

University Senate Evaluation Committee Report

March 2024

Members:

- Susan Dillmuth-Miller, chair
- Margaret Ball
- Robert Cohen
- Johan Eliasson
- Brian Akonu, SGA president

An evaluation of the Senate is to be conducted every 5-7 years per Section 5.6.1i of the University Senate Constitution. At the September 2022 meeting of the University Senate, the Senate moved forward with organizing an ad hoc University Senate Evaluation Committee for the purpose of conducting an evaluation and assessment of the University Senate.

The ad hoc committee met five times from September through November 2022 to develop a plan for assessment. They developed a survey, which was distributed in February 2023. Thereafter, the committee met to review survey results and plan a University Senate presentation.

To prepare the evaluation, committee members reviewed the 2007 and 2016 University Senate Evaluations, researched other PASSHE (Pennsylvania s State System of Higher Education) institutions to learn about other university governance structures, reviewed our current constitution and by-laws, and developed a survey to assess the effectiveness and perceptions of the University Senate.

The committee's goal was to complete the evaluation and assessment by the end of the academic year. The results were reviewed and discussed with the University Senate at the April 2023 meeting.

Review of the 2007 and 2016 University Senate Evaluations

The 2007 University Senate Evaluation committee gathered data by meeting with 12 different campus groups. They received written feedback and took notes from the campus group discussion. They categorized the issues and made future recommendations. The following issues were discussed:

1. Shared governance, open discussion in an “atmosphere free from the threat of retribution.” From this discussion, the committee recommended periodic affirmation of an open discussion, a permanent Senate orientation committee to discuss topics of public debate, Robert’s Rules of Order, responsibilities, purpose and function of the University Senate; and an open discussion on how shared governance is defined on our campus.
2. University Senate Business: Purpose and the full range of issues that should be coming before the Senate, the University Senate President as the presiding officer, a budget to support the

operation of the University Senate, the University President to serve as ex-officio, non-voting member, the definition of a quorum, standing committees, and attendance.

3. Visibility and Communication: Many individuals outside of the University Senate were not aware of the issues being discussed. Recommendations included disseminating an annual report summarizing the activities of the University senate, and student newspaper coverage.

The 2016 University Senate Evaluation gathered data by issuing a survey and determined that the University Senate “was not functioning efficiently as a deliberative body to express the collective views of the faculty, staff, students, and administrators.” Recommendations from the analysis focused on constitutional and bylaw changes that would improve efficiency. These proposed changes included senate committee membership selection, timing of the senate elections, officer duty clarification, revisions to the university senate evaluation committee, executive committee timelines, manner to propose constitutional changes, and clarification of non-senators' status on standing committees. Changes were made to the constitution to address these areas.

Review of other PASSHE University Senates

The University Senate Evaluation Committee investigated the PASSHE schools regarding their governing structure. We found wide variations in University Senates. Some universities such as Cheney and Edinboro were like ours, serving as a recommending body to the president, while other University Senates, such as Kutztown's, oversaw all committees and reviewed all academic policies and procedures that impact their university. Other PASSHE schools included various combinations of faculty, staff, students, union representatives, and administration making up their University Senates.

Review of the Constitution and By-Laws

The University Senate Evaluation Committee reviewed the constitution and by-laws to determine if there were any areas that needed revision or clarification. The following recommendations are made:

1. Consider requiring each senator to serve on a Senate committee.
2. Define procedures for when a University Senator has an extended absence (i.e., temporary leave/sabbatical)

Survey

The University Senate Evaluation Committee developed a survey to distribute across campus to include input from University Senators and non-senators. Please see Appendix A for the survey questions. The survey was distributed via a hyperlink. University Senators took the survey during a Senate meeting and were then asked to encourage their representative areas to take the survey. The survey was also announced via campus email and Warrior Notes. The following timeline was agreed upon.

