Student Senate Starter Guide

Last Updated on August 17, 2023

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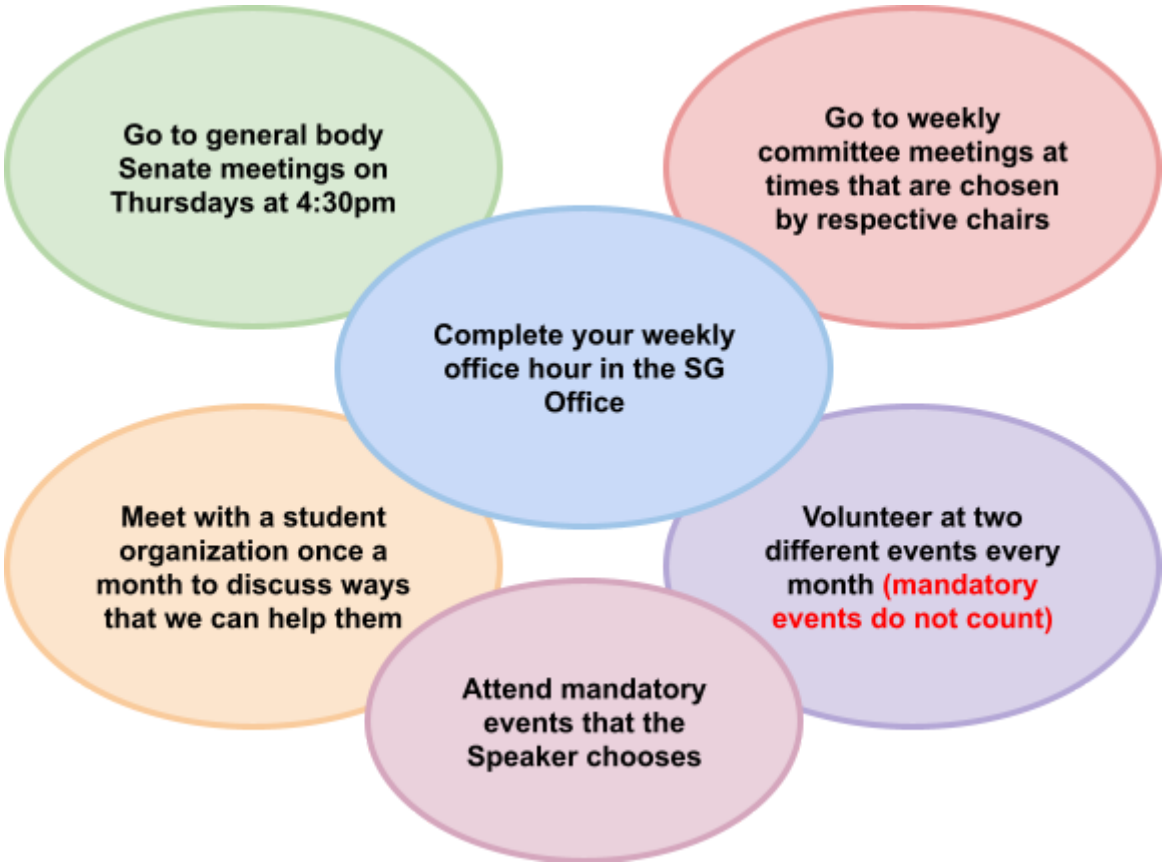
PREFACE

This is an abbreviated guide to the basics of Student Government, and does not include all the procedures of the organization. For more information, please consider consulting the Code of Student Governance, the Student Body Constitution, the Rules of the Student Senate, and/or the Legislative Drafting Manual of the Student Senate.

This version of the guide is up to date as of August 17, 2023.

COMMITMENTS



As a Student Senator, you need to…

Attend the weekly general body meetings. If you have to miss just one, inform both the Speaker and the Speaker Pro-Tempore. However, if it becomes a habit, you may not be excused and instead be given a strike.

Attend the weekly committee meetings. These are held at times that are chosen by chairs for each committee. You must declare for at least two. If you cannot make two, then contact the Speaker and the Speaker Pro Tempore.

