

Frequently Asked Questions Concerning Faculty Governance

Faculty Governance Committee

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When we introduced an earlier draft of the Faculty Governance proposal to a few small groups, a number of questions were asked several times. We are also adding a number of points which help explain the document we have submitted for your comment.

Those of you who saw the earlier version will recognize significant changes in this draft. Each group responding to the earlier version provided helpful input. We believe the present version incorporates significant improvements as a result. Nevertheless, it is still a work in progress. Your comments will shape our further deliberations.

1. Why consider the issue of faculty governance now?

The Faculty Governance Committee was formed because the Board of Regents asked President Ransdell to respond to many of the recommendations found in the University Review conducted by Fisher and his associates, including this one: "It is recommended that the new President immediately commission a special task force on university governance and made up of faculty with student representation (no staff) with an administrative officer appointed by the President." Fisher went on to say that the task force should report by May 1998. We are behind schedule!

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2. How was the committee constituted?

President Ransdell asked Dr. Burch to convene a committee to study Fisher's recommendations. Based on the recommendations of the college deans, Dr. Burch chose one faculty member from each college, Extended Campus, and a department head. The chairs of the Academic Council and Faculty Senate, and one person from the VPAA office were also included.

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3. How did the committee begin its work?

By collecting and studying governance documents from benchmark institutions and by discussing our impressions of our present system and Fisher's criticism of it. According to Fisher, "the campus governance arrangement at Western is one of the most illogical and incoherent we have seen. The existence of both a Faculty Senate and an Academic Council is confusing, time consuming, often redundant, and according to many interviewees, both bodies are essentially unimportant." After noting that many faculty have concluded that neither body is "particularly effective or worth taking seriously," he concluded, "the present design at Western simply will not work during a period of thoughtful and participative transformation" (*Report*, p. 73).

Fisher's acerbic comments challenged the committee members to look at our situation critically. For most of us there was no doubt that in his interviews Fisher had picked up on the considerable discontent and feelings of powerlessness that are present among us.

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4. Why did the committee not do a survey of faculty opinion to see if faculty wanted change before developing a proposal?

While one committee member was strongly supported this approach, the rest of the committee was not convinced it would be helpful. Most members of the committee believed that our present system of faculty governance could be improved. Hence a better approach would be to develop an improved system and to present it to the faculty for their consideration.

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5. Will the entire faculty vote on the governance proposal?

Yes, the Faculty Governance proposal will be submitted to the entire faculty for a vote. The procedure from here on should look something like this: there will be open meetings for faculty to comment on the present draft. After getting feedback on this draft, the committee will make revisions. A revised draft will again be posted on the web. If there are significant changes, another round of meetings will be held. This process will continue until all faculty members have had an opportunity to respond to

our changes.

After the discussion process is complete, the committee will post its final version and schedule a vote. Probably each department will vote separately. All persons with faculty status are eligible to vote; those serving in an administrative role will be asked to vote in their home department.

If the vote is negative, the president would have the option of accepting that result or asking the committee to revise the document further.

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6. When will the new governance structure be implemented if approved?

If a favorable vote on the proposal is taken sometime in the spring semester, the Board of Regents could conceivably approve it at the July meeting for implementation next year.

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7. Why has the committee chosen to recommend a single governing body?

If one looks at faculty involvement during the past few years, there is a clear pattern: when a major issue needs to be studied, neither the Faculty Senate nor the Academic Council are consulted but a new committee is appointed by the administration. Why? Neither the Faculty Senate nor the Academic Council is thought to speak for the entire faculty. This is the Achilles' heel of our present arrangement.

Consider Post-Tenure Review. The issue was referred neither to the Faculty Senate nor to the Academic Council, but rather a new committee was appointed by the Provost. Of course, the present committee on Faculty Governance is another example, and the harmful effects of this kind of procedure are very clear in our case. These *ad hoc* solutions could be avoided if there were a regular committee structure, elected by the faculty with the power to deal with such matters.

Looking to the future, there is even more reason to have a single faculty governing body. We are just starting to feel the impact of Governor Patton's efforts to reform post-secondary education. One goal is that the comprehensive universities become distinctive institutions by developing specific strengths. This will require important institutional changes and faculty should be involved. If we do not develop a strong form of faculty governance, we can expect the old pattern to continue. The administration will appoint a study committee, and faculty members will feel powerless and mistrust whatever it recommends.

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8. What are some of the other benefits of a single governing body?

The election process is simplified, since there will be only one set of elections,

rather than two. Moreover, if the new body has a significant role on campus, the departments are more likely to elect their most qualified members as representatives and senators are more likely to take their assignment seriously when they realize that important issues will be handled by the Senate and its committees.

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9. What other implications does this new form of government have?

