

**NINTH SENATE REVIEW COMMISSION
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2025
232 ENGLISH BUILDING
MINUTES**

Present: Chair Nolan Miller, Jenny Amos (Zoom), Nizam Arain, Hunter Farnham, Michael Grossman (Zoom), Eric Kurt, Beth Meschewski, Kirsten Pullen, Jenny Roether, Carol Symes, Jess Williams

Absent: Joyce Tolliver

1. CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Ninth Senate Review Commission (SR9) was called to order at 12:00 pm with Chair Miller presiding.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

No requests received.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the November 20, 2025 meeting were approved as distributed.

4. CHAIR'S REMARKS

Without objection, SR9 voted to allow remote participation by Amos and Grossman.

Chair Miller noted that Prasanta Kalita, Chair, Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees (HD), will attend the meeting next week. The Ad Hoc Committee on the Honorary Degree Award Process continues to meet and refine its approach. Chair Miller also spoke with Jon Hale, a member of the HD Committee, who is also leading the ad hoc committee, and stated that the ad hoc group hopes to complete an internal report next week. However, SR9 should not expect to receive any materials from them until mid-January.

Chair Miller would like to set aside time next week to review and clarify the specific timeline for next steps.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a) Establish the Process for Collecting Feedback

Grossman and Amos reviewed the email draft that will be sent to committee chairs. Grossman suggested adding space after each question to allow additional comments. The group reached consensus to include a final question at the end of the form, to collect any additional information that the chair wants to share.

SR9 discussed timing and agreed the form should be sent before winter break, with a reminder message sent in January. The questions should be placed in a Word document rather than in the body of the email, with the introductory section serving as the email text.

b) Information Exchange with Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA) Peers

Roether observed that Illinois engages in more public debate than many peer institutions. Many universities do not have committees dedicated to honorary degrees at all, and one institution does not award honorary degrees. At others, a review of honorary degrees is just one responsibility among many, rather than the sole focus of an entire committee.

c) SR.26.01, Review of the Honorary Degree Award Process

Tolliver shared information from the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) and the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS), though their processes remain unclear. UIS explicitly states that honorary degree award decisions are voted on by the Senate. The process at UIC is less transparent, its timeline indicates that the Senate External Affairs Committee oversees the review, with a March 31 deadline to submit materials to the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) and a May 2 deadline for the Senate to identify the nominee pool. It is unclear whether the full Senate or the SEC does this work, though there is strict emphasis on confidentiality.

Grossman questioned whether SR9 is responsible for developing specific procedures or whether those should be outlined in the *Bylaws* of HD, allowing that committee to craft the detailed process. He also asked who will ultimately make recommendations, SR9 or HD, given that the SEC expects recommendations from both groups. Chair Miller believes recommendations will come from both groups and any changes to the *Bylaws* would have to go through the Senate Committee on University Statutes and Senate Procedures (SP).

Chair Miller suggested that SR9 focus on proposing improvements to the process that strengthen candidate vetting, protect privacy, and uphold the role of the Senate in recommending candidates. He proposed considering two possible paths, one that maintains a process culminating in a full Senate vote, and another that would require statutory changes to allow more flexibility. Ultimately, the Senate must decide which approach to adopt. It may be that HD potentially handles the details of the implementation, but SR9 gives specific suggestions such as getting permission from a potential candidate.

Grossman and Tolliver drafted a proposed revision to the *Statutes*, Article II, Section 1(d) that would allow greater flexibility for the honorary degree award process that would not necessarily require a full Senate vote. Grossman noted that Section (d) is poorly written and confusing. Their draft adds the phrase “according to processes stipulated in its bylaws,” allowing each Senate to determine its own procedures. This would give the authority to change the *Bylaws* to include a process that all parties can agree upon. They also proposed moving the honorary degree awards provision out of the first subsection and into its own separate section, clarifying the distinction between earned degrees and honorary degree awards. Finally, they added “president or designee” to indicate that the President may delegate responsibilities, such as to the Chancellor.

Chair Miller agreed that separating honorary degree awards from conferred degrees is a good approach. He noted that the problematic part of the current language is the phrase “each Senate shall recommend,” which still implies that the Senate itself must vote. He suggested revising it to “the Senate shall establish processes for recommending” which would clarify that the role of the Senate is creating processes.

