

Report of Activities
Faculty Senate and Its Committees
2003-2004

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Operations

1. Infrastructure

Accomplishments: During 2003-2004, the Faculty Senate established a permanent infrastructure for the first time and began to organize its archives.

- At the opening of the 2003-2004 year, the Faculty Senate developed the job description for a new permanent part-time assistant, interviewed 6 candidates, and hired Francine Fredette.
- The Senate also established permanent office space for the Senate on the second floor of the library. New equipment was also purchased (laptop, tape recorder).
- During 2003-2004, the Senate began reorganizing the Senate website and locating and indexing Senate archives back to 1996. All of the paper archives have been completed; 25% of the electronic archives have been indexed.

Assessment: The remaining archives should be indexed and the web site redesign completed.

2. Communication with Administration

Accomplishments: Over the course of 2003-2004, the Executive Committee met 15 times with members of the administrative leadership to discuss a wide variety of on-going issues.

- During 2003-2004, the Senate Executive Committee met with President Jackson and Provost Peterson together 5 times (9/9, 10/2, 11/11, 3/22, 4/7). While many topics were discussed, some of the more prominent included the need for increased budget flexibility, concern over the status of faculty at Hartford, ideas for a Faculty Club, working with students over the +/- proposal, desire to increase research diversity, and faculty morale.
- Senate Executive Committee met with Provost Peterson alone 5 times (10/15, 11/4, 12/3, 3/3, 4/7). Topics of discussion included the faculty handbook, administrator evaluation, core curriculum, performance planning, the staff handbook, the +/- proposal, and the depth requirement in the science core.
- Senate Executive Committee meet with Sam Heffner, President of the Board of Trustees three times (9/18, 12/6 and 5/13) and discussed faculty morale, budget flexibility, and promotion and tenure.
- The President of the Senate also met with the Vice Provost and Dean of the Undergraduate College Gabriele twice (10/15 and 1/14) to discuss the proposal on core curriculum objectives.

Assessment: Regular communication with the administrative leadership is an effective mechanism for coordinating faculty interests with administrative agenda. It also represents a significant investment of time for the Senate

leadership. Coordination with Institute Vice-presidents will bring added benefits.

3. Communication with Faculty

Accomplishments: During 2003-2004, the Senate increased the number and the quality of its communications with the faculty.

- An electronic newsletter for the faculty from the president, The Sage Occasional, was established, and used 8 times to alert faculty to upcoming issues.
- An index of Minutes of Faculty Senate meetings were distributed to the faculty for the first time, with web links to specific discussions.
- Electronic balloting was moved from WebCT to email resulting in increased participation at lower cost of effort.
- In addition to the regular elections, special ballots were held on the core curriculum proposal and the +/- proposal.
- Live streaming of General Faculty Meetings was tried and well received.
- Two web sites for discussion of issues were established and contributed to by the members of the faculty.
- Videoconferencing was established between Hartford and the RPI campus for two General Faculty Meetings and the Senate Meeting at which Dean Eckbreth presented.

Assessment: Efforts at regular but judicious communication with the faculty is key to effective governance. Permanent videoconferencing capability should be installed in the Fishbach room; arrangements for virtual attendance and voting at General Faculty Meetings should be considered; and support should be given to Senators to increase their ability to communicate with their constituents.

4. Agenda Development

Accomplishments: Efforts were made to solidify the Faculty Senate around a core agenda.

- In the opening week of the academic year, 30 members of the Senate and its Committees held a half day retreat at the Sage Dining hall to brainstorm issues to be addressed during the year.
- In the Senate, Working Groups were formed to supplement standing committees to deal with key agenda items: Graduate policy, Quality of Life, Faculty Satisfaction, Compensation, Infrastructure, and Research Diversity.
- Roughly, the final 30 minutes of Senate time bi-weekly was given to these Working Groups to 1) Generate Senate agenda items, motions, invitations, report, that will move issues along; and 2) Develop the internal expertise to keep Senate discussions on issues at a high level.

- Working Groups were responsive for initiatives in some of the key areas discussed below.

Assessment: Senate Working Groups should be continued and empowered. A mechanism for better routine coordination with standing committees ought to be developed.

