



Undergraduate  
Student  
Government

Princeton USG Senate

September 18th, 2022

**Budget:**  **USG Fall 2022 budget**

**Reform Project:**

## THE SENATE

princeton university, princeton, new jersey

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### Senate Resolution X-2022

Submitted by Senators MARIAM LATIF '24, WALKER PENFIELD '25, and SEAN BRADLEY '24, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Chair BRAIDEN AARONSON '25, Campus & Community Affairs Chair ISABELLA SHUTT '24, and Executive Secretary CHARLOTTE SELOVER '25,

## Resolution

Establishing a special rule requiring voting members to serve on at least one Senate Core Committee.

### Explanation:

Currently, Senate committees are mostly filled with members of the student body who are not involved with the USG otherwise. This leads to committee chairs facing difficulties staffing their committees with enough engaged members to fulfill their duties. Having members of the USG on committees beyond the respective chairs may also foster a more collaborative Senate. Some committees also tackle policy issues that are less appealing to the student body, leading to the majority of the workload falling on chairs.

To better support committees, this resolution would require voting members of the Senate to serve on at least one committee. This will ensure that every committee has enough active members to execute their advocacy work and programming effectively.

The Executive Committee may vote to grant an exemption to this rule, for example in the case that a voting Senate member:

- serves as the chair or co-chair of an Ad-Hoc committee.
- is facing personal circumstances that would prevent them from serving on a committee

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*Resolved by the Senate of the Undergraduate Student Government,*

## SECTION 1. CREATION

In accordance with Section 406 of the Senate Constitution, *Rules; Parliamentary Authority of the Senate Constitution*<sup>1</sup>, the Senate adopts a new requirement that each Senator and U-Councilor serves as a member of at least one Core Committee, unless granted an exemption by the Executive Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 406(a) states, “By a 2/3 vote, the Senate may adopt any special or standing rule that it considers necessary for its orderly and efficient operation.”



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**SECTION 2. RESPONSIBILITIES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Executive Committee shall determine the process by which Senate members are selected to serve on Core Committees so that each voting member has the opportunity to fulfill this requirement. The Executive Committee shall also determine, by a majority vote, if a voting Senate member shall be exempt from this requirement.

**SECTION 3. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

Sections 1 and 2 of this resolution become effective upon a 2/3 vote of the Senate in accordance with Section 406 of the Senate Constitution.

Approved       , 2022.

Members in Favor \_\_: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.  
Members Opposed \_\_: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.  
Members Abstaining \_\_: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

HANNAH KAPOOR '23,  
*Vice President of the Undergraduate Student Government and  
Presiding Officer of the Senate.*

Attest:

CHARLOTTE SELOVER '25,  
*Executive Secretary of the Senate.*

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## Referendum Reform Proposal

Feedback document:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/10mFMJE6toKowPOHLp11DWvcBG-sTktiYCAV1xjBpDwU/edit?usp=sharing>

### Current Situation

Referendums allow a unique opportunity for students to directly participate in Senate policymaking. The ability to ask a question of the student body and have their response yield direct results can be a useful tool in ensuring democratic participation and Senate accountability.

However, referenda issued under the advisory power of the Senate have the direct effect of a position paper sent to administrators while the intent of the vote is University action. This incongruence in the expectation of voters and the results they experience can create frustration and lack of trust in Senate elections. For this reason, the decision to include a question gauging interest in *University* decision-making on a *Senate* ballot must be weighed against the administrations' responsiveness to student voice and students' expectations following a successful referendum.

When an advisory referendum is called by petition, the Senate is incapable of making this judgment. In effect, a petition-triggered referendum allows advocates to use the Senate as a stage walked over to gain visibility with no ability to ensure audience satisfaction nor advise the actors on the next best move.

The language review process and the frivolous referenda clause demonstrate a Constitutional intent for the Senate to uphold the integrity of their elections. However, these two processes greatly limit the Senate's power and allow for the issues described above while also leaving the potential for politicization of these "low bars."

At the same time, petitions have historically been effective methods for starting campus conversations and building movements within the student body. Examples include Change WWS/Princeton Now, DivestPrinceton, Princeton Students for Title IX Reform, Princeton Disability Collective for Remote Learning Options, and No LANY for Lawnparties. While the Senate does not have a formal channel for responding to these petitions, they often inform the work of Committees and Senators.



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This proposal seeks to utilize and improve already effective systems to respond to issues arising with the referendum process.

### Recommendations

We recommend that the Senate amend the Constitution and Elections Handbook to shift the student advocacy channel away from petition-triggered referenda and to petition-triggered hearings that allow the Senate to thoughtfully determine the methods by which student wishes can best be represented in University decision-making. We also recommend that the allowed for petition-triggered referendums undergo a reformed language review process conducted by the Parliamentarian and Elections Manager(s). We have included the Constitutional language that would implement these changes below.

