The Council Handbook

Your Guide to Student Governance at Stockholm University.
Preface

This handbook is meant as support to you who are, or are considering becoming, active as a student representative at Stockholm University. By student representative, we mean students as well as PhD students who have been given the mandate to represent other students.

As a student representative, you are an important part in raising the quality standards and improving the situation for students at Stockholm University! You have the opportunity to influence your and other students’ study situation for the better, while at the same time gaining experiences that will benefit you for the rest of your life.

In the handbook, we briefly describe the function of the Student Union and how the university is organised. After this description, we go through what student governance means in theory as well as in practice. Lastly, we go through what rights you as student have, and where they come from.

We hope this handbook will be useful!

Stockholm University Student Union
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1. About the Union

Stockholm University Student Union is a non-profit member organisation, that has been active at the university since 1883. In order to become a full member of the union, you have to be studying at Stockholm University. The Student Union has a long tradition of, in cooperation with the university, reviewing and ensuring the quality of the education at the university.

Democratically structured organisation
The Student Union is a democratically structured organisation. This means, among other things, that a student union election is held each year, where you, as a member of the union, can vote. The election settles the number of seats each union party gets in the Student Union Representative Assembly. The members of the representative assembly then elect the union board, including president and vice president of the Student Union.

Student Union Staff
Around twenty elected representatives and almost ten officials work at the Student Union. The representatives are students with remunerated positions, that generally last one or two terms. The tasks include, among other things, student representation, student governance, study environment issues, equal opportunities issues, students’ associations, events and activities for members. The officials’ tasks include the union’s finances, membership scheme, administration, communication and intermediary work.

A Bridge Between Students and University
One of the Student Union’s main tasks is to represent the students’ common interests and to work towards guaranteeing that you and other students get to influence your education. An important part of this work is to support the student councils, the PhD councils and the student representatives at Stockholm University. Together, we can have an impact on the university’s decisions concerning students and the prerequisites for a good education.
2. University Structure

The university’s organisation is primarily split into two parts: the administrative part (the University Administration) and the collegium. The collegium is split into three different levels: department level, faculty level and academic area level.
Departments

Education and research are carried out mainly through the departments. This means that, in the university’s structure, the departments are at the level closest to the students. It is also the body that usually hires teachers and researchers. Decisions within the departments are made by the department boards. The head of the board leads the department. The departments often have local councils to deal with questions regarding, for example, equality and work environment.

Faculties

Faculties are groups of departments, that make decisions on an interdisciplinary level. In the faculties, decisions are made by faculty boards consisting of representatives from the various departments. The president of a faculty board is called a dean. A dean’s immediate superior is the vice-chancellor of Stockholm University.

Academic Areas

The academic areas can include multiple faculties, and they make faculty-wide decisions at the university. There are two academic areas at Stockholm University: the Human Science Academic Area and the Science Academic Area. Decisions are made by the respective area boards. These consist of representatives from the different faculties and is the highest authority in the academic area.

The Area Board of Science is led by a deputy vice chancellor, who is also the dean of the Faculty of Science. The Science Academic Area only has one faculty, but it is split into different sections: chemistry, biology, earth and environmental sciences, and the mathematics-physics section. These are led by so called section deans.

The Human Science Academic Area has three faculties:

- Faculty of Humanities
- Faculty of Law
- Faculty of Social Sciences.

Two of the three deans at the Human Science Academic Area are also deputy vice-chancellors, and are president and vice-president of the Area Board of Humanities.

University Administration

The university’s administrative part is called the University Administration. The University Administration processes a number of matters, in sections that serve as support functions. Some examples of areas covered by the administration are IT services, finance, Stockholm University Library and the two offices of the academic areas. The latter have a great amount of knowledge that can be of use to representatives, with information about what rules and regulations the university adheres to, among other things.

University Board

The academic areas – the Human Science Academic Area and the Science Academic Area – and the University Administration answer to the University Board, which leads the activities of the university at large.
3. Student Governance

As a student, you have the right to influence your education and to be represented when the university makes decisions that may affect your study situation. Students being able to influence is called student governance or student influence.

