

GPSS Handbook for Graduate Program Advisers 2026-27

Oct 7, 2026 ·

What GPSS is

The Graduate and Professional Student Senate is the elected representative body for graduate and professional students at the University of Washington. Senators represent academic departments as well as non-academic programs and communities.

GPSS advocates for students on campus and at the state and federal levels, runs professional and social programming, fills student seats on university-wide committees, and distributes funding for travel, diversity events and departmental needs.

For you as a GPA, the practical value is a two-way channel. Your Senator brings your students' concerns into university decision-making, and brings back information about resources your department may not be able to provide on its own.

Senator seats and how to nominate

Seats come two at a time, and the level they sit at depends on your unit's structure (Article II, Section A).

- **School or college level.** Every school or college recognised by the University holds two seats by default.
- **Department level.** If a school or college contains multiple degree-granting departments, the school's two seats are forfeited and each department receives two instead. This happens automatically, with no application.
- **Program level.** A department containing multiple degree-granting programs can apply for two seats per program. This takes an application, and it is all or nothing: every program in the department must be granted seats, and the department's own two seats are forfeited entirely.
- **Degree level.** A Masters program and a doctoral program in the same field can hold separate seats, but only by application. Without one, a program's Senators represent all its students regardless of degree type.

If you are not sure which level applies to your unit, email gpssvpadmin@uw.edu before nominating.

Nominations come from you. There is no application, screening or interview on the GPSS side, but the bylaws do require that Senators be chosen through a fair, consistent and democratic process (Article II, Section B). The suggestions below satisfy that.

Nominations are accepted on a rolling basis throughout the year. 9 October 2026 is the target date, so Senators can be onboarded before the first meeting, but a program that nominates in January is just as welcome and the student will be onboarded the same way.

To nominate, email gpssvpadmin@uw.edu with the following for each student:

1. Full name
2. UW email address

3. College or school name
4. Program name
5. Degree type (Masters, PhD, etc.)

GPSS handles the rest: adding them to the Senator roster, the Senator mailing list and the Teams channel, and sending them the Senator Onboarding Course.

Choosing who to nominate. Email your incoming and returning students before the first day of classes, or by the end of the first week at the latest, and ask who is interested. Ask them for a short bio, a brief note on why they want the role, and confirmation that they can commit to roughly three Wednesday evenings a quarter. If you get two or fewer responses for two seats, circulate the names to your students as a final call for nominations, and if nobody objects the nominations stand. If you get more interest than seats, run a short vote: circulate brief bios and ask students to rank them, or hold a quick session where candidates speak.

After the first four weeks of autumn quarter, a unit still holding fewer than two Senators may nominate any interested student. You post a notice of the nomination, and only hold an election if more students are interested than there are seats.

Challenges. Anyone can challenge a selection in writing to the Judicial Committee within 30 days. This is rare, and running an open process makes it rarer.

Terms. A Senator serves until the next regular Senator selection date, and there is no limit on how many terms they serve.

Need representation at a different level? Apply to the Vice President of Administration, who decides these applications alone. Senate approval is not required. The application asks for evidence that the programs are official degree-granting programs, that they admit students through their own process, that their curriculum is distinct, that no student would end up doubly represented, and that students actually want the change. No single piece of evidence decides it, and approved changes take effect immediately.

A decision can be appealed in writing within seven days to the Chair of the Judicial Committee and the Vice President of Equity and Inclusion.

Vacant seats are never lost. A seat left empty stays allocated to your unit for future years, and it does not count against quorum.

What Senators commit to

The obligations are light. Most of what Senators do beyond this is voluntary.

- **Attend at least half the Senate meetings each quarter.** One of those may be covered by a proxy. A Senator who cannot attend must give the Vice President of Administration advance written notice.
- **Bring their constituents' concerns to GPSS,** and keep their cohort informed of what affects graduate and professional students.
- **Tell their cohort about departmental funds** and apply for them when there is a need.
- **Help recruit GPSS Liaisons** for university committees.

- **Give the Vice President of Administration a preferred email address.** This is the official channel, and Senators are responsible for passing on what arrives there.
- **Assist with Graduate Program Reviews** in their own degree-granting unit, alongside the Vice President of Equity and Inclusion.
- **Know the Constitution, Bylaws and Senator Handbook.**
- **Resign in writing** to the Vice President of Administration if they can no longer serve. You can submit the resignation on their behalf if they are unable to.

