

Campus Review Team Report

Faculty Senate and University Assembly

February 2022

Campus Review Team

The campus review team was composed of Seemantini Pathak, associate professor in Global Leadership & Management in the College of Business Administration; Emily Ross, teaching professor in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics in the College of Arts & Sciences; and Nancy Singer, associate professor and associate dean in the College of Education. One of the reviewers has previously served as a senator and senate committee member. One reviewer has served as a senate committee member. The third committee member has had no prior affiliation with the faculty senate or university assembly.

Evidence Provided

This report is based on the following sources:

- The Faculty Senate and Assembly self study report
- Interviews with groups organized by the Faculty Senate. These included meetings with administrators and deans; staff and students; faculty members and senators; senate steering committee and recent senate chairs; senate committee members.
- Follow-up emails and meetings with members of the above groups who asked to have their opinions/clarifications considered in the review.
- The external reviewer's report

Interviews were conducted via Zoom on Friday, Jan. 28, 2022. Participants were assured of confidentiality in reporting.

Overall Comments

This review was conducted during a worldwide pandemic. At the time of the review, the university community had undergone nearly two years of interrupted work, shortages, workload/pay adjustments, and overall uncertainty. We acknowledge that pandemic frustrations may have colored constituent groups' responses to this review.

Overall, the Faculty Senate/Assembly appear to have a collegial and positive relationship with campus leaders. It is our hope that good working relationships also denote good faith efforts. However, many interviewees expressed that there may not be a strong enough "firewall" between campus administrators and senate leadership representing the wider campus community. There is a real or perceived movement of increasing decision making centralization at both the campus and system level. This is having a deleterious effect on morale. The reviewers understand that the Intercampus Faculty Council (IFC) is working to formalize a shared governance policy at the system level, and encourage the UMSL Senate/Assembly to seek ways to promote its independence or to be clear with the campus community on issues for which they only have advisory, not oversight authority.

In a review filled with differing opinions and wide-flung solutions, one comment was consistent among all groups: praise and gratitude for Loyola Harvey, administrative assistant to the Faculty Senate/Assembly. The reviewers wish to acknowledge her service as well.

Recommendations from the 2016 Five-Year Review

Dissemination of Information

We found this issue improved, but not resolved. See 2022 recommendations below.

Role of Staff and Students in the University Assembly

We found progress in this area, but there is still room for improvement. See 2022 recommendations below.

Preparation of Faculty for Committee Responsibilities/Training

We did not hear issues with preparation for committee work and offer a suggestion below.

Representation of Faculty

In particular, “representation of faculty” in the 2016 review had to do with adjunct faculty members. We believe the Senate has made strides toward inclusion of these colleagues, but offer additional measures below.

Shared Governance

Following the 2016 review, the faculty Senate created an ad hoc committee on shared governance that more adequately represented and codified the relationship between the Senate and the university administration. We find no issue with the updated bylaws, but do point to issues that still persist around perceptions of shared governance.

Committees Concerned with Employment Conditions

We do not propose the formation of a new committee or a change in by-laws, but do address the importance of hearing issues concerned with employment conditions in the “faculty concerns” section below.

Faculty Concerns

This issue does not appear to have been satisfactorily addressed. We provide additional recommendations below.

Provide More Time for Senators to Deliberate on Honorary Degrees

This concern has been satisfied.

Recommendations for the 2022 Five-Year Review

Dissemination of Information

Many cited the “Senate Snapshot” as a way to learn about items discussed at the Senate/Assembly meetings, but distribution of the “Snapshot” is not even across campus. While the

reviewers recognize that the senate leadership has charged senators with distributing this information to constituent groups in their unit/college, the fact is that it simply is not happening. Moreover, staff members who do not work in academic units that would be represented by a senator and adjunct instructors do not receive this communication at all. Some senators pointed out that the “Senate Snapshot” is only meant to be distributed to faculty; however, staff members suggested that some components of the Senate Snapshot are relevant to them. To improve transparency and communication, we urge senate leadership to use university-wide distribution lists to send the “Senate Snapshot” to all employees (or to consider sending a ‘snapshot’ of University Assembly meetings to a broader audience).

The self-study cited virtual Senate meetings as a positive aspect of communication during the pandemic as these Zoom meetings allowed for wider participation. When asked why the Senate did not make a virtual option a permanent option for the campus community to use, the reviewers were told that the online setup was cumbersome. We urge the Senate to continue to seek technological solutions that would allow for the wider campus community to listen in on Senate/Assembly meetings if they cannot attend in person.

Senate/Assembly meetings are open to the entire campus community, but several groups that included both faculty and staff said they were not aware of when Senate meetings were held or what was on the meeting agenda. The review team recognizes that meeting dates are posted on the Senate website, but for full transparency we urge Senate leaders to announce the meeting and agenda—preferably with an invitation and a Zoom link—using the campus-wide email distribution list.

Role of Staff and Students in the University Assembly

The 2021 self-study cites improved communication with and inclusion of staff and students. While the review team did not hear from students (to our knowledge there was only one student in one Zoom meeting), 64 staff members did attend the Zoom meeting for this review. The turnout denotes that the staff *are* interested in the work of the Senate/Assembly. However, the overall tone and comments in this meeting were of dissatisfaction.

It is difficult to parse if staff members are particularly dissatisfied with the work of the Senate/Assembly or if it is general dissatisfaction with their work environment. While the Senate/Assembly alone cannot improve the job satisfaction of staff, it can help aid the overall campus work environment by 1) Sending out the “Senate Snapshot” to the entire campus community, 2) Inviting all campus constituents—including staff—to attend senate meetings virtually, 3) Retuning to the importance of staff opinions on committees and amplifying staff voices. Staff pointed to specific committees—Information Technology, Physical Facilities, Space, & General Services, and Curriculum & Instruction (academic calendar)—where they feel their opinions are not solicited or that they are ignored.