Faculty Rights and Responsibilities

5. Faculty Memorials

Accomplishments: The process of remembering departed members of the Rensselaer Faculty has been improved and better coordinated with the Staff memorials.

- On 11/12, on the Senate Meeting closest to Veterans Day, the Senate read memorials for faculty who had died in the past year.
- On 4/17, the Senate, in cooperation with the Pillars of Rensselaer, held a joint Memorial Service at the Chapel and Cultural Center. Memorials were read for faculty who had died in service during the preceding year, and candles were lit for retirees.

Assessment: The Senate needs to develop a better process for keeping track of departed faculty.

6. Faculty Handbook

Accomplishments: An Ad Hoc Committee was appointed to review the Faculty Handbook and proposed revisions to bring it up to date.

- In early Fall, a 4-member Handbook Committee (Guttman, Adali, Wallace, and Hess with Kapila) was appointed and worked through spring on the first major revision of the faculty handbook in well-over a decade.
- The Handbook Committee handed off its revision to the Executive Committee on 2/9.
- The Executive Committee completed its review of the revised version on 2/25 and 3/3 and delivered its recommendations to the Provost on 3/30.
- The revised version of the Faculty Handbook is sensible and will bring about a major improvement in a long outdated document.
- We now await the results of the review from Rensselaer's counsel.

Assessment: The revised version of the Faculty Handbook is sensible and will bring about a major improvement in a long outdated document. When the Handbook is brought to vote in early fall, the Senate may wish to assign members separate sections for review and report.

7. Employee Handbook

Accomplishments: The Senate called for change to the Employee Handbook to reflect better HR policies on faculty.

- In October, the Senate became aware of problems involving the Employee Handbook coverage of faculty issues and repudiated its application, in its entirety, to faculty.
- Subsequently, it was discovered that two versions existed. A long version, not publicly available, contained a scope note limiting the applicability its contents to just those sections in which faculty are explicitly mentioned. A short version, publicly available on the web, did not include this scope note.
- The Executive Committee, through the Provost, asked that the scope note be added to the short version and that the full version be made available on the web.

Assessment: As of this report, the Employee Handbook available on-line has not been changed. Resolution of this issue needs to be pursued in discussions with the Vice President of Human Resources.

8. Constitution

Accomplishments: Several Constitutional amendments were formulated and passed by the faculty this year.

- In Spring, 2003, a Constitution Committee was formed to deal with issues of Constitutional reform and especially voting rights for the clinical faculty.
- For the Spring, 2004 election, this committee recommended some changes to update administrator titles, to change various quorum rules, and to make the Committee on Honors a standing committee of the Senate, but no proposal was put forward on the clinical issue.
- The Working Group on Faculty Satisfaction also proposed a constitutional amendment requiring the Senate to conduct a yearly survey of faculty satisfaction with faculty Senate and the administrative chain of command.
- All amendments were passed by a vote of the full faculty and, as required by the Constitution, will be sent for endorsement to the President and Board of Trustees.

Assessment: The issue of clinical status on the faculty remains problematic. The Constitution Committee, chaired by Sharon Anderson-Gold, should continue working on amending the constitution to provide clinical faculty with faculty status.

9. Grievance

Accomplishments: During 2003-2004, the Executive Committee of the Senate, in accordance with procedures established in the Constitution, received and acted on one grievance from a member of the faculty. The mediation failed.

- On 12/5 The executive committee received a grievance from a member of the faculty and gave the administrators against whom the grievance had been filed 10 working days to respond as required by the Constitution.
- On 1/22, the executive committee meet in closed session to review the grievance and responses and decided that the grievance warranted further consideration.
- On 1/26, a three person Grievance Committee was appointed to make an effort to mediate the dispute.
- This mediation failed.

Assessment: The Grievance procedure represents a real resource for the faculty and makes a positive contribution to resolving issues between the administration and individual faculty members.

Specific Issues

10. *Hartford*

Accomplishments: The Senate has been attentive to conditions for faculty at Hartford this year.