Meetings are hybrid, with in-person attendance preferred. Dinner is provided.

Communication with you. Senators who have access to their program listserv should email updates to their cohort every other week. Senators who do not should send those updates to you instead. Either way, a short meeting once a quarter, ideally once a month, keeps the loop working. You may set your own standards beyond this.

Attendance records are posted publicly on the GPSS website alongside the roster. This is a tool for you and your students to see whether the seat is being used, not a public shaming.

Key dates

9 October 2026 is the ideal date for confirmations, but nominations continue to be accepted on a rolling basis all year and Senators are onboarded as programs nominate them. The dates below matter only for getting a Senator seated early.

Date	What happens
9 October 2026	Target date for Senator confirmations, so students can be onboarded before the first meeting
14 October 2026	First Senate meeting of the year, 5:00pm
21 October 2026	Second Senate meeting, 5:00pm
4 November 2026	Third Senate meeting, 5:00pm

A Senator confirmed after a meeting can still be seated for the next one. Onboarding takes a few days, so there is no point in the year at which it is too late to nominate.

All Senate meetings start at 5:00pm. The full meeting calendar for the year is on the GPSS website under Records.

Other ways students can get involved

Not every interested student needs to be a Senator. Point students who missed out, or who cannot commit to meetings, toward these.

Liaison positions. Campus-wide committees, boards and organisations hold student seats, and GPSS helps fill them. Liaisons sit on their committee and send GPSS short summary reports on what it is doing.

Lighter commitment than a Senator seat, and a good fit for students with a specific interest. Students should email gpsspres@uw.edu or gpssvpadmin@uw.edu.

Proxies. A Senator who cannot attend can send a proxy, who must be a current graduate or professional student from the same school, department or program. Another Senator cannot serve as a proxy. One meeting per quarter may be covered this way, and the proxy form comes from the Vice President of Administration.

Quarter-long proxies. If your Senator has a class conflict for a single quarter, they can designate a proxy from the same unit for that quarter rather than giving up the seat. Email the name to gpssvpadmin@uw.edu.

Committees. Most GPSS committees are open to any UW student, Senator or not.

When things go wrong

A Senator stops showing up. Meet with them first. Most lapses are workload, not disinterest. You can also ask GPSS to speak with them, which is sometimes more useful than it sounds, since students who feel disconnected from a large organisation tend to disengage from it. A Senator who misses the attendance requirement may be removed from the roster by GPSS, and can only be reappointed with your approval and the Vice President of Administration's. If a conversation has not worked, email gpssvpadmin@uw.edu and we will handle it from there.

A Senator resigns mid-year. This usually happens at a quarter change when schedules shift. Check whether they are resigning for the year or only for a quarter, since the bylaws let a Senator depart for up to one quarter. For a single quarter, they can designate a proxy from the same unit. For the rest of the year, run a fresh nomination. Resignations go in writing to the Vice President of Administration, from the Senator's registered email or from you if they cannot send it themselves.

A faculty adviser discourages participation. This comes up more often than it should. Encourage the student to contact GPSS so we can look at alternatives. If it would help, GPSS can join a conversation with the adviser or the program director. The Vice President of Administration or the Vice President of Equity and Inclusion would usually attend. Email gpssvpadmin@uw.edu to start that.

Funding your students can access

Worth flagging to your students whether or not they are Senators. Full details and application forms are under Funding on the GPSS website.

Fund	What it covers	Amount
Travel Grants	Conference travel to present work	Up to \$300 domestic, \$500 international
Diversity Funds	Student group events celebrating or fostering diversity	Small awards
Department Allocations	Events or items benefiting	Varies

Fund	What it covers	Amount
	students in a department	
Special Allocations	Supplemental funding for RSOs running graduate programming	Varies

Questions about any of these go to the Vice President of Finance at gpssvpfb@uw.edu.

Who to contact

For	Contact
Senator nominations, roster, seats, attendance, anything in this handbook	Vice President of Administration, gpssvpadmin@uw.edu
Liaison positions	gpsspres@uw.edu or gpssvpadmin@uw.edu
Funding questions	Vice President of Finance, gpssvpfb@uw.edu
General GPSS enquiries	gpss@uw.edu

GPSS is in the Husky Union Building, room 314.

If you are not sure who to ask, email gpssvpadmin@uw.edu and it will get to the right person.