

ACalifornia State University, Los Angeles
Academic Senate

Report of the Task Force on the Governance of the Academic Senate

Spring, 2001

Background: In 1999-2000, the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate reported on the Academic Senate's governance options (as seen by the Executive Committee), and at the May, 2000, Academic Senate Retreat, the Saturday session was based around the options in the report. The 2000 report centered around three questions concerning the Senate: first, who should be represented on the Academic Senate? Second, what exactly should the Academic Senate do? And third, how could the Academic Senate communicate more effectively with its constituencies on campus?

The 2000 report suggests that representation on the Academic Senate *could* be changed in the following ways:

1. Representing faculty on the Senate by Departments instead of Colleges
2. Adding the Chairs of the Senate standing committees to the membership of the Academic Senate
3. Adding one or two seats for part-time faculty on the Academic Senate
4. Adding one or two seats for the staff on the Academic Senate
5. Adding a seat to the Academic Senate for the CFA campus chair

The 2000 report suggests further that the Senate's committee structure could be changed in any of the following ways:

1. The standing committee chairs could be represented directly on the Executive Committee
2. The number of standing committees and subcommittees could be changed (i.e., simplified and reduced) as needed, with the use of ad hoc committees for specific topics that do not fit within the existing committee structure at any given time.

The 2000 report also suggests that the Senate could become a more significant information source for faculty if it made a conscious effort to place relevant documents on its web site and if it had a series of debates on significant topics each year.

The 2000 report made no recommendations. It laid out the advantages and disadvantages of each option. The options chosen were those most commonly found in CSU Academic Senates and other Academic Senates in comprehensive institutions.

Charge: In order to continue the process begun in Spring, 2000, the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate established this task force, referred to in this report as the 2001 task force. Its charge is to examine two broad questions:

- What is and should be the role of the Senate – what should our fundamental mission be? What is that mission in the light of collective bargaining?
- What should the style of the Senate be? Should we continue to be a body that debates policy documents only – one that focuses on Senate policy and changes to the Faculty Handbook? Or, for example, should the Senate debate issues that affect faculty and are of broader import, not limited to Senate policies in the Faculty Handbook?

The task force: The task force consisted of the 2000-2001 Vice Chair of the Academic Senate, Ted Anagnoson (Political Science), as chair; Marshall Cates (Mathematics and Computer Science), Cherie De Jong-Hawley (Curriculum and Instruction), Carlos Gutierrez (Chemistry and Biochemistry), and Laura Whitcomb (Management). Meetings were held from Fall, 2000 through Spring, 2001.

I. What is and should be the role of the Senate – what should our fundamental mission be? What is that mission in the light of collective bargaining?

The committee dealt with this question by examining the 1985 “Clarification of the Respective Roles of the Academic Senate and the University Administration,” agreed to by both the Senate and the President in 1985. This document defines the role of the Academic Senate as specified in legislation, discusses the areas of primary responsibility within the concept of shared governance (for the faculty, curriculum and instruction as well as faculty affairs; for the President, planning, resource allocation and utilization, administrative organization and operations, and the appointment of administrators), and defines both formal and informal consultation.

The fundamental mission of the Academic Senate of California State University, Los Angeles, is to represent the faculty. We do not feel that this mission has deteriorated with the growth of collective bargaining over the last two decades. While the California Faculty Association (CFA) has areas that overlap the responsibilities of the Academic Senate – for example, where there is an agreement between the Administration and CFA to implement a merit pay system – the implementation of the agreement has been through a Senate policy. While it is inevitable that there will be some overlap in interests between CFA and the Academic Senate, we are struck by the lack of fundamental policy conflicts that have developed over the years.

While we feel that there should be change in *how* the Academic Senate conducts its business and in who is represented *on* the Senate, we do not feel that the fundamentals of the Senate need to be rethought.

We considered whether the Academic Senate should have a mission statement. At present, the Senate by-laws and the Constitution of the Faculty have statements that are similar to a mission statement, but there is no explicit “The mission of the Academic Senate, CSLA, is...” statement.

The existing statements are:

The constitution of the Faculty, California State University, Los Angeles:

“The Academic Senate is the official representative body of the faculty” (Article IV, Sect. 1).

The Faculty Handbook states, regarding the Academic Senate:

Faculty members and students have a major role in the governance of the University through the Academic Senate, which is the official representative body of the faculty. The Senate recommends policy to the President. If the President rejects a Senate proposal, the Chair of the Senate is informed in writing of the compelling reasons for rejection of the Senate recommendation. All full-time members of the faculty are eligible for election to the Senate, whose membership also includes five student voting members and one emeritus faculty voting member. See Appendix B, "The Constitution of the Faculty of California State University, Los Angeles."