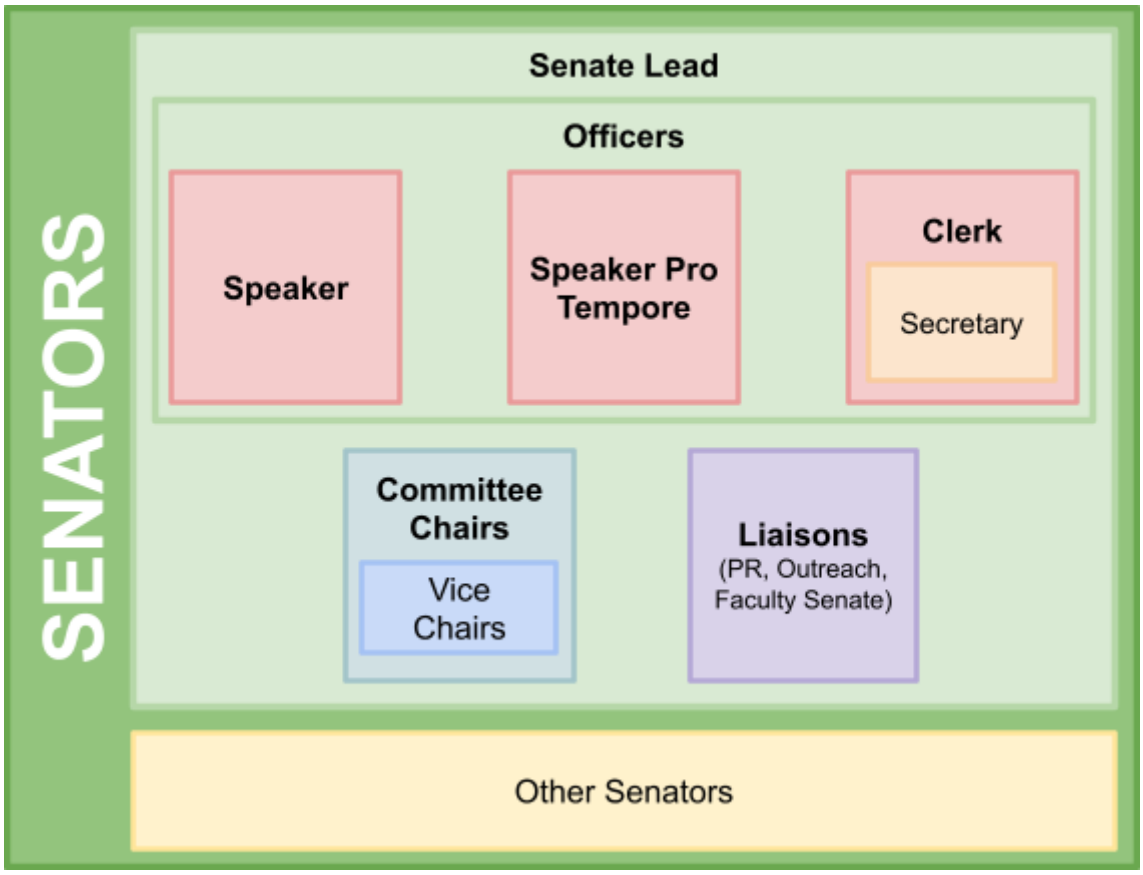
Complete your weekly office hour. Document this in the sheet found in the office.

Complete your monthly outreach. Meet with RSOs and check if they are doing well. Find ways that we can help them as an organization or as individuals.

Volunteer at two events. These can be SG events or non-SG events. Mandatory events (chosen by the Speaker) do not fulfill this requirement.

Attend mandatory events. These are chosen by the Speaker. Excuses are handled by the Speaker Pro Tempore.

SENATE STRUCTURE



Lead consists of…

Speaker: In charge of keeping the Senate running smoothly, especially during the Thursday meetings.
Speaker Pro Tempore: Assists the Speaker in keeping the Senate running smoothly.
Clerk: Manages and processes all the documentation for the Senate.
Secretary: Assists the Clerk in their duties. Usually writes minutes for General Body meetings.

There are also…

Chairs: Lead committees and their weekly meetings.
Vice Chairs: Assist Chairs in leading committees. Usually write minutes for the meetings.
Liaisons: Connects the Senate with the PR department in Exec., with RSOs, and with the Faculty Senate

And of course, all other Senators!

ROBERT'S RULES BASICS

Student Senate meetings operate on a modified version of meeting rules known as Robert's Rules. Below are some of the motions that are used most commonly in Student Government.

Move to Previous Question
Use this in general body meetings to end discussion and go into a vote.

Point of Order
Use this to correct an error, such as a vote being counted wrong.

Point of Information
Use this to ask questions about the topic at hand, such as when an event is being held.

Point of Inquiry
Use this to ask questions about *procedure*.

Point of Personal Privilege
Use this to ask to leave the room or for things similar to having the lights turned off.