Nov 28: Finalize survey

Jan 23: Survey to be presented to university community via college meetings

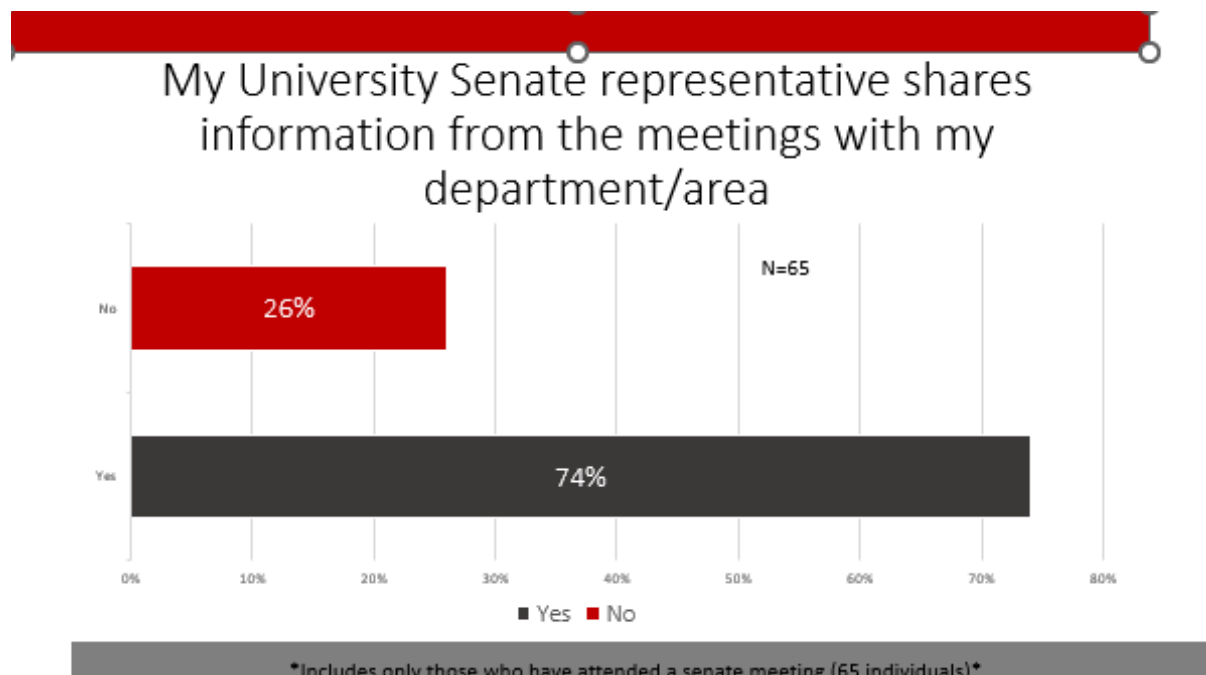
Feb. 6: Survey taken during Senate meeting (survey thereafter distributed to the campus community).

Feb 28: Survey closes

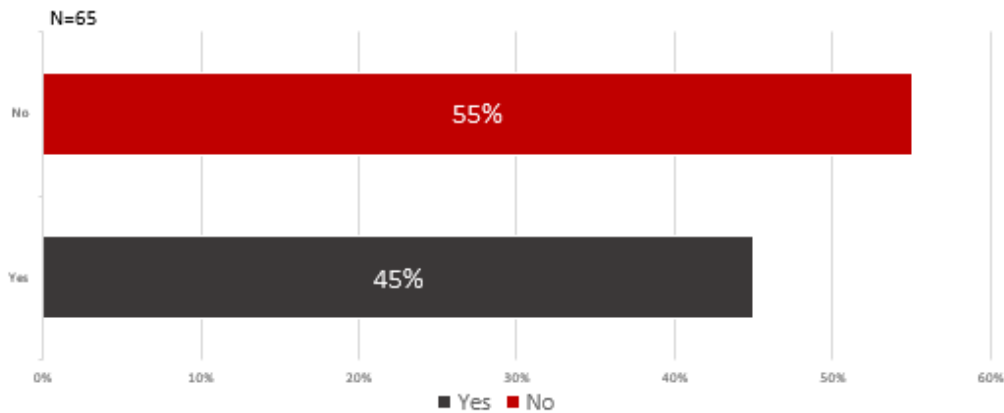
April 3: Results presented to the Senate

Results

A total of 144 people responded to the survey. We decided to only include those respondents who indicated they have attended at least one meeting. From the comments, we could see that respondents confused the University Senate with the Student Government Association (SGA) or were unfamiliar with the University Senate.

