

Jacksonville State University
Ad Hoc Committee

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee to Review the Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws

After a thorough review of the current JSU Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws, the Ad Hoc review Committee presents the following recommendations and opinions.

I. Immediate Recommendations:

A. Add amendment to the Bylaws already passed dealing with the filling of positions left vacant at the beginning of the school year.

B. Correction in the text of the Bylaws, Section 3 which refers to a non-existent Section of the Constitution:

Current: determined by Article 2, Section 2 (3) of the Constitution.

Correction: determined by Article 1, Section 2 (3) of the Constitution.

C. Change word *effecting* in Article 1, Section 6 of the Constitution to *affecting*.

(Section 6 - The Faculty Senate may hear all academic matters pertaining to and effecting the morale and welfare of the faculty and students of Jacksonville State University.)

D. With the recent changes in the number of Colleges at JSU, a resulting change in the proportion of Colleges necessary to amend the Constitution seems appropriate.

Bylaws Section 8 –

Current: The Faculty Senate may amend these Bylaws at any regular meeting by a simple majority vote of the members present. A proposal for amendment must be recommended by at least seven members of the faculty holding faculty appointment in at least four different colleges, the proposal must be submitted to the Faculty Senate at a regular meeting of that body, and the vote by the Faculty Senate must be at their next regular meeting.

Change: three different colleges

2. Opinions: The Ad Hoc Committee also reviewed several additional matters relating to the Bylaws and Constitution at the request of various Senators.

A. The reapportionment of Senators following recent administrative changes at JSU.

Our general opinion is that the current statements in the Constitution and Bylaws over representation by Department seem adequate and should be adhered to:

Constitution, Article 1, Section 2 (3)...The number of Senators shall not exceed one for every 15 faculty, but each academic department and the library shall have at least one Senator.

Bylaws, Section 3...Each academic department and the library shall elect one Senator and an additional senator for each additional fifteen faculty or major fraction thereof, determined by Article 2, Section 2 (3) of the Constitution.

If recently combined Departments now exceed the 15 faculty limit, they should determine for themselves how to apportion representation. If they do not exceed the 15 faculty limit, they should hold new election to come into compliance with the Constitution of the Senate.

Several other options have been mentioned for figuring faculty representation:

First that representation be determined by discipline rather than department. While that might alleviate some of the immediate problems, in the end trying to define “disciplines” may create more problems than it would solve.

Second, that all current senators (1996 – 1997) be allowed to fill out their terms and through attrition departments will come into accord with the Constitution.

Third, that at some point the Constitution be changed from 1 per 15 faculty to 1 per 10 for representation.

B. Finally, we were asked to review several of the changes which had been made between the proposed 1989 Constitution and Bylaws and the current document, in particular the section on grievance and the link between the academic faculty and the Faculty Senate. In general, we found that the material relating directly to the Faculty had been removed from the Senate documents and transferred to other documents dealing with faculty governance and policy, like the JSU Faculty Handbook. Such moves seem appropriate in terms of governance and policy. The Faculty Senate grievance structure had no recognized authority. As well, much of the material in the Constitution proposed in 1989 was moved to the Bylaws of the current document.

There are statements in both the Faculty Handbook and the Faculty Senate documents which seem to suggest the link between the academic faculty and the Senate.

Constitution, Preamble:

We, the faculty of Jacksonville State University...do hereby request that the Board of Trustees do ordain and establish the Constitution for the Faculty Senate of Jacksonville State University.

Faculty Handbook, p. 19, Policy 1.5.3 – THE FACULTY SENATE: The academic faculty elects from among its members a representative body known as the Faculty Senate. The Faculty Senate is an advisory body and as such may consider and make recommendations through the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Those areas affecting the academic activities of the University and faculty welfare are appropriate for consideration by the Faculty Senate.

Submitted May 12, 1997

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Academic Quality

In attendance were: Suzanne Marshall, George Whitesel, Carmine Di Biase, Roger Sauterer, Jeff Dodd, Greg Barnett, and Susan Di Biase.

The group discussed resolutions under development.

Writing Across the Curriculum: Carmine will add the two clauses as agreed at the last meeting. This Resolution will be presented at the December Faculty Senate Meeting.

Student Friendly Campus: Carmine suggested that Greg divide this resolution into two parts. One would address constructing a meeting place on the Quad, and one would address the lunch hour time for meeting. There were several suggestions about additional rationales which could be added to the resolutions. George and Carmine were excited about the possibilities of faculty lecture series or performances. Susan asked again whether Tuesday and Thursday would be the best days to meet. The College of Nursing tries to keep Mondays free from 11:15 to 12:15. She will ask Mary if the College of Education has a particular schedule.

