other preparation, have it completed so as to report your findings and progress
to the chair and the rest of the committee. Being engaged also means that you pay attention to everything that goes on, contributing with critical questions or suggestions. You are standing-in for a variety of constituencies and you should try to adopt their concerns (as best you can) as you work on whatever topic or project at hand.

**Voting**

As mentioned above, the passing of resolutions is a central activity of the Senate. It is through resolutions that we as a campus faculty speak to the administration, the Board of Trustees, SUNY, and the students regarding issues we are concerned about. Resolutions are crafted within the Committees, and when approved by committee members are then brought to the floor of the Senate. Resolutions are shared with Senators (they are posted on the Governance website, and all Senators are notified by email) before the Senate meetings in which they are voted on, and it is expected that every Senator reads them, gives them consideration, and when appropriate, seeks counsel from their departments. This is one of the principle products of Senatorial deliberation. By the time a resolution is passed, it would have gone through several rounds of critical reflection. First, when the resolution is curricular, it has gone through the department, then through the Executive Dean, then to the Campus Curriculum Committee, then to the Senate. More often than not, by the time the curricular resolution gets to the Senate, it has been refined into a form that is acceptable to all stakeholders, but it sometime happens that Senators detect some conflict or absence that requires the item to return for further refinement by the department. Therefore one of the main functions of the Senator is to vote on resolutions after due diligence – vigilantly asking questions about how the resolution would affect his/her department or area, or some other constituency.

**Leadership**

Your participation, not just presence, is essential for being an effective Senator. As you gain experience with the processes and procedures of the Senate, however, it is likely that you will find yourself taking our charges to heart. The issues that we take up, research, and deliberate about, significantly impact the lives
of our students, faculty, and administrators. We hope that the work itself encourages you to pursue leadership roles. Do you have an interest and expertise in classroom technologies or computer policies? Why not offer to chair the Campus Computing Committee? Perhaps you enjoy working with students in clubs, or other non-curricular activities; consider being the chair of the Student Liaison Committee. Such leadership roles are a superb way of coming to understand how the College really works, which often translates into being a better advocate for the people you represent. Don’t forget that leadership and commitment are important when we are being considered for promotion.

Our role in helping to chart the waters

It is a crucial component of the College’s commitment to excellence that we deliberate not just about the efficiency and effectiveness of our work, but of the adequacy of our vision and our mission. Our accreditation as an institution of higher education and our standing within SUNY require ongoing self-reflection on the mission and vision of the College. It makes sense that faculty governance also engage in this important but sometimes neglected process of reflection on the aims and vision of the College.

- It is appropriate, then, that Senators provoke colleagues to think about the state and the direction of the campus and the College.
- Do you find persistent but under-recognized problems at the College?
- Are there barriers to instruction or to student learning or to professional development and growth?
- Are there things that are not yet significant problems but that you
foresee becoming problems if they are not prevented?

- Are there problems that are new and significant and that are not being adequately addressed or even acknowledged by a. faculty members, b. students, or c. administration?

- Are there ways that the College and/or Campus can change things to improve things that are merely functional?

- Are there ways in which the college is failing the community at large?

- Is our College responding appropriately given all the changes in higher education? Is our role in determining College policy in the face of certain and significant changes adequate?

- Is our role in our local and larger culture changing? If so, are we adequately responding to the needs of the communities we serve, or do you think we are not yet addressing issues we should, or not doing so with as great a force as we ought?

- Is the role of Governance within the College appropriate?

- Is our relationship with the Administration what we want?

- Because we always ought to be subject to the same open, searching, and truthful scrutiny as any body, are we living up to our charge?

- What business does our everyday business fail to address adequately?

- What about what we do can be done better, and how do we improve the way we go about things?