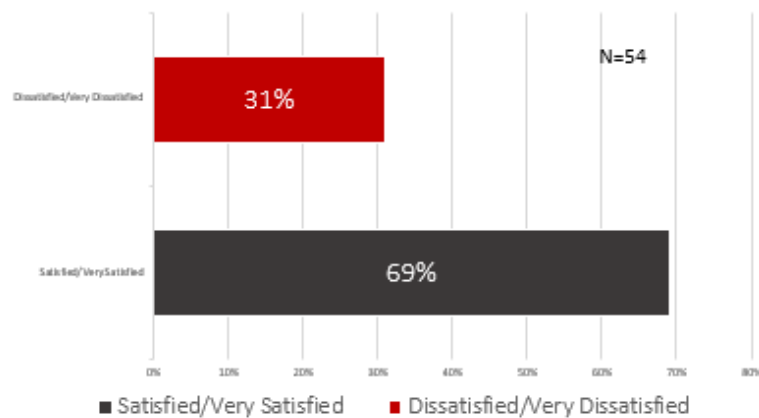


I have suggested agenda items to the University Senate within the past 5 years.



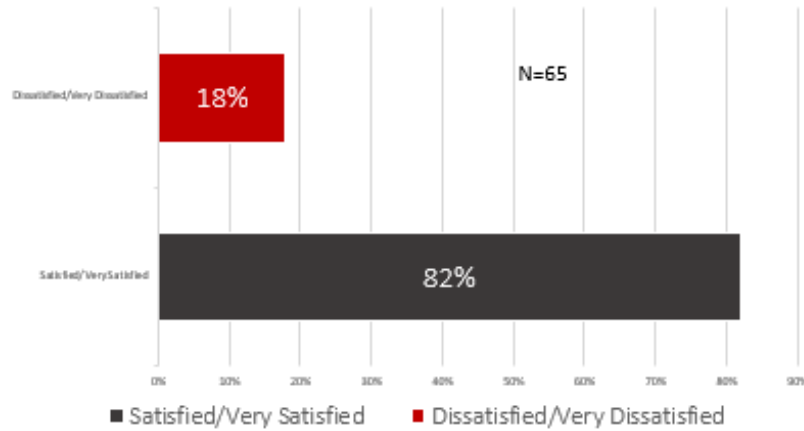
Includes only those who have attended a senate meeting (65 individuals)

How satisfied are you with the performance of the University Senate? ("no opinion" not included)



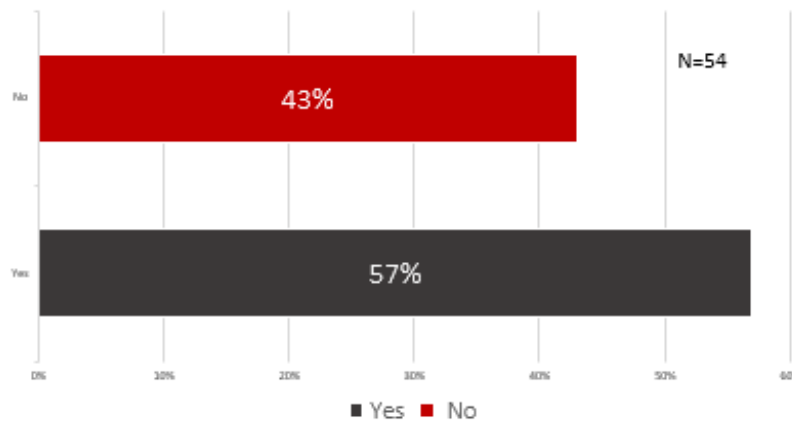
Includes only those who have attended a senate meeting