Advisement and Enforcement of Prerequisites: Several detailed suggestion for revision of practical points were made. Under item 2B, we deleted “and must complete each within the first 60 credits earned at JSU.” Under item 2C, Greg said that he would check to see if there are 300-level courses that a freshman should take (to see whether exceptions should be made, for example, for music performance ensembles). Under item 3A, it was suggested that education majors be offered two advisors, one from the Education College, and one from the subject area. Both would need to sign off at the registration time. It was suggested to discuss this idea with Mary to see if this approach could be coordinated. Several ideas for expanding the whereas rationales were offered, and Jeff said that he would be happy to work on this for next time.

[At this point, only Suzanne, George, Jeff, Roger, and Susan were left at the meeting.]

Students at Risk: Susan reported on the summer orientation program. Her source said that about 400 traditional students attended the two-day session. Transfer students have a shorter night session. She discussed the content of orientation. She said students with an ACT < 18 are automatically required to take Learning Skills 102. Susan’s colleague, who helped with orientation, suggested that it be kept voluntary so that the students who attend will be motivated. Roger argued that all freshmen, even those with high ACTs, should be viewed as potentially at-risk because of time-management or other problems. He wondered whether students on academic probation are required to take the Learning Skills class. He also wondered whether there is data proving the class is effective in raising GPAs. Suzanne felt that time management skills might be better taught in the context of an academic course. [Note: the Learning Skills courses are coordinated by Claudia McDade of CII.] Susan recommended that no resolution on students at risk be developed, because sufficient campus resources are available.

Student Evaluations: Suzanne presented this resolution at the request of Greg. There was some discussion of differences in handling of evaluations in different departments. We also mentioned grade inflation and credit hour production. Suzanne suggested that this resolution be tabled until Greg was able to return, since no one was sure if any department bases evaluation solely on student measures. It is possible that this is a departmental issue, rather than a university one.

Women's Center: Suzanne said that she knew of a course on campus which had resulted in a proposal for a women's center two or three years ago. She believed that the proposal may have included a needs assessment and other justification for the center. The center was not approved or funded, however. The low level of support for the minority students' center and the failure of the non-traditional students' center were discussed. It was felt that the administration would be unlikely to fund a women's center, perhaps partly for political reasons and partly for financial ones. Suzanne argued that it was important to make the attempt and continue to express the need and concern. Several examples of sexual harassment on campus were mentioned. It was suggested that the role of the center needed to be made more clear, and that deficiencies of the current system needed to be itemized. Suggestions on roles of the center included rape prevention information, and an accessible person for sexual harassment grievances. Jeff suggested integrating information into orientation. George suggested developing a web page with information and resource listings, including the grievance process. It was also suggested that an ombudsman for grievances is needed. Suzanne said that she would look again at the previous proposal.

Learning Communities: There was brief discussion of this resolution. Everyone was in support of the learning communities. Susan asked whether the administration had not encouraged and supported the learning communities, since Bill Meehan and the Faculty Forum had encouraged their development. Suzanne mentioned difficulties in obtaining travel reimbursement and problems in listing the courses in the course schedule.

Next Meeting: It was agreed to meet after the semester break to look at revisions to the resolutions. [Suggestion: perhaps we could take one or two at a time instead of trying to cover them all in one meeting.]

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Plus and Minus Grading

The committee began its examination of plus and minus grades by asking members of the Faculty Senate to poll their respective departments regarding their opinions of such a system: 47 faculty were in favor, 74 were opposed, and 17 indicated no opinion. Four of those in favor remarked on the opportunities which they believe plus/minus offers for making precise evaluations of students' work. Another stated that the system must be applied consistently across the University, perhaps through numerical equivalents for each grade: A+ = 100-97, A = 96-93, A- = 92-90, for example. Yet another noted that the school should award quality points to reflect the plus and minus. Of those opposed making comments, one argued that plus-minus would have to be accompanied by numerical equivalents like those described above; two asserted that the gradations in plus/minus would be so slight as to be insignificant; a fourth had polled two classes – both disliked the proposed change. Two faculty expressing no opinion included remarks as well: one voiced interest in plus/minus, but knows little about it; the other stated that plus/minus may well cause a lot of “point-picking” by students. All in all, the comments indicate that faculty who favor plus/minus grades see them as more precise means for assessing student performance, if they can be applied with consistency. Those who opposed consider them too complicated and too subtle to be worthwhile.

