

## **Senate Executive Committee Report on Department Bylaws (June 4, 2018)**

### **Introduction**

By tradition and custom, shared governance is a central academic value not only for the university as a whole, but also for individual academic departments and units. Written bylaws (sometimes called policies and procedures or charters in some departments on campus) are typically used by an organization to codify its rules for how it governs itself and conducts its business. Following the advice of the Auburn University Chapter of the AAUP, the Senate leadership has been discussing with the Provost's Office the value of bylaws for clarifying the expectations for shared governance within academic departments and other comparable units. In Spring 2017 the Provost's Office requested from the colleges and schools all currently existing bylaws. The responses revealed that few departments have bylaws outside of the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Agriculture (see Appendix below). After a review of the existing internal governance documents conducted in May 2018 by James Goldstein, Immediate Past Chair of the Senate, the Senate Executive Committee offers this report to the University Senate, with suggestions to departments or other comparable academic units that wish to consider creating bylaws for internal governance.

### **Rationale for bylaws**

Although many departments have long operated without a formal written document codifying internal governance, in our view the benefits of having written bylaws will likely outweigh the inconvenience of creating them. Bylaws are especially useful for newly hired faculty members who wish to understand the culture of shared governance in the department or unit. Bylaws provide clarity and transparency to faculty members about how internal decisions affecting the department are made, including administrative appointments, committee work, curricular design, managing resources, long-term planning, and other forms of participation in a collective decision-making process. Bylaws may also prove useful to a department or unit that seeks to understand how its governance practices compare with those of similar units on campus. The process of writing bylaws provides an opportunity for an academic unit to

think intentionally about its shared expectations for governance, and to articulate those expectations carefully in writing. Finally, bylaws can strengthen mutual understandings between a department and college and university administrations about self-governance in matters that are primarily internal to the department.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

Because departments and comparable academic units on campus vary greatly in mission, history, size and complexity, number and kinds of degree programs, proportion of tenure-line to non-tenure-track faculty, internal and external constituencies, etc., no single template for bylaws would likely serve the needs of all departments. However, for departments considering the creation of bylaws for the first time, the following list provides a sense of the range of topics that are frequently included in governance documents. Excluded are such matters as the department's promotion and tenure standards, and other policies and procedures that do not directly pertain to matters of shared governance, such as policies on leaves and other research support, course loads, assignment of workspace, summer teaching, etc.

#### **Typical Content of Department/Unit Bylaws**

- **Date** of original and amended versions of bylaws
- **Introduction** (may include mission statement, purpose, etc.); statement that college and university policies (e.g. *Faculty Handbook*) take precedence over department bylaws
- **Faculty membership**; eligibility for voting and on what matters
- **Meetings**: frequency, rules of order (Robert's, Sturgis, Keesey's, etc.), how called, agendas, minutes
- **Internal organization**
  - **Head/chair (or director)**: eligibility, process of election, term of office, duties/responsibilities; how evaluated by department

- **Other administrative officers**, such as associate/assistant head/chair; GPO; director undergraduate studies; program directors: eligibility, process of selection, term of office, responsibilities
- **Standing committees**: how members chosen, terms, responsibilities; for example, executive/steering/advisory; graduate; undergraduate; curriculum; planning; scheduling; P&T; assessment; honors & awards; teaching effectiveness; diversity
- **Ad hoc committees**: how appointed, charged
- **Procedure for amending bylaws**
- **Approval of bylaws and amendments by the dean or provost**
  - **Policies** (not all bylaws include policies); for example, job search/hiring procedures (TT, NTT); merit salary raises; performance reviews

## **Recommendations**

The Senate Executive Committee offers the following recommendations to departments and comparable academic units:

- that they adopt bylaws;
- that they review their bylaws from time to time;
- that they allow for the temporary suspension of bylaws when extraordinary circumstances dictate.

## Appendix

### Departments/Units with Current Bylaws or Similar Governance Document

#### CLA

Art and Art History  
(School of) Communication and Journalism  
CMDS (list of committees and officers)  
English  
Foreign Languages  
History  
Music  
Philosophy  
Political Science  
Psychology  
Sociology, Anthropology, Social Work  
Theatre

#### Other colleges

Agricultural Economics  
Animal Sciences (miscellaneous policies)  
Electrical Engineering and Computer Science  
Entomology and Plant Pathology (administrative structure described in program review report)  
(School of) Fisheries, Aquaculture, Aquatic Sciences  
Mathematics and Statistics