

University Senate - Senate Engagement Strategy Update

Background

At its April 2022 meeting, the University of Saskatchewan Senate approved a new “Senate Engagement Plan”, the purpose of which was to outline some clear steps to allow for the Senate to more fully participate in, and contribute to, core priorities of the university’s aspiration to be the University the World Needs.

The strategy outlined the following priorities and goals:

Key Priority Area #1: Build Meaningful and Mutually-Beneficial Engagement from a Clear and Inspiring Purpose

GOAL 1.1: Develop a strong foundation of role clarity and sense of purpose.

ACTION: Develop a purpose and vision statement for Senate through collaboration between Senate and its stakeholders.

ACTION: Using the purpose statement and the USask mission as a foundation, develop resources to guide Senators in fulfilling their role, including consideration of responsibilities, opportunities, boundaries, and expectations.

ACTION: Develop an onboarding plan for new Senate members, which includes mentorship from experienced member(s) and an in-depth orientation process.

GOAL 1.2: Position Senate as a champion and ally of equity, diversity, and inclusion and prioritize contributions to, and fulfilment of, the university’s EDI Strategy and Action Plan and our Indigenous strategy, ohpahotan oohpaahotaan: “Let’s fly up together.”

ACTION: Examine Senate composition and our conceptualization of ‘representation’.

ACTION: Prepare input on legislative changes (i.e., the University of Saskatchewan Act) to advocate for a more diverse and inclusive approach to Senate membership, to ensure representation and voice from our communities

GOAL 1.3: Enable meaningful contribution through strengthened relationships.

ACTION: Engage in a collaborative process of defining engagement and what it means for Senate, led by the Senate Engagement Plan Advisory Group.

ACTION: Examine and leverage aspects of meeting format and frequency that can enable greater interaction opportunities, small group work, and more in-depth discussions.

ACTION: Consider creating a dedicated “Senate Engagement Committee,” whose mandate would be to champion, support, and assist with the fulfillment of goals in the Senate Engagement Plan.

Key Priority Area #2: Co-Create Mission-Driven Engagement Opportunities that Support and Strengthen our Communities

GOAL 2.1: In partnership with USask colleges and units, and the Senate Engagement Committee (should one be constituted), collaboratively develop, promote, and implement Senate engagement activities.

ACTION: Create an inventory of current engagement opportunities and solicit additional ideas from Senators, university and college leadership, students, and other stakeholders.

ACTION: Develop and maintain a listing or “menu approach” of available discretionary engagement opportunities for Senators (e.g., ways to volunteer, matching on interests/expertise, focus groups on initiatives, providing advice on program development).

ACTION: Grow and foster engagement and connection through Senate-hosted events (e.g., campus BBQ, ‘meet the Senators,’ think tanks, Senate Forum), targeting two such events per year, resources permitting.

ACTION: Explore the use of creative platforms that can support ongoing dialogue, sharing of current information as relevant to Senate’s role and interests, and exchange of ideas.

Establishment of an Ad-Hoc Working Group

A small working group met in August to begin to tackle some of the actions outlined in the Strategy, in particular “developing a purpose and vision statement for Senate”. The committee notes are attached to this report and will be brought for discussion and feedback to the Senate-as-a-whole at the fall meeting.

Progress and Next Steps

A full report on progress will be part of a presentation at the fall Senate meeting. A particular item of note is the partnership that has been formed between the Governance Office and University Relations. In contemplation of the Senate Engagement Strategy it has become evident that there are effectively two important, but distinct, areas of engagement.

One portion of the Strategy focuses on Senators-as-governors and outlines actions on how the Senate, as a governing body of the university, can be best positioned to participate in the decision-making process. The other part of the Strategy focuses on Senators-as-community-members and outlines actions on ways to involve members in events and programs of the University.

This approach requires a partnership between two different offices of the university in order to enact: the Governance Office to support the statutory and decision-making role of Senate and University Relations to support the goals of Senate as the University's first connection with the community.

Conversations have taken place between the Offices which will result in Senators being contacted directly by staff in the University Relations unit to move this portion of the strategy forward.

Attachment:

1. Ad-Hoc Senate Engagement Working-Group Notes



Ad-Hoc Senate Engagement Working-Group Notes – Aug 2023

Theme	Comments that pointed to this theme
Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being able to ask questions - Voice being valued- and this showing up in practical sense eg. longer Q&A, say in agenda items, shorter presentations, Q&A directly after each report - Coming prepared to meetings having read package - Ability to have voice/contribution in university plans/matters -
Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relationship building/connection - Communication between senators - Messaging to alumni to get them involved in Senate - Communication about events throughout the year (incl. time/date/place to better engage people) - Newsletter communications = highly valued
Real experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentorship - Engagement with governance - Increase embedded experiences that better equip Senators to speak to their community (eg. art archives at USask) - Connection to districts through offering to hand out awards at graduations -
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get to be a “critical friend” for the university – that is, critical to the university’s direction and also critical OF the university’s direction - Be “in the know”/ have inside knowledge of the university - Use this knowledge to engage with community

Summary of Discussions Re: Draft Purpose/Vision Statement and Senate Engagement Definition

The Senate Engagement Plan stipulates that the Senate purpose statement should be:

- authentic, achievable, and aligned to the role (as defined or re-defined); it should highlight what Senate can be and is uniquely positioned to be and do

The below statements are based on the themes that arose from comments at the first meeting of the working group, regarding the role of Senate. These statements are just a starting point and the idea is to have the working-group edit and contribute and make changes to them before we bring them to the Senate meeting in October for further feedback.

Senate Purpose

The senate is the University's window on the province and the province's window on the university. This means that the purpose of the Senate is to provide valuable feedback and insights to both the University regarding the province, and to the province regarding the University, ultimately allowing for enhanced understanding, connection, and relationships between the University and the province.

Senate Engagement:

Engagement as it pertains to the University of Saskatchewan Senate is multifactorial and therefore the definition of 'Senate Engagement' needs to encompass all varieties of engagement including:

- Engagement of Senators with USask
- Engagement of Senators with their communities
- Engagement between Senators

Furthermore, engagement needs to have purpose and align with the USask mission, vision, values, and overall strategic direction.

Definition of Senate Engagement:

Senate engagement can be defined as authentic and meaningful connection, allowing for voice, feedback, and genuine communication between Senators and USask, between Senators and their communities, and between Senators themselves, with the purpose of contributing to and aligning with the USask mission, vision, values, and overall strategic direction, and allowing for the best possible fulfillment of USask's responsibilities to its Senate and its community, and Senator responsibilities to the University and to their communities.