How satisfied are you the by way meetings are conducted? (“no opinion” not included)



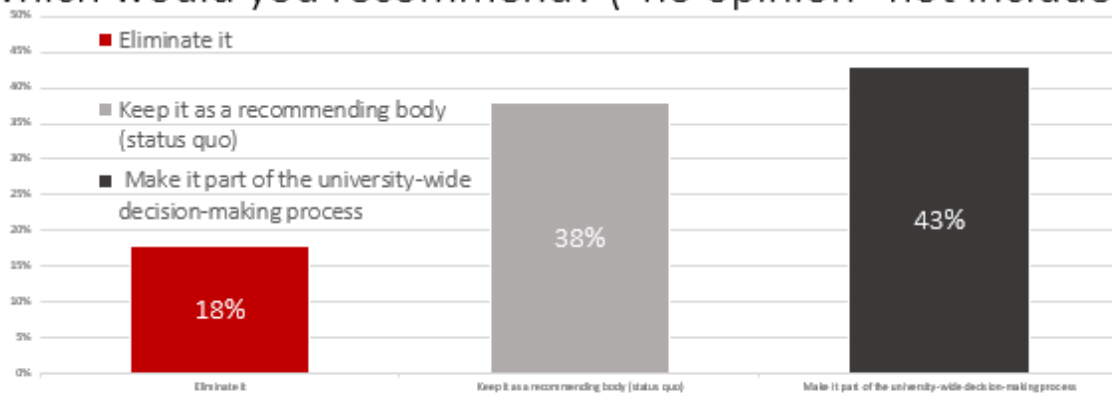
Includes only those who have attended a senate meeting

Is the University Senate serving as a university-wide representative voice? (“no opinion” not included)



Includes only those who have attended a senate meeting

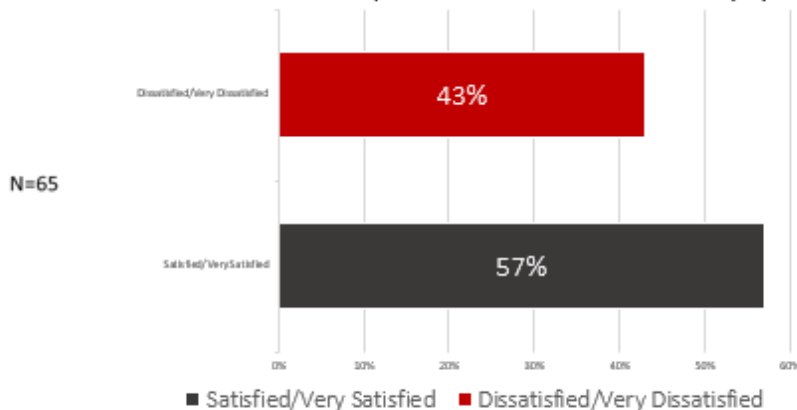
Prior University Senate evaluations have recommended changes. Considering the future of the University Senate, which would you recommend? ("no opinion" not included)



Includes only those who have attended a senate meeting

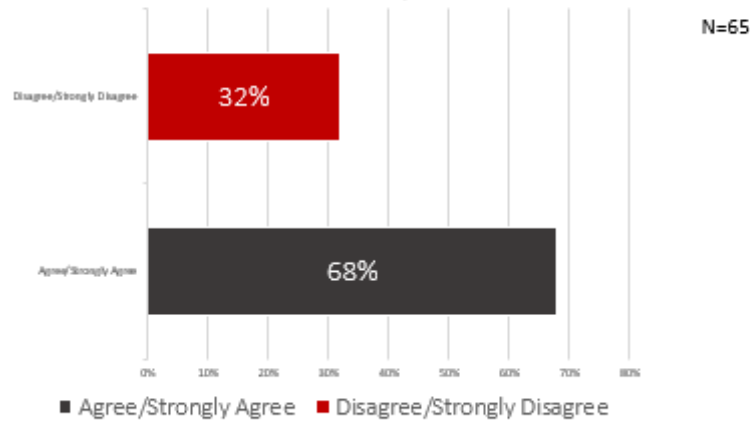
N=60

How satisfied are you with the University Senate's effectiveness as a recommending body with potentially actionable items, such as university policy?