Move to Recess
Use this to call for a break for a specific amount of time.

Other Motions
Move to Limit Debate, Move to Amend, Move to Suspend the Rules, *and more…*

COMMITTEES

The Student Senate has six standing committees. Shortly after joining, you should commit to being a voting member for at least two. To do so, email the Speaker and CC the chair(s) of each committee that you plan on joining.

The Speaker may turn down your declaration, likely if a committee is already full.

Admin & Finance
Handles SG finance and some administrative matters, such as admitting new members to the Senate.

University Services
Interacts with campus operations such as parking, dining, housing, and more.

Diversity and Multicultural Affairs
Works with various offices and organizations to improve inclusivity within Mason.

University Life
Interacts with student involvement on campus, the Title IX office, and multiple well-being/safety offices.

Government and Community Relations
Connects student government with our local community, as well as local, state, and federal governments.

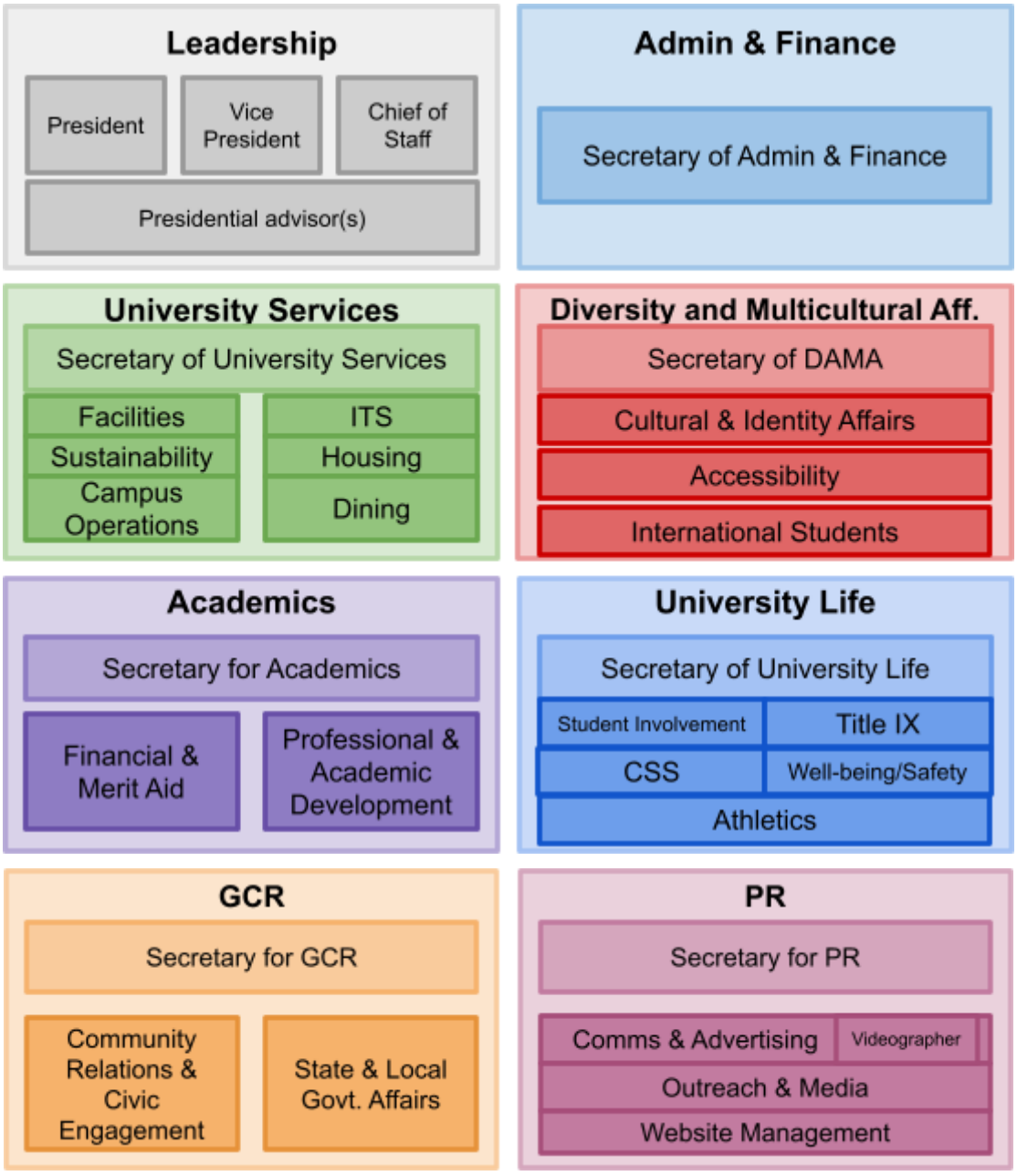
University Academics
Works with various offices on academics-related topics, such as tuition, class options, and more.

