

Powers and Responsibilities of Committees of the Academic Senate

The Executive Committee is offering this primer regarding the power and responsibilities of committees of the Academic Senate to facilitate their work this year.

A. Significance of the Academic Senate in University Shared Governance

As committees do their work this year, it is important to remember that the University's traditions, history, and institutions recognize the central importance of the Academic Senate in University governance. This means that the Academic Senate has substantial authority in shaping policy across significant areas of the University. It also means the Academic Senate has special responsibilities in addressing the University's business.

The Academic Senate's central role in University governance is primarily recognized in three documents: the University Constitution, the "Blue Book" supplement to the Bylaws of the Academic Senate, and the Memorandum of Understanding. The University Constitution, for example, plainly states: "**ARTICLE V. Academic Governance, Section 1. Academic Senate:** *The primary governing body at Illinois State University shall be the Academic Senate, which shall provide for faculty and student participation in academic governance.*" Likewise, borrowing some language from the University Constitution while further defining the authority and responsibility of the Academic Senate, the Blue Book states:

When creating policy that affects the academic area broadly understood, the President will seek the advice of the academic community through its principle representative body, the Academic Senate.

Within the limits established by legislative statute and the authority delegated thereby to the Board of Higher Education and the Board of Trustees, the Academic Senate shall be the primary body to recommend educational policies of the University, including those described below, and to advise the President on their implementation. . . .

The Senate shall:

- 1. Recommend policy for the admission of students to the University.*
- 2. Recommend policy for degree requirements, and the procedures for inaugurating, changing, or terminating degree programs.*
- 3. Recommend policy for the annual calendar of the University.*
- 4. Recommend policy for the adoption and standards of educational and academic conduct common to all elements of the University community.*
- 5. Recommend policy for intercollegiate programs and activities.*
- 6. Recommend policy with respect to student life and conduct.*
- 7. Recommend policy for the evaluation of faculty members including academic administrators in connection with their appointment, promotion, remuneration, and retention.*
- 8. Recommend policy to insure the protection of the rights and privileges of the various elements of the academic community, and establish procedures for the hearing of grievances.*
- 9. Recommend policy and act on report of standing and ad hoc committees of the Academic Senate. Standing Committees shall be established by the By-Laws of the Senate which shall delineate the composition of and the procedures of each committee.*
- 10. Recommend patterns of the academic community's self-government by exercising its authority to delegate responsibility to colleges or departments or committees.*
- 11. Participate in the formulation of capital and operating budgets and requests to be submitted to the Board of Trustees.*

12. *Participate in the formulation of long range academic plans including those to be submitted to the Board of Trustees.*
13. *Participate in the formulation of long-range plans for campus buildings and physical facilities.*
14. *Participate in the formulation of the academic and administrative structure of the University.*
15. *Advise the President on any matter, at his or her request or on the initiative of the Academic Senate.*
16. *Participate in the formulation of policies governing the terms under which individuals and groups can use University facilities for out-of-class activities. ...*

A. Academic Senate

The Academic Senate is the primary governing body at Illinois State University and provides for faculty and student participation in academic governance.

Finally, the “Memorandum of Understanding,” which was signed in January 1999, states:

The Academic Senate agrees that the Board of Trustees has final legal authority and that the Academic Senate makes recommendations to the President and the Board of Trustees.

The President and the Board of Trustees agree that the faculty (or appropriate representative bodies, such as the Academic Senate) has primary responsibility for academic issues, faculty affairs issues and educational issues related to student life and is entrusted with the authority to recommend policies on those issues to the President. The President and the Board of Trustees anticipate that these recommendations will be modified or rejected only in exceptional circumstances.

The Board of Trustees anticipates further that, in the interest of open communication, the President will communicate with the Academic Senate concerning any rationale for modification or rejection of an Academic Senate recommendation pertaining to academic issues, faculty affairs issues and education issues related to student life.

B. Powers of Committees of the Academic Senate

The extended analysis of shared governance at Illinois State University offered above makes it clear that the Academic Senate has substantial authority within the University. Substantial authority brings with it the ability and need to conduct serious, thoughtful analyses of the issues it faces. Accordingly, committees should be aware that they have the authority and power to take many actions that will facilitate their work:

- To raise issues of concern within their field of responsibility, whether in response to a request from the Executive Committee, an internal committee, a University administrator, a University community member, or a committee’s particular interest;
- To, through their own initiative, gather and collect information relevant to an issue;
- To request University administrative staff collect and present information relevant to an issue;
- To request information, whether in person or in writing, from anyone who might provide valuable insights into the issue under study;
- To formulate draft plans and policies that they then solicit commentary about;
- To accept or reject ideas and plans referred to them by the Executive Committee or other sources;
- To oversee the operations of the external committees, if any, that report to the committee. Such oversight includes the authority to make sure the external committee is following appropriate University rules and regulations as it undertakes its operations in the name of the internal committee;
- To expect timely responses to requests for information;
- To have access to appropriate means of communicating and promulgating their plans, policies, and

- requests for information to the University community;
- To expect that the recommendations they make, if adopted by the Academic Senate, will be carried out by the University administration;
- To form subcommittees to further their work, subject to the requirements of the Illinois Open Meetings Act;
- To hold supplemental meetings if necessary to facilitate their work;
- To contact the Chair of the Academic Senate to enforce their prerogatives and answer their concerns;
- To contact appropriate University administrators or the Chair of the Academic Senate if they have encountered difficulties, such as unresponsive staff persons or scheduling conflicts, in carrying out their responsibilities;
- To take appropriate time to understand the issues that come before them.

Note that for the upcoming Academic Year, the office of the Vice President and Provost has developed a list of appropriate staff contacts on an issue-by-issue basis. This will certainly facilitate the collection and promulgation of information this year.

C. Responsibilities of Committees of the Academic Senate

Just as committees have powers, they also have responsibilities. Among these are:

- Timeliness in addressing the issues before them;
- Professional, respectful debate on the facts and policies they consider;
- Due diligence in considering issues and their alternatives;
- Full, fair, and serious consideration of the realistic issues and concerns associated with particular policies or programs;
- Presentation of appropriate information to the Academic Senate to facilitate the Senate's decision-making;
- Cooperating with University administrators and other constituents in achieving shared goals;
- Taking and keeping meeting minutes;
- Keeping the Executive Committee informed of the status of the issues before it, including an expected decision date for any pending information and action items;
- Committee organization intended to facilitate the committee's business;
- Broad consultation with relevant groups affected by particular policies and issues.

These lists are, at most, partial. However, they are suggestive of the **minimum** powers and responsibilities shared by the standing committees of the Academic Senate. Committees should deploy any of these—or other—powers to help them fulfill their responsibilities. Keeping the principles of shared governance, the role of the Academic Senate, and the powers and responsibilities of committees in the forefront of our work should help the Senate and the University achieve our shared goals more effectively and efficiently.