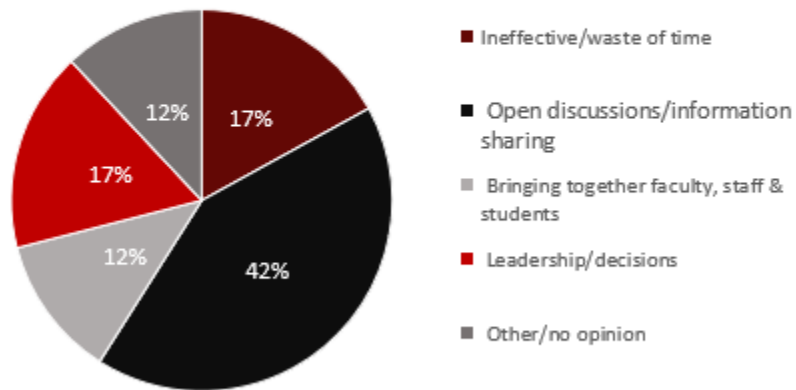
Includes only those who have attended a senate meeting (65 individuals)

I feel the University Senate encourages open discussion free from the threat of retribution (“no opinion” not included)



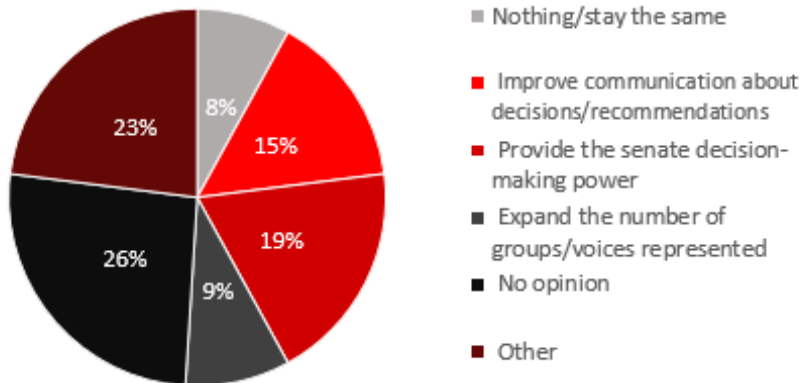
Includes only those who have attended a senate meeting

What is the University Senate doing well? What do you think is the most important outcome of the University Senate thus far? N=65



Includes only those who have attended a senate meeting

What do you see as areas of improvement? What do you suggest the University Senate do differently? N=65



Includes only those who have attended a senate meeting

Comments:

The University Senate is a recommending body to the University President. The University President must give full consideration to any proposals passed by the University Senate, and it is incumbent on the University President to communicate to the University Senate the rationale for rejecting or modifying University Senate proposals. The strength of the University Senate is bringing together faculty, staff, and students in one place for open discussion and information sharing. However, some expressed that information sharing can happen at another meeting and that few actionable items result from the University Senate.

The University Senate does not receive many agenda items from faculty, administrators, or students which is one explanation for the lack of actionable items. Administrators shared that working through University Senate proposals is a lengthy process with proposals often referred to committees, so they choose other avenues that are preferable for timely decisions. A lack of visibility was a general theme throughout the survey that could contribute to this problem. Non-senators were not aware of the presence or function of the University Senate so were not aware that they could bring agenda items forward through their University Senators.

The University Senate does not seem to be functioning to its full potential of operating as a recommending body. A majority (57%) feel the University Senate is serving as a university-wide representative voice while 43% do not. There was no strong consensus to either increase or decrease the university's presence or decision-making power, though 61% desire change. Forty-three percent desire to increase university-wide decision making (43%), or eliminate it (18%), while 38% desire to keep

the University Senate as a recommending body. Almost a third (32%) disagreed that the University Senate encourages open discussion.

