

Class Rep 101 Guide

1. Why do we have class reps?

Class reps promote constructive communication between students and staff. They give lecturers access to students' opinions on the teaching and delivery of papers. Representatives give confidential feedback to their department, reporting on positive aspects and identifying any potential areas for improvement.

“Being a class rep is an opportunity for you to take an active part in determining your education experience.”

The University of Otago Class Representative Policy “supports the widespread implementation of a class representative system,” with OUSA “taking a leading role in co-coordinating and facilitating the class representative system across the university.” The full policy can be found here: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/policies/otago003107.html>

2. An overview of the Class Rep System & Responsibilities

OUSA	Departments/Faculties	Student Reps
Promotes rep system	Promotes rep system	Promote rep system
Enters class reps into database	Enters class reps into database	Engage with students
Trains class reps	Invites students to attend departmental meetings	Attend OUSA training
Provides ongoing support for reps	Actions points raised in meetings	Attend department meetings
Organises rep awards/ other functions for reps	Passes feedback to teaching staff	Collect and collate feedback
Offers ongoing training opportunities	Provides feedback to rep on actions/non actions from issues raised	
Provides letter of reference		

3. Where to go for help

If you have a question about things that the Department handles, such as meeting times for reps, please contact your departmental admin person.

If you feel like you need some advice and/or support about the rep role or have a question that you don't know where to go for the answer, contact the OUSA Student Rep Coordinator at classreps@ousa.org.nz or pop into OUSA Student Support at 5 Ethel Benjamin Place (behind OUSA Rec Centre, Albany St).

4. Areas of Responsibility

As class reps, you are interested in gathering feedback about the teaching and delivery of your paper/course. The four main areas that this includes are:

- Resources (print resources, e resources, subject specific software/equipment)
- Teaching (lectures, tutorials)
- Assessments (assignments, internal tests, examinations, subject specific assessment tasks)
- Workload (deadlines and time allocated for completion of required tasks)

5. Class Rep Duties

- Attend Intro to Class Rep training.
- Make sure the students you represent know who you are and how they can contact you.
- Maintain a respectful and collegial relationship with lecturers, administrative and other Department staff.
- Actively seek feedback and gather input from students about the paper/course.
- Attend any scheduled department meetings and present student feedback. If you are unable to attend a scheduled meeting, please make sure that you send apologies.
- Raise student issues informally where appropriate.
- Refer students to other services and sources for help if necessary (see page 6).

6. Boundaries

The sorts of things class reps *don't* deal with are:

- Harassment or bullying concerns
- Personal issues (i.e. things that would be best worked through with a counsellor)
- Disciplinary issues
- Staff issues
- Anything that may overload you or cause you unnecessary stress or impact negatively on your academic work



“You’re not expected to be Dr Phil!”

7. Communication

When you are seeking feedback, find out what's good first. We suggest these are the two questions you could focus on:

1. What's working well in this paper?
2. What would you like to see changed/improved?

“Focus on the positive.”

8. Listening

Listening is something we often take for granted. We have established patterns of communication with our friends that we're comfortable with and don't need to think about. When you're a rep, you may find that you need to communicate much more widely, with a diverse range of people. The following is a checklist for listening well if a student approaches you with an issue:

- Allow the student to talk without interruption.
- Maintain a friendly, open manner.
- Try not to leap to conclusions or make judgement statements about what you're being told (like, 'Oh, that's terrible!').
- If you are unclear about any details, ask for clarification.
- Summarise what the student has just told you and reflect back to them: 'My understanding is that Is that correct?'
- Ask the student what they would ideally like to see happen and when.
- Assure the student that you will maintain confidentiality (unless otherwise agreed) and thank them for taking the time to talk to you.
- Agree on any next steps that are your responsibility as a rep OR refer to other help as appropriate.

9. Collective vs individual?

You need to sift through the information you receive from students to make sure that it's valid. For example, if one student has a particular gripe with the lecturer for a personal reason, their feedback may be more reflective of that and not something that is going to affect the wider cohort. Ask yourself, 'Are other people likely to find this an issue?'

Scenario

If one or two people tell you that there is far too much reading and they're spending 24.5 hours a week keeping up with the requirements for this ONE paper, do you:

- A) Go directly to the lecturer and tell her/him?
- B) Send an email to the entire class and ask people how they're finding the readings?
- C) Raise the matter in the next department meeting?

Scenario suggested response:

B) Check with other students to see how they're finding the workload. If the one or two students are isolated cases, refer them on to other potential places for help.

