

Report of the University Structure and Governance Committee (USGC) on Charge S-1908

Charge: Honorary Degree and Commencement Speaker Selection

Process: Consider possible improvements to our policy and processes for selection of recipients of Honorary Degrees and Commencement Speakers.

Background

The University administration in 2014 asked the Senate to recommend a process for the University to incorporate input from the community in selecting recipients of honorary degrees and in recommending commencement speakers. The Senate Executive Committee provided an initial response in the form of the report on charge S-1405 (Appendix A). The University Structure and Governance Committee (USGC) was subsequently requested in charge S-1410 to study the recommendations of S-1405 and formulate detailed processes for their implementation. Following the adoption by the Senate of the processes recommended by USGC in November 2015, President Barchi requested that they be amended to include deadlines reflecting the need for timely action in light of the need to invite recipients and speakers far in advance. A modified report on this charge was adopted by the Senate in February 2016 (Appendix B). Charge S-1908 was initiated to determine whether the process requires or would benefit from any changes or improvements.

The key components of the recommended procedures, which have been in operation since Fall 2016, are that:

- the Senate Executive Committee at its September meeting each year appoints members of a representative University Commencement Panel (UCP) of senators
- the UCP recommends three faculty and two student senators from the respective units to serve on Chancellor's Committee on the Camden, Newark, New Brunswick/RBHS (combined) campuses
- the Chancellors of Camden, Newark, New Brunswick/RBHS (jointly) appoint Commencement Committees consisting of the five recommended senators and four additional designees of their own.

The recommendations in the (amended) report on charge S-1410 contain additional details regarding creation of the (then) new UCP and its composition, solicitations of nominations, the selection process carried out by the Chancellors' Commencement Committees (CCCs), etc.

Considerations

As these procedures have been in operation over the course of five years, several difficulties have emerged, giving rise to the current charge to consider improvements.

1. The USGC recommendation for the representative appointment of the UCP each year was:

The UCP will be composed of members with representation from each unit (R-C, R-N, R-NB, RBHS), as follows:

- a. Executive Secretary of the Senate (non-voting)
- b. Vice Chair of the Senate (chair of UCP)
- c. Four Faculty Senators, with each of the following groups being represented:
 - Tenure-track (TT), non-tenure-track (NTT), and part-time lecturers (PTL)
- d. One Staff Senator
- e. One Alumni Senator
- f. Two Student Senators

Unfortunately, the resolution adopted by the Senate adding the UCP into the Senate Handbook incorporated an earlier draft of that recommendation:

University Commencement Panel Standing Charge: The University Commencement Panel (UCP) shall be appointed by the Executive Committee at the beginning of each year and shall consist of the Vice Chair of the Senate, serving as chair of the UCP; four faculty senators (one each from Camden, Newark, New Brunswick, and RBHS, and including at least one tenure-track, one non-tenure-track, and one part-time lecturer senator); two student senators; one staff senator; one alumni senator; and the Executive Secretary of the Senate (non-voting).

The key difference is this: the recommendation aimed that the UCP as a whole would be representative of all campuses, and required that the faculty members include TT, NTT, and PTL representatives. The resolution as adopted incorporates the additional burden that the faculty members alone must represent each of the campuses.

Experience has shown that the call for nominations for the UCP generates relatively few volunteers in general—perhaps because the UCP is not, in fact, directly involved in considering recommendations for recipients of honorary degrees or commencement speakers, but only in selecting those who will be appointed by the Chancellors to do this work. However, in conjunction with the fact that the conditions adopted are more restrictive than they should have been, it has been difficult in practice for the Senate Executive Committee to appoint the UCP. There has often been limited choice and flexibility, especially as regards trying to find four faculty members from among the volunteers, subject to the

seven constraints as to both campus (Camden, Newark, New Brunswick, RBHS) and status (TT, NTT, PTL).

