Staff Guide to
Student Academic Representation
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1. Key Roles & Terms

Academic Representation

Academic Representation is a process through which we ensure students’ voices are heard. Though the work of representatives actively consulting with and engaging the students they represent, all students should have the opportunity not just to feed back on their experience, but to work with staff as partners to shape their academic experience.

Course Representatives

Course Representatives are students who are members of Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs) and represent the students on a programme of study. The role of Course Representatives is to work with staff to ensure students’ feedback is communicated and acted on, and that student’s voices are represented in departmental decision-making. The role of Course Representatives is not limited to SSCCs; representatives are encouraged to work with their peers and communicate feedback to staff both inside and outside of meetings throughout the year.

Research Student Representatives

Research Student Representatives play a similar role to course representatives, but represent research students rather than taught students on a programme of study. Defining where to place Research Student Representatives can be slightly trickier, given they are not assigned to a given programme of study. Any distinct community of postgraduate research students should have a representative, which might be based on department, specialism, physical location, or other attributes.
Lead Department Representatives

Lead Department Representatives are appointed from each SSCC, and take on a leadership role for student representation in their UCL department. They will work closely with staff in the department, jointly chairing the SSCC and agreeing the agenda with them in advance of the meeting according to student priorities. They will also attend the Department’s Teaching Committee (or doctoral education equivalent) as a student representative, and communicate relevant items between the two committees. If there are multiple SSCCs in a Department, there will be multiple Lead Department Representatives.

Faculty Representatives

Faculty Representatives play a similar role to other student representatives, but engage with Faculty-level staff and committee meetings. Faculty Representatives liaise with other representatives across their Faculty’s constituent departments, in order to pick up common trends and represent students effectively. Faculty Representatives are elected in elections hosted on the Union’s website, in close consultation with Faculty staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Meetings Attended</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Union Sabbatical Officers</td>
<td>Faculty Reps Forum, other university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Representatives</td>
<td>Faculty SSCCs, other faculty meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Department Representatives</td>
<td>SSCCs, other departmental meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course &amp; Research Student representatives</td>
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Staff-Student Consultative Committees

Staff-Student Consultative Committees are formal meetings for academic representatives to share feedback with staff, to develop solutions to students’ concerns, and to prioritise areas for improvement. Some departments have a single SSCC, while others split this into different groups of programmes or levels of study. Most commonly, departments operate both an undergraduate and postgraduate SSCC.

Student Engagement

Academic Representation is a key mechanism through which UCL and the Union aim to facilitate students’ engagement with their educational experience. The UCL Education Strategy 2016-21 commits us to ‘expand the opportunities available to our students to participate in creating and shaping policy and practice at local and institutional levels’. Through the work of student representatives who communicate on an ongoing basis with their peers and the staff in their department, all students can be engaged with their teaching, learning, and wider university experience.

Partnership

The Union believe that partnership between staff and students is the purpose of student engagement. Partnership working breaks down divides between staff and students, and enables a joint-approach to problem solving. This approach recognises the different but equal value which staff and students can bring, and through dialogue, promotes an academic community of staff and students who are engaged with one another’s pursuits and aspirations.

Academic Manual

UCL’s Academic Manual is the repository of UCL’s policies and regulations. Regulations relating to Student Academic Representation are contained in Chapter 6, Section 6. There are also requirements for student representation on committees contained in Section 7. This guide is intended to be read alongside those regulations.

Find More Online:
The Academic Manual Chapter 6, sections 6 and 7 of which deal with student representation, is available at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/academic-manual/academic-manual/c6/
2. Appointing Representatives

When

Appointment of representatives should take place during the first few weeks of each academic session, during October. Dates of the appointment period for this year can be found on page 11. Appointing representatives on time is important, as it ensures they are in place and can be trained before their first SSCC meeting. For this reason, it is best not to schedule SSCCs during October where this can be avoided.

Has this changed?

Previously, two appointment periods existed during the year, in October and in January-February. This has been simplified to a single period. If a representative steps down after October and is replaced, please continue to let the Faculty and the Union know, and we will endeavour to provide such students with support.

Who

Within each Department, there should be **Course Representatives** for the following:

- At least one student from each year of study within each taught programme. (where appropriate, a student or students can be appointed to represent closely linked clusters of programmes instead.)
- At least one part-time student for each taught programme (where relevant).

