

March 20, 2013

Dear Senate Executive Board Members:

Thank you for making room on your agenda to hear my concerns. I asked to meet with you today to share some suggestions on how to create more time for New Business items at Senate meetings; how to help Senators become better prepared for meetings; and to request some clarification on your role as the Executive Board. These comments are offered in the spirit of collegial communication, so I appreciate you taking the time to listen to them and to refer to the attached documents.

More Time for New Business

Since the Senate is the official voice for faculty members in academic and professional issues, it is important for faculty concerns, which often fall under the New Business section of the agenda, to be heard at Senate meetings. However, New Business items are listed at the end of the agenda before Good and Welfare and Concerns, and some meetings, such as the March 13 session, may run out of time before all New Business has been discussed. This frustrates Senators who had asked that items be added to the agenda at the request of their academic areas.

One way to create more time for New Business could be to require all reports (president's, co-chair reports, and other reports) to be written and e-mailed to Senators ahead of time with the expectation that Senators read these before the meetings. Some co-chairs already submit written reports prior to meetings, and these are available with the agenda. (Two excellent examples of this are Kate Pluta, who writes clear, detailed reports on complex ASC matters and follows up with e-mails occasionally on Senate items of discussion, and Nick Strobel, who writes such comprehensive ISIT meeting reports that many ISIT reps simply e-mail his minutes to their academic areas.) If all Senate reports were written and sent to Senators ahead of time, communication could be enhanced, Senators could be better prepared for meetings, and the meetings could proceed at a faster pace since reports could be quickly summarized and accepted. Besides providing a valuable record, written reports also educate Senators and the faculty they represent about the day-to-day work of Senate officers and committees. Finally, written reports could assist the Senate secretary since these could be added to the minutes as attachments.

If written reports are too much additional work for Senate officers and co-chairs to complete, another alternative could be to move the reports section of the agenda to the end of the meeting before the Good and Welfare and Concerns. While this idea, which was suggested to me by another Senator, would allow New Business to be heard earlier in the meeting, the drawback to this change is that reports, especially that of the president, often inform discussion of other items on the agenda. Perhaps Executive Board, which helps the president develop the agenda, could consider trying one or both of these suggestions on a trial basis and then survey Senators to evaluate their effectiveness.

Helping Senators Prepare for Meetings

While written reports often help Senators understand issues more completely than oral presentations, many Senators pay the most attention to voting items. Since Executive Board helps develop the meeting agendas, it should indicate voting items consistently on these agendas. Senators usually learn of voting items in three ways: An item seeking Senate support often is discussed at two Senate meetings, and after being discussed at the first meeting as an upcoming voting item, the Senate minutes refer to it as a potential voting item for the next meeting; an e-mail reminder is sent out by the Senate meeting secretary prior to the meeting in which the vote is scheduled; and the item is listed as a voting item on the agenda of the next meeting with the symbol of double diamonds. However, when Exec Board members wish to push a vote forward, none of these items need occur.

An example of this happened at the March 13 meeting in which Achieving the Dream was not listed as a voting item. As a result, some Senators, including me, did not expect to vote on it. I have attached the Feb. 27 and March 13 agendas for comparison of double diamond items, along with the unapproved minutes from the Feb. 27 meeting. Please note that while Dr. Christian's presentation on Achieving the Dream is summarized expertly, Senators are asked "to share this information with faculty in their areas and to bring any feedback for discussion at the next meeting, March 13" (3). Nowhere in the minutes does it mention that this would become a voting item on March 13, yet voting items often are mentioned in minutes. For example, in the Jan. 30 minutes, when committee charge updates were discussed under New Business, the minutes state these changes are being presented as a first reading. "Senators should be prepared for voting at the next Senate meeting" (2).

Besides reminding Senators of upcoming voting items in the minutes and signifying these with double diamonds on the agenda, our amazing Senate meeting secretary also sends e-mails out at the request of Executive Board members to remind Senators of upcoming votes. A recent example of this is the March 14 e-mail and attachment on the Budget Committee's changes to its charge, an item that will be voted on April 3 (see attached). If such an e-mail reminder was sent for Achieving the Dream, I must have missed it. When an issue isn't discussed as a voting item in the minutes, the agenda appears to list it as discussion only, and Senators hear little about it as a voting item in advance of a meeting, why would Executive Board members assume that Senators are prepared to vote on it?

If the board wants to help prepare Senators for upcoming votes, it could do so by following the above three procedures consistently for all voting items that are not emergency matters. This also would reduce confusion at Senate meetings.

Achieving the Dream was not the only confusing item at the last meeting. Another was the charge of the Audit Task Force. When several Senators asked what this was, they were told that they should know what the committee charge is because this charge had been sent to them via e-mail. This e-mail, which had been sent March 5 on behalf of the Senate president, and which listed the task force's charge in three parts, was re-sent by the Senate meeting secretary on March 14 after the last meeting (see attached). But what appeared lost in this discussion is that Senators were raising questions regarding the duties of a committee of which they were members. Recent agendas and minutes reflect no record of the Senate receiving a first reading of this task force's charge, or of voting on this charge following a second reading of it. But according to past practice and the Senate's rules, the Senate normally votes on committee duties (see attached Senate Bylaws). Even though this group's charge as described in the e-mail sounds fine, shouldn't the Senate have voted on it?

Role of Senate Executive Board

Since this charge appears to have originated with Executive Board members, if the Executive Board posted an agenda and kept minutes of its own meetings through its elected Senate secretary, such as the CCA Executive Board does, and these were sent to Senators, perhaps less confusion would occur during Senate meetings. The board is not required to do this, and certainly some items discussed could only be summarized in general terms due to their sensitive nature. However, if the board posted an agenda and provided minutes, Senators would know what issues are being discussed and why. Written records could provide transparency, help eliminate confusion, and educate Senators on the role of the board.

Senators also could learn more about the duties of the board if Executive Board members and Senators agreed to a training session at the beginning of each year. This session could cover a Senator's responsibilities; Robert's Rules of Orders; the Senate's Constitution and Bylaws; effective ways to

communicate with each other, their Academic areas, and Executive Board; and the role of officers and co-chairs on the board. This also could build a stronger Senate and encourage members to run for Senate office. Without training, some Senators learn how to speak up only after a number of meetings or after several months "on the job."

As a Senator who has learned a great deal "on the job," and who looks forward to learning more, I still am confused as to how some things are done, which is why I decided to bring my concerns to you today. Thank you for taking the time to listen.

Since I am an advocate of written records, please include this letter and its attachments as support for an agenda item that I will request to be added to the next Senate meeting. It could be called, "Senate Meetings and Communication." With any luck, we may just get to this before the meeting ends.

Sincerely,

Kathy Freeman

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