2. The Senate chair and vice-chair met with President Barchi to ask how this process is viewed by the administration and whether he felt that any improvements were needed. President Barchi indicated that the process itself was helpful and works but could be improved. The administration's main issue with the Senate process is that often potential recipients who have been invited have scheduling conflicts and are not available when asked by the University. Thus it is critical that the CCCs are able to begin their work sooner and continue it when necessary after the first round of requests. In practice, the UCP is currently appointed in September, solicits nominations for service on the various CCCs, and meets to make recommendations to the Chancellors. It has usually been possible to complete this by November, occasionally December or October. Nevertheless, the time that this takes hold up the procedures whereby the Secretary of the University invites the community to propose potential honorary degree recipients or commencement speakers, to be considered by the respective CCCs.
3. In addition, when such calls are issued, they are not for commencements in the following May, but for the year after that. The process as a whole is time-consuming. The CCCs send ranked recommendations to the Chancellors, but then the University administration must begin the process of inviting recipients and speakers a year or more ahead of time, and yet must be able to respond if and when some of those who have accepted drop out, for whatever reason. The detailed procedures set out in the report on charge S-1410 do not specify terms for the CCCs. Under the existing procedures, new recommendations for CCC members are provided by the UCP around November, and the Chancellors appoint the CCCs (including their own four designees) at some time thereafter. It is therefore not clear when a CCC is expected to hand over to its successor. Members appointed in one Fall may no longer be Senators the following Fall. Student members may have graduated. As has happened several times in recent years, speakers may unavoidably drop out only shortly before the date of commencement; in such cases, if the ranked list provided by a previously-serving CCC has been exhausted, it is not clear what Senate involvement is required for any remedial actions to be taken by the University administration, or what role, if any, a successor CCC is expected to play.

Recommendations

These issues were discussed by the USGC in 2019–2020, and the development of recommendations was under way, but no conclusions were reached before the final committee meetings of the year were lost to the COVID-19 pandemic. They were thus taken up afresh by the current USGC. Discussion initially focused on resolving the unplanned complexity of the requirements for the UCP, bringing the timing of the UCP’s appointment forward to the final Senate Executive Committee meeting of the previous year (June) instead of the first meeting of the subsequent year (September), and defining a term for the CCCs.

An initial set of draft recommendations was under discussion, as follows:

1. The original USGC recommendation for the representative appointment of the UCP should be adopted; namely:
 - The UCP will be composed of members with representation from each unit (R-C, R-N, R-NB, RBHS), as follows:
 - a. Executive Secretary of the Senate (non-voting)
 - b. Vice Chair of the Senate (chair of UCP)
 - c. Four Faculty Senators, with each of the following groups being represented:
 - Tenure-track (TT), non-tenure-track (NTT), and part-time lecturers (PTL)
 - d. One Staff Senator
 - e. One Alumni Senator
 - f. Two Student Senators
2. Each year, the outgoing University Senate Executive Committee should solicit nominations from the incoming University Senate for membership on the UCP, and at its final meeting of the year it should appoint members to the UCP from among those nominations
3. The UCP should solicit nominations from new and continuing senators to serve on the following year’s Chancellors’ Commencement Committees and make recommendations to the Chancellors by September each year.
4. No change is need in the composition or duties of the CCCs.
5. If the above recommendations are accepted by the University, then the handbook of the Rutgers University Senate should be amended to replace Article VIII.D section 11 with:

“11. University Commencement Panel Standing Charge: The University Commencement Panel (UCP) shall be appointed by the Executive Committee at its final meeting of each year from volunteers solicited from among new and returning senator for the following year. It shall include representation from the Camden, Newark, New Brunswick and RBHS campuses, and shall consist of the Vice Chair of the Senate, serving as chair of the UCP; four faculty senators (including at least one tenure-track, one non-tenure-track, and one part-time lecturer senator); two student senators; one staff senator; one alumni senator; and the Executive Secretary of the Senate (non-voting). Members will be

appointed to this panel in addition to their regular committee duties, with the following responsibilities:

- Identify and select faculty and student senators to serve on the Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick/RBHS Commencement Committees (which vet and rank nominations for honorary degrees and for commencement speakers), as follows:
 - o three faculty senators from the respective campus (in the case of New Brunswick/RBHS, at least one from each)
 - o two student senators from the respective campus (in the case of New Brunswick/RBHS, at least one from each)
- Advise the chancellors no later than the beginning of September of the names of those selected for appointment.”

