

The Senator

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University Senate or Faculty Senate?

Carole Browne

The suggestion of changing the Senate from a University Senate to a Faculty Senate stems from several sources. One is the frustration with the lack of relevance of the Senate to University decision making. Another is a lack of response to the Senate from the administrators on Senate resolutions that shows a lack of respect for the institution of the Senate. Finally, the recent debate over the independence of WFDD radio showed that the Senate can have an impact, when it speaks publicly and forcibly. But the issue of who was speaking when the Senate issued its proclamations wasn't clear. The resolutions passed by the Senate were clearly critical of the administration. These resolutions put the administrators on the Senate in the position of having criticized their own administration. But in fact virtually all of the administrators on the Senate chose not to vote, and the vote in effect reflected faculty, not Senate, sentiments.

A University Senate where faculty and administrators work hand in hand to shape university policy is certainly the ideal. But that is not what we have at WF. We have little voice in the planning process. We have no role in policy decisions. We have no representation on the board of Trustees, and in fact, are restricted from having contact with them. Our most visible contribution to the university is the approval of candidates for honorary degrees.

Frustration with the apparent ineffectiveness of the Senate is not a recent occurrence. In 1987, the Senate formed an ad hoc committee to study the Mission of the University Senate. The report stated that: At the root of the discontent over the Senate's mission is the perception expressed by current and former faculty Senators, and many other faculty members, that the Senate has little influence on and involvement in making institutional decisions. During the late 1970s and 1980s, the creation of new administrative offices with specific duties has increased the ambiguities of the Senate's mission and authority. Fewer and fewer decisions have been left to the purview of a university-wide body.

Faculty senators presumably represent their colleges, and administrators of the colleges presumably represent themselves. However, the latter presumably speak officially for themselves. Debate, and perhaps even frank discussion of significant issues, may be inhibited by this disparity of position. In the proposed by-laws changes, administrators, who presently are ex officio members with voting rights, would retain the status of ex officio members, but without voting rights. There also is a suggestion that not all senior administrators should necessarily be ex officio members of the Senate.

In summary, the Senate's performance over its twenty years of existence has fallen short of the objectives of its creator's and participants. This shortfall can be traced to the ambiguity in its mission, the peculiarity in its organization, and some of the way it conducts its business. What can the faculty do as a Senate that the presently constituted University Senate cannot? It can speak for the faculty to the administration, without the administration itself having a role in what we say or how we say it. The faculty needs a voice. The Senate needs some authority. The University needs faculty input.

(N.B. Please send any thoughts on this matter to Carole at browne@wfu.edu)

Senate Preliminary Discussion of Potential By-Laws Revisions

Ron Wright, Secretary

Carole Browne proposed that the Senate discuss the *general direction* of a set of by-laws changes that the Senate Executive Committee was recommending. Line-by-line discussion of language changes could wait until another meeting.

The Executive Committee proposed to convert the University Senate into a Faculty Senate. Although some administrators would still serve on the Senate in an ex officio capacity, only faculty members would vote. The Committee saw this as a possible response to the long-term ineffectiveness of the University Senate, as expressed in a 1987 self-study. Part of the problem with the Senate was the lack of a clear role. This lack of clarity is most visible in the work of committees, when administrators sit in on discussions about what to recommend to their own administration. If the Senate were to become the institution for clear expressions of faculty views on institutional matters, there would be less confusion about its role and it could become more vital. More limited involvement by administrators could also allow for more candid discussions of issues among faculty members.

During discussions, some members of the Senate expressed doubt that less involvement by administrators would make the Senate more effective. There is a risk that the Senate could become more isolated and even less effective. Ed Wilson suggested that the Senate might be more influential than it first appears, because some administrators might use arguments or insights they first heard through the Senate and use them during internal administrative debates. Others argued that some administrators are more willing than others to use input from the Senate, and the Senate should keep its traditional role as a more inclusive forum, despite the ups and downs of its influence with particular administrators.

A second concern about the plan dealt with the role of staff members. Staff members currently have an unofficial and unexercised role in the Senate. The proposed by-laws changes would make staff participation in this body more difficult. If the changes are adopted, some alternative forum for staff members would become necessary. If they are not adopted, the role of staff in the University Senate should be formalized.

Some Senators suggested that the Senate ask the administration for some proof that the institution has influenced the administration in the past. If there is no solid evidence that the Senate has been effective, the case for change is stronger. Others suggested a survey of peer universities to determine the ordinary proportion of faculty and administrators serving on University Senates. Perhaps the best result would be a different balance of faculty and administrative representatives, without renaming the institution.

Finally, some argued that any change of this magnitude should become a subject for discussion in the various faculties of the University. The Senate should solicit broad-based faculty comments about any changes in the basic function of the Senate.

Carole Browne ended the discussion by suggesting that members send their further thoughts to her by e-mail. The Executive Committee will then formulate a plan for the next step in this self-examination. The next Senate open meeting, where this issue will be discussed, will be Wed. Dec. 1 in Room 1312, the auditorium of the Worrell Professional Center.

Fringe Benefits Committee

Jack Meredith updated the Senate on the work of the Fringe Benefits Committee. The committee is comparing Qual Choice benefits and the "Long Term Care" program on the two campuses. It is also investigating medical options at the time of retirement. Three of the recommendations from last Spring regarding retirement benefits are now the subject of discussions with the administration.

Capital Planning Committee

David Levy, the Senate's liaison to the Capital Planning Committee, gave a report on CPC activities. Plans are now going forward for a new facility known as the "Student Athlete Enhancement Center" (or SAEC). Discussions are at a much earlier stage for other potential building projects: a stand-alone bookstore operated by a contractor such as Barnes & Noble, a daycare center, and parking decks. At a recent meeting of the CPC, members talked about the possibility of combining two or more of these projects on one site. Future meetings of the CPC will review the current status of the 1991 Campus Plan.

WFDD Committee

Ron Wright reported on the work of the ad hoc committee to inquire further into the WFDD controversy. In an effort to avoid duplicating the work of the Faculty Interim Advisory Committee on WFDD, the Senate Committee has decided to focus on two issues: (1) the confidentiality obligations of WFDD employees, and (2) internal job structures within WFDD that could contribute to journalistic independence. The committee plans to interview staff members at WFDD and others with relevant expertise. It aims to produce a short report on each of its two chosen topics.

Senior University Appointments

Linda McPhail presented the recommendations of the Senior University Appointments committee for this year's recipients of honorary degrees. The Senate approved all five nominees and one alternate nominee. Past practice has limited the total number of degree recipients to six; when a Commencement speaker is included, this slate reaches the traditional limit. The Senate urged the nominator for the alternate candidate to resubmit the name again next year. There were fewer nominations than usual from faculty members this year, possibly because of the new schedule for submitting names.