



**The Undergraduate Student Senate Constitution  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University**

Authored: USS Transition Team, 2021  
Adopted: University Council of Virginia Tech, 2021  
Amended: January 2022

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## **Preamble**

We, the Undergraduate Student Senate of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), in order to facilitate an inclusive representation with a character of integrity and nurture an atmosphere of enhanced approachability and accessibility, pledge to protect student rights, promote equity and inclusion of all, investigate the welfare of students, and take the appropriate action to champion their needs, wants, and hopes for Virginia Tech. Furthermore, the Undergraduate Student Senate aim to provide a liaison between the undergraduate student body, faculty, and administration of the university, promote academic freedom and responsibility, and ensure transparent advocacy. As undergraduate students elected by our peers, we pledge to lead by exemplary boldness of character and to uphold the honor of *Ut Prosim* in all we do, and present this constitution and bylaws as the principal governing documents of the Undergraduate Student Senate at Virginia Tech.

## **Land Acknowledgement and Labor Recognition**

Virginia Tech acknowledges that we live and work on the Tutelo / Monacan People's homeland and we recognize their continued relationships with their lands and waterways. We further acknowledge that legislation and practices like the Morrill Act (1862) enabled the commonwealth of Virginia to finance and found Virginia Tech through the forced removal of Native Nations from their lands, both locally and in western territories.

We understand that honoring Native Peoples without explicit material commitments falls short of our institutional responsibilities. Through sustained, transparent, and meaningful engagement with the Tutelo / Monacan Peoples, and other Native Nations, we commit to changing the trajectory of Virginia Tech's history by increasing Indigenous student, staff, and faculty recruitment and retention, diversifying course offerings, and meeting the growing needs of all Virginia tribes and supporting their sovereignty.

We must also recognize that enslaved Black people generated revenue and resources used to establish Virginia Tech and were prohibited from attending until 1953. Through InclusiveVT, the institutional and individual commitment to *UT Prosim* (that I may serve) in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence, we commit to advancing a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

## **Article I: Name**

The name of the senate is the Undergraduate Student Senate of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, hereafter referred to as the Undergraduate Student Senate, the USS, or the USS at Virginia Tech.

## **Article II: Purpose**

The purpose of the Undergraduate Student Senate is to improve the undergraduate student experience by consistently demonstrating *Ut Prosim* and servant leadership in all endeavors; to represent and promote the values of Virginia Polytechnic and State University in formulating and implementing university policy; and to assist Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in its efforts to:

1. Provide an environment conducive to the pursuit of learning, scholarship, research, and service that promotes inclusion, wellbeing, and a sense of belonging for all undergraduate students.
2. Anticipate and meet the social, academic and developmental needs of all undergraduate students in a manner that enhances welcoming and inclusive community for undergraduate students at each Virginia Tech campus.

The Undergraduate Student Senate is part of the legislative system defined in the University Council Constitution. This system constitutes the main bodies for policy formation at Virginia Tech and also includes the A/P Faculty Senate, the Staff Senate, the Faculty Senate, the Graduate and Professional Student Senate, the university and senate commissions and their related committees, and the University Council. Domains of responsibility for each senate are outlined in Article VII of the University Council Constitution. The senate commissions formulate and recommend policies to the senates, which in turn recommend policies to the University Council; the university commissions formulate and recommend policies directly to the University Council. All senates have at least one commission assigned to them. The University Council makes policy recommendations to the president. Final authority rests with the president of the university and the Board of Visitors. Because these bodies constitute a legislative system, their functions, relationships, and the processes they hold in common are defined in the University Council Constitution and Bylaws. All aspects of the Undergraduate Student Senate not defined in those documents are defined in the USS Constitution and Bylaws.

USS policy recommendations are advanced in the form of resolutions as described in Article III of the University Council Bylaws; Article VII, Section 4 of the USS Constitution; and Articles VIII and IX of the USS Bylaws.

