

UMSL Faculty Senate and University Assembly Five Year Review Campus Committee Report

The Campus Review Team (CRT) members were Dinesh Mirchandani, Professor of Information Systems; Lee Slocum, Associate Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice; and John McGrosso, Associate Professor of Music. The CRT acquired information from the Senate's self-study report and interviews with the Provost's Council, Staff and Student Government Association Leaders, Faculty and Senators, Senate Steering Committee and former Senate Chairs, and Chairs of Senate and University Assembly Committees. The self-study report helped the CRT frame questions for the interviews. At the beginning of the day the CRT met with the external reviewer to set the organization of the meetings. Although we provide an independent assessment, at the conclusion of the day the CRT again briefly met with the external reviewer to discuss the major themes that had emerged from our meetings.

Provost's Council

Members on the Provost's council commented that recent unionization efforts on campus may have gained momentum due to faculty concerns over pay. In addition, many faculty members may not understand the Senate's role in providing a forum to voice concerns and participate in the governance of the university because information does not always come back to departments. Council members expressed concerns that inserting a new entity between the faculty and administration would complicate effective operations and governance and even preempt some of the shared governance functions of the Senate and University Assembly (UA). In the event of unionization, there would be more UM system involvement in the governance of the university and contracts would supersede other relationships. They also emphasized, however, that the level of support for a union is not known.

In the last five-year review, concerns were raised that segments of the faculty and staff were not well-represented. The Senate and has made great strides in increasing the diversity of its members. Council members appreciated the proactive changes made in the rules and bylaws of the Senate and UA permitting continued representation on these bodies from departments and units who had experienced a shift towards having more non tenure-track (NTT) faculty. The Senate and UA do not distinguish NTT senators from TT senators when determining which units have faculty Senate representation. However, the Council acknowledged that the voice of adjuncts may not be gathered.

The CRT noted that each academic unit obtains report-backs from their senators differently. Some units have monthly meetings of their faculty with updates provided by their senators on the deliberations of the Senate, UA, and the different committees on which they serve. Other units do not have a formal process of disseminating this information to their faculty and adjuncts are likely left out of the information loop. Furthermore, none of the units conducts formalized training of their senators on their roles and responsibilities as a senator. Some Council members commented that the UA does an orientation for senators but were unaware of its details. All of the units stated that they elect their senators through a vote of the faculty.

Concerns were expressed about the preparedness of the representatives on the Senate and assembly committees. For instance, there is no training provided to members of the Budget & Planning (B&P) committee to understand the budget process. A suggestion was provided that

since a majority of the work of the Budget and Planning committee is done in the Spring semester, the Fall semester may be a good time to provide training to the committee members.

The Provost's Council felt that the university's budget cuts were largely handled transparently and the opinions of all constituents were solicited and considered. The B&P committee meetings were well attended, students held their own forum, a website was created to seek feedback from the university community, and a final vote was taken in the Senate. The Council was aware that during the process there was considerable staff and graduate student anxiety over the budget cuts due to the uncertainty of the impacts. The Graduate School held a forum for graduate students (GTAs and GRAs) to discuss concerns over stipends and tuitions. In the B&P meetings, the student representatives sought and were provided more information.

In regards to the working of the Senate and its committees, appreciation was expressed for the Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) committee - it works well, is organized, and is cooperative with all the units. Likewise, the transparency of the decision making process for the new learning management system (LMS) proposed by the Academic Advisory and IT committees was commended.

When asked the meaning of shared governance, the Council voiced a variety of ideas such as the university exists for students, the faculty drive the curriculum, and everyone collectively manages the processes to support the research, teaching, and service missions of the university. The structure of the Senate and UA provides opportunities for the university community to engage in its functioning.

In response to a question about challenges, it was observed that only a few faculty members attend Senate and UA meetings even though the meetings are open all. Moreover with the pace of change and the need for administrators to make quick decisions, it might not be optimal or efficient to always seek faculty input. It is also difficult to maintain continuity in representation on the bodies and often there is self-selection.

In summary the Council felt that the fundamental processes of the Senate and UA were sound. Moreover, they felt that the Chancellor and Provost valued the Senate and UA and were responsive to its concerns and deliberations.

Staff and Student Government Association Leaders

The Staff and Student Government Association Leaders expressed concern about being underrepresented on the UA. Because there are 40 faculty senators, but only 14 SGA and 3 staff representatives, even if the student and staff associations combine their strengths they are still outnumbered by the faculty in terms of votes. They perceive that the purpose of assembly meetings is to give reports on their associations' activities and approve minutes of the previous meeting in an environment that is not very welcoming. As an example, they mentioned that faculty senators are provided name placards at meetings but staff and student representatives are not. Being in the minority, they did not feel encouraged or empowered to speak on issues of concern to them. Even in committee meetings such as B&P, they felt that key decisions had already been made and they were just being informed.

In recent times, the staff association's meetings have included the Vice Provost for Student Affairs who provides guidance. The staff association also now meets monthly with the Chancellor, Provost, Vice Provost for Student Affairs, and the CFO. The staff leaders expressed happiness with the existence of this channel of communication.

