Local Senates: Suggestions for Academic Senate Presidents
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Introduction

The community college reform legislation, Assembly Bill 1725, mandates strengthening the role of senates in the local governance process and provides the basis for that strengthened role by calling for joint agreement between senates and representatives of the local governing boards on a variety of issues such as hiring procedures, procedures for determining equivalent qualifications f or hire and for tenure, and procedures for implementing the administrator retreat rights to probationary faculty status. This new responsibility for senates to work with district representatives may call for changes in the way some senates interact with their local trustees or administrators, and the material that follows is intended to facilitate the move toward a more active role f or local senates in shared governance as the reforms of AB 1725 become reality.

Senate leaders should carefully assess the relative strengths and needed improvements of the local senate in terms of the following:

Structure: Are existing committees appropriate in terms of the work that needs to be done? Are there committees to develop proposals for hiring procedures, standards, and criteria; affirmative action policies and implementation; administrator retreat rights; or procedures for determining equivalent qualifications for hire or for tenure?

Membership: Are all segments of the faculty represented, including part—time, non—credit, adult education faculty? The hiring, equivalency, and administrator retreat procedures will affect all of these segments, and all should be actively involved in senate decision—making at the committee level.

Productivity: Is the senate effective in working with students, administrators, trustees, and college staff in bringing about changes that improve the teaching and learning environment? Does the senate accomplish goals it sets for itself at the start of each academic year? Are these goals realistic and valuable?

Leadership: Is the senate perceived as a leadership group on campus? Are positions and actions of the senate respected? Does the senate identify and actively pursue professional issues, rather than getting mired in fruitless discussions or endless debate?

Function: Do senate leaders have a clear perception of the senate's function, purpose, role on campus, especially as senate function, purpose, and role differ from those for collective bargaining? Do senate and union leaders have a mutually supportive relationship, supporting one another's functions?

The pages that follow present some suggestions, arranged chronologically where such arrangement is possible, for senate leaders to consider as they begin discussions with trustees or administration on the reform issues that necessitate joint agreement.

Because each district has its own history of working with trustees and administrators, these suggestions may be more useful in some districts than in others.

In addition, local senates in multi-campus districts should consider how they can best work together to implement reforms at the district level, especially if there is no district academic senate. Where there is a district senate, the development of these reforms necessitates a close working relationship between district and campus senates.

At any time, senate leaders should feel free to call upon the Executive Committee members of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges for additional support or suggestions.

Meet With Administration From The Start

While Assembly Bill 1725, the omnibus community college reform legislation, says that senates and representatives of local governing boards shall jointly develop and agree upon such policies as hiring, equivalency for hire and for tenure, and administrator retreat rights, the material which follows references joint faculty! administrator committees, rather than faculty! trustee committees, in the assumption that, where trustees are actively involved in the development of these policies, administrators will also be involved.

Just as faculty members distrust proposals developed unilaterally by administration without faculty participation in the discussions and meetings that led to their development, so also administrators distrust proposals developed unilaterally by faculty groups. Thus, senate leaders should consider how this process of jointly developing proposals can best be accomplished. Following are several options:

1.   Administrators as Ex—Officio Members of Senate Committees:

        Before adding administrators as ex—officio members of senate committees, senate members should decide whether the move is intended to be temporary or permanent and clearly name the committee to reflect its stature and avoid confusion. If the change is temporary, the committee should have an *ad hoc* title, such as *Ad Hoc Committee on Hiring.*

2.   Joint Task Forces:

        Another structure for joint development of policies is the college task force. This group would operate outside the senate itself and is, therefore, less desirable than the option listed above. One of the goals of AB 1725 is strengthening the local senate, and a college task force, which removes discussions and decisions from the senate structure, will not accomplish that goal. Thus, senate leaders should strive to create a structure within the senate where joint decisions can be developed and where administrators will feel that their participation is valid and meaningful.

3.   Senate Members of the President's Council:

        The senate could be asked to identify representatives to join the president's council and have that group jointly develop policies concerning hire, equivalencies, and retreat rights. Clearly, this is the least desirable option, as the senate representatives are farthest removed from senate operations and are functioning within an administrative arena where their positions on policy will be least effective. As with the joint task force option above, this structure for joint agreement on reform issues will not help to strengthen the local senate, but may indeed accomplish the reverse.

Committee Membership

Ground Rules for Joint Committees:

Where joint senate committees have never before existed within the senate, faculty members should discuss and agree upon the ground rules of such a change. But even if local senates routinely participate in administrative task forces to accomplish various activities, AB 1725 provides an opportunity for senate leaders to set new ground rules.

In setting these ground rules, faculty should, to the maximum extent possible, strive to keep decision—

making within the senate structure.