For larger programmes, it may be appropriate to have more than one Course Representative for each year of study. This should be as multiple roles, rather than one shared role, as the Academic Manual states that all representatives appointed should be able to attend each meeting of the relevant SSCC.

Similarly, there should be **Research Student Representatives** to represent each distinct community of research postgraduate students within the department. Within each community, there should be at least one representative for early years students (years 1-2) and one for later years students (years 3-4).
How many Reps is the right number?

For large cohorts of students, more than one representative might be appropriate. For example, for a class of 30, one representative will be plenty. For a class of 100, there might be a good case for two or even three representatives. As an approximate guide, we recommend a representative for every 30-50 students in larger programmes.

The role of Course Representative or Research Student Representative should be seen as important and highly regarded to enable students taking on the role to be effective. Having excessively large numbers of representatives can devalue the role, and makes it more likely that representatives will speak only for themselves rather than taking responsibility for speaking on behalf of the students they represent.

The Lead Department Representative should also be appointed during the October appointment period. The simplest way to do this is to ask members of the relevant SSCC to select or elect the person from amongst the membership of Course and Research Student Representatives. Alternatively, separate elections directly to this role can be run.

How

Departments appoint their representatives in various ways. This section aims to provide some guidance, and to highlight things which will help to ensure that students are successful once taking up a role.

1. Explaining the role

Critical to ensuring that volunteers come forward is explaining the role to students early and clearly. This might mean building discussion of Academic Representation into induction talks or other introductory activity, for both new and returning cohorts of students.

In September, the Union will mail round hard copy publicity materials by internal post, as well as making electronic resources available online, and a video specifically to introduce the role designed for induction talks. These resources are intended to aid departments in the task of promoting the role.
2. Appointing Students to Roles

The ideal process for appointing representatives is an election, particularly when there are many volunteers. Holding an election gives students a connection to their representative, ensures those taking on a role feel a greater sense of accountability to their peers, and promotes the role’s importance.

If the number of volunteers for roles is equal to that of the positions available, an election may not be needed, though it may still be helpful for the profile of the representatives if students are asked to confirm the choice. Individual students should not be appointed directly by staff without student involvement unless the role would otherwise be impossible to fill. If this is frequently the case, please do seek advice from the Union, who are happy to provide support for creating interest in the role.

How can I run an Election?

Running an election for representative roles can be simple if planned ahead of time.

If there is an in-person opportunity to allow students to vote, you can download resources to do so from the Union website at https://studentsunionucl.org/student-academic-representation/staff. Alternatively, a show of hands might be appropriate.

Most simply, many departments make use of the Opinio platform, which requires students to log-in to vote on the available options. Guides for using Opinio can be found via our staff resources page above. Some programmes with programme Moodle pages use Moodle polls in order to allow students to select representatives. If conducting a vote via Opinio or Moodle, you should consider circulating 50-100 words from each volunteer saying why they think they would be good at the role.

For those departments using Unitu, this software includes a function for electing representatives, which should be used.
3. Communication within the Department

Once students have been appointed to their roles, this fact should be communicated to students and staff to help the representatives in carrying out their role. The name and contact details of the representatives should be circulated, and it may be helpful to display the names of representatives prominently somewhere physically and online (such as a moodle page) in order that these are continually available.

Representatives, particularly new representatives, should be strongly encouraged to attend training arranged by the Union as part of their role, as this is required in order to carry out their role effectively. The department or programme may additionally wish to provide their own introduction to specific areas, such as the roles and responsibilities of local staff, meeting dates, ongoing departmental projects and priorities, and anything else which may be relevant.

If the Lead Department Representatives are being appointed from amongst the SSCC members rather than separately, consideration should be given to how to set this process in motion with a physical pre-meeting, or electronically in advance of the first SSCC.

4. Communication to the Union

The details of all representatives appointed should also be provided to the Faculty via the designated Faculty Contact. Please ensure these are returned on the data sheet provided. If your Faculty has not provided this, you can contact us directly at reps@ucl.ac.uk

These details will then be passed to the Union and Academic Services, and the representatives will be contacted and invited to training, as well as being provided with resources and ongoing support.
3. **Important Dates and Contacts**

**Appointment Period**

The annual appointment period is when Faculties and the Union require all representatives to be in post and their details confirmed. The time available to the Union and Faculties to process these details has been compressed to give Departments and Programmes as long as possible to elect representatives.

