

History of the Arizona State University, “One-Senate” Model

At the conclusion of the spring semester of 2008 the ASU Academic Assembly members approved combining all campus-based Senates into a single University Senate. The following information was placed on the University Senate website in the fall semester of 2008 by then University Senate President Philip VanderMeer.

During the 2008 spring semester, faculty on the four ASU campuses, acting through their Academic Senates and then as Academic Assemblies on each campus, approved a set of significant amendments to the Academic Constitution and Bylaws. These measures provide for a single, university-wide system of faculty governance that matches the previous restructuring of the university administration. As president of the Academic Assembly for the Tempe campus and as chair of the University Academic Council of the University Senate, I am writing to provide a basic explanation of those important and rather complex changes.

This new system does reflect important continuities with the past. It rests on the principles of shared governance as established by Arizona statute and by the Arizona Board of Regents. Also unchanged is the inclusive composition of the Academic Assembly: tenured and tenure-eligible faculty, fulltime contract faculty and academic professionals, members of the Emeritus College, and others designated in the University Senate Constitution. Assembly members are still represented in the senate through their primary academic unit, although the university’s growing variety of schools, departments, and divisions makes the terminology more complex. Finally, presidents are annually elected from each campus for three-year terms. Thus, the system retains a representative, deliberative, senate with committees and an executive; the primary differences arise from integrating these systems from all four campuses.

The basis of representation is the “degree-granting unit,” which may be a department, school, or division. The primary goal is representing faculty with shared interests and in units where they meet. Because units differ in size, larger units have more representation; to reduce the possible service burden, units with very few members have the option of sharing representation with another unit(s). Units that are not degree-granting (such as the University Libraries) may petition the Senate’s executive head, the University Academic Council of the Senate, for representation, and that body will also consider other petitions related to representation. In the near future I will be sending letters to all units, informing them of their representation.

The senators chosen according to this system of representation will be members of the new University Senate. This single institution will meet, simultaneously, on the four campuses, connected by audio and video links. It will act on one agenda, deliberate on the same issues, and vote as one unit, making decisions on behalf of the entire Academic Assembly. While there is now only one Senate, the senators elected from units on individual campuses may, at their initiative, meet additionally to discuss issues of specific importance to their campus.

Each campus continues to elect someone annually to a three-year term, serving successively as president-elect, president, and past president, and these individuals continue to serve as presidents of the Academic Assembly for their campus. Instead of serving as presidents of their campus senates (which no longer exist), all presidents from each of the four campuses serve together as the University Academic Council of the University Senate (UAC). This body is the executive board for the Senate and the core of the Executive Committee of the Senate, together with Senate Committee chairs and other ex-officio

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members. The UAC chooses one of the four presidents to serve as its chair and as the presiding officer of the Senate.

Creating a university-wide senate parallels the creation of university-wide committees. This includes not only the Senate's internal committees, such as the Student Faculty Policy Committee, but also the Curriculum and Academic Program Committee, which reports to the Senate. Other committees which have been campus-specific, such as the General Studies Committee, are now unified, with representation from all campuses and deciding on programs and policies for the entire university. Finally, the ASU grievance committees – the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure, and the Governance Grievance Committee – include members elected from each campus and function on a university-wide basis.

This new system is designed to fulfill all of the Academic Assembly's responsibilities of shared governance, with the authority to advise and propose on all matters of educational policy, faculty grievance, faculty personnel, financial affairs, university support services, and all other matters affecting the faculty and academic professional role in the university, its campuses, research parks, and other facilities. By creating a university-wide system we expect to act more expeditiously and to speak more clearly for the faculty. Drawing on the talents of senators from across the university and by creating an executive of 12 members, we intend to address questions of central importance to faculty members and to the continued progress of this institution.

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