

Senate Council
March 22, 2010

Improving the Senate

Agendas

- Eliminate informational presentations. All items that come before the senate need to be seeking motions for consent/advice/endorsement... official Senate business. DO NOT waste the time of Senators on things that can be posted on the web page for review. (by the way, this year has been better than the last in infommercialism).
- Put the action items near the start of each meeting, and leave guest speakers and less important items for later. "The mind cannot absorb more than the seat can endure", and after a while during the meetings the mind becomes saturated. Putting the action items at the start will ensure that they are carefully considered and that questions will be asked and answered. Near the end of the meeting the voting tends to become perfunctory.
- All items on Senate agendas should pertain to Senate business, with no informational reports.
- The Senate should not serve as a rubber stamp for the SC, even though the SC does most of the work.
- With a group as large as the Senate, committees should function properly. When proposals come to the Senate, they Senate should be voting to approve it, showing trust in the review given by a Senate committee. The Senate should not spend time doing what committees can do well.
- There is a perception that senators are merely asked to vote on items for which decisions had already been made. Most issues on campus really come down to money, and that is something in which the Senate must be involved.
- S.C. continue to report every Senate meeting, but the minutes of all SC meetings since the last full Senate meeting should be included in the Senate agenda so that all Senators can review all SC items/issues. This may require the SC meeting minutes to be brief but inclusive and complete.
- Add a New Business component to the agenda of each meeting. At present, I have no idea when or how to bring issues to the floor.
- Make/expand consent agenda for all courses/program changes/proposals. If there is concern from more than two senators, they pull it off consent and put on Senate agenda. Not sure of the how the current consent agenda works, nor the protocol for pulling things.
- There has not been a call to respond to action items or do work; meetings are made up of relatively mundane curricular items.

Committees/Councils

- Revive the Senate's moribund committee system. (Two or three years ago I volunteered to be on some sort of undergrad curriculum committee, but never heard back after making the offer. With the development of GenEd in full swing you'd have thought this would be an active group. Maybe the group is indeed active, but I just wasn't put on the committee -- I have no way of knowing.)

- Require ALL Senate committees to present a report to the Senate at least once per semester. The report should include action items, number of meetings, issues/concerns, etc., needing full senate action with the committees official recommendations. These reports should then be entered into the Senate minutes.
- Committees that don't meet are problematic, and there should be more faculty members who volunteer for University service.
- Until the late 1970's, it was routine for the April and May meetings of the Senate to concentrate on committee reports from committee chairs. If committees can be given clearer charges during orientation activities, many subsequent faculty-led activities can occur more easily.
- It is difficult to be a productive member of a Senate committee when there is no discernable charge, purpose, or guidelines on reviewing proposals.
- Admissions standards have been lowered at UK, and there was a question as to whether or not the appropriate Senate committee, let alone the Senate itself, was consulted prior to making the decisions.
- Committees should be more active, and regular reports by committee chairs during Senate meetings would be helpful.
- There was some discussion about the role of Councils, etc. in vetting curriculum proposals. I am currently a member of Undergraduate Council and previously served a three-year term on Graduate Council. In my experience, the Councils usually do a good and conscientious job of vetting curriculum proposals. That said, it would be beneficial and appropriate for the University Senate to provide more explicit guidance to the Councils regarding the objective of their vetting (to my knowledge, no such guidance exists). The guidance might take the form of a broad policy statement. For example, the faculty in the academic unit proposing the changes likely are in a better position than the Councils and Senate to know whether the proposed changes enhance (or at least do not compromise) academic rigor and whether they unduly harm current students. Senate thus might decide that the broad policy statement provide guidance about the extent to which Councils should give deference to the academic units proposing the curriculum changes versus exercising their oversight responsibilities.
- The Senate has a wide variety of committees, which deal with many aspects of campus life – Senate committees must be charged in order to expect committees to perform as intended.
- There should be better guidelines for Senate committees that review curricular proposals. Currently, unless there is an egregious problem, most proposals just go on through.
- Even if a proposal receives approvals from a variety of different reviewing bodies, proposals do not seem to be scrutinized in the review process.
- Not every reviewing body considers all aspects of a proposal. Part of representative governance is that there are pieces that are not seen by everyone.

