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Restructuring the Composition of the Faculty Senate

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Approved by the Senate:
Not Approved by the Senate: 11/30/1999
Approved by the President:
Not Approved by the President:

Restructuring the Composition of the Faculty Senate

Submitted by Larry Mutter

11/30/1999

Motion:

Dr. Larry Mutter motioned that Article V, Section 8, of the Georgia Southern University Statutes be repealed and replaced with the statement: "The Faculty Senate shall be composed of forty regular full-time members of the Corps of Instruction holding the rank of instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, or professor who have been members of the faculty of the University for at least one year at the beginning of their terms." The motion is offered simply to get a sense of whether the voting members of the Faculty Senate desire to amend the Statutes of Georgia Southern University regarding the composition of the Faculty Senate. The amendment I offer would have the effect of restricting membership of the Senate to elected faculty senators or their alternates.

Not Approved by the Senate: Debate was closed on the motion. The motion was defeated 19-9 with 3 abstentions.

Dr. Larry Mutter (CHPS) read the following statement: "The Statutes of Georgia Southern University, approved by the Board of Regents on April 10, 1996, state in Article V, Section 8: "The Faculty Senate shall be composed of the following: A. Voting members.

Voting members of the Faculty Senate shall include forty regular full-time members of the Corps of Instruction holding the rank of instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, or professor who have been members of the faculty of the University for at least one year at the beginning of their terms; the President of the Student Government Association; and the Student Government Association Vice President for Academic Affairs. B. Administrative members.

The following administrative officers shall have the authority to participate in all deliberations of the Faculty Senate: the President; Vice Presidents of the University; the Academic Deans; and the University Librarian.” The Statutes make it clear that administrators and students are members of the Georgia Southern University Faculty Senate, though administrators may not vote on the business of the Senate. However, the Board of Regents Policy Manual does not specify this particular composition. It leaves the issue of what constitutes an institution’s Senate membership up to the institution.

The Board of Regents’ Policy Manual addresses the subjects of faculty meetings and faculty rules and regulations in the following sections: “302.05 Faculty Meetings Each faculty shall meet at least once each academic term and at such other times as may be necessary or desirable, except at those institutions which have a council, senate, assembly, or other such body, in which case the faculty shall meet at least twice per year...” and “302.06 Faculty Rules and Regulations The faculty, or the council, senate, assembly, or other comparable body, shall make, subject to the approval of the President of the institution, the Chancellor and the Board, statutes, rules, and regulations for its governance and for that of the students; provide such committees as may be required; prescribe regulations regarding admission, suspension, expulsion, classes, course of study, and requirements for graduation; and make such regulations as may be necessary or proper for the maintenance of high educational standards. A copy of the statutes, rules, and regulations made by the faculty shall be filed with the Chancellor. The faculty shall prescribe rules for the regulation of student publications, athletics, intercollegiate games, musical, dramatic, and literary clubs, fraternities and sororities, and all other student activities and affairs, subject to the approval of the President of the institution, the Chancellor and the Board.”

The first part of the first sentence of Section 302.06 makes it clear that an institution’s faculty senate may enact statutes, rules, and regulations for its governance, subject to the approval of the institution’s President, the Chancellor, and the Board. Keeping in mind that the composition of the Senate’s membership is an institutional prerogative, not a Board of Regents policy, I will make a motion in a moment to alter the composition of the GSU Faculty Senate. It is important to note that amendments to Statutes are governed by Article XII of the Statutes of Georgia Southern University, which states that amendments are to be handled through a specific process that involves the President appointing a “Committee on Revision of the Statutes.”

If it is the Senate’s desire to amend the Statutes per the motion below, the proposed amendment then would be reviewed by the Committee on Revision of the Statutes. The Committee’s job would be to review the proposed amendment, make changes to it if necessary, and offer it for adoption by the Faculty Senate. If approved by a majority of the Senate’s voting members, it would become Statute.

The motion was seconded and the floor was opened for debate. Dr. Larry Mutter (CHPS) asked if the vote on the motion could be conducted by ballot per Robert's Rules of Order. By general consent of the faculty, it was agreed that the vote would be conducted by ballot.

Dr. Linda Bleicken (Acting Provost) stated: "The Senate might be interested to know that last year the Deans' Council met with the Senate Executive Committee and a proposal that was somewhat similar to this was forwarded to the members of the Senate Executive Committee by the Deans' Council. The Deans' Council had heard at some point that there were members of the Senate who may feel intimidated about speaking out on issues given that there were a number of administrators sitting around the table. So the proposal that was suggested to the Senate Executive Committee at the time was that one Dean be elected as a member of the Senate and the other Deans not sit around the table.

At the time, this was greeted by the Senate Executive Committee with some consternation. And the general response was that this would signal that administrators did not have an interest in what was going on in Faculty Senate if this occurred. So I put that to you so that you know that there has been discussion of this. This is a slightly different motion than the proposal that was made by Deans' Council last year."

