

How We Got Here - Spring 2010

For Senate all-institute meeting & campus distribution

The Academic Senate was formed in 1991 to remedy deficiencies in Pratt's governance structure noted in connection with accreditation of the Institute by Middle States and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD). Since then, we have had what the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) terms a classic shared governance structure. The Senate, elected by the faculty, is empowered to make independent judgments regarding academic matters, including curricula. The independence of the Pratt Academic Senate was secured through by-laws approved by the Board of Trustees and had, until now, been honored by all parties.

Our classic shared governance structure, via the Senate, is in contrast to alternative models of governance, which allow for appointment of faculty, without election, to all-institute committees with upper administration. The imbalance of power and authority in such committees can place unfair pressure on faculty and inhibit deliberation. Pratt's Senate, on the other hand, is an elected body that **independently** represents faculty in governance and academic matters.

Two years ago, the administration hired an outside consultant, John Erickson, to conduct an evaluation of governance at Pratt. A report was issued. To the Senate's surprise, it recommended a significantly diminished role for faculty in governance. Few of the issues raised by senators in interviews were addressed in the Report. The Senate expressed its concerns in a memo to President Schutte and the Board of Trustees. Our memo received no response.

The Administration subsequently appointed an Academic Governance Oversight Committee (AGOC) to implement recommendations of the Erickson report. **The Senate was not consulted or included in finalizing the recommendations for implementation,** notwithstanding that both Senate bylaws and the Erickson Report specifically require that the Academic Senate approve academic policies and procedures.

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The AGOC initiated a new Institute-Wide Curriculum Committee (IWCC) comprised of upper administrators, chairs and faculty. This committee reports to the administration. The AGOC requested that the Senate appoint select members of the current Senate Academic Policies & Procedures Committee (APPC) to serve on the new administrative committee (IWCC). The Senate, with trepidation but in good faith, accommodated the AGOC request, in spite of the fact that the Report required that faculty on the IWCC be elected, not appointed.

Bylaws for the IWCC were then drawn up and approved by its members, again without consultation with the Senate. When the Senate finally read the IWCC bylaws, it learned that the IWCC had accorded itself authority in curriculum review currently held by faculty through the Senate. **The Senate was formed specifically to oversee curriculum.** In other words, the bylaws of the IWCC and the Senate were in conflict. We emphasize that the Erickson report recommended respecting Senate bylaws.

The Senate, in accordance with its role in approving policies and procedures, requested an opportunity to review and approve the IWCC bylaws. The request was ignored.

It is now apparent to the Senate that it is being asked to disregard its own bylaws. That is, the Senate is being told to participate in its own demise, effectively ending the Institute's only faculty governance body that has any authority or influence in academic matters.

The Senate subsequently withdrew its APPC members from the IWCC in order to continue the Senate's ordinary business of curricular review. The Senate believes it is essential for faculty to retain its independent voice regarding curriculum. In order to remain effective and candid, the faculty must be able to deliberate without undue influence by administrators.

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We have tried to work with the administration and Board to resolve governance issues internally and in a mutually acceptable manner, but have seen the steady erosion of the faculty's role. We have now reached an impasse. Looking for guidance, as the Administration did earlier with Erickson, the Senate is now requesting an outside evaluation.

The Senate has resolved to engage the AAUP, a recognized national authority on university governance, tenure and academic freedom. We note that the AAUP has frequently been cited by many in our community as an authority on academic freedom. We have asked the AAUP to conduct an *evaluation* of Pratt's state of governance. This request has elicited strong reactions. To clarify: We are not, at present, requesting an investigation, which could lead to sanctions by the AAUP. Instead, we are just asking for an evaluation of our current situation. We have several times invited the Administration and Board to join us in seeking the AAUP's counsel.

An evaluation is a preliminary assessment of the situation in question. After the AAUP issues a report, the decisions for an AAUP investigation would fall to the next elected Senate. We are now simply asking for informed and impartial advice, review and comment. We believe the AAUP is the appropriate unbiased expert organization to clarify the current situation.

The Senate is the elected representative body of Pratt faculty in academic matters. We want faculty to retain the independent and uncompromised voice in Institute governance.

REFERENCE

FROM THE AAUP'S "STATEMENT ON GOVERNMENT OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES," SECTION 5, REGARDING FACULTY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE (emphases added)

"The faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process. On these matters the power of review or final decision lodged in the governing board or delegated by it to the president should be exercised adversely only in exceptional circumstances, and for reasons communicated to the faculty. It is desirable that the faculty should, following such communication, **have opportunity for further consideration and further transmittal of its views to the president or board**

Agencies for faculty participation in the government of the college or university should be established at each level where faculty responsibility is present. An agency should exist for the presentation of the views of the whole faculty. The structure and procedures for faculty participation should be designed, approved, and established by joint action of the components of the institution. **Faculty representatives should be selected by the faculty according to procedures determined by the faculty."**

**FROM THE PRATT FACULTY HANDBOOK
PART 01. ORGANIZATION & GOVERNANCE
FACULTY GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

"The charter of Pratt Institute vests the Board of Trustees with the primary responsibility for the educational and financial well being of the institution. The Board, in turn, authorizes the president and administration to direct the Institute in its many and complex operations. **The Board, the president, and the administration recognize the important role of the faculty in developing, implementing, and monitoring the content and quality of Institute programs, curricula, and courses. To this end the Institute has established an academic senate** composed of faculty and chair representatives elected directly by the faculty and chairs of the Institute. The academic senate is a faculty administration governance body that relates directly to the president and provost without review by any other Institute group.