- Senators should be told the value of programs to undergraduate students, not just presented with a distribution of courses to review.
- The lengthy review process offers a variety of opportunities for faculty to speak up if something about a proposal is objectionable.
- Curricular forms are the guidelines and instructions for proposals.
- The opportunity to stop a course proposal was utilized within the past few months, so that type of action is available to faculty. I do not think the committee structure of the Senate has been well used. Committees offer an opportunity for some issues to be brought forward and should be part of the solution for performing an advisory role. That said, committee meetings for the sake of meeting are not effective. I do not think that all the standing committees must always be active at a given time, but they should be available to serve their charge or to receive requests from senators posing agenda items to them. Some committees are probably too broad; for instance, facilities seems to cover everything from computing to classrooms to grounds. Perhaps it would be better to make more use of ad hoc or working groups on specific issues as needed (for example, IT support issues, distance learning initiatives, etc.). Committee agendas beyond the general charge could be generated by concerns brought forward by senate members or suggested by senate council based on their overview of priorities for the coming year. To stimulate member initiated agenda, the senate council call for specific agenda items at the start of the year and focus on constituting the needed committees based on that input. I think committees should be available and active as needed based on institutional priorities and member concerns.
- Several people complained about the Senate's role as a rubber stamping organization. One approach would be to delegate authority for final decisions on certain issues to those committees that consider them carefully. In my experience a large group viewing complicated issues with little preparation rarely makes good decisions, and I question why final votes on certain issues take place in the full Senate. Perhaps committee decisions and supporting materials could be made available to Senators for review and challenges for a prescribed period before becoming final decisions.

Communication

- Committee meetings should be posted on the Senate website, in part so faculty members may hold one another accountable.
- I don't see meaningful *communication* from Senators to the groups they represent. Providing a concise list of relevant announcements and Senate decisions that Senators could post on faculty listservs would be one way to standardize the information coming out of the Senate. In cases where several Senators represent one group such as a college, a single Senator could be selected to disseminate the information to that group.
- I appreciated the opportunity for the Senate to have a broad open discussion facilitated by Professor Swanson about our role in university governance.
- Budget issues - Clearly this is a huge concern for everyone these days. If we could possibly be facing program or benefit cuts or other draconian responses to a dire budget situation, will the senate have enough information to provide meaningful input? Will such input be sought? The suggestion was made

that the Senate council chair could seek to participate in the meetings between the Provost and the Deans. This would seem to be an important way for the Senate to be kept apprised of issues that could have a large impact on the institution as a whole.

- In the same way that the Provost sends a liaison to SC meetings, the Chair should be a regularly invited guest to meetings of the Provost's Deans' Council.
- The Chair should request that he be included in meetings of the Provost's Deans' Council meetings.
- Although the Senate is not privy to proceedings of the Deans' Council, there are a variety of administrators on the Senate's committees. Said committees are not necessarily specifically aligned with administrative committees.
- Faculty members are not asked by the administration to provide input. Having the Chair attend meetings of the Provost's Deans' Council would be a good way to share information with the Senate from the beginning, instead of after the fact. Faculty need more information about current issues in order to better participate.
- There really should be some regular communication between the US and the SS on matters of money. Perhaps the Senate Council and the Staff Senate's Executive Committee could meet on the issue occasionally?
- Also, it might be nice if there was some more general communication between the two Senates. It might facilitate matters for each to know that the other exists, and that, for the most part, a lot of the internal struggles they're each facing are the same.
- It was acknowledged that we do not receive much information about the budget. What I would find most useful as a Senator is some kind of abstract of how the campus operates financially — at least the non-medical parts of it. Ideally this would not only include a breakdown of basic facts by College — total UK budget, total external funding, total gifts, total expenditures, # undergrad students, # grad students, # faculty, # staff — but also some simple ratios: student:faculty, Student:Budget\$, etc. Some years ago I saw such a spreadsheet done by a budget analyst in my College, and I was surprised and informed by the differences among the Colleges. I think that this kind of information is vital in keeping Senators informed about how money is spent on this campus.
- How can the Senate have better ties to other university committees where appropriate or ensure seats reserved for a senate member are filled? One of the reasons I saw a need for a senate IT committee was because the UK academic computing committees had been vacant and inactive for years. Vince Kellen re-constituted these committees in 2009, one for instructional computing and one for research computing. Is there some channel of communication between the Senate and committees such as these? Related to this, how many university committees call for a Senate representative? For example, I serve on the university web advisory committee that has a slot for a senate member that has rarely been filled during the last 6 years. Is there a way for senate members to know who those representatives on outside committees are so they could provide input to them on relevant issues?
- Philosophically, I associate the idea of a "senate" with the dual roles of "advise and consent" and it is the lack of much of an advisory role that I see as the most problematic. I find almost all of what we do

