



Participate! How to Get Faculty Engaged and Involved

Published: September 2011

Author: Davison, Dolores, North Representative and Bruno, Julie, Area A Representative

One of the major hurdles senate leaders face, regardless of their time on the senate, is finding faculty to participate in committee work. Unless the committee's work directly impacts a faculty member (i.e., a hiring committee), or he or she is compensated (i.e., union service or tenure review committees), many faculty would much prefer to just teach and mentor students, while avoiding committee service. How do you, as a senate leader, engage faculty so that they want to serve on committees, especially in cases where committee service is not a contractual obligation? Below are suggestions, compiled from senate leaders at breakouts at both the Spring 2011 plenary session and the 2011 Leadership Institute, that have assisted senate leaders in increasing faculty participation.

- Use a personal approach. One of the most common comments at the breakouts was how effective requests for service were when they came directly from the senate president, the committee chair, or a senator from a faculty member's division. Something as simple as a phone call, rather than a mass email, may be the difference when it comes to persuading a faculty member to participate. A face-to-face meeting over coffee about what the committee does and why you are asking that faculty member to become involved is a particularly effective tool, especially if you...
- Clearly define commitments ahead of time. When asking for volunteers, the more information you can provide, the more likely it is that you will be able to find someone who is willing and able to serve. Providing information including the time and dates of the meetings, expected length of the term of service, and work outside of the meetings does wonders when it comes to recruiting faculty to serve on a particular committee. This is especially helpful in cases where the committee meets regularly; for example, if someone wants to serve as a senator, knowing when the senate meets can help the faculty member work his or her schedule around the meetings. It can also help faculty members...
- Play to their strengths. For committees which serve a particular population or a very narrow purpose, it is always helpful to recruit people who will be able to approach the committee on a level playing field. If you are recruiting for an ad hoc committee on online pedagogy, for example, asking someone who has taught online for a number of years means that faculty member will already have a background in the area and may not need to do as much "catching up" as someone who has never taught online. In addition, finding faculty who will complement the strengths of the committee is also important. A faculty member who is highly organized may become frustrated serving on a committee chaired by someone for whom organization is not a strength. The more you know about how a committee operates the better you can recruit for that committee, which leads to making sure that you...
- Know your committees' purposes, members, and leaders. It is far easier to recruit faculty when you know what the committee does and what its goals are for the next year. It is also helpful to avoid having personalities that conflict among the committee members; asking someone to serve on a committee with an individual with whom that faculty member has a conflict could be a recipe for disaster. Identifying possible conflicts by knowing the faculty is an important reason why you should...
- Use your senators. At colleges with smaller numbers of full time faculty, it is possible to know most, if not all, of your colleagues; that becomes much more difficult at larger colleges. Your senators probably know most of their colleagues within their divisions and will be able to suggest people for service. They also may know part time faculty who are interested in serving, and can bring those individuals to your attention if part-time membership is usual within your local college culture and appropriate for the particular committee. Faculty who teach at multiple schools bring an additional knowledge and new perspectives to committee work. Knowing who is doing what and where also helps you to...
- Publicize the work of the committee and the faculty. One senate president commented that he posts the names of every faculty member along with his or her committee service and the approximate number of hours that each faculty member spends on a weekly basis on committee work. While this particular action may not be practical or desirable for your college culture, publicizing the work that the committee does (with annual reports, publication of minutes from the meetings, goals for the next year, and the like) validates the work that the committee has completed and demonstrates the importance of the committee within the college structure. It also helps to ensure that the faculty do not feel that their committee service has been a waste of time. To show that faculty participation is valued you must...
- Show appreciation. One of the most important things that you can do is to thank your committee members at the end of the year (or even before). Whether it's a note, an email, cookies at the last meeting, or acknowledgement in a public forum, letting your faculty know that you are grateful for their service goes a long way in having those faculty return the following year to seek other committee opportunities.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but hopefully it can provide some guidance for encouraging faculty to become more engaged in committee service at your college and more involved in the body as a whole. Remember, being a senate leader does not mean doing everything yourself (although it feels that way sometimes!); the more you can increase participation, the more people you have to draw from and the more perspectives you have to help with decision making. A faculty with active participation by the majority of its members is key to a strong and relevant senate on your campus.

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555 CAPITOL MALL, SUITE 525 SACRAMENTO, CA 95814
(916) 445-4753