Senators may propose for there to be temporary committees (ad hoc committees) by writing a resolution that goes to the Administrative and Financial Affairs committee and one other chosen by the Speaker.

Senators may also propose for existing committees to be altered or for there to be more/less by writing bills that adjust the Code of Student Governance.

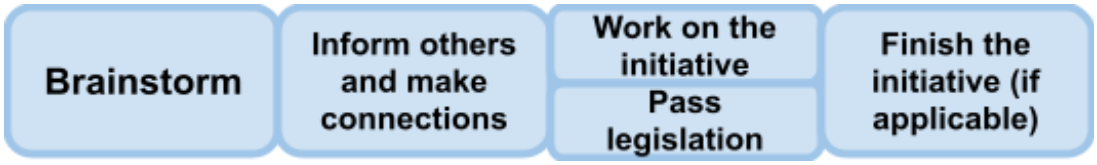
EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The executive branch consists of many Secretaries and Undersecretaries, as shown below. The only department in the Executive Branch that does not have a committee counterpart is the PR department.



INITIATIVE PROCESS

Not every initiative is the same, but they tend to follow the same structure as follows:



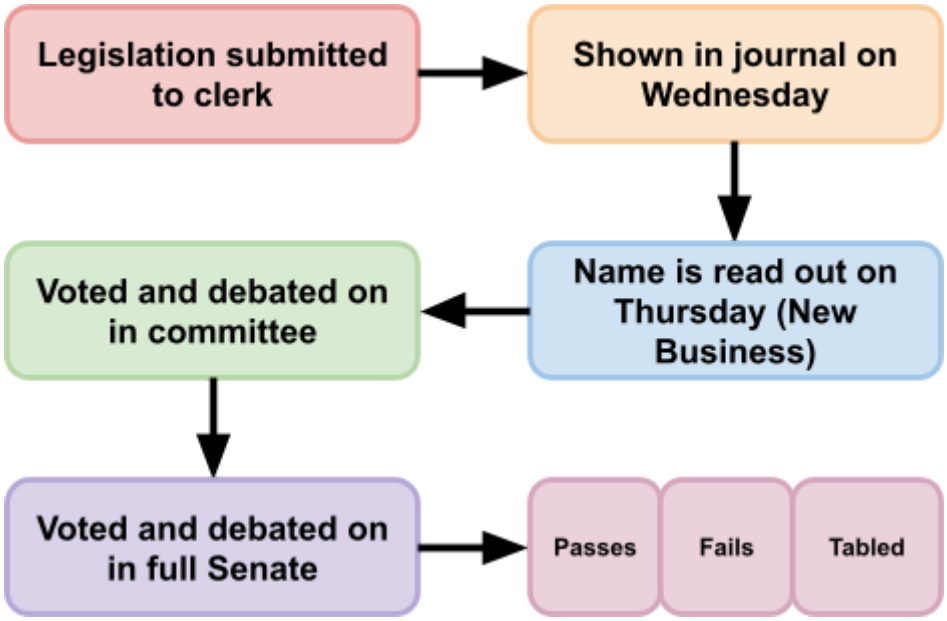
WILL THE INITIATIVE NEED A RESOLUTION?

NO IF…
It's internal SG work or communications
You're just reaching out to people to make connections, ask questions, or share concerns

YES IF…
You require all of SG's backing for the initiative (i.e. support for a farmer's market, a new safety measure for students on campus, official SG presence at an event, etc.)

UNSURE?
Ask around.