## Article III: Functions & Scope

### Section 1. Official Charge

Per Article VII, Section 7 of the University Council Constitution, the USS is charged as follows:

“The Undergraduate Student Senate shall be representative of the entire undergraduate student body and have the authority and responsibility to act on their behalf through legislative recommendations concerning campus life; academic and learning environment equity; undergraduate student health and wellness; dissemination of a portion of the student activity fee to registered student organizations; matters of equity, inclusion, and access that affect undergraduate students; and the learning conditions of the undergraduate student body.”

### Section 2. Functions and Scope

- To improve the undergraduate student experience.
- To enhance inclusion and diversity for all undergraduate students.
- To promote *UT Prosim* and servant leadership among the undergraduate student body.
- To promote the values of Virginia Polytechnic and State University.
- To advance the reputation and goodwill of all members of the Virginia Tech community.
- To develop and provide programs, information, and communications that enhance community among the undergraduate students that align with the goals of Virginia Tech.
- To consider resolutions and advance legislation that supports a positive student experience for all undergraduates.
- To refer appropriate matters within this *function and scope* to commissions, senates, groups, or individuals for consideration and recommendations.
- To allocate funds from the student activity fee to the recognized student organizations.
- To represent and demonstrate *UT Prosim* in all endeavors.

## Article IV: Definitions

- A. "Advising Team"-This term refers to the professional staff who are assigned to work, coach, and guide the student leadership within the USS. This team includes a senior advisor.
- B. "College"- This term refers to one of the nine academic colleges housed within Virginia Tech that are responsible for the execution of the academic curriculum. These nine colleges are *College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, College of Engineering, College of Architecture and Urban Studies, Pamplin College of Business, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Natural Resources and the Environment, College of Science, Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, and the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine.*

- C. “Director”—This term refers to a selected member of the USS who holds an administrative role that helps the organization to function. Directors do not have voting rights within the USS.
- D. “Senator”- A senator is an elected undergraduate representative who holds voting authority for matters of legislation and internal USS operations. Cabinet members, directors, and assistant directors are not senators and do not hold voting rights within the USS.
- E. “Student Member”- all enrolled undergraduate students at Virginia Tech. f. “UCSO”- A University Chartered Student Organization (UCSO) is an organization that has significant campus impact through providing resources and/or services that are best delivered by students in conjunction with their sponsoring campus department. This classification of the organization must align with, and is integral to, departmental and university missions to create robust student experiences.
- F. “University Governance”- University Governance refers to the university governance structure, including the Faculty Senate, A/P Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, Graduate and Professional Student Senate, the University Council, all commissions, and the Board of Visitors.
- G. “Undergraduate Student Body”- All enrolled undergraduate students at Virginia Polytechnic and State University.
- H. “USS”- One of the official abbreviations for the full title of the Undergraduate Student Senate at Virginia Tech, and will be used on all the organization’s documents, marketing materials, and other important information.

## **Article V: Membership and Eligibility to Vote**

### **Section 1: Student Membership**

- A. All undergraduate students at Virginia Tech are members of this organization. b. All enrolled undergraduate students are eligible to vote in USS elections and referendums. When voting for college senators (see article IV, section d) within the USS, only undergraduate students who are currently enrolled within that college will be able to vote for their college senator.
- B. Members reserve the right to attend, participate, and engage in senate meetings and affairs to the extent that they are willing. However, daily operations, executive, and legislative actions will be the responsibility of the USS senators alone.
- C. USS Senators vote on all resolutions that come before the USS senatorial body.

## **Section 2: Non-Discrimination Policy**

Recognizing that Virginia Tech is an important part of Blacksburg, Montgomery County, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the United States, it should be incumbent upon every member to participate in activities that contribute to overall community well-being. Active members shall:

- A. Honor Virginia Tech's Principles of Community and respect all members of the community.
- B. Adhere to Virginia Tech's Non-Discrimination Statement contained in Presidential Policy Memorandum 112 (<https://policies.vt.edu/assets/112-non-discrimination-statement.pdf>).