In more recent discussions, however, several additional concerns surfaced. Although the above proposal would resolve the unintended complexity of the UCP, and significantly improve the timing of recommendations to the Chancellors, some delay in forming and starting up the CCCs in September would still remain; and the issues relating to CCC terms were still not addressed. In addition, the prevailing view in the current USGC is that the UCP as a whole is an unnecessary complexity. It is required to be representative, and its role is only to recommend senators to serve on CCCs. It does not attract significant number of volunteers—and some of those who do volunteer do so in error, as they actually prefer to serve on their CCC. The conclusion of this discussion was that the Executive Committee itself is elected by senators and is already required to be representative, and that it would not place an undue burden on the Executive Committee to require them to solicit and consider nominations for CCCs and recommend senators to serve on them directly to the Chancellors, instead of spending time appointing the UCP. Further, if this were to be done at the final (June) meeting each year, it should be possible for Chancellors to appoint the CCCs even earlier.

There was some support for the notion that service on a CCC might be tied to specific commencements rather than fixed terms. This would have advantages in relation to the need to have senators and others for the University administration to work with when changes had to be made late in the day. However, there can be no guarantee that that senators—particularly students, who have one year-terms—who serve on a CCC that ranks and recommends honorary degree recipients and commencement speakers will still be serving as senators by the time of that commencement perhaps over a year later. Conversely, if the Executive Committee can recommend senators to Chancellors to serve on their CCCs by June each year, it may be realistic for CCCs to be appointed for one-year terms from July 1 each year. Nothing prevents a serving CCC member from volunteering to serve again in the following year, and Chancellors remain free to select their own designees with continuity in mind. Such a scheme offers simplicity and

clarity, as well as consistency with senate terms. Each CCC would vet potential recipients and speakers for a commencement that would be towards the end of the year following its term; but its term would continue until the end of June, and the CCC would be available to be consulted by the University administration regarding remedial actions in the event of needing to replace a speaker close to the time of an imminent commencement.

In light of these discussions, the USGS's recommendations are:

1. The appointing of a UCP should be discontinued, and references to the UCP should be removed from the Senate Handbook.
2. Each year, the outgoing University Senate Executive Committee should solicit nominations from the incoming University Senate for membership on the Chancellors' Commencement Committees (CCCs), and at its final meeting of the year it should select, from among those nominations for CCCs, three faculty members and two students for each of the CCCs, and should advise the Chancellors accordingly.
3. The composition and duties of CCCs, as well as the process for selection process for honorary degree recipients and commencement speakers should remain as set forth in the amended report on charge S-1410 adopted in February 2016.
4. CCCs should be appointed for one-year terms commencing each year on July 1.
5. In the event that it becomes necessary to select honorary degree recipients or commencement speakers after the recommendations provided by a CCC that is no longer serving have been exhausted, the University administration should consult with the CCC for the affected campus(es) serving at the time that action is needed.
6. If these recommendations are accepted by the University, the Senate Handbook should be amended accordingly.

Resolutions

Be it resolved that the Rutgers University Senate

endorses the following modifications to the process set out in the report on Charge S-1410 to select honorary-degree recipients and commencement speakers and asks the University administration to implement them:

1. Each year, the outgoing University Senate Executive Committee should solicit nominations from the incoming University Senate for membership on the Chancellors' Commencement Committees (CCCs), and at its final meeting of the year it should select, from among those nominations for CCCs, three faculty members and two students for each of the CCCs, and should advise the Chancellors accordingly.
2. The composition and duties of CCCs, as well as the process for selection process for honorary degree recipients and commencement speakers should remain as set forth in the amended report on charge S-1410 adopted in February 2016.
3. CCCs should be appointed for one-year terms commencing each year on July 1.
4. In the event that it becomes necessary to select honorary degree recipients or commencement speakers after the recommendations provided by a CCC that is no longer serving have been exhausted, the University administration should consult with the CCC for the affected campus(es) serving at the time that action is needed.

