A Quick Guide to Academic Governance at MSU

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Academic Governance at MSU aspires to the principle of shared governance. For this to be the reality, there must be sharing of ideas, responsibilities, and decision-making between administrators, faculty, students, and staff. This document was prepared to help guide MSU towards that goal, by helping to demystify the structure and processes of academic governance at our institution.

The primary goal of this document is to provide an introduction to academic governance to newly serving faculty, reducing confusing and making this service more rewarding. It is NOT a bylaws document, but an attempt to delineate processes in which faculty members have a range of powers. Further, this document suggests efficient communication strategies to help gather and focus faculty power. Please email Brian Teppen (teppen@msu.edu) to suggest improvements.

1. Structure of Academic Governance at MSU

MSU academic governance is described by a set of amendable bylaws. MSU espouses a shared governance system, however faculty senate recommendations are strictly advisory (Bylaw 1.3.2), with the administration and the Board of Trustees holding executive power. This advisory role should be used effectively for the betterment of the university. The university is stronger when faculty engage in academic governance, utilizing their wide range of expertise, and when university leaders and administrators foster and utilize participatory governance processes. In its advisory role, the faculty can influence university issues, programs, and values, but the faculty can also demand and work toward implementing a system of "shared responsibility" (Bylaw 1.3.3). All faculty members are expected to serve their colleagues and the University through participation in academic governance, while colleges and departments are expected to support and reward such service.

There are three overarching deliberative bodies in academic governance: the faculty senate, the university council and the steering committee. In this section a brief description, including composition and goals is provided. Additional information can be found in acadgov.msu.edu.

a) Purpose of the Faculty Senate

Faculty Senators represent faculty members' ideas, suggestions, and concerns to the President and Provost, consult and discuss with one another, and channel the information/actions from the senate back to their constituents.

Faculty senate provides advice on curricular issues, faculty tenure and promotion, and faculty salary and benefits as described in Bylaw 3.3.4.1:

"The Faculty Senate is a deliberative, representative, and legislative body for Michigan State University faculty. As such, the Faculty Senate is the major, regularly meeting body in which curricular issues, faculty tenure and promotion issues, and faculty salary and benefits issues are presented. (…) The Faculty Senate's role is to communicate its position to the administration on these issues."

Faculty also advise on other issues Bylaw 3.3.4.6:

"The Faculty Senate obtains and synthesizes the opinion of the faculty to form recommendations on key issues facing the University, and communicates those recommendations to the President and the Provost."

Faculty senators are representing their constituents – their college, as described in Bylaw 3.3.4.7:

"Members of the Faculty Senate have the responsibility to represent their constituents on issues that should be considered by the governance system."

Much of the work occurs through subcommittees that report to Faculty Senate. These include:

1. University Committee on Faculty Affairs (UCFA) as described in Bylaw 3.3.5.2. Bylaw 4.6.3 asserts that the UCFA faculty members have **shared responsibility** with the Provost to determine "the rights and responsibilities of faculty."
2. The University Committee on Faculty Tenure (UCFT) as described in Bylaw 3.3.5.3. The UCFT's role is strictly advisory (Bylaw 4.7.3), except "on all cases for exceptions to the rules of tenure" (Bylaw 4.7.5).
3. University Committee on Curriculum (UCC) as described in Bylaw 3.3.5.4. The UCC comprises "the faculty's delegated authority to review and approve or reject all changes" to undergraduate and graduate curricula and degree requirements (Bylaw 4.5.3). A subcommittee of UCC focuses on undergraduate curricula (UCUE) and another on graduate curricula (UCGS). These are described below.

b) Purpose of the University Council

The purpose of University Council is to facilitate meaningful dialogue among all university constituencies. In addition to all faculty senators, UC contains student representatives, deans and an array of program directors. Representatives to UC bring their constituents' members' ideas, suggestions, and concerns to the university community, consult and discuss with one another, and take back the information/actions to those they represent.

The university council affects the whole university, and therefore has a wider scope than the faculty senate as described in Bylaw 3.2.5.1:

"The University Council brings together faculty, student, and administration representatives to discuss issues that involve the entire University. the primary focus of discussion in the University Council is on other issues that are not the core responsibility of the Faculty Senate."

University policy affecting broadly the university community need to be discussed in the university council (Bylaw 3.2.5.2):

"The University Council … shall provide a forum for the dissemination of information and exchange of views regarding University policy."

Subcommittees that report to University Council include (Bylaws 3.2.6.1 and 3.2.6.2):

1. The University Committee on Student Affairs (UCSA). The UCSA is advisory to the Vice President for Student Affairs and Services on policies and procedures related to the "academic rights and responsibilities of students" (Bylaw 4.9).
2. The University Committee on Undergraduate Education (UCUE). Bylaws 4.4.5 and 4.4.6 declare the faculty to have **shared responsibilities** on UCUE. UCUE shares responsibility with the Provost for decisions about establishing, merging, and discontinuing undergraduate classes and programs (Bylaws 3.3.6.2 and 4.5.3).   The University Committee on Graduate Studies (UCGS). Bylaws 4.8.5, 4.8.6, and 4.8.7 assert the faculty **shared responsibilities** on UCGS. UCGS shares responsibility with the Provost for decisions about establishing, merging, and discontinuing graduate classes and programs (Bylaws 3.3.6.3 and 4.5.3).
3. The University Committee on Academic Governance (UCAG). UCAG is charged with interpreting and reviewing academic-governance bylaws across the University (Bylaw 4.3). UCAG recommends amendment of academic-governance bylaws to University Council (Bylaw 4.3.3).
4. The Athletic Council.

c) Purpose of the University Steering Committee

The University Steering Committee consists of the University President, the Provost, other key administrators, 5 At-Large faculty members and representatives from each of the subcommittees listed above. The 5 At-large faculty members are faculty elected to represent the faculty and academic staff of the entire university to the President, Provost, and Board of Trustees. *The Steering Committee sets agendas for Faculty Senate and University Council meetings.*

2. Expectations for faculty senators

Faculty senators have responsibility of three-way communication. They bring concerns from their constituents to the attention of Faculty Senate, they disseminate information from Faculty Senate to the faculty in your college, and engage with other faculty at the senate to create bridges within and across colleges. The effectiveness of faculty senate relies on each senator being open and vocal. This section sets expectations for faculty senators.