- (1) Restrict referenda called by petition to only be permitted when amending the Honor or Class Government Constitutions, which can only be amended via a petition-triggered referendum. This will prevent elections from being used to pose options the Senate cannot deliver.**

USG Constitution - §1001. Calling for Referendum Generally

(a) SENATE-INITIATED REFERENDUM.—The Chief Elections Manager shall organize a referendum concurrent with a regular election for Senate office if—

- (1) the Senate, by a majority vote of the entire voting Senate membership, calls for the referendum concurrent with the election; and
- (2) the referendum does not amend the Constitution of the Honor System.

(b) REFERENDUM BY PETITION.—The Chief Elections Manager shall organize a referendum concurrent with a regular election for Senate office having received a duly completed petition if—

- (1) the petition calls for amendment of the Constitution of the Honor System and is signed by 200 undergraduates; or
- (2) the petition calls for amendment of the Class Government Constitution and is signed by 10% of undergraduates.

- (2) Add to the Constitution an expressed student right to a response from the Senate to petitions that receive signatures from 20% of the student body in the preceding two months.<sup>2</sup> This will hold the Senate accountable as an advocacy channel between students and administrators, while also allowing for discernment of the most effective means by which to conduct this advocacy and giving students a clear method of engagement with Senate work.**

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<sup>2</sup> The Senate response to a petition may be to hold a referendum on the issue during an upcoming election.



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- (a) To retain the benefit of increased campus conversation that is typical of petition-triggered referendums, establish transparency in the Senate's advocacy efforts, and inform appropriate Senate action will require the **institutionalization of a public hearing process that allows the Senate to acquire knowledge on administrative action and policy, as well as student perspectives and advocacy**. This hearing must occur within two weeks of the petition's delivery with results required within four weeks of the delivery.

### USG Constitution - § 301. Advisory Power

(a) IN GENERAL – The Senate may discuss, deliberate, and take an official position on—

- (1) a question relating to or affecting undergraduate life; or
- (2) any other question of interest to undergraduates.

(b) OBLIGATORY RESPONSE TO PETITION – Should the Senate, by way of the Vice President, receive a petition calling for action by an entity of the University that 1/5 of undergraduates signed in the preceding two months, the Senate must—

- (1) host a public hearing within 14 days of the petition's delivery at which the student or group responsible for sending the petition to the Senate, as well as any students who contributed to the writing of the petition, are given adequate time to make their case for Senate support and
- (2) determine appropriate (in)action by a majority vote in response to the petition and announce the decision within four weeks of the petition's delivery to the Senate.

**(3) Shift the language review process to be the jurisdiction of the Parliamentarian and Elections Manager(s) and include guardrails that ensure the referendum amends the Honor Constitution or Class Government Constitution in this process (see 306(d) below), while giving the Senate the power to overturn this decision (see 306(f)(3A) below).** This will depoliticize the language review process, but should also be understood in context: should the other reforms hold, the only referendums that undergo this process amend the Honor Constitution or Class Government Constitution.

- (a) This will make the frivolous clause irrelevant, so it should also be removed.

### Elections Handbook - § 306. Referendum Language Review

(b) IN GENERAL.—In order for a referendum sponsor to begin petitioning, the Chief Elections Manager and Parliamentarian, or the Senate as outlined in subsection 306(f)(3)(A) of the Elections Handbook, must approve the language of the referendum resolution and its presentation on the ballot.

(c) SCOPE OF REVIEW.—

(1) REFERENDUM RESOLUTION.—The Senate shall approve the language of the referendum resolution if—

- (A) the resolution is neutrally worded;



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(B) the resolution makes clear its direct effects on the work or structure of the Honor System or Class Government; and

(C) the proposed amendment language within the resolution follows the format outlined in Appendix B of the Constitution.

(2) BALLOT PRESENTATION.—The Elections Manager(s) and the Parliamentarian shall approve the presentation of the referendum on the ballot if

(D) the ballot question clearly describes the referendum resolution, and

(E) no aspects of the referendum's presentation on the ballot are misleading.

(e) PRESENTATION OF LANGUAGE.—

(1) TIMING.— The Chief Elections Manager shall present the final or draft language of a referendum at the Senate meeting immediately following language review.

(2) APPROVED LANGUAGE.—The Chief Elections Manager shall present all language of a referendum that will appear on the ballot or within the referendum resolution.

(3) REJECTED LANGUAGE.— The Chief Elections Manager shall provide the Senate with the most recently submitted draft ballot question and referendum resolutions that, according to the Elections Manager(s) and Parliamentarian, did not meet the requirements outlined in subsection 306(d) of the Elections Handbook.