As a student representative, you can contribute with a student or PhD student perspective on questions raised, and make sure that the decisions made benefit the students at Stockholm University. By joining or forming a student council or PhD council, you get a platform for exercising student influence.

It’s important to point out that student governance is an integrated part of how Stockholm University is managed, and is implemented as a fundamental right for all students. We can be confident in the impact our work has, and should feel certain that our voices are heard. But it takes us all working together!

The university’s “Policies and Guidelines for Student Governance at Stockholm University” contains information about how the university should work with student influence. This is a useful document for you who are active in a student or a PhD council.

Student Councils

A student council usually consists of a group of students from the same department, but the responsibilities may be shared by the different subject areas at bigger departments. Among teacher students, different departments’ councils often cooperate.

Important platform for student governance

Through your student council, you get the opportunity to work with issues that affect you and your situation, both regarding the content and structure of your education and your study environment.

For example, you can get the chance to:

- join your department board
- work with the development of courses and course literature
- run projects and issues that affect students in your academic areas.
The work that is carried out at the student councils is mainly at the department level, but it’s also possible to take matters to the faculty level. By working this way, we create a better study environment for everyone at the university, and greater sympathy for the student perspective when decisions concerning our education are made.

**Different perspectives are needed**

The ideal is that the student council is representative of the students participating in the courses and programs where the council is active. This means that, no matter if you are new to the university life, or if you have studied for a longer period of time and have a good grasp of how things work, your involvement in the council matters.

All different views are important concerning a student perspective on the education, regardless of if you are taking your first credits or making that last push before graduating.

**Social activities**

The student councils often arrange more social events, as a way to create a sense of community between students, and build bridges between the different subject areas and levels within the various departments.

**Choose your level of involvement**

It’s up to you and the other people on the council to decide how much you want to do. Your involvement in the council only requires as much time as you are able and willing to spend. By helping each other out when someone in the council has much to do, you can make sure that the student council’s work gets done.

**Close connection between student councils and the union**

The student councils are independent bodies that act within their own areas of responsibility, but they are closely linked to and get their mandate from the Student Union. The union and the councils work together for good communication between students and departments. For the union to know which student councils are active, the councils need to get registered every term at the Student Union’s web site **www.sus.su.se**.

**Election of student representatives**

At the student council’s meetings, student representatives are nominated to, for example, the department board and the faculty council. The representatives are then elected by the Student Union, which informs the university of the decision.

In the department board, decisions regarding the specific education within the department’s area of responsibility are made.

In the faculty council, students and PhD students from the entire faculty get together to discuss broader issues.

**Requesting financial support**

During a student council meeting, the council can decide to request financial support from the Student Union. Council funding can be applied for each term, and activity funding for the different activities that the council organises. The activities should be clearly linked to the council’s work.
The Central Student Council

The Central Student Council (CSR) is a body that represents all bachelor’s and master’s degree students. CSR’s purpose is to improve the faculty council’s and the Student Union’s chances to influence and shape the university, and to maintain good communication between faculty councils and the Student Union Board. Therefore, its voice carries weight in questions regarding student influence, and it has an important consultative role for the Student Union Board.

During their education, students may encounter difficulties that can’t be solved by a department or faculty. In such cases, a platform for a university wide engagement is needed. Questions discussed in CSR are faculty wide and affect many students. For example, they may deal with the university’s pedagogical approach and educating lecturers, or common quality evaluation systems.

The councils should be democratic

To have a functioning structure of student governance, it is important that your student or PhD council has a democratic decision-making process. This means that the council is set up like an association, with a chairperson, a secretary and a treasurer. They can maintain order at the meetings and make sure that the students or PhD students are called to attend them. The student councils act as a representative for students, and therefore it is important that the decisions that are made are made democratically.
Meeting Minutes

Here is an example of how a meeting can be structured. You don’t have to include all these items every meeting, and naturally you can add other relevant items – the important thing is that all decisions are made through voting and that everything is registered.