* How large should the joint committee be? Typically, the larger the group, the more difficult it is to reach agreement. Therefore, senate representatives should strive to keep the committee to a maximum of about ten members total.

* Should trustees, classified staff, and students have representation? Each district has its own history of faculty/ Administrator/ trustee interaction, and faculty should build upon that history, maintaining its strengths and working to improve upon perceived weaknesses. The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, however, recommends the inclusion of as many segments of the campus community as possible.

* Who should chair the joint committee? If the joint committee is a committee of the senate, a faculty representative should serve as chair. If the joint committee is a campus task force, and if administrators object to the idea of a faculty chair, it might be desirable to have a faculty member and administrator as co—chairs.

* Can the senate members of the joint committee meet alone? It would be wise to reserve the right to have faculty meet separately. After all, senate representatives should reflect the needs and positions of the senate, and it may be necessary to retreat for a short period to consider how discussions relate to senate goals and needs.

* Do administrators serving on a senate committee have a vote? Ex—officio members can be either voting or non—voting, so this issue should be clarified before committee members assume one way or the other. The advantage to giving administrators a vote is that the reform issues require joint development and agreement, and that cannot easily be reached when some committee members are denied a vote.

• Who selects administrative representatives to the joint committee? As ex-officio members, the administrators serve because of their positions within the college. For example, it would be logical for an instructional officer or division dean to serve on a committee developing policies on hire because that administrator's position will necessitate involvement in the hiring process. Just as faculty should control the selection of faculty representatives to a college committee, task force, or study, administrators should control the selection of their representatives to joint committees.

• Should there be equal numbers of administrators and faculty? Typically, senate committees with administrators as voting members have 2 or 3 faculty members for every one administrator. College task forces vary, sometimes having equal numbers of administrators and faculty members.

* Does the joint committee act autonomously? All agreements reached within this joint committee should be taken to the senate for approval. Otherwise, faculty leaders may find themselves cut off from their base of faculty support, and they may become isolated, lured into agreement on an issue that proves to be disadvantageous to the faculty.

* Who will be responsible for what? Faculty members should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the joint group, especially if it is a college task force and not a senate committee. Despite the normal headache of classes and paper grading, faculty members will feel uncomfortable if all the written proposals are prepared by administrative representatives and must therefore offer to prepare some drafts. Similarly, administrators must have a clearly defined role and should not leave to faculty the full burden of preparing written proposals.

* <u>When will parts of the joint proposal be ready</u>? The joint committee should agree upon a timeline for development of the various tasks it must accomplish. Without such a timeline, the group may find itself with a fast approaching deadline for implementation and little to show in terms of written material.

* <u>How solid are agreements reached by the joint committee</u>? Committee members should clearly understand their role and scope of authority. AB 1725 gives both faculty and governing board representatives veto power over ideas presented by the other group; neither group is more powerful than the other.

* <u>Who has ultimate responsibility for jointly developed policies</u>? AB 1725 clearly puts accountability for these jointly developed policies in the hands of the local governing board. The board members, however, can delegate that responsibility, and members of the joint committee should have a clear understanding of the level of such delegation of responsibility. Will the board of trustees agree to approve whatever policy the joint committee develops? Will the board refer back to the joint committee any areas that need further consideration or development? Will the board act on its own authority to revise the jointly developed policy?

* <u>What happens if the board rejects the joint agreement</u>? Both groups should clearly understand the process and should know what must be done if the board of trustees rejects a jointly developed policy proposal.

* <u>Should the ground rules be written</u>? The members of the joint committee should prepare a written statement of the ground rules upon which they agree to operate as one measure to avoid later disagreements about methods of operation.

Bring Initial Positions To Joint Meeting

Senate representatives will be most effective if they are carefully prepared for each joint meeting.

1. <u>Know the Major Faculty Issues</u>:

    Senate representatives should meet in advance of the first joint meeting to establish a list of major issues for the faculty. Similarly, they should expect that administrators will arrive at the meeting knowing exactly what they expect to accomplish. This list can be valuable in keeping the focus of discussion clear and keeping the goals for faculty in the forefront.

2. <u>Argue from the Standpoint of Academic Quality</u>:

    In preparing goals, proposals, and drafts for policies to be jointly agreed upon with the administration, senate leaders must always remember the responsibility of the senate for academic and professional matters. Administrators have a different perspective, and they will articulate it well for themselves, so it is not necessary for faculty members to argue from the standpoint of efficiency or productivity--leave that to the administration.

3. <u>Be Open to Suggestions</u>:

    Each group should periodically attempt to perceive the issues from the other group's perspective. Administrators have legitimate concerns about implementation of the joint proposal, while faculty concerns will appropriately concentrate upon academic quality. Each group must remain sensitive to the needs of the other.