1. Faculty senators are expected to know the faculty they represent. Typically, each college has several faculty senators. Communicate to the other faculty senators in your college and agree to a strategy for covering the communications with the whole college.

2. Faculty senators are expected to introduce themselves to their constituents. Make sure they know who you are and how they can communicate with you and with academic governance in general. Please emphasize that you represent faculty and you welcome input from colleagues.

3. Faculty senators are expected to relay information to their constituents, namely the faculty of their college/unit. Identify with the other senators in your unit the best way to communicate news and issues discussed in Faculty Senate and/or University Council so that it reaches all faculty in your College. This can be by email, communication with your College Advisory Committee (CAC), and/or any other way that makes sense in your College. Resources for communicating university-level governance issues and discussions include:

   a. [Faculty Senate minutes](#)
   b. [University Council minutes](#)
   c. [Upcoming Faculty Senate agendas](#)
   d. [Upcoming University Council agendas](#)
   e. Past issues might be found at [Current Topics](#) and/or the [Tracking System](#). The tracking system contains partial histories and documentation of many previous issues.

4. Faculty senators are expected to encourage their constituents to bring issues/suggestions to faculty governance, and report back to faculty on the disposition of those issues. Faculty can raise issues or provide suggestions in one of three ways:

1. By telling their faculty senator.
2. By emailing acadgov@msu.edu.
3. By submitting the issue/suggestion online at: https://acadgov.msu.edu/form/faculty-input

Faculty senators should also encourage and empower their faculty to be active in other participatory governance processes at MSU, including College Advisory Councils, providing ideas at ideas.msu.edu, etc.

5. Faculty senators are expected to attend senate meetings. Faculty senators are not allowed to miss more than 2 meetings in a semester or 3 in an academic year. It is understood that faculty need to travel and may have other commitments. For this reason, as a faculty senator you are expected to identify an alternate (to be communicated to the Secretary of Academic Governance at the beginning of the academic year) that can serve as your replacement.
According to Bylaw 1.4.3 *"Members who fail to attend two meetings in a semester, or three meetings in a single academic year, of a particular governance body designated in these Bylaws, and who also fail to provide designees in their absences, shall be removed from the governance body."*

The mechanism for removal is via a memo to the representative's Dean, and so absences should be avoided. Thus, each faculty representative who might be absent should identify one or more designees to fill in for them for both Faculty Senate and Academic Council. The designee *"must have the same eligibility and constituency as the replaced member, and shall have the same rights and privileges as the member replaced. The attendance record of a member who provides a designee shall be unaffected"* (Bylaw 1.4.2).

6. Faculty senators are expected to bring up issues/questions/ideas to the Faculty senate meetings. As described in Bylaw 3.4.2.5

"The Steering Committee shall receive proposals for action in academic governance from individual faculty or students, and from faculty or student groups and organizations. "

The steering committee is responsible for putting together the agenda of the senate meeting. The best way to ensure that a matter gets added to the senate agenda is to send an email to all five of the at-large Steering Committee members, with copy to the Secretary of Academic Governance (acadgov@msu.edu). This needs to be done 2 weeks prior to the senate meeting (see the next section for details on the timeline).

Alternatively, issues can be raised from the floor at the end of each senate meeting. No prior warning is necessary when pursuing this option. Note however that no action can be taken unless the item is explicitly on the agenda.

7. Faculty senators are expected to engage during the senate meeting.
Senators are expected to review the materials provided by the secretary of Academic Governance prior to the senate meetings and participate in the discussions at the meetings. While it is impossible for all voices to be heard given the large group involved, it is critical that you speak up if you (and your constituents) have a different perspective from that being presented.

8. Faculty senators should also communicate laterally with other senators to obtain clarifications, and further deepen the understanding on a given issue.

3. Timeline for actions

University-level processes are typically slow are require several steps. It is important that senators are prepared to continue to push the issue over time, and do not hesitate to bring it back for discussion multiple times.

In particular, when a faculty member brings up an issue here is the typical sequence of steps involved that often take a couple of months:

> Step1: Submission by a faculty Member by email to acadgov@msu.edu
> Step 2: The issue will be discussed by the University Steering Committee at its next meeting.
> Step 3: The Steering Committee will decide whether and <u>where</u> the issue should be sent for further discussion. Options include University Council, Faculty Senate, other University committees, or an informal response to the sender.
> Step 4: The Steering Committee communicates back to the community member what happened with the issue that was raised.

> **Commented [1]:** Insert info here for the right process for changing bylaws? For changing policies?

5. Rules for the senate meetings

The faculty senate and the university council meetings operate under the Robert's rules of order. An academic-governance summary of Robert's Rules of Order can be found <u>here</u>. Note that this summary is rather archaic, with one section referring repeatedly to "Mr. Chairman." The secretaries for Academic Governance have been asked to update the document.

6. Emerging issues

In any given year, there will be unfinished business from the previous year. Typically, the chair of the steering committee will try to provide the context for the items to be discussed but sometime it is hard to catch up and appreciate the history of the issue. A large list of materials is available in acadgov.msu.edu under "Current Topics". Feel free to email members of the steering committee for clarifications when necessary.