Williams pointed out that UIS begins with a body not subject to the Open Meetings Act (OMA). Pullen wondered whether this approach eliminates Senate debate. Kurt responded that establishing a different process does not inherently exclude a Senate vote.

Roether cited the *Statutes*, Article II, Section 1(g) which state that each Senate adopts bylaws governing its procedures and may delegate statutory duties to committees. When the Senate approves its *Bylaws*, it is effectively approving how statutory duties will be carried out. Thus, although the *Statutes* say “the senate shall recommend,” the recommending work could be done through a committee.

Chair Miller shared his concern that if the Senate delegates an official statutory duty to another body, that body may then be considered a public body under OMA. The discussions would still be public, but potentially less contentious because they would occur within a smaller group. Roether noted that the Joint Advisory Committee on Investment, Licensing, and Naming Rights (JACILNR) was intentionally structured to include Senate representation. She pointed to the *Statutes*, Article VIII, Section 4(b) which state, “The senate may specify a committee to provide advice on its behalf under conditions established by the senate.” Roether questioned why University Counsel would consider a committee delegated an official statutory duty to be subject to OMA, given that JACILNR operates under a similar model without falling under OMA.

Roether shared the example where the *Statutes* say that education policy is the purview of the Senate. However, by virtue of the *Bylaws* it is given to the General Education Board (GEB). GEB is a campus body subject to the will of the Senate, though the Senate votes only on student members, all of the faculty members are appointed by deans. This shows precedent for other structures. Arain asked whether delegation of actual decision-making authority, rather than advisory work, affects OMA requirements and whether University Counsel could clarify which factors are determinative.

Roether suggested revising the *Statutes* to separate honorary degree awards from earned degrees because one is an award and the other is a degree. Chair Miller supported developing revised language for SEC that clearly separates and clarifies the process.

Arain proposed exploring whether a JACILNR-style model is appropriate for honorary degree awards. Meschewski noted that some peer institutions do not award honorary degree awards but instead give medals and that adopting such a model should be considered. Grossman emphasized that the core issue is the process and the role of the Senate, regardless of how the nominee is recognized.

Arain summarized a spectrum of possible approaches:

- Eliminating honorary degrees entirely and allowing campuses to establish their own award structures.
- Retaining honorary degrees but revising statutory language to give senates more flexibility.
- Making incremental procedural improvements within existing statutory constraints.

Arain suggested gauging Senate sentiment on options such as discontinuing honorary degree awards versus retaining them with a more functional process.

Chair Miller noted that eliminating Senate involvement or replacing honorary degree awards entirely would be easier procedurally, but faculty may resist giving up the ability to speak on the Senate floor. Pullen believes that baseline issues should be addressed regardless of the model, such as the current practice of notifying candidates only after public debate. Arain emphasized focusing on what is “broken” and ensuring all proposed changes address those issues.

Pullen suggested compiling a written list of definitive recommendations and priorities. Chair Miller noted that if the process ends with a Senate vote, candidate permission should be obtained before becoming public. In a confidential JACILNR-style model, the question of candidate notification remains open. Arain questioned, if in that model,

would information on all nominations be publicly reported. Farnham questioned whether the Senate would object if a committee, rather than the Senate, selected honorary degree award recipients. Chair Miller observed that removing Senate votes might reduce public confrontation but would still prompt strong reactions if a previously rejected candidate later received an honorary degree award.

Arain pointed out that candidates may still be harmed by public debate even if they ultimately receive the award. Farnham suggested allowing candidates to opt out.

Chair Miller identified three potential paths:

- Discontinue honorary degree awards and replace them with another distinction.
- Retain honorary degree awards but delegate the process so it does not culminate in a Senate vote.
- Maintain the current structure but improve procedures and privacy.

Chair Miller recommended clearly stating what aspects of the current process are broken, outlining what any improved process must address, and developing specific recommendations for each of the three paths.

d) SR.26.02, Ninth Senate Review Commission (SR9)

No new discussion.

6. NEW BUSINESS

No new business.

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 pm.

Corazon Johnson
Committee Support Staff