Dr. Patrick Novotny (CLASS) asked Dr. Mutter: "I just have a question to follow up on Dr. Bleicken's comments. I'm honing in on two words, and that is "restricting membership." It seems to me that by our votes membership is restricted. We are all mature. I think we can infer what the words "restricting membership" mean, but it seems to me in a technical sense, respectfully, that membership is restricted already in the context of votes. And so what we're talking about perhaps is something different. Would you care to respond to that?"

Dr. Mutter (CHPS) replied: "I'd like to address your issue, Patrick, by reading something I sent to Robert Warkentin on October 18th in response to his request that I explain what I meant by the term "activist Senate," which I used at the October 4th Senate meeting. This is what I wrote to Robert: "First, I must tell you that I have not enjoyed my term as a senator. I see the Faculty Senate as a reactive body, with no developed agenda of its own, no or little resources with which to advance an agenda, and weak access to decision making. These observations have dampened my interest in being an active senator. Worse still is the tense, intimidating environment of Faculty Senate meetings. I am intimidated by the presence of some administrators who in the past have shown thinly veiled contempt in their tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language for our most vocal senators.

As a junior faculty member, I never would have thought of opening my mouth in such a setting." "I am not alone in thinking this way. When I made this same statement at a

recent College of Health and Professional Studies' faculty meeting, several faculty members also said they felt this way. In my many interactions with faculty all over this campus I hear it time after time "Why do we have administrators at our Senate meetings?" I think it's a shame that the 600 or so faculty members on this campus who are principally teachers and researchers don't have a forum that is under their control and independent from administrators. The instructor/assistant professor/associate professor/professor job series is probably the largest class of employees on campus and we have no independent forum in which to think, dream, and debate our unique vision of this University. I think that's a shame."

Dr. John Averett (COST): "I'd like to raise a different point. Not so much about the merits of the issue, but the way we would go about this. In particular, we considered this in the Senate Executive Committee. And the principle point that we raised is that we will be considering all of these things at a future date anyway and do we really want to write legislation in a group like this? I would urge you to defeat this motion simply for that reason. There are other words that need clarification, such as, what a Corps of Instruction is, who is a person responsible for teaching, and I think there are a number of things that need definition. It's the sort of thing that you need to really work out in committee."

Dr. Mutter (CHPS) replied: "My response to your issue, Dr. Averett, is that it's sensible to address the issue of Senate composition before we deliberate any other structural reforms. It is important to address who we are before we even begin to think about where we are going, and how we hope to get there. The issue of Senate composition is fundamental and should be addressed alone and before all other issues."

Dr. Charlie Crouch (CLASS) stated: " I would like to speak to one thing Patrick said earlier, and that is that politics is not only about voting, it's about symbols, and I think Larry has addressed a very important symbol. I know when I was an untenured member of this Senate I was very intimidated. Secondly, as to why not roll it into broader reform, I think Larry makes the point beautifully. We need to define ourselves before we get redefined again by another body. I think Larry's motion puts that process in step."

Dr. Janie Wilson (CLASS) stated: "And for whatever reason tonight we actually saw at least three senators explain their vote based on a question from a Dean. I don't think the Dean asked for that, but it was obviously interpreted that way. And as long as we are explaining the way we voted something is definitely wrong in this room."

Dr. Lowell Mooney (COBA) stated: " I'd like to speak against the motion. Not on the merits, although I don't agree with the motion, but I think we would be throwing away a valuable resource of information if we were to exclude administrators. I don't want us to do a piecemeal approach to this restructuring issue. The President has been meeting with us, on the SEC, monthly since he came here and he has convinced us that we

really do need to address the structure of the Senate. It may be that we will recommend that the President create this committee which Larry talks about, but let's bring all that together in a complete package. Let's don't try to do this piecemeal where we do something today and then when we look at the big picture later on. Can't we give the processes that are in place now time to function? It may very well be that Larry's motion is a part of that recommendation, that overall recommendation that we bring."

Dr. Jim Bigley (CHPS) stated: "In response to that and a couple of other observations, this is not about losing resources for these meetings. These other people--the administrators and students-- could sit in the gallery, they could be addressed, we want their input, we need their input, but this is our Senate and as long as it has other people as members, and administrators are members, it's not a Faculty Senate. And the rush, if it is perceived to be a rush, is that at the first meeting the President gave us the keys to a hotrod, and he said "here, go with it." We need to do that. This is the time to strike on this thing. We don't want to fold it into a bunch of other efforts. At the beginning of this meeting, he put some kind of governor on the hotrod, with his process thing, which I think is what you are referring to, but we still need to go with this. This is like throwing the kings tea in the harbor kind of thing. Or firing on Fort Sumter, if you're a Southerner."