Faculty members and students participate in the governance of the University by their service both as members of the Senate, and as members of the university-wide standing committees and various subcommittees which are agencies of the Senate in the determination of internal policies.

If a mission statement were to be written, it could look like the only one we found in a web search, from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln:

MISSION STATEMENT: The mission of the Academic Senate is to actively work with all levels of university governance to formulate and implement educational policy, specifically:

- To create a productive and rewarding academic environment for faculty and students
- To protect the ability of faculty to pursue independent, scholarly research
- To protect the freedom of faculty to openly present and discuss scholarly ideas (<http://www.unl.edu/asenate/welcome.htm>).

We felt that this mission statement did not sufficiently emphasize the Senate’s role in representing the *faculty*. A shorter mission statement that emphasizes the representation role might look like this:

MISSION STATEMENT: The mission of the CSLA Academic Senate is to represent the faculty in the shared governance of the University.

However, a mission statement this short doesn’t really say much that we don’t know about the Academic Senate, and a longer mission statement risks either including too much or excluding items that subsequently become important. We suggest that if a mission statement is desired, it be short like the one above. But we are not convinced that it is needed at this time. If desired, the Academic Senate could write one.

We feel that the fundamental mission of the Academic Senate is the same as it has been historically – to formulate policy in the areas of curriculum and instruction as well as faculty affairs, areas where the Administration normally agrees with the recommendations of the Academic Senate, and to convey faculty concerns and recommendations in other areas of university governance. We have not found that mission to have deteriorated in the light of the CSU system’s collective bargaining experience, although others might disagree. We do feel that the way in which the Academic Senate conducts its business might be broadened a bit, and we feel that the Senate’s committee structure needs to be updated.

We also considered the Academic Senate, Cal State Los Angeles, in the light of 18 “Traits of Effective Senates” distributed at the 2001 American Association of Higher Education conference in Tampa, Florida, by leaders of the SUNY statewide Academic Senate in New York. The 18 traits are:

- Permanent office space, files, archives
- Annual budget (travel, telephone, computer, supplies, etc.)
- Secretarial assistance
- Adjusted workload for officers
- Regular meetings with the college president
- Consulted on the creation of all non-Senate committees
- Senate president (faculty officer) presides at senate meetings
- Bylaws specify areas where senate decisions are normally determinative, co-determinative, or advisory
- Meetings and activities announced in advance and records of actions widely published
- Attracts both junior and senior faculty who are esteemed as academic leaders
- Is regarded by the campus as dealing with crucial issues
- Has effective representation on other key governance groups
- Senate leadership visible in the ceremonial and symbolic affairs of the campus
- Initiates a major portion of its agenda items
- Defends the core values of academic freedom, determines curriculum
- Provides an effective forum for controversial issues
- Is seen as an agent for necessary institutional change
- Grounds its practices in parliamentary procedure and published and endorsed principles of governance

CSLA’s Academic Senate is not perfect on every item, but it seems to us to do well on most items. The two items that seem somewhat deficient are toward the end, providing “an effective forum for controversial issues,” and being “seen as an agent for necessary institutional change.” Our report has recommendations that should help alleviate concerns in these two areas.

II. What should the style of the Senate be? Should we continue to be a body that debates policy documents only – one that focuses on Senate policy and changes to the Faculty Handbook? Or, for example, should the Senate debate issues that affect faculty and are of broader import, not limited to Senate policies in the Faculty Handbook?

We *do* recommend some changes in *how* the Academic Senate conducts its business.

Forums on Broad Issues

First, we recommend that the Academic Senate host and organize one to three forums per year on wider issues – broad policy questions – than just those that come before the Academic Senate as policy changes to the Faculty Handbook. What seems to us to be most viable would be a debating format, with two or three faculty on each side and time for questions at the end. Background information for Senators and faculty might be provided through the Senate’s *www* site. All faculty on campus would be invited and encouraged to participate.

Information Provided for Academic Senators

Second, we feel that more information should be provided to members of the Academic Senate regarding the information before them and the implications of the votes they will make. The chair of the particular committee, in our view, has a special responsibility here to tell the Senate the background, the issues involved, the decision and rationale of the majority of the committee, and the rationale of the minority of the committee, if there is one. These rationales could be oral or written. The Executive Committee of the Senate has the responsibility to ensure that these “Academic Environmental Impact Statements” are provided for Senators before debate. They are of special interest when the decisions of the standing committee are not unanimous.

In addition, the Senate and its Executive Committee should consider providing the chairs of the standing committees with instructions as to how to handle Senate documents and the rationales that go with them, the need to provide oral background for the Senate, and the need for an oral or written “academic environmental impact statement.”