Despite their expressed concerns, the staff and student associations take their UA representation seriously. The SGA provides training to its senators in an annual retreat that provides specifics on each committee along with a description of expected responsibilities. In the last five-year review, it was noted that elected student representatives did not attend all meetings. Steps have been taken to rectify this issue. The SGA tries to fill all slots on assembly committees based on students' interests and schedules and assigns backup representatives if the primary representatives are unable to attend. The student leaders, however, mentioned that despite training, student representatives feel intimidated in committee meetings and choose to skip meetings rather than show up late or leave early because they do not want to be perceived as rude. The staff association also expressed the concern that sometimes supervisors may not permit staff members to attend assembly committee meetings.

Faculty and Senators

Faculty and Senate members expressed appreciation of the various collegial discussions in the Senate, UA and their committees. They did not feel that there was anything lacking in the functioning of shared governance at the university that had triggered the unionization efforts on campus; Rather, it was a matter of timing as to when the union had begun approaching the faculty. The initiative of the Senate and UA to organize Town Hall meetings to answer questions about unionization was appreciated. However, the tone of communication from the UM system towards union supporters was considered as disparaging. Some faculty and senators thought that perhaps the Senate was not representing the entire faculty and not enough hard questions were being asked in the Senate. They also thought that there is a culture of non-engagement in the faculty. Non-senators do not attend Senate meetings. Departments do not encourage participation and people do not know when meetings occur because they do not receive notice. Furthermore, most people are unaware that they can attend meetings if they are not senators.

Faculty and senators expressed gratitude and pride that NTT faculty have a voice and a vote in the Senate, which may not be the case on other campuses. There is no perception of hierarchy in the Senate, and NTT members are respected with some serving as chairs of Senate and assembly committees. The change in bylaws permitting units with predominantly NTT faculty to continue having representation on the Senate was termed as impressive.

In a discussion about the university's budget cuts, some faculty and senators felt there had not been enough meetings of the B&P committee and when the report was presented by the committee to the Senate, it was like a *fait accompli*. Others commented that the provost would provide summaries to the Senate at each meeting and B&P meetings had very vocal participation from staff and students demonstrating that everyone had input in the process. There was concern about how the layoffs were executed, the widespread misinformation and rumors, and the all-time low morale across campus.

Faculty and senators stated that the responsibilities of Senate and UA committees are sometimes ambiguous and overlapping as is the process of how a committee brings its items up for vote on the Senate floor. The role played by the steering committee and Provost in determining which items make it to the Senate's agenda was also discussed. Another issue raised was that the faculty do not know that they are allowed to attend Senate and assembly meetings as well as committee meetings even if they cannot vote. Sometimes even the staff who serve on UA committees do not know when the Senate meets because they do not receive notification of meetings.

A suggestion was made that meetings should be held in larger rooms and that senators should encourage their department members to attend by providing meeting dates and other information. Also, there should be a mechanism to make it incumbent on unit directors/chairs to facilitate the communications and functioning of the Senate as some chairs do not welcome direct communication from their senators to their department faculty and also do not appreciate the senators' service on the Senate. The Senate orientation meeting held in May which explains parallel units and the responsibilities of the committees and senators was viewed positively.

The senators discussed that they often feel unprepared for Senate and UA meetings. They would like to know the topics that will be discussed in the Chancellor's and Provost's presentations in advance so they can prepare questions and seek clarification during the presentations. At present, rather than feeling actively involved, they feel 'post-hoc' involved as critical information is not circulated in advance other than the agenda, C&I information, and minutes of previous meetings. Loy Harvey's diligence in circulating these materials and posting them to the Senate website was commended but the concern was also raised that not all senators read meeting materials in advance. In the case of honorary degrees, having more time to read the nomination materials and perhaps do independent research on the nominees would be helpful. The senators understood that this process must be confidential but felt that with the current process they were rubber-stamping rather than having input in the decisions.

In conclusion, the faculty and senators agreed that in spite of some drawbacks, the Senate exemplifies shared governance and facilitates collegiality across campus. They feel that the Senate is empowering and beneficial in understanding how the university works. Examples were provided of the transparent processes for the non-smoking policy and the new LMS systems. They feel it is rewarding to provide input on policies that have a noticeable impact such as raising the incoming GPA to become a more selective institution, which has helped improve the classroom experience for teachers and students. At the same time, they recognize that there is a need for more faculty to take an active role in the Senate.

Senate Steering Committee and former Senate Chairs

Members of the Senate Steering Committee defined their role as the executive committee that discusses issues prior to each Senate meeting and sets the agenda. Proposals to be placed on the agenda from the Senate and UA committees are reviewed by the Steering Committee and sometimes returned back to the committees for rework. The Steering Committee is authorized to act on behalf of the Senate if a decision needs to be made before the next meeting. The meetings of the Steering Committee are closed and frequently attended by the Provost, CFO, and Chancellor. The Steering Committee members admitted that there could be the perception among faculty that the Steering Committee is too close to administration and that they are in cahoots.