Returning these details on time assists us in ensuring representatives are trained and prepared to engage positively and constructively within the department as soon as possible.

**Term One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tr>
<td>Promotional Material sent to Departments</td>
<td>Week beginning 11 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of Representatives to take place</td>
<td>From Monday 25 September to Friday 13 October</td>
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<tr>
<td>All departments to send details to Faculty</td>
<td>By Friday 13 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final date Students’ Union can accept new representative details</td>
<td>Monday 23 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome Reception for Representatives</td>
<td>From Monday 23 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for Representatives</td>
<td>From Monday 23 October</td>
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Faculty Contact

Each faculty has a designated contact for Student Academic Representation. This person is the central point of communication in each faculty, and is the person to whom the details of appointed representatives should be provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Contact Name</th>
<th>Email Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Humanities</td>
<td>Ashley Doolan</td>
<td><a href="mailto:a.doolan@ucl.ac.uk">a.doolan@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp; Historical Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain Sciences</td>
<td>Julie Evans</td>
<td><a href="mailto:julie.evans@ucl.ac.uk">julie.evans@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Sciences</td>
<td>Hazel Smith</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hazel.smith@ucl.ac.uk">hazel.smith@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built Environment</td>
<td>Rebecca Payne</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rebecca.payne@ucl.ac.uk">rebecca.payne@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Simon Banks</td>
<td><a href="mailto:s.t.banks@ucl.ac.uk">s.t.banks@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laws</td>
<td>Karen Scott</td>
<td><a href="mailto:k-scott@ucl.ac.uk">k-scott@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah Campling</td>
<td><a href="mailto:s.campling@ucl.ac.uk">s.campling@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical &amp; Physical Sciences</td>
<td>Roger Gaywood</td>
<td><a href="mailto:r.gaywood@ucl.ac.uk">r.gaywood@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stefanie Anyadi</td>
<td><a href="mailto:s.anyadi@ucl.ac.uk">s.anyadi@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Sciences</td>
<td>Blathnaid Mahony</td>
<td><a href="mailto:b.mahony@ucl.ac.uk">b.mahony@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Health Sciences</td>
<td>Mike Rowson</td>
<td><a href="mailto:fphs.education@ucl.ac.uk">fphs.education@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute of Education</td>
<td>Tracey Allen</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tracey.allen@ucl.ac.uk">tracey.allen@ucl.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other Contacts

Sarah Al-Aride
Education Officer
Co-Chair of Student Academic Representation Steering Group
ec.officer@ucl.ac.uk
x37893

Derfel Owen
Director of Academic Services
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x58209

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x32504

Diana Hawk
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x32857

Simon To
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Lead, support for students and staff
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x37707

Mark Crawford
Postgraduate Students’ Officer

ps.officer@ucl.ac.uk
x37892
Training

Training for first time Course and Research Student Representatives introduces them to the important elements of their role and asks them to consider the strategies they will utilise to fulfil them. The training is based around the model ‘feedback cycle’ below.

For representatives who have already spent time in their role, we instead run an information and reflection-based session, providing information on student survey data and UCL priorities, and asking representatives to outline their own goals for the year ahead.
Lead Department Representative Training

Lead Department Representatives receive an introductory training session jointly with Faculty Representatives. This training session covers elements of chairing meetings, leadership, and being an active and engaged member of UCL committee meetings.

Other Resources and Briefings

The Union also provide all representatives with access to relevant resources, including an archive of previous SSCC minutes, NSS departmental reports, PTES and PRES results, and handover documents prepared by previous representatives. We also provide briefings and reports on changes at UCL, annual processes such as ASER, and Students’ Union Campaigns.

