

## **Report of the University Structure and Governance Committee (USGC) on Charge S-2014**

### **Charge S-2014: Standing Committees and the Chair of the Senate:**

Consider the duties of the Chair of the Senate in relation to its various standing committees and make any appropriate recommendations.

### **Background**

Historically, senators elected to serve as Chair of the Senate have usually served previously as chair or co-chair of one of its standing committees, and ordinarily have continued to do so. While this has the benefits of retaining their experience within the standing committee, and continuing to keep serving chairs actively engaged in the ongoing work of the Senate, it also has the practical effect of tying up chairs with committee work in the mornings before Senate meetings. An alternative model adopted by many organizations is that the chair of the assembly becomes an *ex-officio* member of all its committees.

Adopting such a model, in conjunction with not assigning the Chair of the Senate to serve as a regular member of any standing committee, would facilitate the Chair of the Senate spending time over the course of each year attending meetings of its various standing committees. This might provide for better communication between the Executive Committee and the other standing committees, and might reduce the appearance that the Chair of the Senate favors the agenda of any one particular committee. It might also reduce some of the burden of work that falls to the Chair of the Senate; conversely, however, it might be seen as discouraging committed chairs of standing committees from being willing to serve as Chair of the Senate. Better communication between the Executive Committee and the chairs of the other standing committees can only improve the outcomes of all our work and the Chair of the Senate may play a useful liaison role in achieving that, as a result of this or other possible changes.

## **Considerations**

Following Recommendation 1 of the Report of the Rutgers University Senate University Structure and Governance Committee on Charge S-1501: Eligibility, Nomination, and Election of Senate Leadership and Board Representatives:

*Candidates for chair and vice chair shall be elected Senators with two or more years of experience (not necessarily consecutive) on the Senate and at least one year as either a member of the Executive Committee or as a committee chair or co-chair.*

In practice, therefore, newly-elected chairs of the Senate are typically either committee chairs, or members of the previous Executive Committee (who may often themselves still be serving as committee chairs).

Article VIII.B.1 of the Handbook of the University Senate contains the following:

*All senators will normally serve on one standing committee. Senators elected to the Executive Committee, however, will also be assigned to an additional committee.*

In consequence, chairs of the Senate, who are elected to the Executive Committee, are also assigned to serve on an additional committee—most commonly, the committee on which they served immediately prior to election. The prevailing practice until recently has been for the status quo to continue: elected Senate chairs continued to serve on their other committees, and continued to chair them if they did so previously. In recent departures from these norms, Chair Gillett stepped down as co-chair of the University Structure and Governance Committee, and served as a regular member of the Budget and Finance Committee instead; and after one transitional year, Chair Oliver stepped down as co-chair of the University Structure and Governance Committee and continues as a regular member.

The work of the Senate chair is time-consuming. In addition to the visible duties of chairing meetings of the Senate and of the Executive Committee, and the need to prepare both those meetings and to develop the agenda of the Executive Committee meetings with the Executive Secretary, the chair:

- meets each semester with the President and with Chancellors
- responds to additional *ad hoc* requests from the Rutgers central administration
- represents the Senate at, and reports on its behalf to, Board of Governors meetings
- serves on one or more Board committees
- represents the Rutgers University Senate at meetings of the Big Ten Academic Alliance Shared Governance meetings
- handles certain personnel matters and deals with decanal reviews

- responds to requests for information from senators and members of the public
- represents the Senate at various events organized by the University

Of course, being a senator, and serving as a member of any of its committees, are themselves serious undertakings that require significant time commitments. The University Senate is a volunteer organization and all senators, not just chairs, continue to have other major responsibilities. Committee chairs, in particular, are not just responsible for planning and running their committee meetings; to them also falls the lion's share of report writing.

The Executive Committee issues charges to committees; subsequently, it receives reports from committees and ultimately docketed them for presentation, debate, and possible votes on any resolutions, at Senate meetings. Each member is also responsible for acting as Executive Committee liaison to one or more standing committees of the Senate, and reporting on the activities of those committees as necessary. In general, the Executive Committee does not involve itself directly in the work of other standing committees, but does concern itself with the reports received from them, and whether or not they are ready to be docketed for debate in the Senate.

A procedure used by many organizations is to provide that the chair shall be *ex officio* a member of all committees (usually, except for a few where this would not be appropriate). In our case, such a procedure would allow (but not require) the chair to attend the meetings of any standing committee, while freeing the chair from the obligation to attend the meetings of a single assigned committee, as well as from the duties of chairing a standing committee. It also allows for the possibility of the chair needing to attend to urgent Senate matters in the morning before Senate meetings, and could potentially improve communication between the Executive Committee and standing committees *before* reports are submitted. With eight standing committees at the present time (not including the Nominating Panel, the Appeals Panel, and the Executive Committee itself) and only seven or eight regularly scheduled committee meetings each year (though in the right circumstances, the Senate chair might be able to attend more than one on certain days), strengthening the relationship between the Executive Committee and the other standing committees could be a valuable benefit, while freeing the chair from greater responsibilities towards a single committee for the year.

There appears to be no need to extend this provision to Ad Hoc committees (which in any case was not part of the charge to the University Structure and Governance Committee); the chair can be assigned to these as and when they are formed by the Executive Committee, unless this seems undesirable.

## **Recommendations**

A single small change to the Handbook of the University Senate will be sufficient to release the Senate chair from assignment to a single committee and to make the Senate Chair a member *ex officio* of the standing committees. This will provide greater flexibility in the event of urgent Senate business arising in the hours before Senate meetings, as well as promoting better communication between the Executive Committee and the other committees, and allowing the chair to meet more senators. As the current edition of *Roberts' Rules* points out, it would not be appropriate for this to be extended to the Nominating Panel, especially because in our case chairs may wish to run for second and third one-year terms. In addition, the Handbook already explicitly provides that the Appeals Panel is chaired by the Senate vice chair, so it does not seem necessary or appropriate for the Senate chair to be an *ex officio* member; happily, the Appeals Panel is not required to meet in most years. Although the Executive Committee is listed in the Handbook with our other standing committees, the Senate chair is already a member.

The University Structure and Governance Committee therefore recommends that Article VIII.B.1 of the Handbook of the University Senate be amended to provide that in addition to chairing the Executive Committee, the Senate chair shall be a member *ex officio* of all Senate standing committees other than the Nominating Panel and the Appeals Panel.

## **Resolution**

### **Be it resolved that the Rutgers University Senate recommends:**

that in Article VIII.B.1 of the Handbook of the University Senate, the final sentence:

Senators elected to the Executive Committee, however, will also be assigned to an additional committee.

be amended to read:

Senators elected to the Executive Committee, however, will also be assigned to an additional committee—except for the chair, who shall be a member *ex officio* of all standing committees other than the Nominating Panel and the Appeals Panel.



## University Structure and Governance Committee 2020 – 2021

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