Dr. Hal Fulmer (CLASS) stated: "I want to speak against this on a couple of points. I want to make the observation that I have been on the Senate now going on a third term. I was an untenured member on this Senate, and maybe I was fortunate because of who I had as a Dean or a Chair, I never felt intimidated and I spoke freely as an untenured member. And I want to call your attention to the fact that you can't move administrators away from the table, and leave them in the room if intimidation is part of what's driving this document. You will have to excuse them from the room. Now the other thing that worries me a little bit about this is we're taking students off of it. Georgia Southern has a very long and proud history of students involved in the governance of the University, and I am proud to sit as your representative on SGA. My point is is that when you do that you drive another wedge between groups on this campus that I think historically have operated quite well. And what concerns me is that what we are saying is there ought to be this significant difference between faculty and administrators. A lot of our administrators came up through the ranks. A lot of them continue to teach. And I am concerned that somehow we think that they don't have some kind of interest in what we are doing. And so, I speak against it, and hope you will, too."

Dr. Alison Morrison-Shetlar (COST) stated: "I agree with that. One of the reasons I was interested in getting on to the Senate was a fact that it was a balanced community. And that we can get input from all sorts of aspects of the University, and I would also be very sad to see that go. I think everybody has a valuable contribution to give and I would like to be able to hear that contribution."

Dr. Lane Van Tassell (AVPAA; Dean of Graduate Studies): "I want to echo the comments that Hal ended on. But let me say as a preface, I applaud Larry Mutter and others who contributed to this initiative. I think this is probably a conversation this body needs to have from time to time regardless of where it goes. But I do want to make a couple of observations, and I probably come at this from several hats. Quite frankly, I have been at this institution for a pretty long time. That brings a lot of pro and cons, perhaps, even to this discussion. But I came up through the ranks. I served six terms on this Senate. I've seen this body evolve. I've seen this body change. Not always for the better; quite frankly, one of the detriments to this body over the years has been a rather shabby record that all of us have had about coming to these meetings prepared to discuss the items on the agenda. Now, if indeed a different composition of the Corps of Instruction would change that I would be all for it, in some ways. I think there would be some very big losses, however. Secondly, I just want to make the observation that, and maybe this is the other hat, I am very troubled by what I heard tonight about the we-and-them mentality that has run through four or five major issues. And I am concerned about excluding the students. They have made this body a bit of an exception throughout the System. And so I think those are serious moves but I do think this is a conversation we need to have."

Dr. Mutter (CHPS) replied: "I think it is important for senators, voting senators, to remember whom we represent. We are elected by the Corps of Instruction of our respective Colleges to represent their concerns. The Corps of Instruction is defined in Statute as full time professors, associate professors, assistant professors, instructors, lecturers, and teaching personnel, full time research and extension personnel and duly certified librarians. I think it is important to have an SGA liaison to the Senate but, as with administrators, why should they sit as members of the Faculty Senate when they are not elected faculty members? Simply put, the Senate should be the official domain of elected senators. All others are welcome guests, and their issues should be addressed with the endorsement of elected senators. Maybe it's all semantics anyway. Perhaps we should simply rename ourselves the University Senate. This characterization would then fit our present composition. Or is there a perspective unique to the Corps of Instruction that warrants a true Faculty Senate made up of elected faculty who convene their own meetings?"

Dr. Leo Parrish (COBA) stated: "Department chairs around the table are elected. They are part of the Corps of Instruction. Is that correct?"

Dr. Mutter (CHPS) replied: "Very important point. This motion excludes all administrators from the table. If there is a weak point in this motion, it is in interpreting the term "Corps of Instruction." That is a very important issue that needs to be looked at. The way I interpret it, I don't think Chairs are considered "full-time professors, associate professors, etc." as suggested by the Statutes. I read the Corps of Instruction

to preclude chairs that sit on our Senate right now. That's my reading of it, but it's an open issue."

Dr. Parrish (COBA) followed up: "You know if what we are saying is we can no longer elect chairs to the Faculty Senate, and I understand that is the response you just gave, I'm very much opposed to it. Second question: as I read this I am confused, Larry, that the motion is offered simply to get a "sense." I'm confused as to what I would be voting on."

Dr. Mutter (CHPS) replied: "I would like to clarify that. Article XII of the Statutes lays this out. We don't make any decisions here. We are simply getting a sense of the Faculty Senate's view on this issue. It then moves to the President, who must appoint a committee to review and consider this change to the Statutes. The President has the power to appoint anyone he or she wants to this committee. This committee then reviews and revises the proposal--this motion that I made--and then gives it back to the Senate for consideration. If the Senate approves it, it's still advisory to the President. If the President buys into it, it then goes to the Chancellor. If the Chancellor buys into it, it goes to the Board of Regents. This is a very lengthy process. We are just getting a sense today of whether the Senate wants this issue forwarded in the first place."

Dr. Jake Simons (COBA) stated: "I speak against the motion because as I see it the crux of the issue is that since the administrative members are non-voting members, and since at the same time the meeting is open and we say that we encourage them to come, the question is really one of whether or not we are explicitly inviting them to come and participate. I believe that that's important for two reasons: 1) for availability to us as senators to be able to get information that we need in our deliberations, and 2) while I do acknowledge that certainly there are going to be instances where people are intimidated by the presence of someone, if there are contentious issues, I think it is equally important for the administrators to be aware of that, which they won't necessarily be unless we ask them to come and hear."