1. **Opening**
   1.1. **Introduction and Pronoun Round**
       Introduce yourselves to each other and make everyone feel welcome.
   1.2. **Election of the Chairperson**
       The chairperson leads the meeting.
   1.3. **Election of the Secretary**
       The secretary takes notes during the meeting.
   1.4. **Election of the Attestant**
       The attestant reads the minutes after the meeting and makes sure everything is in order.

2. **Approval of Agenda**
   This item is for approving the intended content of today’s meeting or if someone has something to add.

3. **Approval of Minutes**
   Under this item, you look back at what was said during your last meeting. This can then be approved and filed.

4. **Finances**
   For example, you can look over your finances or apply for action grants or activity grants.

5. **Reports**
   The student representatives in, for example, the department board or the faculty council, can give updates on what's going on in the different bodies.

6. **Election of positions**
   This only applies when you need to fill a position. For example, you can elect a representative to the department board, or a new secretary for the council.

7. **Project**
   Under this item, you can look at the student council’s current activities, or plan future events.

8. **Other matters**
   What doesn’t fit under any of the previous items can be entered here.

9. **Next meeting**
   It’s a good idea to decide when (and maybe where) the next meeting will be held right away.
Positions in a Council

Chairperson
The chairperson has the overall responsibility for the student council staying active and on the right track. This can mean being the contact person for the Student Union, convening meetings, putting together an agenda and arranging a meeting room.

Vice Chairperson
The vice chairperson supports the chairperson. If the chairperson is absent or unable to carry out all of their tasks, the duties of the post are carried out by the vice chairperson.

Treasurer
The treasurer has the overall responsibility for the finances, which, for example, means that they apply for council funding and activity funding from the Student Union. It is also common practice that the treasurer buys tea, coffee and snacks for the meetings, and keeps track of all expenses by documenting them.

Secretary
The secretary takes notes during the meeting and writes the minutes of the meeting. They make sure that information regarding the minutes and important events are available to the Student Union and the students.

Study Environment Officer
The study environment officer represents the students in issues regarding study environment at the department. Among other things, they attend the department’s safety inspections and participate in the Student Union’s Study Environment Network.

Equal Opportunities Officer
The equal opportunities officer’s task is to raise questions, issues and proposals regarding equality, equal opportunities and equal treatment. The officer also participates in the Student Union’s Equal Opportunities Network.

Student Representative in the Department Board
The department board is the highest decision-making body in each department. They make decisions about courses, budget and much more. The prefect, the director of studies and other department employees sit on the board. The position as student representative is remunerated and the election of this position has to be reported to the union for a Bureau decision.

Representatives in the Faculty Council
Each student council should elect a representative to the faculty council, who can attend the meetings and report back to the student council. The student representatives in the faculty boards (the highest decision-making body in the faculty) and their commissions and drafting committees are nominated by the faculty councils.

Representatives in other councils and working groups
The departments often have local councils and groups that the student or PhD council can elect representatives to.
PhD Councils

As a PhD student, you are different in the way that you are both a student and an employee. However, when it comes to student governance, PhD students are students first and foremost. You have the same right to influence your education and to be represented in the university’s organisation as students at the bachelor’s and master’s level.

Important platform for student governance

Like the student councils, the PhD councils are an important platform for student governance. Each department with PhD students should have a PhD council. At bigger departments with several subject areas and many PhD students, the council may be made up by representatives. At smaller departments with few PhD students, the council may instead be made up by the entire group of PhD students.

In a PhD council, you have the opportunity to raise and discuss questions regarding education at the post-graduate level. The councils nominate representatives to the department board and other workgroups in the department. This is important to get insight into and be able to influence activities concerning the education or work environment at one’s department. The PhD councils also nominate representatives to the faculty councils, where it is possible to raise questions of a more general nature.

Joining a PhD council comes with many benefits

Being a PhD student can be lonely at times. By getting involved in a PhD council, you get the opportunity to mingle, network and, together with your colleagues, exercise influence over your own education and working conditions. It’s also a good qualification, since you get insight into the university’s activities and framework – important experience and knowledge for a continued scientific career.