to be quite “top down.” Generally, we are informed of decisions that have been made or are recommended to be made. I am able to go back to my unit and report on what has transpired, but what seems to be missing is much opportunity for two-way communication; that is, a way for me to bring other issues that concern my colleagues back to the Senate. I do think an active committee structure is part of the answer, but I think it also goes beyond that.

- A theme in the discussion was antipathy toward “administrators” and glorification of faculty. On one hand, this was amusing because I consider the Senate to be part of administration. On the other hand, it was disturbing because we have an entire branch of our Gen Ed curriculum to teach students not to apply such generalizations to broad groups of people. If I had a third hand, I would also point out that any group that refuses to work constructively with others gets marginalized. My impression is that the majority of Senators are interested in constructive collaboration to solve problems, but they are easily drowned out by those who speak often and loudly. Promoting more electronic communication on important issues before and after meetings may be a way to increase productive participation. Yesterday’s invitation to send “Improve Senate” emails is a good example of a way to encourage broader participation.
- I think communication could be improved within the senate. I had a interaction that may not be typical, but was nonetheless frustrating. In the spring of 2008, I sent a proposal to the council chair suggesting the senate council consider the need for a Senate IT related committee/work group. That request was never acknowledged. Since that was near the end of the spring term for the senate council, I assumed it was just being deferred. I resubmitted it the next year in the fall of 2008 to the new council chair. It was also not acknowledged. However, I did find out later from another source that it got on the agenda for spring of 2009, but I was on sabbatical then and not part of the working group that did finally explore this issue. My point is really just that, based on my limited experience, I concluded there may be communication lapses between senate council and senate members. There should be a defined process for how a senator can bring items forward for consideration.

Shared Governance

- Maybe there needs to be a basic understanding of what the role of the Senate should be, and how to speak as one voice.
- As opposed to merely reacting to top-down directives, faculty should play a role in developing policies themselves.
- Shared governance between faculty and the administration depends on the willingness of both to share. From the faculty’s perspective, how we can best enhance the effectiveness of Senate’s role in shared governance depends on the administration’s willingness to share its governance authority. How and to what extent is the administration willing? For example, I was on the Senate committee that interacts with the administration on budgetary matters several years ago. The administration shared a lot of budget information with the committee, but I never got the sense that it would lead to actual changes in budget decisions. I recommend consultation with appropriate members of the administration to get a more accurate sense of its willingness to share governance.
- Senators recognize the need to respond to solicitations for volunteers from the Office of the Senate Council, yet other responsibilities often hinder such desires.

- Faculty should have some say in the criteria by which the President is evaluated.
- There is a culture of distrust between faculty and administrators at UK, and a corresponding lack of strong faculty input. There are areas at UK where there is a strong faculty culture, yet perhaps it is not reflected in the Senate, but rather in the department or college.
- There was no guarantee of anonymity to faculty responding to the questionnaire for the President's evaluation. The criteria for the evaluation are not appropriate. However, the criteria are set by the Board of Trustees (BoT).
- Kentucky statutes prevent meaningful faculty input into the criteria by which the President is evaluated.
- The timing of the annual evaluation of the President is not conducive to meaningful faculty input. There is no external or independent data on which to make any judgment – the only accompanying supporting documentation is the President's self-evaluation.
- There needs to be input from the Senate floor into the issues that are brought by administrators for consideration.
- My sense is that there are some deep disagreements among faculty regarding issues such as: a. the balance between traditional academic degrees and professional degrees; b. the authority of the provost; and c. the duties of revenue-generating elements of the university community with regard to other segments. Even if institutional policy addresses such an issue squarely, there will be senators who feel compelled to bring the matter up at every possible opportunity. I doubt that there is an effective mechanism to derail such discussion even if it is out of order, other than to limit the number of opportunities for debate (which just might make matters worse).
- Faculty have regained increased control over courses, curricular programs, educational units, educational policy, etc. since Charles Wethington stepped down. There remains a lack of "input symmetry," though, in that while deans, chairs, etc. have a chance to offer input into faculty educational policy, faculty are not asked for input into managerial decisions.
- The curricular review process is cumbersome and paper-heavy. The Senate's reviews of degree programs should take the form of questions regarding how such a program will affect other programs across campus, not the minutiae of whether or not a unit has a sufficient number of instructors for a program.
- There is clearly a sense among some faculty that the administration needs to do a better job of sharing its governance authority with the faculty. If the faculty is truly committed to shared governance, we need to be open to the possibility that, on some dimensions, the faculty needs to do a better job of sharing its governance authority with the administration. Consultation with the administration on this issue is appropriate.
- Faculty and department chairs, etc. need to value participation in faculty governance activities such as committee appointments.

