

Senate Council members:

At the September 21st Senate Council meeting, I expressed my concern regarding the inactivity or underutilization of certain Senate committees. In an e-mail to me, Dave challenged me to "frame a "motion" to the effect of what SC should do to begin the process of making these things work; the motion may, of course, have a preamble that summarizes the problem, as you see it. We'd then discuss that motion, and hopefully start the process."

I will give it a try. First some background and then my proposal (without a preamble).

One of the greatest criticisms I am sure that all of us have heard over the years is that while the University Senate is designated as the principle voice of faculty, governance is weak, ineffective and at times appears to act simply as a rubber stamp of policies developed by the administration with limited faculty input. My sense, after three complete cycles of Senate duty, is that policy development, governance and oversight at this institution is much too driven by our administration and that, in my opinion, the faculty have abdicated their governance input or have accepted a minor role. The faculty Senate should be the lead agent in faculty governance and faculty deserve more than we have given them. One important step toward this goal would be to reactivate our existing yet largely dormant Senate committees with specific charges based on their overall area of responsibility and of issues deemed of importance based on a yearly assessment (or more frequently as needed) of the Faculty council. I see such directed committee functions serving as both creative forces in policy development, a necessary watch dog of faculty rights and a component in the fulfillment of faculty responsibilities. As one example of the existing situation, I have been on the institutional finance and resource allocation committee for the past three years. This committee has not met during that three year period despite significant issues of resource allocation being proposed by the administration during this time.

Hence, I make the following motion.

On a yearly basis:

1. Towards the end of the spring semester, the Senate should identify issues of importance for consideration for the following academic year. (The reports of the Senate committees as to their findings and recommendations should be a valuable component in this process.)
2. At the summer Faculty Council retreat, the above issues, as well as any other relevant issues should be discussed and specific issues, requiring consideration and action should be identified. On the basis of the specific issues identified, charges for the appropriate Senate committees should be drafted. Each committee's charges should include a projected timetable for the committee's dealing with its charges, provision of timely updates and specified date of submission of a final report (or interim report) for each charge to the Faculty Senate.
3. These draft charges should be circulated to the faculty at the beginning of the fall semester, with a request for faculty comments and suggestions.

4. Soon after the draft charges have been circulated (e.g., 10 days), the Senate Council should meet with the chairs of all the standing Senate committees, and finalize the charges.

The above timetable should not preclude the addition to or modification of charges, based on new developments or situations, as the academic year proceeds.

A few examples that might be addressed, by no means a complete guide and in fact just skims the surface focusing on only a few committees, are suggested below (I have attached a list of all the committees to this e-mail for your perusal):

(To facilitate the information gathering components of any charges, it is anticipated that previous analyses of these issues and recommendations would be reviewed as part of the information gathering phase.)

I. Senate Academic Planning and Priorities Committee:

A. evaluation of the status of undergraduate education including established indicators, such as student to faculty ratio and facilities, and measures of enhancement of education experiences. Based on this evaluation, a specific plan should be developed to address deficiencies, build on strengths and develop new initiatives. Wherever feasible, the individual components of this plan should be prioritized.

II. Academic Facilities Committee:

A. infrastructure development across our university. The Faculty Senate is in a unique position, as an all-campus organization, to view the global needs of the university and to recommend to the administration priorities in the construction of new buildings where there are obvious, yet overlooked, deficiencies.

III. Senate Institutional Finances and Resources Allocation Committee

A. Development of an appropriate plan concerning financial contributions by the athletic program to the general fund

B. Assessment of the academic and financial impact across our university of the increased use of distance learning as a revenue generating stream and development of committee recommendations based on this assessment.

C. Evaluate the attempts to remove benefits in a relatively cavalier manner i.e., little faculty input before making a decision impacting on faculty welfare such as health benefits to retired persons, 5 year wait in order to have TIAA-CREF contributions from UK fully vested, increased deductible, etc. and development of committee recommendations based on this evaluation.

Shelly