Regarding the operation of the meetings, 82% percent said they are satisfied with the way meetings are conducted. Comments included liking the convenience of videoconferencing, but suggested cameras should be required for better engagement. Robert's Rules of Order seems to be serving the Senate well for such a large group. Some wanted more instruction on Robert's Rules.

Suggested areas of improvement included increasing agenda items and proposals, improving communication about decision/recommendations, and providing the University Senate with decision-making power. Less than half of the University Senators have brought forth an agenda item and some comments relayed confusion regarding procedures to do so. At this time, recommendations will focus on increasing visibility, engagement, and efficiency, similar themes noted from the 2007 evaluation report.

Recommendations:

1. Improve visibility
 - a. Add a link to the University Senate webpage to increase visibility.
 - b. Reference University Senate at employee orientation, All-University meetings, and college meetings.
 - c. Rebranding of the University Senate.
2. Improve information flow to University Senators/streamline the process from proposal to vote
 - a. Proposals should include pros and cons before the meeting so that membership can discuss the material with their constituents.
 - b. Invite people relevant to the discussion to University Senate meetings.
 - c. Encourage University Senators to regularly communicate and gather feedback on issues from their constituents.
3. Increase University Senate Engagement
 - a. University Senators have voted to continue holding meetings over Zoom for efficiency and increased consistency in attendance. Senators should have their cameras on and should be present during the meeting and not attend to other obligations during the meeting.
 - b. Add a suggestion box.
 - c. The following should be periodically reviewed with the University Senators: Robert's Rules of Order, allowed areas of engagement, procedure to bring agenda items forward.
 - d. Constitutional proposals regarding committee participation requirements and for sending a designee for absences.
 - e. Discussion on shared governance.
 - f. University Senate leadership to encourage open discussion.

Appendix A: University Senate Survey

The survey will run from February 7th - February 24th.

The survey is offered to all faculty, students, and staff.

Survey of the ESU (East Stroudsburg University) University Senate 2023

We invite all administration, faculty, staff, and students to take the following short survey assessing the University Senate.

The University Senate functions as a deliberative body to express the collective views of faculty, staff, students, and administrators.

The survey was created by the University Senate Evaluation Committee who is charged with the evaluation and assessment of the University Senate's performance and function.

Taking the survey is voluntary, and your participation is anonymous.

We encourage you to participate. The survey results will shape any discussion on changes to how the University Senate operates.

1. I have attended a University Senate meeting in the last 5 years.

1. Yes

2. No

2. My University Senate representative shares information from the meetings with my department/area.

1. Yes

2. No

3. I have suggested agenda items to the University Senate within the past 5 years.

1. Yes

2. No

4. How satisfied are you with the performance of the University Senate?

1. Very Satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Dissatisfied
4. Very Dissatisfied
5. No Opinion

5. How satisfied are you with the way University Senate meetings are conducted?

1. Very Satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Dissatisfied
4. Very Dissatisfied
5. N/A

(Box for comments)

6. Is the University Senate serving as a university-wide representative voice?

1. Yes
2. No
3. No Opinion

7. Prior University Senate evaluations have recommended changes. Considering the future of the University Senate, which would you recommend? Feel free to comment.

1. Make the University Senate part of the university-wide decision-making process
2. Keep the University Senate as a recommending body (continue the status quo)
3. Eliminate the University Senate
4. No opinion

(Box for comments)

8. How satisfied are you with the University Senate's effectiveness as a recommending body with potentially actionable items such as university policy?
 1. Very Satisfied
 2. Satisfied
 3. Dissatisfied
 4. Very Dissatisfied
 5. No Opinion
 6. I feel the University Senate encourages open discussion free from the threat of retribution.

9. I feel the University Senate encourages open discussion free from the threat of retribution.
 1. Strongly Agree
 2. Agree
 3. Disagree
 4. Strongly Disagree
 5. No opinion

10. What is the University Senate doing well? What do you think is the most important outcome of the University Senate thus far?
 1. (Open ended)

11. What do you see as areas of improvement? What do you suggest the University Senate do differently?
 1. (Open ended)