



Parliamentary Procedure: Guidance for Officers & Elected Members of the University of Maine Faculty Senate

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Parliamentary Authority

Article VI, §5 of the [Faculty Senate Constitution](#) (hereafter “Constitution”) states that “Robert’s Rules of Order, as most recently revised, shall govern meetings of the Senate” In accordance with this section, the Newly Revised 12th Edition of Robert’s Rules is the sole parliamentary authority and is the primary reference for this guidance document. Where a particular rule or procedure is written in the Constitution and Bylaws, whether it contradicts or adds to the governing parliamentary law, that rule or procedure has been treated as supersessory.

Parliamentary Law (hereafter “the Law”) serves an important function in deliberative assemblies, including legislative bodies like the Faculty Senate at the University of Maine (hereafter “the Senate”). In addition to promoting efficiency, the Law encourages a pattern of formality that aids deliberation by facilitating dispassionate and impartial debate. One of the main principles underlying the Law is that all participants, whether they are in the minority or the majority, are entitled to certain rights and privileges as equal members of the assembly.¹ Proper awareness of, and adherence to, the Law safeguards these rights, builds trust in the Faculty Senate as an institution and leads to more active participation of the membership.

Suspending Rules

The Senate may suspend individual rules by a two-thirds vote of the members in attendance at any given meeting.² Given the manifold advantages and functions of parliamentary procedure, suspension should be reserved for the rare occasions when strict adherence to the rule(s) would serve to hinder, rather than facilitate, the assembly’s work.

¹ Henry Robert et al., *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 12th ed. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2020), xlix.

² Robert et al., *Robert’s Rules*, §2:21.

Example Meeting

The following example illustrates how a typical Senate meeting might be run. The example is outlined in rough chronological order, based on the history of past Senate agendas. Examples of rules governing common member actions appear throughout, with brief explanations about the reason for the rule where appropriate. Rules stated explicitly in the Constitution and Bylaws are referenced as such.

Quorum

[Article VI, §7 of the Constitution](#) states that quorum “shall consist of a majority of [the Senate’s] members.” In other words, quorum is met when a majority of the normally elected members (not substitutes) are in attendance. Without quorum, the meeting may not continue.³

Call to Order

Assuming there is a quorum, the President calls the meeting to order. The Secretary (or the administrative assistant if delegated) then notes the time the meeting was called to order.

Ex.

Madam President: *Having determined that there is a quorum, announces ... “The meeting will come to order.”*⁴

Secretary: *Notes that the meeting was called to order at 3:02pm.*

Order of Business

After the call to order, the meeting proceeds to the first item of business on the agenda, which, by custom, is the reading of the [land acknowledgement](#).⁵ [Article VI, §4 of the Constitution](#) states that the agenda will be determined by the President, the Vice President and the Secretary. In the Senate, this responsibility is normally undertaken in coordination with the Executive Committee, who assists in filling out the agenda document with committee reports, hyperlinks to forthcoming motions, supporting documents, etc.

³ Ibid., §40:6-10. When there is no quorum, the Senate may decide to adjourn, recess, reconvene at another time, or attempt to meet quorum through various actions.

⁴ Ibid., §3:15.

⁵ The Senate could formalize this custom by passing a Special Rule of Order or a Standing Rule, which may be printed together with the Constitution and Bylaws under a separate heading. See Robert et al., *Robert’s Rules*, §2:14-25.

The agenda is circulated to the Executive Committee one week in advance, then forwarded to individual members at least 24 hours prior to the regularly scheduled meeting.

All members have a constitutional right to add items to the agenda, but they must do so by submitting a written proposal to the President, Vice President or Secretary.⁶ After the call to order, nothing may be added to, subtracted from or rearranged on the agenda.⁷ In addition to the myriad other advantages of a binding agenda, this provision safeguards the mutual right to properly prepare for proposed actions before they are presented.

Land Acknowledgement

Ex.

Senator Smith: Reads the [land acknowledgement](#) aloud before the entire assembly.

Madam President: The President thanks the Senator and welcomes the assembly.

The meeting immediately proceeds to the next item of business, which, by custom, is the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting.

Approval of Minutes

Ex.

Madam President: “Is there a motion to approve the minutes from our previous open meeting on March 13?”

Senator Calhoun: “I move to approve the minutes.”

Senator Stewart: “Second!”

Madam President: “It has been moved and seconded that the Senate approve the minutes from the March 13 meeting. Is there any discussion?”

Senator Stewart: “Madam President, the secretary has misspelled my last name. It should be ‘S-T-E-W-A-R-T,’ not ‘S-T-U-A-R-T.’”

Madam President: “Thank you. The secretary will now correct the misspelling. Is there any further discussion?” *Pause.* “Seeing none, the Senate will now vote on the motion to approve the minutes as amended from the March 13 meeting. All those in favor, please

⁶ See [Article VI, §4](#) of the Faculty Senate Constitution. The Agenda Committee (composed of the three officers mentioned above) may refuse the member’s proposal, but not for more than 30 days.