4. <u>Look for Alternatives</u>:

> On points of disagreement between the two groups, faculty representatives should attempt to list options, including the absolute ideal from a faculty perspective, the *status quo,* and the absolute negative from a faculty perspective. With the full range of possibilities mapped out, sometimes intermediate positions are more clearly recognized.

Work Toward Consensus

A meeting that enjoys consensus on every issue rarely occurs, but there are ways for members of joint committees to facilitate the development of consensus:

1. <u>Speak from an Established Position</u>: Joint groups work best when everyone clearly articulates a position, and they fail when a member stays silent during the meeting and then wanders the campus complaining about comments made by other members of the group.

2. <u>Be Honest and Straight forward</u>: Taking positions just to irritate other members of the group or arguing a point simply for the sake of argument not only thwart joint agreement but risk undermining the possibility of ever reaching joint agreement, as they build distrust.

3. <u>Listen Intently and Actively</u>: Sometimes the hardest part of joint committee membership involves listening to an opposing viewpoint and hearing what that individual says. Group members should periodically rephrase ideas with which they disagree as a means to better understanding those ideas and clarifying them. One might say, for example, "Am I correct in hearing you say ...7"

4. <u>List Areas of Disagreement</u>: When groups seem farthest from agreement, it is wise to list the major points of disagreement and attempt to break them into smaller components for discussion and possible agreement.

5. <u>Strive for Appropriate Language</u>: Joint agreement often eludes groups that weave into the written document concepts or words that carry negative impact. Counselors and librarians, for example, know the frustration of being treated as though they were not faculty members, through policies and discussions that deal only with "instructors" and ignore the needs of non— instructional faculty.

Look For Ways To Make Everyone A Winner

Joint committees with faculty and administration sometimes find themselves at a frustration point where both sides want only to win. In fact, no one wins when one side leaves the discussion feeling that the other group has lost, for in the next round of discussions, even on another topic, the possibility for revenge appears. Instead, senate leaders should constantly look for ways to accomplish consensus and let both faculty and administrative representatives leave the discussions feeling they have been successful.

Following are some suggestions for accomplishing this mutual gain position:

1. <u>Look for New Solutions</u>: On points of disagreement, seek solutions not previously identified by either group. This mutual search for a new solution allows everyone to gain and sometimes results in better policy decisions.

2. <u>Move Beyond Minor Points</u>: If a minor point of disagreement appears to block forward movement, suggest that it be temporarily set aside while the group focuses attention upon the next major item for discussion. A subcommittee might work to resolve the minor point, meeting separately and developing a recommendation.

3. <u>Resist the Urge to Win at Any Cost</u>: When groups reach the point of wanting to broadcast victory over the opponent, both groups should recognize that they have entered dangerous territory in terms of policy development. At such a point they should address the issue squarely and identify ways to move out of that posture to a mutual gains posture instead.

4. <u>Recognize that Change is Threatening</u>: For both faculty and administration sudden wrenching change creates fear and antagonism. Thus, groups developing policy should attempt to build into the joint agreement methods for moving toward change in as non—threatening a manner as possible, giving everyone time to become familiar with new routines.

5. <u>Agree that there should be No Surprises</u>: Just as faculty members do not appreciate being taken by surprise with an administrative announcement at a board of trustees' meeting, administrators also would prefer that faculty members discuss a point of disagreement before taking the issue to the board.

Touch Base With Faculty Periodically

Faculty leaders who work closely with the administration in developing agreement on reform policies risk the perception that they are out of touch with the faculty. Thus, it must be obvious to both faculty and administration that the senate leadership communicates frequently with faculty members and listens to faculty suggestions. Following are some suggestions for building these lines of communication:

1. <u>Keep Faculty Members Informed</u>: While it is true that even the best attempts at open communication will not reach everyone, and that someone will most likely complain about not being consulted, the senate should actively work to build communication links.

   * Regular reports at senate meetings on ideas under discussion with the administration help to dispel faculty rumors and permit faculty to seek clarification and give direction.

   * Occasional faculty—wide meetings for presentation of major areas of concern and major areas of mutual agreement with the administration.

   * Occasional joint faculty—wide and administration—wide meetings for joint presentation of major areas of mutual agreement between the two groups.

   * Frequent written reports dealing only with the topic of joint agreement are more likely to be noticed that statements buried within other senate reports or minutes.

   * Frequent calls to ask various faculty groups how an idea might affect them, especially if that idea comes from the administration and leaves faculty representatives to the joint meetings even slightly uncomfortable.

