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Training Guide for Student Representation on University Committees

The SRC has a member on most University committees, usually with the President as the representative. Sometimes committee break off into working parties. If you have the time and it is an issue that interest you, ask the meeting if you can join that working party. This Training Guide is intended to help you gain an understanding of what it means to be a representative for your faculty or the broader student cohort, to understand the process of meetings, and how to be effective.

The documents

You will receive an 'agenda pack' before the meeting, through a portal or by email. The pack will include the minutes of the last meeting, the agenda for this meeting, plus any additional documents for some of the items in this meeting. You should read all of these and take note of any item that is particularly interesting to you. If you attended the previous meeting, check if the minutes accurately reflect what happened. Some of the items on the agenda will have a star next to them, indicating items that will be discussed. Any item on the agenda without a star will be assumed to be agreed to by everyone on the committee and will not be mentioned or discussed. If there is something you want to discuss, you will have the chance at the beginning of the meeting to 'star' the item. This is the only chance you have to 'star' that item, so make sure you get to the meeting on time.

Other members

It is a good idea to introduce yourself to the Chair of the committee and the secretariat (the one who puts together the agenda pack and who keeps minutes). There will be some members on the committee that will be pleased to see you. Sit next to them, so that you feel like you have some support. They can also help you with any information that you don't quite understand or have missed.

Be assertive

The power difference between committee members and student representatives can make it difficult to speak in meetings. However, being assertive does not mean being critical or argumentative, but is more about sharing your point of view about things that are important to you. You might find it helpful to talk previous representatives about their experiences and how they overcame their fears and reluctance. Disagreeing with someone on a committee will not negatively impact on your degree.

Be persistent



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One of the common ploys used by administrators to overcome attempts by students to effect change is to defer or stall the progress of issues until the students give up in their efforts. This is particularly easy where there is a quick turnover of student representatives. If you are not sure how to return to the issue after the discussion is over, talk to a Caseworker about what options you have to raise the issue again.

Communication

Take written notes before and during the meeting, so you do not have to worry about forgetting what you want to say. You can also read from your notes if you are feeling a bit nervous. This will also help you to clearly articulate your point when you are speaking. Most meetings have a lot of information to discuss in just an hour or two, so it is best to make your point clear and concise. Listen to what other people are saying – what do they think about the issue, and what are they willing to do. They may surprise you.

Respect their time

The people that attend these committee meetings are busy, as are you. Be on time, so that you don't miss any important information or procedures. This also shows that you respect the time of everyone else at the meeting. Similarly, if you know you are not going to be able to attend, send your apologies. If there is someone else that can attend on your behalf, ask the secretariat what you need to do to arrange this.

Get a briefing

SRC Caseworkers can usually provide you with a briefing of the types of issues that are likely to be discussed in the meeting. Send them the agenda pack as soon as you receive it, so that they have time to read over the information and compare it to other committees.

Report back

While your role as a student representative is limited, SRC Caseworkers can piece together all the information that they have, from all the different committees, for the last couple of decades (as early as 1998), to see how the different issues that you are concerned with, fit into the context of the University. Email (help@src.usyd.edu.au) three things that were said at the meeting about the issue that you thought was most important. This can lead to a better understanding of what the University is trying to do, and perhaps help to form a relevant campaign.

Meeting Procedures



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Committee meetings are formally chaired and will follow the decisions of the Chair. Sign the attendance sheet (handed around), then the chair will open the meeting, ask if anyone wants to 'star' an item, then move through the 'starred' items. This will happen fairly quickly and some of the discussion will be taken 'offline', that is, discussed by the relevant people after the meeting. Unlike student meeting, there are very few motions, and most decisions are simply assumed by the Chair. If there is something you want to say or indicate to the Chair, e.g., put your hand up, as quickly as possible. Remember that you are a member of that committee with a unique and valid perspective that represents 35,000 students.

Homework

If you would like to read over the policy for a particular issue, go to the Uni's Policy Register (<https://www.sydney.edu.au/policies/>). Most relevant policies are in the "Studying at Sydney" section. Some issues have many relevant policies, so check with an SRC Caseworker about which ones are the most relevant.

Think about the bigger picture

Don't get bogged down in the small stuff. Look at things as they fit into the bigger picture and focus on things that are important to you. If you're unsure you can always consult with an SRC Caseworker.

Thank you

Thank you for attending these meetings. We all appreciate the effort that you are making and the impact that you will have. As always, SRC Caseworkers are here to help you.