In a discussion on shared governance, it was brought up that students and staff members have input but no veto power in decisions. This was the case during the university's budget cuts and the meetings of the B&P committee. There were intense meetings and heated forums in the College of Arts & Sciences and the Student Government Association. However in the end, the right thing gets done. Examples were provided about the non-smoking policy and the student recreation center which were initiatives driven by the students. It was acknowledged that with only three members, perhaps the staff association is underrepresented on the UA.

The sense of the Steering Committee and former Senate Chairs is that unionization would change the function of shared governance and that the unionization of only certain colleges

would complicate matters further. Currently the Senate provides a mechanism for faculty to express concerns. However, faculty cannot directly bring issues up to the Senate so perhaps there should be a Faculty Concerns Committee. The overwhelming sentiment of the group was that shared governance at the university is not lip service and the campus climate is good.

Senate Committee Chairs and University Assembly Committee Chairs

The committee chairs identified the key motivators for unionization efforts as salary compression, lack of pay raises, and disparate treatment of adjuncts. However, concerns were also raised that unionization would bring cumbersome provisions, inconveniences, and burdens on faculty such as more office hours to be held on a greater variety of times and days of the week. Also, everything would be subject to contract and grievances could not be taken up with administrators.

Discussion shifted to the responsibilities and composition of each committee. It was noted that the same people continue to volunteer and committees have to rely on people who already teach and serve a considerable lot. Very few new people volunteer for the Senate. There is no formal training provided to committee chairs and generally either the same chair continues the next year or a committee member becomes the next chair. There is also no forum for committee chairs to interact with each other regularly and learn from each other (i.e., a Committee of Committee Chairs). There is also no formal mechanism to hand over responsibilities and process/procedure information to the next chair of a committee. In some committees, the former chair passes along a binder to the new chair that includes the minutes, actions, and other relevant information from the previous year.

Some chairs feel that the impact of their committees is small/unimportant and shared governance varies from committee to committee depending on its nature and mission. For instance, some committees only provide information (e.g., Facilities) whereas other committees (e.g., Budget & Planning) have more discussion and input. Sometimes students and staff do not speak at meetings even with encouragement from the chair because they feel if they cannot vote they should not talk.

A suggestion was provided that the Senate should prepare an annual report on its accomplishments in the previous year that might include the reports of each of the committees. A suggestion was made that committee reports should be posted on the Senate website since currently they are not posted.

All the committee chairs expressed appreciation for Loy Harvey stating that she does an amazing job keeping the committees on track and is ‘worth her weight in platinum.’

Recommendations

1. Institute an orientation session for department chairs and deans educating them on the importance of shared governance, encouraging them to disseminate feedback from senators to faculty at college and department meetings, and facilitate the participation of their faculty and staff in Senate and UA meetings even if they are not senators. Encourage department chairs to establish a system for relaying information about the governance of the university to adjunct professors and for obtaining their input.
2. Institute an orientation for student and staff representatives on the UA. Encourage their participation in the discussions of the committees. Encourage students and staff to attend meetings even if they are late or have to leave early due to scheduling conflicts.

3. Institute an orientation for committee chairs. Better define the responsibilities of each committee and make the process for committees to bring their proposals up for vote in the Senate clear and easy. Develop better processes for handing-off responsibilities from past chairs to current chairs. Encourage the retention of institutional memory. Ensure that chairs respect and solicit the opinion of students and staff on their committees.
4. Increase the representation of students and staff on the UA and its committees. Give them the same amenities that are provided to faculty senators such as name placards.
5. Form a “committee of committee chairs” where they can meet, share expertise, and coordinate to reduce the likelihood two separate committees are unknowing working on the same issue.
6. Make it easier for faculty to communicate their concerns, i.e., form a “Committee on Faculty Concerns” that actively solicits input from faculty members.
7. Motivate participation of faculty in the Senate and UA. One strategy might be to circulate brief annual reports that summarize the accomplishments of the Senate and UA for the year, provides next year’s meeting schedule, describes the major issues that will be addressed in the upcoming year, and solicits input on these and other issues.
8. Provide the Provost’s and Chancellor’s presentations in advance to senators for them to raise relevant questions.
9. Provide more time for senators to deliberate on honorary degrees. Consider providing the names of potential awardees and sharing their application at one meeting (as is currently done), but voting the next meeting.
10. Institute Budget & Planning committee training sessions for members each fall semester.
11. While the CRT heard from the Provost’s Council that both FT and NTT faculty worked well together throughout the Faculty Senate, it is not clear that adjunct instructors have a way to communicate their concerns. As the university continues to rely heavily on adjunct instructors, showing interest in their experience and creating a dialogue will improve the atmosphere of investment, and possibly bring to light creative ideas that could greatly benefit the university. To address this, the CRT recommends that a survey be undertaken to ascertain the level of interest in shared governance among adjunct instructors, and in the case of such interest, that the Faculty Senate determine the best way of inclusion.