Recognition & Reward

Representatives may choose to have their experience recognised if they attend training and departmental meetings. This process is student led, and requires them to submit a portfolio demonstrating their active engagement with their role, including work in their department and attendance at relevant training sessions. We also run annual Course Representative of the Year, Research Student Representative of the Year, Lead Department Representative of the Year, and Faculty Representative of the Year awards, to which students and staff may nominate.
Staff-Student Consultative Committee (SSCCs)

SSCCs are a dedicated forum for staff and students to discuss particular issues. Usually discussion will cover both issues raised by students, and areas in which staff may wish to seek input from students. Some departments choose to have open attendance at their SSCC meetings for all students. Whilst we would not discourage departments from doing this, each programme of study and year group should still have an appointed representative.

There is no ‘correct’ way to run an SCC, but here are some simple ‘dos and don’ts’ based on what has proven effective across UCL.

**Do:**

- **Meet more regularly if time and availability allows.** UCL’s Academic Manual suggests a minimum of three meetings a year. Meeting three or even four times over the year can be highly effective in ensuring a sense of continued dialogue, and in ensuring issues and actions can be followed up. Aim for a meeting which feels more like a working-group than a committee.
- **Think about whether the meeting feels overly formal or stuffy.** Whilst the meeting should hold importance to attendees, this does not mean the environment cannot be relatively relaxed.
- **Circulate minutes promptly after a meeting to both attendees and other students.** Minutes are important to ensure that representatives can confirm what has been agreed and communicate this to peers. They help to prevent misunderstanding. They also ensure that students are aware that their issues are being addressed, and that students can hold their representatives accountable.
- **Use the benchmarking tool available on our website as a diagnostic tool for improving SCC meetings.**
**Don’t:**

- **Rely on the SSCC as the sole point of engagement with students.** The SSCC should act as the fulcrum of work with students in the department, but not form the whole of it. Focus groups, small surveys, or even open meetings on a particular topic may be useful, and representatives may be able to work with staff to arrange these.

- **Ask representatives only to provide feedback.** Partnership between staff and student’s means discussing solutions together, rather than staff agreeing to listen and then taking problems away to think about separately. Meetings will be more positive and representatives will find their role more rewarding if how to resolve issues, and the obstacles involved, are discussed frankly and openly.

- **Hold a separate SSCC for each programme.** Whilst inter-departmental programmes will need a separate SSCC, other programmes shouldn’t. Representatives on programme-level SSCCs are more likely to report feeling that the meeting is not useful, because these are less likely to provide students with access to staff able to resolve any concerns that are not teaching-related.

- **Hold meetings which are too large.** Some departments hold SSCCs with so many representatives that some are not able to speak during meetings. Consider splitting departmental SSCCs by level of study, or related groups of programmes, to ensure that agenda items are relevant to the majority of attendees the majority of the time.

- **Schedule SSCCs and other key events during teaching if it can be avoided.** Whilst it’s often impossible to find a time that all staff and student representatives are available, this should be minimised. Do remember that the more often SSCCs are scheduled, the less important not being able to make a single meeting is for attendees.
Departmental Teaching Committees (DTCs)

Departmental Teaching Committees, or any separate committee that deals with doctoral education, are required to include student representatives. The Lead Department Representative should be an ex-officio member of the DTC, and is responsible for representing the views of students at DTCs, and communicating items between the DTC and the SSCC, though they may delegate this responsibility to another student representative if required. Departments may choose to have additional student representatives attend, either for the whole meeting or for particular items.

Working with the Lead Department Representative

The new role of Lead Department Representative is intended to have a significant impact on the way which student academic representation operates within departments. The student in this role will jointly lead the planning and agenda-setting of meetings, helping to ensure that meetings are shaped in a way which engages student members of the SSCC, and promotes a joint community of staff and students. Co-Chairing of meetings and ensuring a student presence at Department Teaching Committee meetings will also help to embed partnership working between staff and students.

The practical steps that will help Lead Department Representatives to excel at their role are:

- Giving careful advance consideration to how the role will be appointed
- Planning and organising agenda-setting meetings between the Co-Chairs and the secretary in advance of SSCC meetings
- Ensuring the Chair of the DTC spends some time with the Lead Department Representative(s) to provide induction and context
- Considering how Department committee meetings can be made more accessible to student members.
Find More Online:

The Academic Manual includes a list of items which must be discussed during the Academic Session. This is a handy resource to consider during agenda-setting.

Our Staff Resources page includes an SSCC benchmarking tool, to guide work to ensure these meetings are more effective and have greater impact.

https://studentsunionucl.org/student-academic-representation/staff