⁷ The Constitution affords an exception to this rule, but only in the event of emergencies. Changes to the agenda require a two-thirds vote by those present. See also Robert et al., *Robert’s Rules*, §25:12.

raise your hand ... Lower hands. All opposed to the motion, please raise your hand ... The minutes are approved.”

By custom, the agenda normally proceeds to Questions of the Administration.

Questions of the Administration

Members of the upper administration are here invited to give updates on university business that has transpired since the previous meeting. Senators are then invited to ask questions of the administration—related or unrelated to the subjects about which the administration gave a report. By custom, “New Business” usually follows “Questions of the Administration.”⁸

New Business

According to [Article VI, §4 of the Constitution](#), the items to be considered under New Business are designated by the Agenda Committee, and as stated previously, any senator or committee that wishes to propose a motion or resolution at a given meeting may submit a written request to the Agenda Committee for approval. Proposals may be conveniently submitted through the [motion submission](#) form on the Senate website. Non-agenda proposals that arise during a meeting must either be postponed to the next meeting or referred to a committee, except in cases of emergency.

Ex.

Madam President: “The Senate will now consider new business.”

Senator Rivera: *Standing, Senator Rivera states, “Madam President.” He then waits to be recognized.*

Madam President: “The Chair recognizes Senator Rivera.”

Making a Motion

Senator Rivera: *Still standing, he begins, “Thank you, Madam President. In reference to the Environment Committee report that was distributed to the Senate at the Open Senate meeting last month, I move that the Senate **support extending the Maine Day festivities by one full day.**”*

⁸ This is a departure from *Robert’s Rules of Order*, which normally places “New Business” after all other items on the agenda (see Robert et al., §3:16). The Faculty Senate Constitution grants the authority of creating the agenda to the Agenda Committee (see Article VI, §4).

Senator Potham: *Senator Potham seconds the motion by stating, “Second!”*⁹

Stating the Question

Madam President: *“It has been moved and seconded that the Senate **support extending the Maine Day festivities by one full day.** The question is now open for debate.”*¹⁰

The floor automatically falls to the maker of the motion, should they choose to claim it.¹¹

Debate

Senator Rivera: *Still standing, the senator then briefly explains the reason for the motion, citing new student support as described in the Environment Committee report from the March 13 meeting.*

Senator Johnson: *Rising, states, “Madam President.” He waits to be recognized.*

Senator DiMarco: *Also rises and addresses the Chair.*

Madam President: *“The Chair recognizes Senator Johnson.”*

Senator Johnson: *Still standing, the Senator argues, “Madam President, I was on the committee that studied this exact same issue five years ago, and the committee concluded that extending the festivities would be inadvisable because ...”*

There is no rule in the Constitution or Bylaws that places a time limit on debate, nor does any rule restrict the amount of time an individual member may speak. The Faculty Senate may adopt an order limiting or extending the limits of debate for a particular meeting, motion, or subject,¹² or it may adopt a Special Rule that would apply to all meetings.¹³

After completing the history on the subject, the Senator says, “... I hope the Senate will consider this history and vote against the pending motion.” The senator sits down, officially yielding the floor.

⁹ Note that by seconding the motion, Senator Potham simply agrees that the motion should be debated or voted upon, not that he necessarily supports the motion. See Robert et al., *Robert’s Rules*, §4:11.

¹⁰ This step is called “stating the question,” and it officially places the motion before the assembly for consideration. See Robert et al., *Robert’s Rules*, §4:2 and §4:15.

¹¹ Robert et al., *Robert’s Rules*, §4:27.

¹² *Ibid.*, §15

¹³ *Ibid.*, §2:15-17.

Madam President: “The Chair thanks Senator Johnson and would now like to hear someone speak in favor of the motion.” *Seeing no one rise, the Chair asks,* “Would anyone like to speak in favor of the motion? Senator DiMarco?”

Senator DiMarco: “Madam President, I am in opposition to the pending question.”

Madam President: “Seeing as no one would like to speak in favor of the motion, the Chair recognizes Senator DiMarco.”

Subsidiary Motions

Senator DiMarco: “Thank you. Madam President, the maker of this motion should consider that the festivities are already a weeklong affair; Maine Day is part of Spirit Week. The Senate should also consider what it would accomplish to further extend the festivities—regardless of whether or not doing so would have student support ... Seeing as the motion is ill-conceived, **I move to table it** at this time.”

Madam President: “With respect for Senator DiMarco’s viewpoint, the Chair will not entertain a motion to table as there does not appear to be any emergency that would preclude the Senate from disposing of the pending motion here and now. As such, the subsidiary motion to *lay on the table* is not in order. Does the Senator wish to make a different motion?”

Senator DiMarco: “Excuse me, Madam President. I meant that **I move to postpone the motion indefinitely.**”

Madam President: “Is there a second?”

Senator Rousseau: “I’ll second that.”

Madam President: “It has been moved and seconded to **indefinitely postpone the main motion that the Senate support extending the Maine Day festivities by one full day.** Again, the question is on the motion to indefinitely postpone. Is there any debate?” *Seeing no one rise, the Chair asks,* “... Are you ready for the question?”¹⁴ *Pause.* “... Those in favor of indefinitely postponing the main motion, please raise your hand... Lower. Those against... Lower. The motion is lost. Once again, the question is whether to **support extending the Maine Day festivities by one full day.** Is there any further debate?”