## **Article VI: Organization**

The USS will exist as a unicameral structure consisting of senators, directors, and a cabinet. Additionally, the USS receives its operational authority from the Department of Student Engagement and Campus Life (SECL) and may not operate as an independent organization separate from SECL or Student Affairs. The USS is organized as follows:

- A. Seven (7) cabinet members (See Article IV, section d)
  - i. President
  - ii. Vice President for Issues and Policy
  - iii. Vice President for Shared Governance
  - iv. Vice President for Equity and Inclusion
  - v. Vice President for Administration
  - vi. Vice President for Finance
  - vii. Vice President and Representative to the Board of Visitors
- B. Directors and assistant directors
  - i. Details about each of the director positions can be found in the Article V of the bylaws
- C. At-large senators
  - i. Calculated to equal one (1) representative per 1000 undergraduate students
  - ii. This is calculated based on current enrollment at the time of elections
- D. College senators
  - i. Calculated to equal one (1) representative per 750 undergraduate students or one (1) representative if the college is under 750
  - ii. This is calculated based on current enrollment at the time of elections

E. Seventeen (17) UCSO senators

Representatives from the following organizations:

1. Asian American Student Union (AASU)
2. Black Organizations Council (BOC)
3. Black Student Alliance (BSA)
4. Council of International Student Organizations (CISO)
5. HokiePride
6. Interfraternity Council (IFC)
7. Jewish Student Union (JSU)
8. Latino Association of Student Organizations (LASO)
9. Muslim Student Union (MSU)
10. National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)
11. Panhellenic Council (PHC)
12. Residence Hall Federation (RHF)
13. United Council of Fraternities and Sororities (UCFS)
14. Virginia Tech Union (VTU)
15. Virginia Tech, Sophomore Class
16. Virginia Tech, Junior Class
17. Virginia Tech, Senior Class

F. Two (2) Corps of Cadets senators

G. The senate will be organized into committees, the details of which can be found in Article VI of the Bylaws.

H. Standing committees include but are not limited to the following:

- i. Issues and Policy Committees (2)
- ii. Commission on Undergraduate Student Affairs
- iii. Communications and Marketing Committee
- iv. Special Programs Committee
- v. Membership Development Committee
- vi. Administration Committee
- vii. Appropriations Committee
- viii. Accountability Committee
- ix. The Commission on Undergraduate Student Affairs (CUSA) will operate as a commission reporting to the USS. Details of its composition and operation are located in Article VIII of the constitution

I. The USS will have an Advising Team of *ex-officio* members who are administrators at Virginia Tech.

- i. Administrative advisors (Advising Team) are appointed to the USS by Virginia Tech Student Affairs.



## **Article VII: Policies and Procedures**

### **Section 1: Policies of USS Meetings**

- A. The USS will hold bi-weekly meetings with the entire organization including all cabinet members, directors, senators, and advisors. These meetings will be free and open to current students, faculty, staff, and administrators of Virginia Tech. All guests or visitors must be approved to attend USS meetings in advance by the Senior Advisor. At least one advisor must be present at all USS meetings.
- B. The president shall serve as the presiding officer of senate meetings and will be responsible for all meeting operations, such as agendas, time limits, discussion procedures, and parliamentary procedures.
- C. Quorum for these meetings shall be defined as the presence of a majority (over  $\frac{1}{2}$ ) of all voting members and at least one advisor. Quorum must be obtained for any voting to take place; if a quorum is not obtained, the meeting may only occur for the purposes of reports, planning, and other similar objectives.
- D. In order to maintain proper communication and decorum during meetings, the meetings will be governed and operated according to Robert's Rules of Order.
- E. No USS meetings shall be longer than ninety (90) minutes unless an extension is approved by a two-thirds ( $\frac{2}{3}$ ) majority of the voting members present. Meetings can be extended by a maximum of 30 minutes. With the additional time, no meetings can exceed a total of one-hundred and twenty (120) minutes.
- F. In the event that a senator wishes to overturn the decision of the president on a matter of parliamentary procedure, they make a motion to do so by saying, "Motion to overturn the decision of the chair." After the motion is seconded, the USS will be in recess for a maximum of five (5) minutes while the body discusses the presidential decision in question among members. The president then calls for a vote. If a majority of the body votes in the affirmative to overturn the decision of the president, the decision is reversed and the meeting proceeds. If the decision is not overturned, the meeting proceeds without further discussion and consideration of the motion.