(A) REFERENDUM NOTWITHSTANDING LANGUAGE APPROVAL.— By majority vote, the Senate may find that, contrary to the findings of the Elections Manager(s) and Parliamentarian, the version of a referendum last presented during the language review meets the requirements outlined in subsection 306(d) of the Elections Handbook and the sponsor may then begin petitioning.

## Considered Alternatives

The Reform Project also considered a tiered response system to petition-triggered referenda that could look like the structure below.

- 1) 50% ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ) of votes cast in favor → a statement declaring the results of the election; made publicly available through typical USG channels
- 2) 66% ( $\frac{2}{3}$ ) of votes cast in favor → statement plus position paper sent to administration
- 3) 80% ( $\frac{4}{5}$ ) of votes cast in favor → statement plus position paper plus creation of ad hoc committee

Ultimately, we decided this proposal does not address the discrepancy between expected and realized results of student votes. However, Senate-sponsored referenda that utilize the advisory power could follow this or a similar heuristic with special attention to communication of this system to voters. This alternative is an important reminder of the creativity the Senate may choose to practice when crafting Senate-initiated referenda and responding to petitions from the student body. In other words, position papers should not be the only option.



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## Amendments in Full

### USG Senate Constitution

#### § 301. Advisory Power

**(a) *IN GENERAL*** – The Senate may discuss, deliberate, and take an official position on—

- (1) a question relating to or affecting undergraduate life; or
- (2) any other question of interest to undergraduates.

**(b) *OBLIGATORY RESPONSE TO PETITION*** – *Should the Senate, by way of the Vice President, receive a petition calling for action by by an entity of the University that 1/5 of undergraduates signed in the preceding two months, the Senate must—*

- (1) host a public hearing within fourteen days of the petition’s delivery at which the student or group responsible for sending the petition to the Senate, as well as any students who contributed to the writing of the petition, are given adequate time to make their case for Senate support; and*
- (2) determine appropriate (in)action by a majority vote in response to the petition and announce the decision within four weeks of the petition’s delivery to the Senate.*

#### §1001. Calling for Referendum Generally

(a) SENATE-INITIATED REFERENDUM.—The Chief Elections Manager shall organize a referendum concurrent with a regular election for Senate office if—

- (1) the Senate, by a ~~1/3~~ **majority** vote of the entire voting Senate membership, calls for the referendum concurrent with the election; and
- (2) the referendum does not amend the Constitution of the Honor System.

(b) REFERENDUM BY PETITION.—The Chief Elections Manager shall organize a referendum concurrent with a regular election for Senate office after receiving a duly completed petition ~~that calls for the referendum concurrent with the election and is signed by~~ **if —**

- ~~(1) 10% of the undergraduates, if the referendum does not amend the~~



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~~Constitution of the Honor System~~ *the petition calls for amendment of the Constitution of the Honor System and is signed by 200 undergraduates;* or

(2) ~~200 undergraduates, if the referendum amends the Constitution of the Honor System~~ *the petition calls for amendment of the Class Government Constitution and is signed by 10% of undergraduates.*

~~(c) FRIVOLOUS REFERENDA.—~~

~~(1) SENATE DETERMINATION.—By a 5/6 vote at a regular meeting, the Senate may determine a referendum called under subsection (b) to be frivolous and thereby prevent that referendum from occurring.~~

~~(2) REFERENDUM NOTWITHSTANDING SENATE DETERMINATION.—~~

~~(A) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding paragraph (1), the Chief Elections Manager shall organize a referendum that the Senate has determined to be frivolous under paragraph (1) if, within 5 days after that determination, the Chief Elections Manager receives a new duly completed petition that calls for the referendum and is signed by 1/4 of the undergraduates.~~

~~(B) TIME OF REFERENDUM.—The Chief Elections Manager shall organize that referendum within 21 days after receiving the new duly completed petition under subparagraph (A):~~

Elections Handbook

§ 306. **Senate** Referendum Language Review

(a) PRE-SCHEDULED TIME.—The **Senate** referendum language review shall occur at a pre-scheduled time.

(b) TIMING.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The **Senate** referendum language review shall occur on a date no earlier than 15 days before the first day of campaigning and no later than 8 days before the first day of campaigning.

(2) **SENATE MEETING.—A Senate meeting must occur after the language review and 7 days prior to the first day of campaigning. The Senate referendum language review shall occur during a Senate meeting.**

(3) RECESS SCHEDULING PROHIBITED.—The period beginning on the date after the ~~Senate referendum language review~~ *referendum language is presented to the Senate as outlined in subsection 306(f) of the Elections*





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*Handbook* and ending on the referendum petition deadline may not overlap with an academic recess.

