

Faculty Participation in Trustee Meetings: An Overview

The Board of Trustees has invited the faculty to establish procedures for the selection of faculty representatives who will regularly participate in board meetings and committee sessions. The university faculty is invited to a special gathering in Northen Auditorium on January 25th at 4:00 to discuss this issue. Some of the preliminary issues identified by the faculty committee charged with addressing these topics are outlined in the following sections.

INTRODUCTION

Faculty participation in trustee meetings is seen as a positive change by both trustees and faculty members. While faculty members have been invited to participate on an *ad hoc* basis for some time, only within the last year have faculty representatives been invited to fully participate in plenary and committee sessions. Foremost among the benefits of full participation are clearer channels of communication between the Board and faculty.

In his charge to the *Committee on Faculty Role in University Governance* (hereafter, the Governance Committee), Acting President Beckley asked, “How should faculty representatives to meetings of the Board of Trustees be chosen, and what is their appropriate role in these meetings and in contributing to the work of the Trustees between meetings?”

Upon receiving this charge, the Governance Committee began deliberations on various interrelated issues. We spoke at length with Rector Norwood and President Beckley, attempted to gather information on similar practices from 40+ peer institutions, and discussed the issues.

The survey of peer institutions yielded the following information. Of the 33 colleges and universities that responded to our survey, only eight said they have no faculty representation on the board. Three have faculty board members. Eighteen have faculty on committees or faculty representatives to the board. Three said faculty regularly attend board meetings.

Several questions remain before the committee can make recommendations on this matter.

- What is the appropriate scale and scope of faculty involvement in trustee meetings?
- How should faculty representatives be chosen?
- How long should these representatives serve?

This document is designed to serve as a catalyst for continued discussion of these matters. It is NOT intended to be a completed report or final recommendation on these issues.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Scale and Scope of Faculty Participation

Scope: The Governance Committee’s conversation with Rector Norwood addressed this issue. The Rector envisioned faculty participation in the general sessions and as non-voting participants

in six of the eight standing committee meetings. Those committee meetings in which Rector Norwood sought faculty participation were Undergraduate Academics and Admission, Campus Life, Capital Projects, Development and External Relations, Finance, and Law. Those excluded were Investments and Trusteeship. President Beckley echoed this desire in his meeting with the Governance Committee.

One issue which the Governance Committee has debated is whether the exclusion of two of the committees is appropriate. Among the relevant issues are the sensitivity of the issues discussed by the Trusteeship Committee and the frequency with which the Investments Committee meets.

Scale: How many faculty members should be identified to represent the faculty as a whole? The challenge here is balancing the sometimes competing desires for adequate faculty representation and maintaining appropriate group dynamics in the meetings. The Board and its committees currently have thirty five members. Thus, a key question before the Governance Committee is how many faculty members should participate overall and in each committee. The discussion thus far has ranged from six faculty members (one per each committee noted by Rector Norwood) to twelve faculty members.

Faculty Selection

There are three processes by which faculty could be selected to participate in Board meetings: election, appointment, a hybrid of the two. There is precedent for each in current practices. The issues which the committee has discussed include concerns related to the legitimacy of the representatives in the eyes of both the faculty and the trustees, the need for representation of various constituencies, the need for alternates, and the logistics of identifying representatives.

Length of Service

At issue is the value of attending multiple board meetings in order to move up the learning curve versus the desire to allow all faculty members who desire to participate in such meetings an opportunity to do so over time. While attending a single meeting might give a faculty member some insight into the issues the board confronts, an individual would be better able to contribute over time. Should the term of service be one year (three meetings)? two years? three years?

If multiple faculty members are participating in each committee, the changes in faculty representation might be staggered so that only a portion of the committee is turning over at each interval. For example, if the length of service is to be two years, half the faculty representatives might end their term of service each year. The other half would remain in place until the following year.

ADDITIONAL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

In addition to addressing concerns related to identifying representatives to Board meetings, the Governance Committee has been asked by Acting President Beckley to examine the following:

- Should a University faculty senate be established to take on some of the responsibilities currently borne by the University faculty sitting as a committee of the whole?
- Should a formal structure or process be established to enable annual evaluation of department heads, deans, and the provost by members of the faculty
- Within each academic unit of the University – the College, the Williams School, and the Law School – how is responsibility for governing the unit best apportioned between the respective dean and faculty?
- What steps would insure that elections to faculty committees are taken more seriously?

The Governance Committee has begun preliminary analysis of related data collected from peer schools. We will continue our discussion of these issues both as a committee and with the faculty as a group in the coming months.