

Report of the University Structure and Governance Committee on Charge S-0902: Senate Speakers, Discussions, Forums

Charge: Consider proposals to limit discussion during University Senate meetings, when motions are on the floor, to that of Senators and specifically invited guests. Also consider proposals to provide for public input to issues before the Senate, such as possibly providing for opening the Senate meetings to the public during the President's Annual Address to the Rutgers Community, as well as during the three annual campus reports, and at other times, such as in public hearings or forums by the Senate or any of its committees, and possibly when the Senate is in committee of the whole. Respond to the Senate Executive Committee by December 2009.

Background: Senate meetings are where duly elected or appointed senators gather to conduct the business of the Senate. In the interests of transparency, they are held in public and, as a courtesy, members of the public have often in the past been allowed to speak. While useful in soliciting public opinion, this has sometimes made it difficult for senators' voices to be heard in the debate on controversial issues. Valuable though it is, public input should not pre-empt the deliberative process itself. The motivation for this charge is:

- to clarify that Senate meetings are not themselves public hearings, and that as at meetings of other deliberative bodies, only senators ordinarily have the right to speak
- to recommend appropriate procedures for ensuring that the business of the senate can be conducted expeditiously
- to consider appropriate mechanisms to ensure that there is still ample opportunity for senators to learn the views of members of the university community who may be affected by or interested in matters being debated.

Considerations: This charge is not intended to change the ground rules regarding who is permitted to speak at Senate meetings, to create a more restrictive regime, or to inhibit input by members of the wider community. It seeks to clarify what the ground rules are, and to consider how input may best be obtained from interested parties without disrupting the conduct of Senate business.

Recommendation: The University Structure and Governance Committee recommends adoption of the following resolution by Senate:

Be it resolved that:

1. Only University senators and guests invited by the Executive Committee should be permitted to address the Senate once a motion is on the floor of the Senate.
2. Committee chairs should be encouraged to promote transparency and provide a forum for public input during a scheduled committee meeting prior to the meeting at which the full Senate will consider particular issues.
3. The Secretary to the Senate should announce pending charges on the Senate web site and include the chairs' e-mail address to allow for requests for input by interested parties.
4. Sakai and/or the Senate website should be used to promote attendance by the public at a forum during which potentially controversial issues are considered at the committee level.
5. Any input from members of the public should also be submitted in writing so that it can be made available to all senators prior to Senate deliberation on the issue.

6. The Executive Committee should schedule public hearings prior to scheduling Senate debate on Committee Reports it considers particularly important and controversial
7. Interested parties and groups may request the opportunity to address Senate on important issues by writing to (or emailing) the Executive Committee no later than one week after the issue is docketed for discussion by the Senate.
8. Chairs or co-chairs of the specific committee considering the pertinent issue may recommend to the Executive Committee that specific interested parties who have met with the Committee be included among those invited to address the Senate
9. Invited guests should be allowed to speak for a maximum of two minutes each during the full Senate meeting.
10. The same procedures should be followed when the Senate meets as a Committee of the Whole.
11. Administrative reports and campus reports should ordinarily follow the disposition of regular Senate business. The Senate appreciates the willingness of the central administration to inform the community of its activities and to answer questions. With respect for this process and the individuals, we recommend that these reports be scheduled as the last agenda item, so as to allow for more efficiency and the largest number of participating senators during the conduct of regular business at the beginning of each meeting.
12. Question and answer sessions following the administrative reports and campus reports should be open to all present, and not limited to Senators.
13. The President's Annual Address to the Rutgers Community should continue to be hosted by the Senate, but should not displace normal Senate business at the beginning of the academic year. It should therefore be scheduled as a separate event.

University Structure and Governance Committee, 2009-2010

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