

**DATE:** 12 January 2010  
**TO:** Linda Olson and Faculty Senate Academic Planning Committee  
**FR:** Dean Saitta, Anthropology Chair and AAUP Chapter President  
**RE:** Suggestions for Committee Process

Many thanks for the opportunity to share observations and experiences about the Gen Ed Review process. You asked for a list of suggestions about how to improve the process. The following are made with curriculum review in mind but they might apply to other areas covered by faculty shared governance.

1. The Senate has a constitutional charge “to formulate, debate, and adopt policy recommendations regarding any aspect of the life of the university and to communicate these recommendations to the administration.” The Chancellor has suggested on numerous occasions that the Faculty Senate should make better use of its power. The Academic Planning Committee should be actively involved in academic planning, even if it is not specifically charged with a task. It could provide a formal, independent evaluation of any university committee’s work that affects the academic enterprise. Minimally, it can do more to facilitate better faculty discussion and debate about academic issues and proposals.

2. The Senate should have a leading role in forming university committees. Committees should include faculty members who are knowledgeable about, and experienced with, the issue at hand. We currently fill committees using a mix of unit elections and administrator appointments. We might consider a process whereby the Senate Executive Committee consults with administrators (Provost, Deans, Directors) to identify and *invite* participation by colleagues who have the knowledge, experience, dedication, and open-mindedness to best serve the university and its students. This should be done with more careful attention to adequate representation of affected units in order to avoid over-representation, revolving-door representation, and other problems. The committee chair should be designated through a similar process of consultation.

3. The process for curriculum reform should follow a strategy akin to that suggested by the AACU. It should start with a campus-wide collective inquiry about curricular goals and/or discussion in small interdisciplinary groups, rather than with the collected concerns of individual (and typically self-interested) units. The process of curriculum development should be as iterative as possible and include the sharing of multiple drafts instead of just a single draft that, by the time it gets to faculty, is pretty much immunized against significant revision. Duke University’s unusually successful process of Gen Ed reform was characterized by hundreds of email exchanges between committee members and faculty, and a couple dozen formal revisions of the official proposal.

4. Because we seek to create a campus-wide research and assessment culture, committee work should be informed by *comprehensive* background research. This includes thorough study of (a) the professional literature on an issue, (b) practices at comparable institutions with similar missions, (c) all recommendations and documents relevant to the issue that have been produced by other university committees, and (d) any relevant assessment data.

5. Consistent with a campus-wide research and assessment culture, in instances where a process concludes with a faculty vote analysis of the results would be appropriate to see if anything can be learned that might inform future practice. Analysis of the faculty Gen Ed vote disclosed that (a) only 51% of undergraduate faculty cared to vote on a curriculum that will affect 100% of undergraduate students; (b) the vote turnout was significantly higher in units that seemed to encourage discussion and debate, (c) faculty in the academic unit having ownership of the eliminated CREX requirement voted unanimously against the proposal, suggesting that insufficient attention was paid to securing the buy-in of these colleagues (something that could have been anticipated and addressed by making a discretionary committee appointment from that unit); (d) a majority of units in NSM voted against the proposal which, given that the science requirement was not being changed while others were being reduced or eliminated, suggests a flawed operating assumption that there’s widespread consensus in NSM about what science education for non-majors should look like.

6. We need some faculty re-education about the meaning of academic freedom. We should reaffirm the fact that *all* faculty members have equal status as co-owners of our academic enterprise. We should make sure that all faculty input on a proposal—in whatever form, and especially where *general* education is concerned—is respected and addressed. We should ensure that faculty have the widest possible latitude in meeting Gen Ed goals. We should certainly avoid imposing a particular classroom pedagogy on each other, just as we would resist such an imposition by administrators and external stakeholders.