Annual registration at the Student Union

Like the student councils, the PhD councils draw their legitimacy from the Student Union. Each PhD council should get registered at the union annually. This allows contact with both the union and with other councils at the university. It is also possible for the council to request grants for different activities and for what might be needed for the council’s current operations.

Central PhD Student Council

There is also a Central PhD Student Council (CDR) within the union, which consists of representatives from all faculties at the university. The representatives, elected by their respective councils, work towards raising and pushing forward issues that affect all PhD students at the university and the post-graduate education in general. CDR also nominates representatives to drafting committees and decision-making bodies above faculty level, such as the academic area boards and the University Board.
Faculty Councils

All the different councils and bodies in the university’s structure can be confusing, but the faculty councils’ operations are worth an extra mention:

**The faculties at Stockholm University**
- Faculty of Humanities
- Faculty of Law
- Faculty of Science
- Faculty of Social Sciences

**Assembly point for students and PhD students from the same faculty**
The faculty councils are run by students and PhD students from the same faculty and have their fundamental basis in the Student Union. It serves as an assembly point for student councils and PhD councils from all departments of a faculty. This means that all student councils and PhD councils should elect a representative to their faculty council. This is important, both to gather all the different experiences from each council and each department, and to coordinate bigger matters and projects.

In the faculty councils, you get to discuss faculty broad issues with other students and PhD students from all departments of the faculty. The representatives decide on the agenda together and can discuss the issues they find important. The questions can then be raised both in the individual student councils and PhD councils, and in the faculty’s decision-making and deliberative bodies.

**Gain insight higher up in the chain of command**
The faculty councils elect student representatives and PhD representatives to different decision-making and deliberative bodies higher up than the department level. Through the faculty council, you get the opportunity to influence the development of your education at a higher level in the chain of command than the department where your student or PhD council is active.

For example, it’s possible to join:
- academic appointment boards, the assemblies that process the hiring of lecturers and professors
- the budget drafting committees, where the faculty’s budget allocation is discussed
- faculty boards, the faculty’s highest decision-making body and board.

All of these are very important groups, where it is of vital importance that the student perspective is pushed forward. You get an exciting opportunity both to get insight into how Stockholm University is run and a genuine impact on what happens to your education.

If you want to know what’s going on higher up in the university’s structure, for example on the academic area level or on the university board, student representatives from the Student Union are part of those bodies.
Student Governance in Practice

Students have the right, by law, to be represented in all university bodies that make decisions regarding the students’ study situation. But how does it work in practice? How can you become a student representative and what are your rights and obligations?

The councils nominate student representatives
The student councils and the faculty councils nominate representatives to the different bodies and inform the Student Union, so that the union can officially elect the representative. When this is done, the representative has the full right to attend, speak and vote at the meetings.

Influence at different levels
As a student representative, you can exercise influence both over your own education at the department level, and at the broader faculty level. Student and PhD councils usually elect representatives for the department board and the teacher education programme boards, while the faculty councils elect representatives for higher authorities, at the faculty and academic area level. We students are able to influence everything from course syllabi and course literature, to the hiring of university teachers and the structure of different programmes.

Compensation for attending meetings
As opposed to meetings with the student councils, PhD councils and faculty councils, meetings with decision-making bodies, such as the department board or bodies at a faculty level, are paid for students at a bachelor’s and master’s level. PhD students are compensated with an extension of their employment, equivalent to the commitment required of the position.

Meetings interfering with mandatory course elements
To facilitate attending the meetings, the university has decided that student representatives have the right to do mandatory course elements at another time or in another way (if it is practicable and financially possible) in case they interfere with a meeting at the university.

The administration language is Swedish
An important thing to note is that the language used in administration at Stockholm University is Swedish. You can request that the meetings should be held in English, but it can’t be guaranteed. This may be relevant when electing representatives to different bodies.

Report back to the councils
Student representatives should, after attending meetings at the university, report back to the student council or PhD council and/or the faculty council what has been said at the meeting that may concern students. If the representative can’t attend the meeting, they should give a written report to the council and the Student Governance Officer in charge.