(c) **COMPONENTS IN GENERAL.**—In order for the *sponsor of a referendum not initiated by the Senate* ~~referendum sponsor~~ to begin petitioning, ~~the Senate must, by majority vote, pass a motion to approve the language of both the referendum resolution and the ballot question~~ *Chief Elections Manager and Parliamentarian, or the Senate as outlined in subsection 306(f)(3)(A) of the Elections Handbook, must approve the language of the referendum resolution and its presentation on the ballot.*

(d) SCOPE OF REVIEW.—

(1) REFERENDUM RESOLUTION.—The Senate shall approve the language of the referendum resolution if—

(A) the resolution is neutrally worded;

(B) the resolution ~~clearly describes the direct effects of its adoption~~ *makes clear its direct effects on the work or structure of the Honor System or Class Government Constitution; and*

(C) *the proposed amendment language within the resolution follows the format outlined in Appendix B of the Constitution.* ~~the resolution does not claim to exercise a power that cannot be exercised by an undergraduate referendum.~~

(2) —EXCEPTION.—A section of a referendum resolution is exempt from the requirement that the section be neutrally worded if both of the following conditions apply:

(A) The section is issued solely under the advisory power.

(B) The resolution unambiguously states that the section is issued under the advisory power.

(2) BALLOT **QUESTION PRESENTATION.**—The *Senate Elections Manager(s) and the Parliamentarian* shall approve the presentation of the referendum on the ballot if

(C) the ballot question clearly describes the referendum resolution, *and*

*(D) no aspects of the referendum's presentation on the ballot are misleading.*

(e) AMENDMENTS TO REFERENDUM.—

(1) ONLY SPONSORS MAY AMEND.—Only the sponsor may amend the language of the referendum resolution or ballot question.

(2) BEFORE APPROVAL.—Before *the Elections Manager(s) and Parliamentarian* ~~Senate~~ approves the language of the referendum resolution and *its presentation on the ballot* ~~the ballot question~~, the sponsor may amend the language.



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(3) AFTER APPROVAL.—After *the Elections Manager(s) and Parliamentarian Senate* approves the language of the referendum resolution *and its presentation on the ballot* ~~the ballot question~~, the language shall not be amended.

**(f) PRESENTATION OF LANGUAGE.—**

(1) TIMING.— *The Chief Elections Manager shall present the final or draft language of a referendum at the Senate meeting immediately following language review.*

(2) APPROVED LANGUAGE.—*The Chief Elections Manager shall present all language of a referendum that will appear on the ballot or within the referendum resolution.*

(3) REJECTED LANGUAGE.— *The Chief Elections Manager shall provide the Senate with the most recently submitted draft ballot question and referendum resolutions that, according to the Elections Manager(s) and Parliamentarian, did not meet the requirements outlined in subsection 306(d) of the Elections Handbook.*

(A) REFERENDUM NOTWITHSTANDING LANGUAGE APPROVAL.— *By majority vote the Senate may find that, contrary to the findings of the Elections Manager(s) and Parliamentarian, the version of a referendum last presented during the language review meets the requirements outlined in subsection 306(d) of the Elections Handbook and the sponsor may then begin petitioning.*

~~(F) FRIVOLOUS REFERENDUM DETERMINATION.— If the Senate approves the language of the referendum resolution and the ballot question, the Senate may also determine the referendum to be frivolous in accordance with subsection 1001(e) of the Senate Constitution.~~

## § 307. Referendum Petition Deadline and Approval

(a) REFERENDUM PETITION DEADLINE.—

(1) PRE-SCHEDULED TIME.—The referendum petition deadline is a pre-scheduled time.

(2) TIMING.—*The referendum with its required signatures must be submitted to the Chief Elections Manager on a date exactly 5 days after the date of the Senate meeting at which the language of the referendum is presented to the Senate.* ~~The referendum petition deadline shall occur on a date exactly 5 days after the date of the Senate referendum language review.~~

(b) REFERENDUM APPROVAL.—



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(1) TIMING.—No later than 24 hours after the referendum petition deadline, the Chief Elections Manager shall review each petition and either approve or disapprove the referendum.

(2) IN GENERAL.—The Chief Elections Manager shall approve a referendum if—

(A) the sponsor has submitted a referendum proposal, as provided in section 302(c), before the referendum proposal deadline;

(B) *the Chief Elections Manager and Parliamentarian or* the Senate ~~has~~ approved the language of the referendum *as outlined in Section 306 of the Elections Handbook* ~~at the Senate referendum language review~~; and

(C) the sponsor has submitted a complete and valid referendum petition before the referendum petition deadline.

(c) DISAPPROVAL.—If a referendum does not meet the criteria in subsection (b), the Chief Elections Manager shall not put the referendum on the ballot.

(d) PUBLICITY.—Immediately after completing the review of each referendum, the Chief Elections Manager shall publish—

(1) the ballot question and referendum resolution of each approved referendum. ~~;~~ ~~and~~

~~(2) —the deadline and requirements for an opposition proposal.~~