### **Section 2: Student Rights During USS Meetings**

- A. USS meetings shall include a period of time in the agenda whereby any current student, faculty, or staff member of Virginia Tech is permitted to bring forth any topic or issue of their choice and present it to the USS. This time shall be designated as "Public Forum."
- B. All current students, faculty, and staff members are free and entitled to speaking and discussion rights at any point in the USS meetings. Nevertheless, any such discussion will have to be strictly within the bounds of the meeting's agenda. The presiding officer shall not entertain any dialogue that is purely meant to disrupt the work of the senate.
- C. Members who choose to participate and speak up will maintain a sense of decorum and

respect during debate and discussion consistent with Robert's Rules of Order. i. Participation by current members of the student body, faculty, and staff will be governed by the presiding officer of the USS. Public participants are not expected to be familiar with parliamentary procedure. However, they are expected to defer judgment to the presiding officer in matters of procedure and respect the decision of the presiding officer at all times.

- D. Members do not have the right to vote on legislation and matters of parliamentary procedure during the meetings of the USS but are entitled to the speaking rights as outlined previously.
- E. Members may not be given the floor if the presiding officer feels that excessive discussion will hamper the fulfillment of the meeting's agenda. However, if there is additional time left at the end of the session, any member will be allowed to share their perspectives on an issue that has already been discussed that day, in the Public Forum.
- F. If a member is found to be deliberately disruptive to the senate proceedings, the presiding officer shall initially issue a warning to the individual. If such behavior is repeated, the presiding officer, with the advice of the cabinet, will ask the individual to vacate the meeting.

### **Section 3: Petitions & Requests**

- A. All members shall be able to bring an issue to a full senate vote by submitting a petition to any of the cabinet members bearing the signatures, official student email addresses, and dates of signature of at least five percent (5%) of the undergraduate student body and at least three senators, including a minimum of one college senator, one UCSO senator, and one at-large senator. The request will be reviewed in its entirety by the cabinet within fourteen (14) days and appropriate action will be taken afterward.
- B. All proposed amendments to the USS Constitution and/or Bylaws must be discussed with the Advising Team.

### **Section 4: Legislative Policies and Paths**

- A. Any senator in the USS, regardless of committee position, may choose to write and sponsor legislation on a topic of their choosing.
- B. Senators are required to meet with university officials and other relevant stakeholders in order to acquire full information about their chosen topic, and to work closely with appropriate university entities on the development of their legislation prior to voting of any kind.
- C. Any resolution that involves the creation or revision of policy must be reviewed and approved within the CUSA prior to senate review and vote.

Legislation will follow the paths and additional policies outlined in the USS Bylaws.

## **Section 5: Elections**

A. USS elections shall be governed by the following rules:

- i. All senators, cabinet representatives, directors, assistant directors, committee members, and representatives to university-level governance bodies shall be elected to these positions, with the exception of *ex officio* positions. Though USS nominees for university standing committees shall be elected by the USS, the President of the University makes the final selection from these nominees.
- ii. Elections shall be held on an annual basis.
- iii. Elections shall be overseen by the Advising Team.
- iv. Elections shall be carried out via an electronic balloting system.
- v. Upon conclusion of an election, the candidate that receives a majority of the votes shall be declared the winner and candidate-elect for that position.
- vi. All USS candidates are subject to and shall abide by the official USS election rules and regulations hereby known as the election code which is a separate document from the constitution and bylaws.
- vii. All terms are one-year, defined by the period of time between inaugurations. Some members of the CUSA may be renewed annually by the Senior Advisor on the Advising Team.

## **Section 6: Line of Succession**

Should the president vacate the office for any reason, the line of succession is as follows: Vice President for Issues and Policy, Vice President for Shared Governance, Vice President for Equity and Inclusion, Vice President for Administration, Vice President for Finance, Vice President and Representative to the Board of Visitors.

Should a Vice President vacate their office for any reason, a special election will be held.

