



**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** The Faculty Senate Steering Committee

**From:** Matt Hudelson, Faculty Senate Parliamentarian

**Date:** September 14, 2023

**Subject:** Faculty Senate Voting Process

---

*To provide some background from Robert's Rules of Order concerning abstentions, I offer the following passages:*

**Page 45, lines 14-19** ("PUTTING THE QUESTION" in section 4):

The chair should not call for abstentions in taking a vote, since the number of members who respond to such a call is meaningless. To "abstain" means to not vote at all, and a member who makes no response if "abstentions" are called for abstains just as much as one who responds to that effect (see also p. 407).

**Page 400, lines 5-12** ("Majority vote – the basic requirement" in section 44):

As stated on page 4, the basic requirement for approval of an action or choice by a deliberative assembly, except where a rule provides otherwise, is a *majority vote*. The word *majority* means "more than half"; and when the term *majority vote* is used without qualification—as in the case of the basic requirement—it means more than half of the votes cast by persons entitled to vote, excluding blanks or abstentions, at a regular or properly called meeting.

**Page 403, lines 13-21** ("Modifications of Usual Bases for Decision" in section 44):

Voting requirements based on the number of members present—a majority of those present, two thirds of those present, etc.—while possible, are generally undesirable. Since an abstention in such cases has the same effect as a negative vote, these bases deny members the right to maintain a neutral position by abstaining. For the same reason, members present who fail to vote through indifference rather than through deliberate neutrality may affect the result negatively.



Additionally, the Faculty Senate Bylaws, section VI (Actions of the Senate) consists of the following:

1. Unless otherwise stipulated in the Constitution or Bylaws, all actions of the Senate shall be adopted by a majority of those present and voting.
2. Unless there is a decision to the contrary, actions of the Senate shall be made public.
3. In the case of a tie vote, the presiding officer shall cast the deciding vote.

*Robert's Rules of Order* is clear that an abstention is a decision to not vote and that calling for abstentions is meaningless. Also, Statement 1 of section VI of the Bylaws is clear that a majority of those present and voting is sufficient to adopt Senate actions. There are no further qualifications to the rules set forth in section VI of the Bylaws.

Based on these passages, I will continue the current practice of framing the polls for Senate actions with two response options: Either "to approve", or "to reject" a measure.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matt Hudelson".

Matt Hudelson, Faculty Senate Executive Secretary