¹⁴ Ibid., §4:34.

Senator Phillips: *Rising and obtaining the floor, the Senator says, “I move to refer the question to the Environment Committee for further study.”*

Senator Rousseau: “Second.”

Madam President: “It has been moved and seconded to refer the main motion to the Environment Committee for further study. Senator Phillips, you have the floor.”

Senator Phillips: *Still standing, “We all read in the Environment Committee’s report that there is some new evidence of student support for additional programming around Spirit Week / Maine Day, but we have not yet considered what this programming might look like ... I think a committee needs to study the pros and cons of various options and report back with recommendations or amendments to this.” The senator sits, yielding the floor.*

Putting the Question

Madam President: *After waiting a moment, and seeing no other senator rise to claim the floor, the Chair asks, “Are you ready for the question?” Seeing agreement, the chair puts the question: “The question before the Senate is on the subsidiary motion to refer the main motion to the Environment Committee for further study.”¹⁵ Those in favor, please raise your hand ... Lower. Those against ... Lower.”*

Seeing that the vote is close, the Chair states, “A counted show of hands is necessary to determine the result. Again, the question is on the subsidiary motion to commit. Those in favor of the motion, please raise your hand until counted ... Lower hands. Those opposed to the motion, please raise your hand until counted ... Lower hands. There are 33 in the affirmative and 30 in the negative. The motion is carried, and the matter will be referred to the Environment Committee for further study.”

... After proceeding through the remaining motions, the Chair announces, “The next item of business is ‘Officer & Position Reports.’”

Officer & Position Reports

The President, Faculty Governance Council Representative, and Board of Trustees Representative each may give a report under this item of business. The President may use

¹⁵ Ibid. It is very important that the Chair makes clear what specific motion is being voted on, especially when motions are more complicated or where other motions have been introduced in reference to the main motion. The wording of the motion as **put** by the Chair is what will be recorded in the minutes. Raising hands is the customary form for taking a vote in the Faculty Senate at the University of Maine.

this opportunity to provide information about upcoming affairs, report on the outcome of a motion that was forwarded to the administration for review, thank a senator or member of the administration for their service, or report on any manner of other items. If desired, the Secretary and Vice President may also give a report, though by custom they do not normally do so.

Committee Reports

The Faculty Senate has 13 standing committees. Of the committees presenting a report at any given meeting, the chair or co-chair of that committee is normally the reporting member.¹⁶ Even when a report is read or summarized orally, a written report should be submitted to the Senate for review.¹⁷

In many instances, committee reports propose no specific action and are for informational purposes only. However, when reports do contain recommendations, these should be in the form of resolutions or motions and be grouped together at the end of the report, such that the reporting member can make a motion to implement the recommendations following their presentation.¹⁸ A second is not required when a motion arises from a committee.¹⁹

For more information on the proper form and procedure for committee reports, see Robert et al., *Robert's Rules*, §51.

Unfinished Business & General Orders

Business is rarely printed under the heading of “Unfinished Business & General Orders” on Faculty Senate agendas. All new items of business are normally taken up and disposed of in the same meeting, and in the rare event the Senate does not complete the new business it planned to take up at a given meeting, most of these items will instead be printed under “New Business” on the agenda for the following meeting. The heading of “Unfinished Business & General Orders” is reserved only for business that arises for the following reasons:

1. A question was pending at the time of adjournment at the previous meeting and was not finally or temporarily disposed of,

¹⁶ Ibid., §51:9.

¹⁷ Ibid., §51:53. See also §51:31.

¹⁸ Ibid., §51:4, §51:11.

¹⁹ Ibid., §51:11.

2. A question was designated as a “General Order” or postponed to the current meeting,²⁰ or
3. A question that was laid on the table is taken from the table under this heading.²¹

Adjournment

Adjournment is not an item on the agenda, but rather a main motion that is put before the Senate for a vote. After the conclusion of Senate business, or at the scheduled end time of a meeting (4:30pm), the Chair may invite a member to, or a member may without an invitation from the Chair, make a motion to adjourn:

Ex.

Madam President: *Noting that the time is now 4:32pm, the Chair says, “The scheduled end time for the present meeting has passed. Is there a motion to adjourn?”*

Senator Stewart: *“I move to adjourn.”*

Senator Potham: *“Second!”*

Madam President: *“All in favor of adjourning, please raise your hand ... Lower. All opposed ... The meeting will now adjourn. Our next meeting will be on May 15.”*

Secretary: *Notes that the meeting was adjourned at 4:32pm.*

²⁰ Ibid., §41:23.

²¹ Ibid., §41:25.

References

“Constitution.” Faculty Senate, February 2024. <https://umaine.edu/facultysenate/constitution/>.

Robert, Sarah Corbin, Henry M. Robert, William J. Evans, Daniel H. Honemann, Thomas J. Balch, Daniel E. Seabold, and Shmuel Gerber. *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised*. 12th ed. New York, New York: Public Affairs, 2020.