Be it further resolved that if these recommendations are accepted by the University, then the Handbook of the Rutgers University Senate should be updated as follows:

1. In Article VII. B., the sentence "The vice chair acts as chair of the Appeals Panel if an appeal is being heard, and reports on Executive Committee action at Senate meetings." should replace the sentence "The vice chair acts as chair of the University Commencement Panel and of the Appeals Panel if an appeal is being heard, and reports on Executive Committee action at Senate meetings."
2. In Article VIII. A., the sentence "Procedures concerning the structure and operation of committees were approved by the University Senate on May 5, 1974, and amended April 28, 1995 and February 19, 2016." should be replaced with the sentence "Procedures concerning the structure and operation of committees were approved by the University Senate on May 5, 1974, and

amended April 28, 1995, February 19, 2016, and [INSERT DATE OF THIS AMENDMENT’S ADOPTION].”

3. iii) In Article VIII. D., delete the following text:

“11. University Commencement Panel Standing Charge: The University Commencement Panel (UCP) shall be appointed by the Executive Committee at the beginning of each year and shall consist of the Vice Chair of the Senate, serving as chair of the UCP; four faculty senators (one each from Camden, Newark, New Brunswick, and RBHS, and including at least one tenure-track, one non-tenure-track, and one part-time lecturer senator); two student senators; one staff senator; one alumni senator; and the Executive Secretary of the Senate (non-voting). Members will be appointed to this panel in addition to their regular committee duties, with the following responsibilities:

- Identify and select faculty and student senators to serve on the Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick/RBHS Commencement Committees (which vet and rank nominations for honorary degrees and for commencement speakers), as follows:
 - o three faculty senators from the respective campus (in the case of New Brunswick/RBHS, at least one from each)
 - o two student senators from the respective campus (in the case of New Brunswick/RBHS, at least one from each)
- Advise the chancellors no later than the beginning of September of the names of those selected for appointment.”

University Structure and Governance Committee 2020 – 2021

Gillett, Peter, RBS:UNB (F) – Chair
 Adya, Monica, Business-Camden Dean (A)
 Ahmed, Amna, SAS -NB (S)
 Alexander-Floyd, Nikol, SGS (F)
 Ameri, Mason, RBS:UNB (F)
 Bogden, John, RBHS-At Large
 Castaneda, Ricky, NCAS (S)
 Dane, Perry, Camden Law (F)
 Farley, Alisa, SAS-NB (S)
 Haliktis, Perry, SPH Dean (A)
 Hodes, Rachel, Alumni Association
 Hsueh, Wayne, RBHS At-Large (F)
 Huang, Bingru, SGS-NB (F)
 Lyles, Rhonda, RBHS Staff
 Mahon, Gwendolyn, SHP Dean (A)
 Menifield, Charles, SPAA Dean (A)
 McCarthy, Bill, SCJ Dean (A)

Mickelsen, Mary, Senate Executive Secretary
 Morton, Patricia, SAS-NB (F)
 Mucherson, Kimberly, Law-Camden Dean (A)
 Nath, Badri, SAS-NB (F)
 Oliver, Jon, New Brunswick Staff
 Ozel, Tugrul, School of Enigneering (F)
 Parsa, Houshang, Alumni Association
 Rivera, Alicia, RBHS Staff
 Sacks, Bryan, PTL-C (F)
 Schroth, Kevin, Other-RBHS (F)
 Shinbrot, Troy, Engineering (F)
 Shobut, Sarah, SAS-N (S)
 Thakuriah, Piyushimita, EJBSPPP Dean (A)
 Trees, Frances, SAS-NB (F)
 Vellangany, Issac, SEBS (F)
 Wayne, Robert, NJMS (S)