If the proposed form of government is adopted, we believe that it will foster a cultural change at Western. The faculty at Western as a body has yet to find its own voice. Some faculty have been here long enough to remember when the university was basically run out of the President's office. Many will remember when faculty input was encouraged, but only when compliant. These approaches have led some faculty to conclude that the faculty had no voice, and to become cynical or apathetic. We believe a new structure which encourages faculty to develop their viewpoint in dialogue with administrators is the best for Western to meet the challenges of the future.

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Questions about specific features of the proposal:

1. Why include appointed faculty members on some committees?

Three reasons: so members of minority groups will be represented on various committees; so faculty with special expertise can be included as needed; and so committee membership can be balanced to more closely mirror the actual size of the various colleges.

With regard to how these committee members are to be appointed, the committee's view has undergone considerable change since an earlier draft. Even so, we remain open to suggestions on this matter, which is obviously a significant one.

[Back to top](#) 2. Why is it proposed that administrators serve as *ex officio*, non-voting members of the Senate and of the various committees?

Note that the proposal splits the difference between the current Academic Council and Faculty Senate. Administrators are full, voting members of the current Academic Council. The proposal takes this right taken away from administrators in *ex officio*

positions. The current Senate limits membership to teaching faculty, so not even department heads can serve. In the minds of many this limitation had the unfortunate result that Department heads never felt involved in the Faculty Senate with the result that it never had the influence it might have had. The present proposal is that Department Heads may be elected to the University Senate like other faculty. Deans and other administrators will serve only in an *ex officio*, non-voting role.

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3. What role are *ex officio* members expected to play?

Administrators have been assigned to committees to supply information, perspective, background and the like.

While some faculty worry that faculty members will be intimidated by administrators, we believe that this fear will not be borne out. Administrative involvement in the present Academic Council hasn't worked that way. We are confident that faculty capable of presenting their views frankly and clearly to colleagues will also be able to speak effectively with administrators present.

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4. Why have a University Curriculum Committee and a General Education Committee?

Although we believe that only about 25% of the items that currently come before Academic Council would come before the proposed curriculum committee, this will still be a significant work load. The University Curriculum Committee will also have the task of monitoring program development. According to Gordon Davies, the CPE should give program development back to the campuses. The Curriculum Committee gives us a faculty-dominated agency to handle this task.

Similarly, the General Education Committee will monitor outcomes mandated by the CPE. It won't just be reviewing courses.

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5. Why have all meetings, including committee meetings, open to interested parties?

The structure which we are proposing lodges a great deal of power in the standing committees. The best way to guarantee that power is exercised responsibly is by keeping everything open to all interested parties.

The need for openness was brought home to the committee clearly when we discovered some faculty felt considerable distrust of faculty in other colleges and or other departments. We believe that the best way to break down such suspicions is to insist that all meetings are open and that the vote of each member be recorded. The only exception would be personnel matters, so elections, e.g., would be by secret ballot.

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6. Does this proposal give too much power to the college curriculum committees?

There are three built-in safe-guards, any one of which will cause the UCC to review an item from a college curriculum committee. First, the college committee itself may flag a proposal and indicate that it has university-wide implications; secondly, the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs may determine that a proposal has university-wide implications--perhaps relating to budget or duplication--and placed it on

the action agenda of the UCC. Finally, the UCC itself can vote to place any item it wishes on its action agenda.

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7. How will the Graduate Council be affected by the proposed changes?

In areas such as approval of Graduate Faculty there will be no changes. With regard to course approvals the same standards will apply as for the college curriculum committees--that is, only matters which have a significant impact on other colleges will have to be submitted to the University Curriculum Committee for approval.

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8. Why are the standing committees structured so differently?

First, it should be said that this is one of the areas that has given the Governance Committee the most difficulty and where, in our estimate, the most refining needs to be done.

We tried to make the committee structure reflect the role of the faculty in each area. So for example, in matters related to the curriculum and general education, the entire membership of the committee (except for the student representative) should come from the faculty, because it is the faculty's task to set the standards in this area. By contrast, budget matters or athletics affect other parts of the university with complementary roles.

Both the Members of the Fiscal Affairs Committee and of the Senate Athletic Committee will serve on the respective University Committees in their areas, with other persons from other areas in the university. The Senate members will make up a faculty caucus with their own chair to report regularly to the entire Senate. In addition, these Senate committees may conduct their own studies and formulate their own resolutions for the University Senate to act on.

The Faculty Welfare and Professional Responsibilities Committee will consider a broad range of concerns. Here more than anywhere else one can see the need for the flexibility to make appointments, though the core should always be supplied by the elected members of the committee.

It should be noted that all committees retain the power to send resolutions to the University Senate as a whole. To illustrate, the University Curriculum Committee will be involved primarily in program and course approvals, but it may also suggest policy changes related to curriculum, or academic policies and rules for the Senate's consideration.

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