The committee also examined grading systems of other schools in the region. Of 22 four year institutions in Alabama and western Georgia which were considered, only three have, or will soon implement plus or plus/minus grading: Samford University (plus only), the University of Alabama (plus/minus as of the fall semester of 1994), and Birmingham Southern College (plus/minus). A telephone interview with a faculty member at each school was conducted: each interviewee answered a series of brief questions regarding the particular school's reasons for implementing plus-minus, the possibility of increased student complaint over grades, prevailing opinion about plus-minus among faculty, and the interviewee's opinion.

The first, Dr. Janice Lasseter of Samford University's English Department, dislikes the plus system, since in her opinion and the opinions of others at Samford, it generates grade inflation; the school is presently considering inclusion of minuses as well. Though Dr. Lasseter is uncertain if the plus causes more student complaint than would simple letter grades, she notes that student wrangling over grades is common at Samford. In her estimation faculty opinion of the school's grading system is split.

Dr. Peter Logan of the University of Alabama's English Department favors the plus-minus system, to be implemented at the University this coming fall. Logan anticipates more argument with students over grades, but also expects better performance since he believes that students will work harder in hopes of receiving a plus and avoiding a minus. A vote by University of Alabama faculty has indicated that the majority favor the change.

Dr. David Ullrich of Birmingham Southern's English Department stated that plus-minus was instituted not only to give faculty more precise means for evaluating their students, but also to reduce grade inflation. Ullrich has not noticed an increase in student complaint as a result of plus-minus, and he believes that the school's faculty are generally satisfied with the system, as is he.

Taken in sum, the interviews offer mixed indications. Though two of the three interviewees favor plus-minus, one of these as yet has no experience with it. Between the two who have, opinion is split. On the issue of student complaint, the reactions are also conflicting: one is uncertain if the plus increases student wrangling, the second anticipates that it will, the third believes that it does not. And although two of the three indicate that faculty generally favor plus-minus, again, one of these schools has not yet implemented it; at the third, opinion varies.

After examining the information from these interviews and the responses from our own faculty, the members of the committee recommend that the Faculty Senate take no action at present on the issue of plus-minus grading. More than two-thirds of our own faculty responding to the poll oppose the system, and in the committee's opinion, the interviews render no decisive information in its favor. Important questions about plus-minus need to be answered before informed decisions can be made. Can the plus-minus system, with its relatively fine gradations, be applied in a uniform fashion across a diverse university curriculum, from the hard sciences, to the humanities, to the arts? Will plus-minus lower GPAs? If so, what will be the effects? Will it generate more student complaint? And will it pose problems for faculty in defending grades? Such issues need to be addressed by the University in careful, systematic fashion if faculty are to have an accurate picture of what plus-minus grading would actually involve. Without such information, adoption of the system represents considerable risk.

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Recommendations Based on Faculty Survey Results

- 1) Recommendations are divided by subject area.
- 2) Recommendations target specific groups for action. Faculty Senate members are asked to communicate with department members if action is needed at the departmental level.

Sexual Harassment

DEPARTMENT: Encourage faculty members to address sexual harassment with people involved.

SENATE: Resolution requesting updated policy was sent to VPAA in Spring 1997. Need information on progress.

POLICIES COMMITTEE: Circulate current faculty sexual harassment policy to all faculty.

AD HOC: Approach SGA regarding recommendation to request revision of student policy, esp. resources available to students.

Faculty Governance

SENATE: Changes in Faculty Senate By-Laws are unlikely to be accepted. We can increase our impact on decisions by carefully weighing issues and acting where appropriate. The relationship between the Senate and the administration has improved in the last year through these efforts.

DEPARTMENT: Faculty are encouraged to communicate issues of concern to their senators.

Response to Survey

DEPARTMENT: Senators have been requested to circulate survey results and discuss them at a scheduled department meeting. Please report to the secretary whether this has been done.

AD HOC: 1) Approach *Chanticleer* regarding possible stories on issues of interest, such as sexual harassment or renovations to campus. 2) Prepare a year-end report to faculty explaining actions taken in response to the survey, including items referred to department level.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: Circulate results of survey, including narrative results, to deans, Mr. Meehan, VPAA, and president. Recommend that trustees indirectly be made aware of survey and salary issues as key concerns. Do not recommend approaching trustees directly or providing results to them at this time.

