Staff Caucus Recommendations on the Conduct of Senate Elections

Given the recent conversation in the Executive Committee about the possibility of conducting of Senate elections via Sakai, the Staff Caucus discussed the election process for staff senators. Following is our response to the conversation of the Executive Committee, and our recommendations for ensuring that all staff members are equally enfranchised in this process.

Several staff members noted that some staff are unfamiliar with technology, and would not be able to learn quickly enough to confidently navigate the Sakai site without substantial technical assistance. Moreover, many staff members do not have access to the internet and email during the work day, and would be disenfranchised by a process that transpires solely online.

To fully enfranchise all staff members in the voting process, there are two issues to consider: first, distribution *about* the voting process and; second, the voting process *itself*. The key elements that are necessary are communication and then access. We need to be able to communicate to all staff that there is an upcoming election, identify the candidates, and explain how to cast a vote. The "how to vote" communication is a key part of providing access.

First, we recommend that the Senate should formally develop an election committee (with a single rep from each constituency) which would have the following express purposes: updating the University Senate regulations under Section B, monitoring elections to ensure that they are done fairly, and ensuring that the vote count is appropriate.

Second, we recommend that information about voting, including lists of candidates and their statements be distributed not simply via email, but perhaps printed in an announcement on paychecks (though we are aware that paychecks will soon no longer be printed) and/or posted at time clocks and other spaces where staff members gather (e.g. lunchrooms). Ensuring appropriate distribution of information could also entail working with HR to have a list of staff given to the Senate elections committee (staff rep) so that a list of nominees and directions for voting can be distributed. This could include pre-printed ballots with a some identification of the staff member on it such as their NETID (to eliminate duplicate ballots) – perhaps using some barcode technology.

Regarding the voting *process*, we recommend that voting take place via four methods:
1. Sakai, but also
2. absentee ballot
3. cell phone (there are some free online services that can be used for this purpose, and most staff members have access to a cell phone), provided that this method would have some mechanism to avoid ballot-stuffing and
4. ballot boxes at several well-publicized locations (perhaps University Libraries, in order to limit the locations to ensure validity and security). At these locations, staff would be able to hand in a written ballot or get online and vote during the extended hours. The difficulty here is ensuring that one ballot is cast by each individual staff member. This needs to be vetted and discussed at the election committee level.

Using at least 1., 2., and 4., it would be possible ensure that staff members had only voted once; it might be more difficult to check with the addition of 3., but we thought it worth mentioning, since it came up in our discussion as a viable and accessible method.

To address the concerns of many staff members that supervisors will not allow them to vote during regular work hours, some staff suggested that an announcement be made by the senior leadership on each campus (i.e. the provost/chancellor) that supervisors *must* allow all employees half an hour to vote during work hours (that is, that they are not required to use their lunch hours or vote on their own time at home). There was some disagreement about this among the staff members, some of whom were concerned about what could and could not be mandated; still, the concerns deserve attention.

Some of our staff members recommend that in order to fully enfranchise employees, a hotline be established so that employees could call to report problems with the voting process. Others believe that by doing so we risk wandering into collective bargaining territory. Though we do not anticipate many calls, staffing the phone line could be problematic. Perhaps the Senate election committee can provide some direction on this matter.

We recommend that voting take place during extended hours, either starting at 8:30 a.m. and ending at 8 p.m., or perhaps lasting more than one day. Some staff members suggested that release time may be provided in half hour shifts for any staff member who wishes to vote in order to accommodate offices who can not afford to lose multiple staff members at the same time. (Though there was some disagreement about this matter, there was feeling among some staff members that without time provided to vote, particularly for union members who are "on the clock," some staff members would not vote at all, and would be reluctant to do so during their lunch hour. We felt it important that this consideration be mentioned.)

Finally, we are sensitive to the fact that conducting an election with paper ballots will require some coordination and human resources; we recommend that the Senate Election Committee, chaired by Secretary of the Senate, and/or the Senate Parliamentarian be responsible for counting ballots (both absentee and cast at ballot boxes).

It is crucial, if staff participation in the University Senate is to be taken seriously, that we fully enfranchise all staff members in the election process.