Guidelines for Consultation with Undergraduate Student Body

The University of Massachusetts Amherst operates under a shared governance system outlined in the Board of Trustees Statement of University Governance (T73-098, as amended; the “Wellman Document”) whereby students, faculty, and administrators are consulted on matters of policy and procedure. Shared governance is a balance between consultation and participation from various campus groups and ultimate administrative accountability through the Board of Trustees, President, Chancellor, and the Chancellor’s designees.

This document is informed by the Wellman Document, while also acknowledging that much has changed since its original passage in 1973. These include the plethora of methods through which an administrator can and does receive feedback and consult on issues of importance to the campus community.

The following guidelines are meant to provide clarity around effective student consultation by the campus administration on Potential Significant Changes in Campus Policies and fees affecting students, including those affecting the campus community as a whole; services and activities which are designed primarily to serve students or those which are financed primarily by mandatory fees; the management of student political affairs and organizational matters; and the standards for student behavior, conduct, and discipline. They are established within an ever-changing environment demanding improved flexibility and responsiveness and a reduction in bureaucratic procedures.

Exceptions to the process outlined in these guidelines may be made at the discretion of the appropriate Administrator in Emergency Situations, in cases that the Administrator deems significant for the health and safety of the campus community, in cases where inclusion of student representatives would pose a significant privacy or security concern for the University, or in cases where the University or Administrator are legally bound or mandated to make the Potential Change. The process outlined in this document shall also not pertain to academic course and program changes submitted through the Faculty Senate, whose councils and committees already have student representation.

Nothing in this set of Guidelines can supersede policies adopted by the University of Massachusetts Board of Trustees, nor the delegated authority of the President and Chancellor.

The Chancellor and SGA Leadership agree that the guidelines presented in this document will be reconciled and merged into a single, new set of guidelines once graduate student consultation guidelines are drafted by the Graduate Student Senate.
Definitions that will be used throughout these guidelines:

SGA Leadership shall be defined as the SGA President, SGA Vice President, and SGA Speaker.

Potential Significant Change shall be defined as a temporary or permanent significant change to a Campus Policy or charge affecting the entire or large segments of the student body.

A Campus Policy shall be defined as a mandate on students that is codified through normal university procedures.

Administrator shall be defined as any member of the Campus Leadership Council, i.e., the Chancellor and his direct reports. These officials are ultimately responsible for all campus policies and procedures directly or by delegation.

Emergency Situation shall be defined as any current or emergent/unanticipated situation/occurrence/event that, in the judgment of the Chancellor, calls for the adoption of policy changes on a schedule that will not allow for the normal consultative process laid out in this document due to consideration of health and safety of students and/or the campus community. The Chancellor has the sole delegated authority to make this determination for the campus.

I. Early and Timely Communication with Student Advisory Boards (Other than in Emergency Situations)

As per the agreement between the SGA and the Administration dated January 22, 2014, there are standing Student Advisory Boards (SABs) for the Vice Chancellors of Administration and Finance, Student Affairs and Campus Life, University Relations, and Academic Affairs. A subsequent agreement also added a SAB for the Vice Chancellor for Information Services and Strategy and Chief Information Officer. The SAB agreements call for meetings with the respective Vice Chancellor three times per semester, or more frequently if circumstances warrant.

Other than in an Emergency Situation as defined above, the relevant Administrator shall engage the appropriate SAB in a formal discussion/formulation of the Potential Significant Change, as outlined in this document. If a Potential Significant Change is to occur in an executive area without a SAB, the appropriate Administrator shall engage with SGA Leadership directly or the most directly related existing SAB. Should the Administrator appoint a special committee or Task Force for the purpose of formulating the change, the SAB shall be invited to provide representation in such a group. Exceptions may be made in Emergency Situations, in cases where inclusion of student representatives would pose a significant privacy concern or security breach for the University, or in cases where the University or Administrator are legally bound or mandated to make the Potential Significant Change.
Communication with Student Government Association

Notification to SGA Leadership
It is the responsibility of the relevant SAB to inform SGA Leadership of the Potential Significant Change under discussion immediately after the relevant Administrator informs the SAB. The SAB will be the channel through which student input will be sought at the formative stage of the formal proposal.

Once a change is decided, the Administrator shall submit a formal proposal to the SGA Leadership promptly.

SGA Senate Presentation
Following submission of a formal proposal for the Potential Significant Change to the SGA, the Administrator or his/her designee shall give a presentation on the Potential Significant Change at the next scheduled Senate meeting or other timely session as jointly agreed upon by SGA Leadership and the Administrator.

Immediately after this presentation, SGA Leadership shall create and share with the Administrator a web page that shall include a description of what the Potential Significant Change is, how it will affect students, and an online opportunity for students to submit questions. SGA Leadership shall use this web page as a tool to make their constituents aware of the Potential Change and to facilitate collection of feedback. (See “Methods of Collecting Student Feedback Directly”).

SGA Senate Vote
After going through the steps outlined in "Methods of Collecting Student Feedback Directly,” the Speaker of the Senate shall place a motion on the agenda, which will result in an official vote to determine SGA Senate support or opposition to the Potential Change. The vote will take place within three scheduled meetings of the Administrator’s SGA Senate presentation of the Potential Change. While such a vote represents the official opinion of the student body, it is non-binding on the Chancellor.

Methods of Collecting Student Feedback Directly

Vice Chancellor Student Advisory Boards
The SABs are the formal channel through which student input will be sought at the formative stage of the formal proposals.

Open Forum
SGA Leadership, in consultation with the Administrator, shall host an open forum that shall take place one hour (or other reasonably agreed upon timeframe) before the scheduled Senate meeting where the formal vote shall take place.
Web Page
SGA Leadership shall garner additional feedback through a web page on their website which shall include information concerning what the Proposed Change is, relevant data and research on the rationale for the Potential Change, how it will affect students, and an online opportunity for students to submit questions.

Student On-line Survey
SGA Leadership shall, with the administration’s help, create a survey that will educate and inform students on the Potential Change, including relevant data and research on the rationale for the Potential Change, while collecting feedback on the degree of support for or opposition to the Potential Change.

Mass Email
The student body shall be notified of the open forum, web page, and survey through a mass email sent by the SGA at least two weeks in advance of the Senate meeting where the formal vote shall take place. The email shall include a description of the Potential Change being considered, details of the open forum and Senate vote, and a link to the web page and Student On-line Survey.

II. Summer Break Alternative Consultation

If a Potential Significant Change unavoidably needs to be initiated and adopted during the summer break during which the SGA Senate is in recess, the relevant Administrator shall notify and consult with the Coordinating Council in place of SGA Leadership. SGA Leadership is responsible for providing the Campus Leadership Council with an updated contact list for the Coordinating Council prior to the last day of the spring semester.

III. Emergency Situations

When the Chancellor invokes an Emergency Situation, as defined above in this document, in order to implement a change in Campus Policy or fee, the Chancellor shall inform SGA Leadership as soon as practicable. The Chancellor shall involve SGA Leadership, and others chosen by the leadership, to the fullest practicable extent in providing input and suggestions. At the outset of an Emergency Situation, the Chancellor shall make every effort to notify SGA Leadership of the Emergency Situation, and upon the conclusion of the particular Emergency Situation, the Chancellor and/or the relevant administrator shall make themselves available to the SGA senate to explain the circumstances and answer questions.

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Sìonan Barrett          Kumble Subbaswamy
SGA President           Chancellor