Student governance officers support the councils and the student representatives
The union has five student governance officers responsible for the four different faculties and the teacher education. They’re there to support the student councils and make sure that student influence is carried out in their area of responsibility. The student governance officers are always there, both for the student councils and individual student representatives, and can help with everything from recruiting to how meetings are held. They can also give advice about how to present proposals in a good way and what platforms are best suited for certain questions.
The Student Union’s representation duties

Even higher up in the chain of command, at the central level and in the University Administration, the elected representatives from the Student Union participate as student representatives, for example the union’s president and vice president, the head of student governance, the student governance officers, the study environment coordinator and the equal opportunities coordinator.
4. Student Rights

It’s not always easy to keep track of what rights you have as a student. Here follows a selection of the rights you have. Your rights are regulated partly by laws and regulations, and partly by local regulations at Stockholm University.

Student Governance

Students have the right to influence their education. All students are participants in the university’s activities, and as such also have a responsibility to influence and improve the education. As a student, you have the right to be represented in decision-making and deliberation that have an impact on the education or the students’ situation. At every department, there should be a student council where you can get involved and pursue agendas relevant to your education.

Course Syllabus, Schedule and Literature

As a student, you always have the right to relevant information about the course before you begin your studies. The course syllabus should be laid down at least a month before the closing date for registration. Information about course literature, schedule and dates for tests and retests should be available at least a month before the course starts. The directives in the course syllabus are legally binding, just as laws and regulations.

Examination

As a rule, you have the right to undergo examination for a course or module at least five times. If you have received a passing grade at an examination, you cannot raise that grade. A passing grade cannot be changed to a failing grade at your request. After receiving two failing grades from the same teacher for a course or module, you have the right to request a new examiner, save for exceptional reasons. An exam should be corrected and graded within three weeks after the examination is held, and at least two weeks before the retest. You cannot appeal a grade, but you can request a re-examination or a correction of your grade. You have the right to a justification of your grade from the examiner, verbally or in writing.

Course Evaluations

After a completed course, you should be given the option to comment on the course through an evaluation. It is important that as many as possible complete the evaluation, as it gives the department guidance as to what has been good about the course and what might need to be changed. The results of the course evaluation, and the possible actions taken following these results, should be easily accessible to the students. The formation and follow-up of the course evaluation is done in consultation with the student representatives. Students have the right to evaluate a course anonymously.
Where Do Your Rights Come from?

Laws and regulations
Parliament and government make laws and regulations, for example governing higher education. Many of the approaches we follow at Stockholm University are based in the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Ordinance and the Administrative Procedure Act.

The Higher Education Act can be seen as a framework where the foundation for higher education is regulated. It is adopted by the Swedish Parliament. The Higher Education Ordinance can be seen as an extension of the Higher Education Act, and contains regulations for education and disciplinary actions. In the Administrative Procedure Act, we find regulations regarding administration of cases.

Legal certainty regarding grading
The most common thing us students experience, that is covered by the Administrative Procedure Act, is grading. All grading is an exercise of public authority, where the foundation is legal certainty. For the conditions of legal certainty to be fulfilled, rules should be published, easily accessible and be applied predictably and efficiently. As a student, you should know what is expected of you in advance. For example, you should know how you will be examined, what rules apply at the examination and what happens if you choose not to take the exam.

The university’s rulebook, guidelines and course syllabi
Stockholm University has compiled many of the laws, regulations and directives in a document called "Rules and Regulations". In it, you can find much of the information that the university has an obligation to provide. "Policy and Guidelines for Student Governance at Stockholm University" is a useful document. It provides information about how the work with student influence should be carried out at Stockholm University.

Other important documents are course syllabi and educational curricula. These contain directives that should be applied to a course or a program. They cannot be waived but should be applied reliably and efficiently.

More questions about student rights? Contact our student ombudsmen at studentombud@sus.su.se
Learn more about us at:

Website: 
sus.su.se

Facebook: 
facebook.com/studentkar
facebook.com/stockholmuniversitystudentunion

Instagram:
instagram.com/sustudentkar

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