Chairing a Senate Committee

This is an informal note to provide some useful information in your duties as the Chair of a Senate committee, in response to past queries and requests. It is not an official Senate document.

Background
The Regents’ Rules of the University of Texas agree with long-standing academic tradition in defining the responsibilities of the faculty. Section 2.1 assigns the faculties:

. . . a major role in the governance of their respective institutions in the following areas:

3.1 General academic policies and welfare.
3.2 Student life and activities.
3.3 Requirements of admission and graduation.
3.4 Honors and scholastic performance.
3.5 Approval of candidates for degrees.
3.6 Faculty rules of procedure.

These are complex responsibilities and it takes a complex organization to carry them out. Different functions are divided among different faculty bodies. These bodies fall into two main systems: 1) the schools and their units, and 2) the Academic Senate and its units. In general, matters concerning educational programs are initiated in the schools and come to the Senate for approval. Matters pertaining to faculty welfare and working conditions generally, faculty rules of procedure, and general university policies affecting faculty are usually initiated in the Senate or Senate committees and approved by the Senate. In both areas the deliberations and recommendations of Senate committees are crucial.

The general principle at U T Dallas is that Senate committees are executive committees, not merely investigative or advisory. The Senate acts for the faculty as a whole, the Senate Committees act for the Senate. If a committee membership is not sure that the action they contemplate is consistent with established policy, or if they think policy is unclear, they can refer the question to the Senate. Conversely, the Senate can always review the action of its committees (except CQ) although it should also be careful to respect the usually greater attention the committees are able to bring to bear in their considerations.

Duties of committee chair
The duties of the chair are primarily to receive matters addressed to the committee, call and conduct meetings, communicate with the Senate and others on behalf of the committee, and provide the Senate an annual report.

Support
We have one Governance Secretary, Vicki Carlisle, but she is also part of the office of the Provost. This also takes substantial amounts of time. In consequence, the Governance office has never been able to assist chairs in calling meetings, minutes, correspondence,
and other such important minutiae. They have always had to rely on their own efforts or resources. In consequence, “institutional memory” and communication has been a perpetual area of dissatisfaction.

Partly to remedy this situation and for some other reasons, the Senate and the Administration formalized the relationship between committees and Responsible University Officials (RUOs) in a memorandum of understanding approve by the Senate on 17 October 2001. The MOU says in part:

The general agreement of the Senate and Administration is that Responsible University Officials will be the administrative official or officials whose area of responsibility most closely accords with the area of responsibility of the Committee. Responsible University Officials shall regard interpretations of academic policy or recommendations by the Committees as the view of the Academic Senate and shall act upon them provided that such interpretations or recommendations are consistent with their budgetary responsibilities, standing law and other University policy.

If the interpretation or recommendation in question does not directly pertain to the Responsible University Official of record, that Responsible University Official will assist the committee in identifying the administrative officer that it does concern and in providing the committee with information on whether the necessary follow-up action is being carried out.

The memorandum further specifies a procedure to follow if the Committee makes a determination of policy that the RUO believes should not be acted on. Either side may refer the matter upward to the Academic Council and Faculty Senate ultimately for resolution with the President.

One implication of the memorandum is that the RUO should be able to provide logistic support if the committee needs it. Another is that in those cases where the committee is clearly giving direct policy guidance to the RUO’s administrative activities, the office of the RUO should also, logically, receive and keep minutes and other records of those policy recommendations.

**Committee charge and membership**

Chairs will receive notice of the memberships of their committee and a copy of the charge of their committee with their letter of appointment. The “official” listing of the charges is in the number policy memoranda maintained on the website of the Provost. Each Committee’s website has a link to their charge in that listing.

Senate committees should have full access to the resources of the university for obtaining whatever information their deliberations might require, and should be able to appoint or seek the appointment of additional required faculty members. If a problem arises in this area, contact the Speaker.

**Meetings**

Generally, Chairs should call one meeting fairly promptly to allow the committee to orient new members and plan the activities for the year. There are many provisions for continuity. All the charges require staggered terms so that in almost all cases about half
the membership will be carried over from the previous year. Some of the charges specify
a minimum numbers of meetings per year others do not.

In principle, all meetings except meetings of the Committee on Qualifications of
Academic Personnel are public meetings.

Meetings should be conducted in the same manner as Senate meetings. Minutes should be
taken as appropriate and copies forwarded to the Senate governance office.

**Bylaws**

All committees have the authority to write (or amend) bylaws for themselves. Bylaws
should be posted on the committee website.

**Website**

Each committee has a website. It is maintained by the Senate and can be reached directly
or through the Senate web site. The URL for the Senate website is
http://www.utdallas.edu/senate/. The index page lists all the Senate committees and all
the University Committees. Clicking on the name of each committee will take you to the
website for that committee. The committee website consists of a home page giving the
general membership, sometimes a brief description of the committee’s area of concern,
and links to the official charge, bylaws, and to any minutes or policy recommendations it
may have made. Clicking on the links for the chair, vice chair, and RUO will bring up an
email form for them. This is true for almost all of the committee members as well.

Material to be posted to the Committee’s web-site should be sent to the governance
Secretary, Vicki Carlisle (vicki.carlisle@utdallas.edu), copy to the Secretary of the
Senate (David Cordell).

**Contact Numbers:**

In the event of a problem requiring Senate attention, you can email the UTD Senators at:
senate@utdallas.edu Alternatively you may contact the Governance Secretary, Speaker,
or Senate Secretary  The contact information for these are all listed on the Senate website.
http://www.utdallas.edu/senate . All members of the Senate and Academic Council are
listed on the web at: http://www.utdallas.edu/senate/members.html.

Murray J Leaf, Speaker, 2009-2010