

FacultyLine

Office of the University Faculty, 138 Fawcett Hall (775-2039 / 775-3560)
Faculty Line #225, November 06, 2018

Colleagues,

Faculty Senate Leadership would like to provide an update to the University Faculty regarding this last weekend's unusual Senate activity and yesterday's Faculty Senate meeting.

Saturday evening (Nov 3rd), Bargaining Unit Faculty received a communication from AAUP-WSU urging its members to express support to their Faculty Senators for a suspension of the normal rules of parliamentary procedure. (Correction: Regular Chapter Members of the Bargaining Unit) The suspension was proposed by AAUP-WSU to encourage Senators to bring to the floor a call for a Special Meeting of the University Faculty to discuss a vote of No Confidence. Senators received a number of communications both in support of and opposition to the proposed suspension on Sunday and Monday morning.

Not surprisingly, this short turnaround time was insufficient for the entire Faculty to consider this issue and for Senators to come well-prepared to speak on behalf of their entire constituency. Monday afternoon found many faculty members unaware of the emerging situation and their voices could not be heard.

The Faculty Constitution¹ has specific protections to ensure the broadest possible consideration of all faculty views. Our constitution requires that members and committees submit items through the Executive Committee to be adopted for the official agenda. Senators vote on behalf of their colleagues, and not simply based on their personal viewpoint. Thus, our process is designed to allow Senators significant time to consult with their constituencies before voting. To do otherwise forces the Senate to act as individuals and not as representative servant leaders.

Although designed to provide time for caucusing, the rules of procedure for deliberative bodies do allow a few mechanisms for haste. Our constitution allows the Faculty President to issue an emergency agenda addendum by Friday prior to a meeting. Items announced in this unusual way still require a majority vote of the Senate to ratify that unusual decision before the item can be considered on such short notice. A final option for speedy consideration is for any Senator to propose suspending our rules that require items of business to be posted first on the agenda. Suspension of the rules requires a 2/3rd majority to pass. This is a high bar, as is appropriate for a deliberative, representative body.

Yesterday, the Senate considered such a motion to suspend its rules. This motion failed to pass (17-15) the required 2/3rds threshold. Thus, this item was not debated during yesterday's meeting. Votes for or against the motion to suspend should not be considered to be votes for or against the desire to hold a Special Meeting of the University Faculty. Neither should that tally be considered an expression of confidence or lack of confidence in University Administration. The recorded vote simply makes clear that the Senate rejects consideration of an item of such serious business with haste.

¹ <https://policy.wright.edu/policy/2010-faculty-constitution>

The next Senate Agenda will be set by the Executive Committee on Monday, Dec 3rd. If you believe that the Senate should or should not call a Special meeting of the University Faculty to discuss confidence in the University President or the Board of Trustees, then please contact your Senators well prior to Dec 3rd. I encourage you to express to them the reasons that you are specifically for or against such a meeting so that the Faculty Senate can best determine how to best proceed with the Faculty's business.

What would support for a Special Meeting of the University Faculty mean?

By our constitution, the Faculty Senate itself does not take votes of Confidence — only the Faculty, assembled, can do so. There are two paths for the calling of a Special Meeting of the University Faculty for such a purpose: either by having the Faculty Senate call for such a meeting or by having the Faculty members do so themselves, bypassing the Senate. In addition, the 2017-2018 Faculty Senate approved means by which a vote of confidence/no confidence can be conducted by secret electronic ballot². This procedure can be initiated at any time by a petition of any 50 members of the University Faculty.

A Special Meeting of the University Faculty assembles the Faculty for the purpose of discussing a specific matter. Special Meetings are chaired by the Faculty President. A quorum of one-hundred faculty members must be present for business to be conducted. All members of the University Faculty are eligible to speak and vote. The University Faculty includes essentially all full-time/fully-affiliated Faculty, including Chairs, Deans, Provosts, and the University President. Such an assembly could discuss and take final action on a desire to express the sentiment of the Faculty on any issue.

Taking a Vote of Confidence/No Confidence in an administrator is serious business and not to be taken lightly. Such a vote expresses the sense of the University Faculty. The intent of such action is to draw public scrutiny to a clearly expressed and critical concern. It is not a personnel action and it is non-binding. A Vote of No Confidence in a University President, for example, is made to its Board of Trustees, who then act or do not act according to their interpretation of the sentiment and stated rationale. A Vote of No Confidence in a Board of Trustees could be reported to a state-wide Department of Higher Education, Chancellor, or Governor for similar consideration. In order for action to be taken, it is essential that such sentiment be credible and justifiable in the public opinion.

Use of Classroom time [Redux]

Faculty Senate Leadership continues to be concerned regarding the potential for negative impact of prolonged uncertainty regarding budget decisions, CBA negotiations, and other ongoing matters on our classroom environments. As professional educators, it is the obligation of the University Faculty to make certain that we consciously and continuously make every effort to provide the best learning environment possible for our students.

Unless it is necessary administrative instruction (or a brief response to a student question), Faculty Senate Leadership most strongly recommends against using classroom time to discuss Faculty issues that are not directly germane to the topic of a course. Likewise, unless relevant to a course, students should not be provided with course-based incentives/disincentives for any student activism in support of or in opposition to ongoing negotiations. Such activities have the potential to be perceived as

² <https://www.wright.edu/faculty-senate/about/faculty-senate-procedures>

threatening or as an abuse of the power-differential between Faculty and Students. Reports of abuse of the Faculty-Student relationship will be taken seriously by all parties.

Final thoughts

I would like to personally thank all of you who took the time to articulate and share your thoughts with your Senators this weekend. Senators, I would like to thank you for responding to your constituents with urgency and care. For those faculty who forwarded comments or form letters to large groups of Senators, I hope you will forgive those of us who were unable to reply to each of you individually. There was a great deal of unplanned effort in a short period of time. Please consider this Faculty Line one response to your concerns and please follow-up through Senate channels should you have additional questions or comments.

Please remember that the Faculty Senate is a representative body. Let your Faculty Senators know where you stand on the issues so that we can fairly and accurately represent the Faculty in our recommendations and official opinions. Tentative agendas, final agendas, and approved minutes of all Faculty Senate business are available online for your consideration.³ Please contact your Faculty Senators⁴ with your thoughts, concerns, and positions on these (and future) issues so that they can fairly and accurately represent you in Senate deliberations and business.

Faculty Senate meetings are open to all. The last Senate meeting of this academic term is Monday, Dec 10, at 2:30 pm, in the Student Union Endeavor Room (E156 SU). The Faculty Senate looks forward to hearing from and questioning President Schrader and Provost Edwards on the state of the University. As always, we invite you to join us.

Travis Doom, Professor
Faculty President

³ <https://www.wright.edu/faculty-senate>

⁴ <https://www.wright.edu/faculty-senate/about/2018-19-officers-and-members>