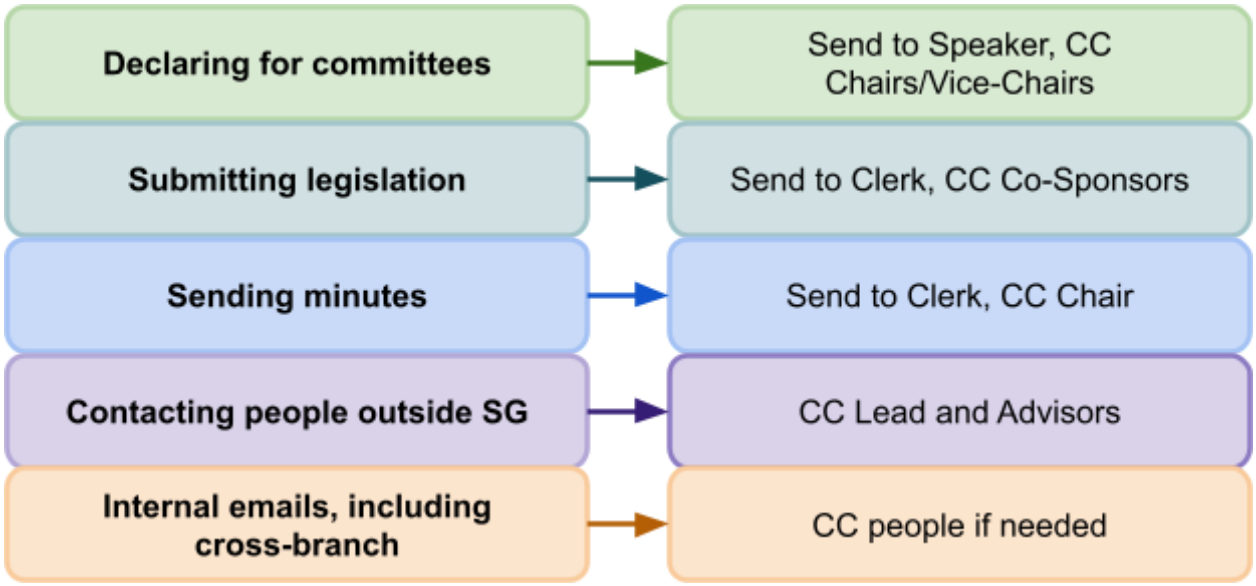
Below is a generalized timeline of legislation in the Senate. Note that discussion on legislation can be tabled either in committee or in the Senate, and that legislation can also be failed in committee.



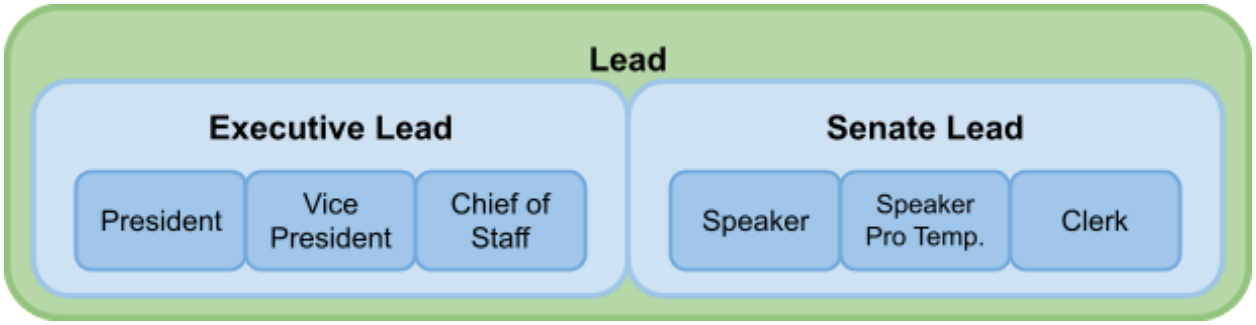
CC POLICY

It's important to keep people informed of what you are doing on the organization's behalf. The people that you should CC in emails depends on what you're doing, as shown below.

When in doubt, CC Lead and Advisors.



Email all of the following **PLUS THE ADVISORS** whenever you send emails to people outside SG:



MEETING AGENDAS

The Senate agenda is created by the Speaker and *usually* has the following format:

Introduction	**Call to Order –** Starting the meeting **Roll Call** **Approval of the Agenda –** Chance to make adjustments to the agenda **Approval of the Journal –** Chance to make adjustments to the journal
Reports	**Officers, Chairs, and Liaisons** each give their own reports
Presentation(s)	Sometimes (but not always) there's a **presentation** given in Senate
Business	**Old business** is legislation that is voted on **New business** is legislation voted on next week **Other business** consists of appointments to Cabinet, Parking Board, or new Senators
Conclusion	Anyone can give **announcements** before the meeting is **adjourned**

Committees operate with similar meeting agendas.

Resolutions vs. Bills

Resolutions Textual statements on behalf of the Student Senate	**Bills** **Code Bills** Changing the Code of Student Governance or other governing documents **Spending Bills** Spending SG budget
Goes through the relevant committee	Goes through the Admin & Finance committee