10. Communicating with your Department

Most of the issues that will be raised (if any) will be minor issues. It's always better to deal with these quickly and informally. We suggest you:

- Catch your lecturer for a few minutes after your lecture or email them and ask for a time to stop in and have a chat.
- In department meetings, focus on passing on positive feedback along with any issues that are outside of the lecturer's control or issues that have been raised but not yet resolved.
- If what you need to discuss requires more time, arrange an appointment with your lecturer or course coordinator.

11. Department meetings

Being a class rep is a privilege and a wonderful way to get to know academic and administrative staff within your department. The relationships you nurture as a rep are invaluable as you progress in your studies, particularly if you plan to continue on to postgraduate studies.

“It is expected that you will attend departmental meetings. If, you are unable to attend, please send apologies to the meeting organiser.”

We suggest that you take brief notes in the meeting of anything discussed that has relevance to your paper (although most departments will take minutes and send you a copy).

If there are agreed action points that will impact on your paper, it is a good idea that these are fed back to the wider student population. Ask who will ensure that students are advised of any changes or improvements. If you have any concerns about meeting protocol or outcomes, contact the OUSA Rep Coordinator.

7 Cs for Meeting Communication

Clear	Speak clearly
Concise	Focus on what needs to be said and avoid going off on tangents
Correct	Present facts accurately and avoid being misleading
Complete	Give all necessary information
Courteous	Always be polite
Constructive	Be positive and offer solutions rather than criticism
Confident	Don't be afraid to speak up!

12. How do you get input from students?

Here are a few ways you can let people know that you are rep and ask for feedback:

- Begin with your friends first and work out from there!
- If they haven't already, ask the lecturer to make sure your details are on Blackboard (or your department's equivalent e-teaching space).
- Email all students via Blackboard to introduce yourself and ask for feedback. If you aren't able to send an email to the entire class, ask your lecturer to give you the necessary access to do so.
- Set up a Facebook page for the paper or add your details to an existing student Facebook page for the paper.
- At lectures, hand out a small flyer (lots to a page to save on printing!) that identifies you as the class rep and ask students how the paper/course is going for them. Give them an email address for responses.
- Ask your lecturer if you can have five minutes at the start of the lecture to speak to the class (the start is better than the end because not many people will want to stay and listen to you once the lecturer's finished!).

You may still find it difficult to get feedback. That's OK! The main thing is to ensure that students know who you are and how to contact you if they need to.

“If you're asking for feedback
and drawing a blank, it probably means
that things are going well.”

13. Skills and Training Opportunities

Apart from the standard class rep training that you will be offered at the beginning of semester, there will be numerous opportunities for other training during the year, including:

- Conflict resolution
- Public speaking

If you have any ideas for the sort of training that you would like OUSA to offer in addition to these, please email your suggestion(s) to classrep@ousa.org.nz.

We will also let you know about other opportunities for volunteering and training in the wider university and Dunedin community as these arise.

Being a class rep provides fantastic 'on the ground' training in terms of communication, listening, being proactive and other valuable skills.

14. Rewards

Class representatives are valued by department and faculty staff and OUSA. Individual departments have different ways of communicating their appreciation to reps.

OUSA will provide opportunities for training as well as social events through the year. We also provide a reference letter for your CV.

15. Other places that can help

Within the university, there are many places that you can direct students for support if they raise an issue that is outside of the scope of your class rep role.

OUSA Student Support

Advocacy (academic, tenancy, all other), Queer Support, Foodbank

help@ousa.org.nz

5 Ethel Benjamin Place (behind the Rec Centre on Albany Street)

Phone 479 5448

Student Learning Centre (SLC)

Loads of study support for undergraduates and postgraduates. SLC also run PASS sessions for some of the more competitive papers.

Slc.reception@otago.ac.nz

South-West Corner Central Library (ISB) Building

Phone 479 8801

Student Health

Doctors, counsellors

Free phone 0800 479 821 (including cellphones)

Phone 479 8212

Phone 8212 (if calling within the University e.g. Halls of Residence)

Corner Walsh & Albany Streets

Please contact OUSA Student Support for a more comprehensive list of internal and external support agencies if required.

16. Thank you and enjoy!

Being a rep should be fun! We hope that it proves to be a worthwhile and rewarding experience for you. Remember, if it's not turning out to be much fun or you find yourself in need of any assistance, help is just an email away: classrep@ousa.org.nz.

“Thank you... OUSA loves you!”