   * Surveys requesting faculty—wide or targeted group response to proposals presented in the joint discussions can also be effective, both in alerting faculty members to the ideas, and in giving faculty representatives a more solid base from which to argue.

2. <u>Meet Periodically with Union Leaders</u>: Because of the possibility that some senate issues overlap with union issues, the two groups should schedule regular meetings to discuss issues of mutual concern. These discussions provide an opportunity for the two faculty groups to touch base on a variety of topics and help to preclude attempts by administration to play one group off against the other.

3. <u>Let Faculty Members Know Their Opinions Count</u>: Make specific reference to ideas incorporated into joint agreements as a result of faculty feedback. In the absence of such references, faculty members may feel that their suggestions are pointless, and they will eventually stop participating.

4. <u>Explain the Incorporation of Opposing Views</u>: Make clear to faculty members the dynamic process of reaching joint agreement with administration so that they understand why senate representatives must embrace administration positions within the joint agreement. Simultaneously, request that the administration explain to administrators why faculty positions have been incorporated into the joint agreement. This process helps build mutual trust and shows both groups' interest in listening to the needs of the other.

5. <u>Reach Agreement Honestly</u>: Faculty representatives should not agree to ideas if they find those ideas uncomfortable and would be unwilling to advocate those ideas among the faculty at large. When such an uncomfortable idea surfaces during joint discussion, faculty representatives should not hesitate to request time to discuss the idea with larger groups of faculty.

Keep Written Records Of Joint Meetings

Whether or not the administration provides secretarial support to record the substance of agreements reached, faculty representatives should identify one faculty representative who will be responsible for maintaining clear written records of each joint meeting. These written records can later be invaluable in clarifying points of disagreement or in clarifying the intent of an ambiguous passage in the joint agreement.

1. <u>Keep a File of Drafts Presented for Discussion</u>: Each draft should have date, author, and disposition (replaced by later draft? edited and adopted? discussed and abandoned?) clearly noted for later reference.

2. <u>Keep Track of Changes</u>: As drafts are edited and modified, note whose recommendations are adopted and then track those changes in the next draft distributed.

3. <u>Review Agreements</u>: Each meeting should begin with at least a cursory review of agreements reached at the prior meeting so that everyone understands the progress of discussions and so that records of such agreement are clear and accurate.

4. <u>Identify Outstanding Issues</u>: One step in the process of adhering to a timetable involves periodic identification of issues not yet resolved and recognition of their relative importance to the policy under development.

5. <u>Tape Record Meetings</u>: If all parties agree that it will not impede the flow of discussion, they might consider the merits of tape recording the meetings. This recording process can be valuable as a means to developing and validating written minutes of the meetings.

Identify A Process To Be Used If Joint Agreement Fails

Both groups should recognize at the outset the possibility that they might fail to reach agreement and should discuss what process they will employ if agreement fails. Following are some suggested steps to take:

1.   Conduct a review of the discussions, creating a chronology of progress toward reaching agreement. Sometimes this review shakes loose a difference in perception about areas of agreement, allowing that difference to surface for more careful examination and possible resolution.

2.   Identify points of agreement and disagreement and assess the overall importance of the points of disagreement to the final policy. If they are minor, it might be possible to reach agreement by a mutual process of combining faculty and administration suggestions.

3.   Identify ways to facilitate resolution of the areas of disagreement. Major points of disagreement might be assigned each to a subcommittee to work on recommendations and lists of options. Sometimes a subcommittee can address and resolve suggestions and ideas the larger committee would not have time to consider.

4.   Invite suggestions from a mutually agreed upon impartial third party, preferably from outside the district. If the faculty and administrator representatives have arrived at total impasse and cannot proceed, they should then discuss the wisdom of inviting a previously identified impartial third party to facilitate the process of resolving areas of disagreement.

Welcome A Careful Review Of Process And Product

Members of the joint committees developing policies on hiring, equivalency for hire or tenure, and administrator retreat rights should build into the policy proposal a process for thorough review of both the process and the resulting policy. Over time, changes will be needed, and the process for initiating change should be understood and jointly agreed upon. Similarly, the policy developed by the joint committee should be open to evaluation for its effectiveness, and a process should be in place to allow improvements.

As with the initial policy, any changes to the policy require joint agreement between senate and administrative representatives of the local governing board. These proposed changes could be considered and developed by

1.   The original joint committee that developed the policy. The full committee size would be warranted if the proposed changes were large in scope and impact.

2.   A new joint committee the composition of which is understood at the time the original policy is developed. The new committee might be a subcommittee of the original committee, or a new group of faculty and administrator representatives.

3.   A new joint committee to be identified at the time of need. Again, the new committee would be smaller than the original joint committee, unless the proposed changes were serious and extensive.