## **Section 7: Stipends**

Cabinet members are eligible to receive a stipend, subject to annual determination by and provision from Virginia Tech Student Affairs.

# **Article VIII: Commission on Undergraduate Student Affairs**

## **Section 1: Official Charge**

Per Article VIII, Section 7 of the University Council Constitution, the Commission on Undergraduate Student Affairs is charged as follows:

“To study, formulate, and recommend to the Undergraduate Student Senate policies and procedures pertaining to the undergraduate student experience at Virginia Tech. Areas for consideration include undergraduate student life, wellbeing, inclusion, and morale; undergraduate student relations with peers, staff, faculty, administrators, alumni, and the community; policy matters related to undergraduate student conduct; undergraduate student organizations, social life, and recreation; employment, placement, and counseling; and residential and campus life, health, safety, and quality of undergraduate student related services.”

## **Section 2: Membership**

The Vice President for Shared Governance will oversee and chair the CUSA. Senate representatives will be elected or appointed by their respective senate or division head. The membership of the commission is as follows:

- a. USS Vice President for Shared Governance
- b. Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA)
- c. Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs (VPUA)
- d. Dean of the Graduate School
- e. Vice President for Policy and Governance (VPPG)
- f. Vice President for Strategic Affairs for Inclusion and Diversity (VPID)
- g. Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Experience VT (AVP)
- h. Two (2) A/P Faculty representatives from the Division of Student Affairs appointed by the Vice President for Student Affairs
- i. One (1) Faculty Senate Representative (FS)
- j. One (1) Staff Senate Representative (SS)
- k. Two (2) Graduate and Professional Student Senate Representatives (GPSS 1 & GPSS 2)
- l. One (1) A/P Faculty Senate Representative
- m. USS appointments:
  - Four (4) USS At-large Senators
  - Four (4) USS UCSO Senators
  - Four (4) USS College Senators

## **Article IX: Amendments to the USS Constitution and/or**

### **Bylaws**

#### **Section 1. Development of Recommendations**

The Senior Advisor for the Undergraduate Student Senate will convene an ad hoc committee to review recommended amendments to the USS Constitution and/or Bylaws. The ad hoc committee may include USS senators, members of the CUSA, students, faculty, staff and/or administrators. A two-thirds (2/3) affirmative of the ad hoc committee is required to advance amendments to the constitution and/or bylaws.

#### **Section 2. Approval of Amendments to the USS Constitution**

Upon approval by the ad hoc committee, proposed amendments to the USS Constitution proceed to the CUSA for development as a CUSA resolution and become effective upon the following sequence of actions:

- A. An affirmative majority vote by the CUSA.
- B. An affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of USS senators present and voting, provided that a quorum has been reached.
- C. An affirmative vote in the University Council of the majority of members present and voting, provided that a quorum has been reached.
- D. Approval by the president of the university.

#### **Section 3. Approval of Amendments to the USS Bylaws**

Upon approval by the ad hoc committee, an amendment to the USS Bylaws becomes effective upon an affirmative vote of the majority of the USS senators present and voting, provided that a quorum has been reached, and requires no further approval.

#### **Section 4: Notice of Proposal**

Notice of proposal to amend the USS Constitution or Bylaws shall be given in the senate agenda and considered at no fewer than two meetings of the senate prior to voting. The proposed amendment shall be distributed with the agenda.

## **Article X: Determination of Legislative Authority**

In order for the shared governance system of Virginia Tech to function as intended, the roles and authority of its different components, including the Undergraduate Student Senate and the Commission on Undergraduate Student Affairs, must be maintained, and participants in shared governance are expected to adhere to the statements of purpose, function, or charge contained in the University Council Constitution. Senate and commission charges identify the areas of legislative authority and responsibility for the relevant body. These charges are not exhaustive: when questions arise regarding the relevance of the topic of a resolution to a commission or senate charge, they will be addressed to the University Council parliamentarian, and if necessary, the University Council Cabinet. Per Article III, Section 3 of the University Council Bylaws, determination of the authority of a commission to advance a resolution rests with the University Council Cabinet and the University Council.