

Why volunteer as a faculty senator?

As the word “senate” would suggest, the UW Faculty Senate is the legislative arm of shared governance. All UW faculty from each of the three campuses (Seattle, Bothell, Tacoma) and the 18 schools that comprise the Seattle campus, are represented in this body. The School of Medicine is one of those and has the largest contingent, consisting of 40% of total senators.

The primary charge of the Faculty Senate is participatory creation of ‘shared governance’. The University of Washington is a creature of the state legislature. As such, the Board of Regents and the President ask the faculty to participate in shared governance. Shared governance is the business of the faculty organizing itself to accomplish the goals of this leading public academic institution of higher learning.

Senators from each school are elected based on the numbers of voting faculty within each school and department. Nominations are invited from faculty and department chairs. Senators are elected by the voting faculty within each department. The term lasts for two years, during which members participate in all activities of the Senate. The Secretary of the Faculty holds a new senator orientation (a can’t-miss event) outlining the role and responsibilities, including attending virtual Senate meetings, reviewing the agenda and attachments, and coming prepared with questions and concerns to discuss on the floor of the Senate. The UW president and provost are members of the Senate, provide comments at Senate meetings, and answer questions.

The role of faculty senator is purely as a volunteer and does not come with any additional time or support. But what it does come with, is the ability to participate in shared governance, help decide on matters related to faculty, and a chance at collaborative change making. Transparent and extensive deliberations on faculty-related topics bring insight into the vastness of faculty roles and responsibilities, as well as challenges and aspirations spanning multiple campus locations, schools, colleges, departments and divisions. The work of the Senate spans the entire arc of faculty hiring, ranks, promotions, compensation, benefits, grievances and discipline, state legislative representation, retention and retirement.

If you are a voting member of the UW faculty and have wondered about the meaning of your faculty citizenship and have a strong desire to represent faculty in these spaces and contribute to the governance of the huge enterprise that is the UW, please nominate yourself for the Faculty Senate! It’s a worthwhile endeavor that will allow you to contribute your ideas for improving the university and faculty working conditions. The Senate website (<https://www.washington.edu/faculty/senate>) is a great resource for more information.