Membership of the Academic Senate

At present we have the following:

- 35 representatives from the six Colleges and DALSA, apportioned according to the number of full-time faculty in each College
- Five senators elected at large from the entire faculty
- The two statewide Academic Senators
- Five student senators, three undergraduate and two graduate students
- One Emeritus Faculty Senator
- Ex Officio Immediate Past Chair
- The six College deans, plus the University librarian

- The President, plus the five Vice Presidents, without vote
- The CFA campus chair, without vote
- The ACSUP campus chair, without vote

We feel that the Senate ought to include two other groups:

The Chairs of the Standing Committees.

We feel that the chairs of the standing committees should be members of the Academic Senate if they have not otherwise been elected. There are many circumstances in which their expertise is needed on some particular issue or where their proposals are being considered and there is no member of the committee present. They could also more easily keep the Senate informed of the business before their committees.

We considered having them be members of the Executive Committee as well, as some Senates do, but this would mean that standing committee chairs would be attending and preparing *weekly* for their own committee meetings, Executive Committee meetings, and Academic Senate meetings. We feel that the jobs are onerous enough at present. Since the Senate meets every other week on average, a good compromise to keep the committees and Senate informed of each other's work is to have the chairs sit on the Senate, with a vote.

Because of the volume of their business on the Senate floor, the standing committees of the Academic Senate that should be represented on the Senate are the Educational Policy Committee, the Faculty Policy Committee, and the Student Policy Committee. None of the other committees, the Fiscal Policy Committee, the Academic Information Resource Committee, and the Committee on Committees has had much business that has gone to the Senate in recent years, and we do not recommend direct representation for these three committees on the Senate at this time. If the volume of their business on the Senate floor were to increase, their chairs might be represented on the Senate also in the future. This recommendation is a majority view of the committee. The minority is concerned with overrepresenting some of the Colleges by giving the standing committee chairs a vote, since the three standing chairs could conceivably be from one College.

Part time faculty on the Academic Senate.

We are also recommending that part-time faculty/lecturers be represented directly on the Senate by having two seats allocated for them. Lecturers play an important role on campus, teaching a large number of our classes. Many other CSU campus senates either include Lecturers as members of the faculty who are entitled to run for the Senate and vote for Senators or have one or two seats set aside for Lecturers.

We suggest that Lecturers who serve on the Academic Senate have a one or two year contract. This provision will ensure that they have some longer term interest in the University than just teaching one quarter. It also avoids a debate over the number of units necessary for qualification. We suggest further that they be teaching at least four

units each quarter while serving on the Academic Senate, i.e., they must be teaching while they are serving.

We are recommending a one year term, with the possibility of re-election. The term would begin in Fall quarter, as it does for all Academic Senators. Lecturer representatives would have a vote like other Senators.

The nomination procedure would be as follows: each College will be asked to nominate one or two potential part-time faculty representatives to the Academic Senate in the Spring of each academic year. A required part of the nomination is a one or two paragraph statement of the nominee's qualifications (the statement could be written by the College nominating committee or by the candidate). The Colleges will use their own procedures for the nominations.

The election procedure would be as follows: the Academic Senate, when it elects the officers and members of the Executive Committee each Spring, will elect two part-time representatives for the following academic year. No two members can be from any one College. Alternates are elected as well in case nominees cannot serve for one or more quarters.

We are proposing that the position be uncompensated.

We did not find the case nearly as compelling for the other groups that might be represented in the Academic Senate. These include:

- A staff representative – if they desired it, they could have representation similar to the campus California Faculty Association chair, or the campus ASCUP chair, a guest with debating privileges.
- CFA – the CFA chair in recent years has been an Academic Senate member. Were that not the case, the CFA chair would be a guest with debating (and announcement) privileges as at present.

The Senate's Committee Structure.

We have heard many suggestions for reform of the Senate's standing committee and particularly its subcommittee structure. Changes to the structure would be Senate policy documents, i.e., changes to the Faculty Handbook, and need to go through Senate debate and recommendation. The committees and subcommittees are not listed in the constitution of the faculty.

We recommend that the Executive Committee formulate the appropriate documents and recommend changes to the Academic Senate's committee and subcommittee structure to the Academic Senate for possible action.

Among the proposals we have heard that might be considered:

- Eliminating the two subcommittees of the Faculty Policy Committee established some years ago to recommend candidates for CSU fellowship programs
- Eliminating or merging subcommittees of the Educational Policy Committee that overlap with others or have relatively little business (Writing Skills Subcommittee, Student Assessment Subcommittee, Academic Advisement Subcommittee)
- Merging the Undergraduate Studies and the Graduate Studies Subcommittee to reflect the fact that most curriculum matters now stop at the College level
- Considering whether the Academic Information Resource Committee should be a separate standing committee or a subcommittee of the Educational Policy Committee
- Renaming the Committee on Committees the Committee on Nominations to reflect most of its business
- Merging the various awards committees, although there are possible problems with workload
- Using task forces consistently, with sunset clauses, for activities that are time limited.