

Report of the University Secretary and Chief Governance Officer

FOR INFORMATION

PRESENTED BY: Jordan Sherbino, Governance Officer

DATE OF MEETING: April 20, 2024

SUBJECT: **Senate Engagement Update**

SENATE ACTION: For information.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY:

The Senate Engagement Plan tasks the University of Saskatchewan with improving the role, functioning, and work of Senate as well as enabling meaningful connections between the university and the broader community through Senate. The Senate Engagement Plan articulates both specific recommendations and broad, aspirational principles to work toward these goals. Highlights of recent work in this area are outlined below.

Baseline Engagement

The Governance Office distributed a survey to all Senators to ascertain a baseline level of engagement and to determine if the work being undertaken in the area of engagement is on the right track. This survey will be replicated on an annual basis to create longitudinal data to see if the efforts of the Governance Office are having their desired effect or if a shift in approach is necessary.

Senate Elections

Tremendous effort has been taken to ensure the upcoming Senate elections are accessible to alumni without the need for voters to login to PAWS (USask's intranet and a software system that requires multi-factor authentication). Further work will be completed by the Governance Office after the elections are concluded to see what, if any, improvements are needed for future years.

Meeting and Reception Logistics

The Governance Office distributed a survey following the fall meeting to solicit feedback on such matters as parking, food, location, agenda flow, and engagement/education sessions. This feedback has been incorporated into the planning for this meeting of Senate, and future surveys of this nature will be taking place for further improvements.

Committee Support

The Governance Office has been working to provide the committees of Senate with more robust documentation to support their decision-making and to enable committee members to contribute more robustly to the conversations and deliberations. Thus far, this has been received positively and it is the intention of the Governance Office to continue with this practice.

Communications with Senators

The Governance Office has been working to communicate more effectively and consistently with Senate members to both provide them with timely information (meeting details, calls for committee work, requesting feedback on different facets of being a Senator, etc) and to provide additional opportunities to be involved in the life of the university outside the work of Senate.

FUTURE ACTIONS:

The following are next steps to be taken to work toward the goal of Senate engagement:

Purpose Statement for Senate and Definition of Senate Engagement

A revised version of the purpose statement for Senate and the definition of what Senate engagement means will be brought to the Executive Committee at their next meeting to determine what next steps might be. Thank you to all Senators who provided feedback on the drafts statements that were distributed previously.

Onboarding New Senators and Senator Resources

In May, Senators can expect to hear from the Governance Office with an opportunity to provide input on what they think the onboarding process should look like for new members and what resources and learning opportunities they think new (and existing) Senators should have. It is the intention to use this information to improve the onboarding process for the new Senators that begin on July 1.

Communications Plan

The Governance Office has been working with the Alumni Office to create opportunities to tell the story of Senate and of Senators throughout the year as opposed to solely when there's a call for nominations or an opportunity to vote in an election. We want the communications to tell stories about impact as opposed to being more legalistic in nature and just fulfilling the requirements of the *Senate Bylaws*.

Senate Engagement Committee

The Senate Engagement Plan says to "consider creating a Senate Engagement Committee," and the preliminary work in this area will begin shortly. As greater certainty develops in this project, the Governance Office will reach out to Senators with opportunities to get involved as they become available and will provide updates on this work.

Senate Portal

Work will begin to establish some sort of means for Senators to connect with one another and exchange contact information or to discuss issues of shared concern.

Senators as Ambassadors of USask

In addition to improving the governance side of the USask Senate, the Senate Engagement Plan also speaks to having Senators be more involved in the life of USask. The Governance Office has begun inviting Senators to various USask events and providing information on different university resources, but greater work will be happening to be more strategic and intentional about this work in a way that aligns with the interests of Senate.

Meeting Format and Frequency

Although not an immediate priority, the Senate Engagement Plan recommends to "examine and leverage aspects of meeting format and frequency that can enable greater interaction opportunities, small group work, and more in-depth discussions." Although this recommendation helped to inform the format of this Senate meeting with implementing small group discussions, other aspects of this recommendation have not been explored. This work can best commence after the work to envision and create a Senate Engagement Committee has progressed.