Student Challenges to Grade and Policy Issues

POLICIES COMMITTEE: Look into development of a university-wide policy regarding student challenges to grades, attendance, or disciplinary measures. Request that university lawyer examine such a policy and any pertinent college-level policies so that guidelines can be enforced.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: Administration has been made aware of faculty concern regarding enforcement of academic discipline.

Communication

DEPARTMENT: Most communication is informal. We rely on individual efforts to improve communication between faculty members and between faculty and administration. The Faculty Senate is one conduit for sharing of information. Faculty are also encouraged to use the chain of command to address concerns. In general, publicity regarding departmental activities needs to be improved.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: The ad hoc committee recommends circulating the results of the survey to the deans. There were many suggestions on improving communication and involvement.

ALL FACULTY SENATE COMMITTEES: Provide a year-end report of accomplishments.

This report will be entered into the minutes and collated into a report to all faculty.

SENATE: Discuss developing a Faculty Club to meet three times a year at the Alumni House for the purpose of building communication and friendships across the campus. Suggestions include a spring picnic and a fall evening barbecue. Discuss:

- Resources persons and organizing a group to coordinate efforts.
- Any interest in reviving faculty reception at the beginning of semesters.
- Any interest in establishing a faculty corner at the dining area of the TMB.
- Ideas on improving publicity regarding campus events.

Campus Procedures and Red Tape

SENATE: Discuss whether there is a need to address procedures re: reimbursement for outside speakers, reimbursement for travel money, etc. Who would handle this?

Academic Standards and Policies

COLLEGE & DEPARTMENT: Examine college policies for absence, tardiness, discipline, and retention. Revise or update if needed.

SENATE: Received report from Dr. Watts at the Oct. 13, 1997 meeting which indicated that JSU is comparable to other state schools in entrance standards. We are just below the national mean. Our ACT scores for full-time freshmen have been rising since Fall 1992. We have better data on entering freshmen than transfer students.

AD HOC ACADEMIC QUALITY: Examine admission criteria for graduate students. Examine feasibility of rising junior-exam.

Salary and Merit Pay

SENATE: Merit pay was discussed at the Faculty Senate meeting on Jan. 12, 1998. A recommendation was sent to the Academic Council to have merit pay policies reviewed by the deans. Deans have been asked to ensure that written guidelines are available to faculty and consistent across the departments.

DEPARTMENT: Discuss merit pay guidelines in your department and seek improvement where it is needed. Bring concerns back to the Faculty Senate for discussion. Encourage faculty to write their legislators about salary increases.

Funding

DEPARTMENT: In light of current funding shortages, encourage faculty to continue to seek grant monies to purchase necessary equipment. Try to network with other faculty who have been successful in winning grants.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: Carry concern regarding temperature control in Stone Center, Wallace Hall, and Houston Cole Library to higher administration. Better temperature control means less energy consumption and lower expenses. Improvements in HVAC equipment need to be entered into the 5 year plan.

Professional Development

COLLEGE & DEPARTMENT: 1) Examine sabbatical program and pre-tenure workload reduction for research. Is this fair in all departments? 2) Consider developing research alliances with other departments or other schools with more experience or resources. Encourage the department to support such efforts by paying travel expenses.

WELFARE COMMITTEE: Examine funding for professional development, including travel, conferences, and research. Is partial funding allowed? Can the reimbursement process for travel be streamlined? Recommend resources be made available for continuing education for re-certification and for continued competence in teaching fields.

Workload

DEPARTMENT: 1) Discuss workload equity between faculty in your department. 2) Discuss balance between teaching, service, and research so that expectations are clear and realistic. 3) Department heads should facilitate research where possible through encouragement and reasonable allocation of resources (including time and workload).

Athletics

UNIVERSITY: Athletics are currently under program review and NCAA review.

Equipment

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: Discuss concerns with appropriate members of administration: compensation for computer personnel to achieve retention, equipment maintenance including HVAC.

Supplies

DEPARTMENT: If shortages of supplies are a problem in your department, try implementing a department tracking system for supplies so that more accurate budgeting can be done.

Parking

DEPARTMENT: If parking is a problem in your department, send a memo to your faculty encouraging them to call the campus police when violation are observed (e.g. students parking in faculty spaces) to improve ticketing. As a department, try to arrange for new faculty spaces to be allocated if necessary.

Submitted by Committee Members:

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February 9, 1998