Through reports and open hearings, the University Senate may have focused more closely this year on its expository function—describing and explaining complex issues to the Columbia community—than on its political and policymaking roles.

In moderating two well-attended open hearings early in the spring semester on the charged issue of the unionization of Columbia students who teach, the Senate’s student caucus, led by Roosevelt Montas, a Ph.D. candidate in English, maintained a consistent neutrality, prompting both pro- and anti-unionization panels to explain their positions in depth and educate a wider audience about the serious issues involved.

A substantial study by the Commission on the Status of Women, written mainly by Kim Kastens, a research officer at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, and presented to the Senate last November, examined the mobility of female scholars through Columbia’s academic hierarchy in the Arts and Sciences, searching for leaks in the pipeline, from enrollment in graduate school through tenure. The result was a detailed and nuanced picture of the last decade, including successes and failures in different disciplines.

An ad hoc committee chaired by political scientist Sharyn O’Halloran surveyed Columbia’s online learning and digital media initiatives in detail, including their funding sources. It concluded, in a report presented to the Senate in April, that online learning initiatives that grow naturally out of the classroom experience of particular faculty and students and can support themselves or produce revenue, deserve to be encouraged and developed, while costlier and less focused ventures, like Fathom.com, should be scaled back.

A few committee initiatives resulted in Senate action. The Budget Review Committee’s Resolution Seeking Greater Budget Transparency, adopted by the Senate in December, asked for a clearer presentation in the University budget of the uses of revenues from patents and royalties, noting that it could not track nearly $50 million of this income for 2000-01. The Education Committee and the student caucus concluded a lengthy study with guidelines for improving the administration of dual degree programs that the Senate adopted in March. Education, chaired by Sen. Letty Moss-Salentijn of the Dental School, also approved a new Master of Public Administration to be conducted entirely at Columbia’s Biosphere 2 campus in Tucson, Arizona, but expressed concerns about such programs in a report that the Senate formally endorsed in February.

The Senate also adopted a resolution from Faculty Affairs asking for data on the salaries of Columbia’s language lecturers, with a view to improving them. A broader discussion of faculty salaries will resume in the fall.

Senators Stephanie Neuman and Barry Allen, representing Columbia’s officers of research, presented a substantial proposal for a greater voice for researchers in the Senate. Action on their request has been deferred till next year.

In October, with minimal discussion, the Senate adopted the Resolution Reaffirming Free and Open Debate in the Aftermath of Recent Terrorist Attacks.

All findings, proceedings and resolutions mentioned here are available on the Senate website, at www.columbia.edu/cu/senate/.

Gender Equality, Student Unionization and Budget Issues Addressed by Senate in Past Year

BY TOM MATHEWSON

Above, David Stern, Law ’66, Chair of the Board of Trustees, left, and new President Lee Bollinger, Law ’71, before the start of the Commencement ceremony. Below, Harley Davidson CEO Jeffrey Bleustein, Engineering Ph.D. ’85, roared onto the dais on a Harley Davidson motorcycle before delivering a speech to the Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science graduates.

Above, graduates of the College of Physicians and Surgeons listen to the Hippocratic Oath being read by Gerald Fischbach, dean of the Faculty of Medicine and the College of Physicians and Surgeons and executive vice president for Health and Biomedical Sciences. Below, students from the Graduate School of Journalism celebrate by throwing newspaper in the air.