- On numerous occasions during 2003-2004, the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate brought up the situation for the faculty at Hartford with the President and Provost.
- Dean Eckbreth was asked to address the Senate on 3/3, responding to issues generated by the Hartford faculty. The meeting was video-conferenced to Hartford.
- In light of budget deficits, faculty layoffs at Hartford appeared inevitable, and four clinical faculty were let go.
- Because of the travel and time involved (roughly 1 days every two weeks), the faculty at Hartford have been unable to elect a representative on the Senate for the coming year

Assessment: Representation for Hartford in the Senate is in danger. The Faculty Senate should move with all deliberate speed to provide a lower cost mechanism for Hartford interacting with the Senate via permanent videoconferencing in the Fishbach Room of the library.

11. *Compensation*

Accomplishments: The Faculty Senate heard a report on the Compensation Initiative from faculty involved in the Faculty Advisory Board.

- On 2/3, the Senate heard a report from members of the Faculty Advisory Board on the Compensation Initiative.

Assessment: Faculty involvement in the Compensation Initiative was extensive and productive.

12. *Privacy*

Accomplishments: In response to parking access data, discussions were initiated in the Senate concerning a privacy policy for Rensselaer and have now been taken up by an institute Task Force on Information Security.

- On 11/12, the Senate heard a report from Vice President Rounds concerning the privacy of gate access data to the parking lots. Members of the Quality of Life Committee had developed a list of issues for Rounds in advance of the presentation.
- At that meeting, Vice President Rounds committed to developing a privacy policy for this data.

- A draft policy was presented to the Senate on 2/18.
- Recommendations on that policy were voted on by the Senate and sent back to Vice President Rounds on 3/15.
- These recommendations asked that the privacy policy be extended to building access data and video data, that the Provost be part of the group necessary to authorize exceptions, that the data not be provided for purposes of performance review, and that the data be destroyed 1 month after acquisition.
- The President has now appointed a committee to deal with Information Security that will, among other things, deal with the privacy issues. A faculty representative will serve on this committee.

Assessment: Information Security may be one of the major issues before the faculty in the coming year. Issues of privacy, security, academic freedom, and free speech are involved.

13. Performance Planning

Accomplishments: Early Input Forums better integrated the faculty into the Performance Planning Process.

- On 9/17 and 10/1, Early Input Forums on Performance Planning were hosted by the Faculty Committee on Planning and Resources for the five schools.
- Prior to the Forums, faculty in each school were encouraged to send the P&R Committee questions they would like asked.
- During the Forum, Deans were asked to address their plans for the coming years and faculty were given a chance to ask questions.
- Following the Forums, the P&R committee drafted a report for the President.
- The President of the Senate and the Chair of P&R attended the seven-hour Academic Portfolio Retreat on 10/21 and provided input to portfolio holders.

Assessment: More could be done to integrate Performance Planning into faculty governance: The mandate of the P&R committee should be reformulated in terms of Performance Planning.

14. Benefits

Accomplishments: Several issues concerning faculty benefits have arisen over the course of the year, but we have not had much success in dealing with them.

- On 12/15, members of the Retiree Forum sent a memo to the VP of Human Resources expressing concern over the lack of a cost of living adjustment for retirees since 1991, twelve years ago.
- On 2/3, faculty-initiated reports were given to the Senate on the benefits situation for retirees (Ed Rogers) and on college consortium benefits (Bill Puka). At the same meeting, Vice President Powell gave a report on faculty benefits.

- On 3/6, Vice President Powell sent a memo to Puka explaining that the College Consortium was not a good choice for Rensselaer.
- In spring, the faculty also became aware of the fact that Research Faculty, unlike other categories of faculty and all full-time staff, are not extended tuition benefits. We brought up this issue with the President and the Provost who said they were aware of the situation.

Assessment: The Faculty does not currently have a mechanism in place for interacting with the administration in an informed and timely manner over benefits. An Ad Hoc Committee should be appointed for the coming year to develop such a mechanism.

15. Faculty Club

Accomplishments: With the encouragement of the President, the idea of a Faculty Club to provide a more comfortable and extensive venue for interactions among faculty has been developed.

