

“The Faculty Senate of the Amherst Campus, University of Massachusetts:
Observations on Theory, Structure and Function”

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- In addition to endorsing the very wise words of John Carroll advocating the advantages of positively functioning campus shared governance, I would add a reference to a recent (2004) short book, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* by Amy Gutmann (President, University of Pennsylvania) and Dennis Thompson (Harvard University), which includes many relevant definitions and arguments, such as:
 - a) “deliberative democracy...(is) a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives) justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present...but open to challenge in the future”(p.7).
 - b) “Deliberative democracy is thus more than a procedure. It is a process that requires decision-makers to accept the responsibility of justifying the substance of the decisions they make on behalf of others...they are responsible for giving mutually accessible and acceptable reasons to the people who have to live with the consequences of their decisions” (p.62).

At the extremes, failure of deliberative democracy can result in painful “lose/lose” situations and stagnation (such as occurred recently at Harvard), while success can lead to optimal functioning and healthy evolution, with better-quality decisions achieved through shared explanation, justification, deliberation, and implementation within the campus community. Democracy may be a “messy” political process, but it is superior to the alternatives!

- Within the spectrum of institutions of higher education—from Research I to community colleges—the institutions generally perceived to be of “higher quality” tend to have a greater investment in shared governance. Research I’s tend to have a lot, community colleges tend to have very little (frequently, they are “run like a business”).
- State law vests the power to lead, manage, and administer the University of Massachusetts with the Board of Trustees, which for the most part delegates to the President and Chancellors. **The Wellman Document (T73-098, as amended)** endorses AAUP policies with respect to shared governance and provides for the establishment of deliberative bodies representing the Faculty and Students. (On the Amherst Campus, the deliberative bodies are the Faculty Senate, the Student Government Association, and the Graduate Student Senate.) The Wellman Document assigns the Faculty “primary responsibility” in “academic matters” and “matters of faculty status.” The Wellman Document also provides that “governing bodies shall have the privilege of recommending policies and procedures affecting the campus and the University as a whole... (and) contributing to long-range planning, the preparation of the annual budget request, and the allocation of available resources.” The Wellman Document also provides that formal

recommendations of campus governing bodies will become policy unless disapproved by the Chancellor, President, or Board of Trustees within specified time periods.

- At the level of the system, there is an **Intercampus Faculty Council** which is a coordinating group consisting of leadership of the Faculty governance bodies of the five campuses. The Intercampus Faculty Council meets following every meeting of the Trustees to address topics of common interest and to discuss Faculty perspective on the Trustee agenda items. The “power” of the Intercampus Faculty Council resides in the power of discussion and persuasion, and also in the power of possible collective action by the five Faculty governing bodies (which has only been exercised once). This structure is unlike the California system, for example, where the Academic Senate is actually a system senate, with branches at each of the campuses.
- The structure of the Faculty Senate at the Amherst campus can be observed and studied on the website: www.umass.edu/senate. In addition to the Bylaws and Constitution, Trustee documents, Faculty Senate documents, minutes of meetings, and information relative to each of the Councils and Committees is readily available on the website.
- The Executive Officer of the Faculty Senate (and spokesperson for the Faculty) is an elected **Secretary**, while the campus Chancellor serves as titular **President**.
- The executive committee of the Faculty Senate is the **Rules Committee**, which consists of five members elected at large, plus the Secretary, the Faculty Delegate to the Board of Trustees, and two Associate Delegates to the Board of Trustees. The Rules Committee is responsible for the overall functioning of the Faculty Senate and sets the agenda for Faculty Senate meetings. In addition, it meets with the Chancellor and Provost in confidential meetings approximately every two weeks, in which the administration responds to issues and agenda items presented by the Rules Committee.
- The **full Faculty Senate** (currently fifty-some) meets approximately every two weeks, or seven times per semester. Senators are full-time faculty/library members elected from various “districts” within the Faculty at large.
- **Faculty Senate** meetings are public and reporters are present; they usually consist of three elements:
 - 1) communications from or with the outside world (such as an address by a legislator or an update on new construction by a campus official), or a “committee of the whole” discussion of an important and timely issue;
 - 2) remarks by “principal administrative officers” and faculty leaders, with an open “question period” in the style of the British Parliament;
 - 3) formal business, which in times past has sometimes been lengthy and contentious but has recently become short and mostly uncontested, because Councils and Committees have been doing such a thorough job.

- The business of the Faculty Senate is accomplished primarily in the 24 standing **Councils and Committees** (plus several Ad Hoc Committees).
- The Councils and Committees are each built around a **“lead administrator;”** membership consists of a predominance of faculty (usually including representation from every school and college) plus relevant staff and students with the “lead administrator” or designee serving *ex officio*. Councils and Committees have the power to “advise” the lead administrator on matters of detail and implementation of existing policy, and to recommend policy changes to the full Faculty Senate. For example, a proposed new graduate program would be distributed by the Rules Committee for review by the Graduate Council (curricular strength and integrity?), the Program and Budget Council (are there resources in place to support the proposed program at a high level of quality?), and Academic Priorities Council (does the new program fit into campus priorities?). The Rules Committee then receives reports back from the councils and places the proposal on the agenda of the next meeting of the Faculty Senate.
- Membership on the Councils and Committees, totaling **over 500 slots**, is almost entirely full. Members of the campus community clearly value the opportunity to participate in shared governance in areas of individual interest (research, undergraduate curriculum, general education, outreach, etc.) and to communicate regularly with the “lead administrator” (Vice Provost for Research, Deputy Provost, Vice Provost for Outreach, etc.) in that particular area. Since new programs and policies are usually “thrashed out” in the Councils and Committees which include faculty, librarians, staff, students, and administrators, recommendations which are forwarded to the floor of the full Senate they are usually adopted with minimal discussion.
- The Faculty Senate is administered by an **office** which is staffed by the Secretary (with a .5 teaching load release) an Administrative Assistant and a Graduate Assistant.
- Overall, the Faculty Senate has “primary responsibility” for academic matters and “advisory responsibility” for everything else.
- With every privilege comes a responsibility. It is the responsibility of the Faculty Senate to consider proposals **“on the merits”** and not “on the politics” and to provide a persuasive rationale for each of its actions. All motions are accompanied by an explanatory report.
- It is the responsibility of the Faculty Senate to deliberate all proposals in a timely fashion. Currently, we offer an informal **“service guarantee:”** any proposal which is in the Faculty Senate Office on the first day of a semester will receive a clear answer (approved, not approved, more information needed) by the end of the semester. Frequently, well-constructed proposals can be approved even more quickly; less well-constructed or very complicated proposals, however, may take longer. Since most proposals come from colleagues, professional courtesy requires a thoughtful and timely response.