Preparation of Faculty for Committee Responsibilities/Training

Several meeting participants at various levels pointed out that committees are where the real work of the Senate/Assembly happens. While there did not appear to be widespread concern for

committee members' training, there were some concerns expressed about committee chairs who were elected to those leadership roles year after year. The review team recognizes and appreciates colleagues who step up to chair committees, but encourages the Senate/Assembly to educate committees on the need for a healthy balance between continuity and fresh eyes. Perhaps the Senate/Assembly could also consider "term limits" for committee chairs.

Both faculty and staff—but particularly faculty—remarked about the lack of transparency in

Senate/Assembly committee selection. Members of the committee on committees assured the larger group that there was no hidden agenda and that they presented a slate of committee members while considering such factors as parallel units, academic rank, gender, etc. We believe that the committee on committees does complete its work in good faith, but, as one faculty member expressed, "there might be a bias against the names you don't know." It remains the case that some faculty members said they have tried to volunteer their time for years and have never been selected to a committee. This may be due to the fact that the committee on committees is a one-year appointment and doesn't have a long enough "look back" to the preference poll from previous years. We recommend the committee on committees use a five-year look back to see if there is a faculty colleague who should be given the chance to serve. Technology (e.g. Qualtrics, a Google form) could aid with the laborious task of asking for and organizing these preferences each year.

Representation of Faculty

After the last 5-year review, Senate bylaws were changed to include all full-time faculty which meant that NTTs could be full committee members. This is a positive change. The inclusion of adjunct faculty representatives in the faculty senate/assembly meetings was also a productive and welcomed outcome of the previous review. However, without adjunct faculty members' voices adequately represented on committees and other important Senate work, their inclusion feels a bit like tokenism and not true representation. We recommend the Senate/Assembly continue to seek opportunities to include adjunct faculty in meaningful ways appropriate to their role in the university. As adjunct faculty are often not included on departmental websites, it is difficult for adjunct representatives to identify and contact their constituents.

Shared Governance

Senators and other faculty offered contrasting views on shared governance. Many believed that the Senate/Assembly is currently fulfilling its appropriate role, and that it is proper for the Senate to only advise or be briefed on several areas while carrying out a greater oversight function for other issues such as curriculum and instruction. Others argued that the Senate should have a greater say in university matters; the recent Academic Program Prioritization initiative was offered as an example. We acknowledge that shared governance is a complex issue, and encourage the Senate to examine the scope of its role in decision-making at UMSL. In addition to general decision-making, the following issues were raised as examples of areas where the Senate could play a greater role:

- A more active role in curricular issues beyond course and program approvals, such as dual degrees and other interdisciplinary initiatives.

- Faculty retention and promotion: Some constituents expressed concern about faculty retention as well as some units' lack of enough full professors. It was suggested that the Senate could help with recruitment and retention by holding faculty focus groups. While the Tenure & Promotion Committee has made bylaw and/or ATP guideline changes to address COVID-19 interruptions, we also urge the committee to investigate if there are particular units where faculty are often not granted tenure or promoted to full professor, and why that may be the case. What might be some recommendations for departments with few senior faculty?
- While the Senate's review of senior administrators was appreciated as helpful, constituents also suggested incorporation of standard procedures for feedback, as well as for the systematic use of data collected during reviews to inform goals/change beyond the specific administrator.

Faculty Concerns

While the formation of an ad hoc committee was a good faith effort to address faculty concerns, its dissolution without resolution and lack of subsequent action means no tangible steps were taken other than the installation of a Senate suggestion box. Senate members indicate that the suggestion box gets very little use. Interviews with faculty members revealed that many are unclear about the Senate's structure and operations and so assuming that they will know to contact the Chair of the Faculty Senate or the Senate Office directly seems unreasonable. Faculty also suggested that more could be done to share Senate activities and involve faculty, especially new faculty members. The Senate should consider improving faculty awareness as well as channels for voicing concerns by faculty, for instance putting in place a committee whose role may be to report on any faculty concerns, anonymized. The Senate Snapshot is another means by which information about structure and how to voice concerns could be achieved. For example, this Snapshot could include a link to the Senate suggestion box or even a reminder that faculty can reach out to their Senator if they have concerns that they wish to have addressed by the Senate.

Looking Ahead

The self-study identified the Senate's goals for the next five years as these:

- Continue to advise the administration on budgetary matters.
- Assist faculty in navigating the changes in higher education, especially in virtual learning and new technology.
- Address challenges in academic freedom and expression.
- Assist faculty in helping students become productive members of society and to teach them to think with an open mind using critical and inclusive thinking.
- Collaborate with staff and students to create a healthy, inclusive working environment for the campus community.
- Strive to provide a positive relationship between staff and faculty which fosters mutual support.

All of these goals are worthwhile, but they are also rather broad. We encourage senate leaders to form tangible, actionable steps for these goals that can be measured in the next five-year review. For instance, what role will the Senate take in helping faculty navigate virtual learning and new technology? How will it help faculty help students become productive members of society who can think critically and inclusively? What steps will the Senate take to create a healthier campus environment that fosters mutual support? We look forward to reading about success with these goals in 2027.

Conclusion

We wish to acknowledge the hardworking, motivated, and well-intentioned members of the senate and, in particular, senate leaders. We greatly appreciate the Senate's critical role at UMSL and applaud the substantial service commitment these individuals have made. We offer these suggestions in the spirit of continuous improvement as well as reporting what the Senate's constituents had to say.