- The Working Group on Quality of Life has developed a faculty survey to establish interest in and parameters for a Faculty Club.
- The President has encouraged the Senate to pursue a moderate concept that might be expanded over the long run. Several properties on 15th street now owned by the Institute might be candidates for renovation.

Assessment: The Senate Working Group on the Quality of Life should conduct its survey in early fall and bring this concept to fruition, working closely with the administration to develop a feasible and attractive concept.

Curriculum

16. *Plus/Minus*

Accomplishments: A faculty-initiated proposal for the adoption of grade modifiers has been approved by the voting faculty by a 3 to 1 margin.

- On 12/3, the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee presented the first version of a proposal for adding grade modifiers to Rensselaer's grading system.
- The Executive Committee meet on several occasions with the leadership of the Student Senate to understand their concerns and to encourage them to develop amendments that would make the proposal more acceptable.
- In response to concerns voiced during a student Forum, the FSCC revised their proposal on grad/modifiers.
- This revision was brought to the full Senate on 4/14, and, in response to a suggestion by the Student Leadership, further modifications were made to the proposal before putting it to ballot before the full faculty.
- In the ballot, 75% of the voters approved the plus/minus proposal; 25% disapproved.
- The Senate forwarded the proposal to the Provost for implementation.

Assessment: The Institute should move with all deliberate speed to implement this proposal.

17. *Core Curriculum*

Accomplishments: A proposal for 22 core curriculum objectives was put before the faculty this year and rejected by a 2 to 1 margin.

- In Spring, 2003, a proposal for 22 core curriculum objectives was passed by the FSCC and Vice Provost Gabriele directed schools to begin the process of implementation.
- In Fall of 2003, the Executive Committee of the Senate informed the FSCC and Vice Provost Gabriele that, according to the Faculty Senate Constitution, changes to the core curriculum need approval by the full faculty
- During the Fall of 2003, a survey of impact of the proposal sent to representatives of 26 majors. In addition, input was sought from faculty through a web site.
- At a special General Faculty Meeting on 1/21, the proposal was brought for discussion and a motion from the floor to bring the proposal to vote as a whole rather than as 22 individual objectives was passed.
- The proposal failed by a 2 to 1 margin when brought to full faculty vote.
- The proposal has been sent back to the FSCC for further refinement.
- Meanwhile Vice Provost Gabriele has approached the curriculum committees of individual schools seeking support for the Biology requirement, bypassing review of the faculty as a whole.
- In exchange, curriculum committees in several schools have been promised that they will be excused from the 2-course depth requirement in science.

- The Executive Committee has protested to the Provost that exceptions to the 2-course depth requirement in science constitute a change in the institute core, and thus cannot be made with a vote of the full faculty.

Assessment: The Senate should take leadership in making changes, presenting proposals to the faculty in a way that is persuasive on content and responsive to their concerns.

18. Graduate Policy

Accomplishments: Three policies associated with the Graduate Tuition policy -- the absentia policy, the time limits on the Troy Campus, and time limits at Hartford – have been identified as matters of academic policy subject to faculty review.

- On 11/12, members of the Working Group on Graduate Policy communicated to the Provost that several matters of academic policy had been put into place (in the catalog and in force) without faculty review. In particular, in the Graduate Tuition Policy, clause 9 of the Overall Policy Guidelines (concerning time to completion) and the Policy on Registration in Absentia (minus the stipulation of the fee for registering in Absentia) are both changes to the academic regulations of the Institute rather than matters of tuition. In addition, the Hartford time limits have not been reviewed. The Provost agreed.
- In the first week of December, the Dean of Graduate Education, agreed to submit the Hartford time limits for review, but suggested that the absentia policy and the time limits on the Troy Campus had already had extensive review.
- On 2/23, the Executive Committee sent a memo to the Provost reiterating the request to bring the Troy time limits and absentia status for review since none of the interactions that the Senate or its committees had had concerning the Graduate Tuition Policy met the requirements for a “review.” Documentation was provided.
- The minutes of the FSCC show that neither Hartford Time limits nor the absentia policy and the time limits on the Troy Campus have yet been submitted for review.

Assessment: These policies should be reviewed in the coming academic year. The Senate may wish to consider appointing a special committee to handle review of such a significant and complex matter.