- I know there are some legitimate concerns about our role being that of a rubber stamping body, but sometimes this is simply the result of predefined roles and established processes. We are the final body to consider academic changes, and although Professor Chappell's concern that we do not invest much time as a body in these decisions has some merit, for the most part I trust that the many previous steps each proposal has gone through has adequately vetted each change. I am in favor of more "local" control when possible and while I do review these items, unless I see some egregious issue of concern I generally do not believe we as a body need to micromanage these approvals. Further, in the example of the College of Ag proposal he was opposed to, there was an opportunity for him to voice his concerns prior to the vote and perhaps sway other senators to reconsider their vote. Other discussion included some who advocated a smaller Senate, but I do not agree with that suggestion. I think the Senate is a unique body that can provide a voice representing the faculty as a whole, and as such it needs to have a large and diverse representation.

Miscellany

- I have always found it odd that the President of the University is the presiding officer of the Senate. Is this a state law? If not, then ensuring the independence of the body should be a key short-term goal.
- While I understand that the Pres turns over the gavel at the first meeting of the year, I'd like to make sure that he can't call it back when push comes to shove and the campus faces an internal controversy. Don't wait for that to happen -- move to exclude the President now.
- Another theme was a desire for more involvement in university-wide policy decisions, earlier in the decision making process. Streamlining the Senate's pro forma duties would leave more time for a proactive policy focus.
- The Senate should be smaller; too many individuals make the body ineffective.
- The Senate is too large and should be much smaller, with just one to two representatives from colleges.
- The Senate size is acceptable, given its representative nature. It is, however, somewhat difficult to effectively communicate with a senator's own unit, resulting in failure at the most basic level of engaging the faculty community.
- Thus, my original idea was to turn the senate council into the faculty senate (thus eliminate the current senate entirely), with no voting administrators, but of course a voting student representative on board. The question is really how such a smaller and certainly more effective senate would be elected, and how many senators could we have. I think that all faculty should elect such a senate (including administrators who are also faculty), but the question remains of how many senators in total should we have. May be, we could settle on 30-35 total, with proportional representation, but at least one representative per college. I am aware that that would not be a perfect solution, but would think that such a small senate would be more effective and the composition also more just, since a combination of proportional and non-proportional composition would be applied (like in the US congress).
- The Senate should have more of a role in the budget process.

- I saw that one comment suggested that “streamlining the Senate’s pro forma duties would leave more time for a proactive policy focus.” I wanted to comment that while rearranging the agenda in particular ways might enhance the Senate's effectiveness, it should not be re-arranged in a way that reduces the functional importance of the elected Faculty Senators, i.e., we need to continue to take action on the degree-list as the state law requires the University Faculty do so (approve it or not). As I understand it this is key to our reason for being.
- The faculty members of the University Senate need to continue approving (or otherwise) the granting of UK degrees. There have been some regrettable examples in other universities recently of institutional leadership being pressured to grant degrees to unqualified recipients. While I don't see this as a current UK issue, we shouldn't abandon our responsibility as senators for the sake of convenience given the potential risk.
- Senators should take their collective role as quality control for degree programs seriously, and apply that responsibility when reviewing degree programs.
- When faculty members are not connected, they tend to be less engaged. There is more of a culture of engagement at the level of the SC.
- Swamy’s comment about looking more like the private university model should be food for thought.