

## COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This section contains comments on the Findings and Recommendations as they do not directly relate to governance matters, which are central to the Senate. Many of the Recommendations do not appear to issue from, or be informed by, the Findings, which seem to point to matters of management, personal interactions and behavior.

### EXPANSION OF THE ROLE OF THE SENATE

The Senate's expanded role observed by Erickson in matters not directly related to curriculum (Finding 7) as well as those that are curricular (Finding 8) were stop gap measures in an administrative vacuum over matters that affect academics.

The Senate's expanded role noted in Finding 7 was in matters not directly related to curriculum. These 2004 Senate initiatives were stop gap measures in collaboration with the administration and the Senate has no intention to continue (see October 2, 2007 Senate Resolution on Workload). The Senate did not expand its role in matters directly related to curriculum (Finding 8). Conflation of Finding 7 and Finding 8 may, however, lead to erroneous conclusions, so the separation of the two and the circumstances for the expansion are detailed as follows:

#### **A1. Expansion in Matters not Directly Related to Curriculum (Finding 7)**

In Finding 7, Erickson notes that the Senate has expanded its role into matters not directly related to curriculum:

*The Academic Senate has taken on roles and responsibilities that might more appropriately be handled by the Provost's Office (or other administrative offices). The stance of Academic Senate leadership is that the Senate has taken on these responsibilities because they have not been addressed by the Provost's Office. This self-appropriated expansion of the role of the Academic Senate has led over time to the Senate functioning as a quasi-parallel Academic Affairs office...*

The observation apparently relates to the Senate's organizing New Faculty Orientation and effecting electronic balloting for students in the Distinguished Teacher Award selection process. Carried out in accordance with the following Senate Resolution on Academic Resources, the purpose was to assist the Provost's Office and the administration for the benefit of the faculty and, by extension, the students.

## **2004-Apr 20: RESOLUTION TO FORM A SENATE ACADEMIC RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE**

RESOLVED, that the Senate form a Senate Academic Resources Subcommittee, as a component of the Senate's Academic Concerns & Support Committee.

The Senate Academic Resources Subcommittee will assist the Office of the Provost in addressing issues related to the ordinary and on-going support of the academic life at Pratt, such as:

- new faculty information package and sessions, including the proposed pilot package and session scheduled for Fall 2004; and in that connection, maintenance and publication of the Faculty Handbook and a proposed New Faculty and Staff Guide
- electronic balloting for the Distinguished Teacher Award
- information and communication, including the maintenance of the current senate website and senate-sponsored listservs

Members of Senate sub-committees may be non-Senators, including administrative staff members.

Since then, the Institute has formed the Division of Information Technology, which has filled previous gaps to provide infrastructure and support for essential academic services. Under all the circumstances, the Senate voluntarily backed out of those projects, resolving its withdrawal, as follows:

## **2007-Oct 2: RESOLUTION ON SENATE WORKLOAD**

WHEREAS, the Senate has become freighted by administrative duties that could and should be undertaken by the Office of the Provost, which has contributed to a fractious relationship between the two bodies; and

WHEREAS, the Senate recognizes that its workload has become overwhelming and furthermore that senate members must take a greater leadership role in setting the agenda of the senate so as to improve its effectiveness;

THEREFORE, this 2nd day of October, 2007;

RESOLVED, that the Academic Senate devote a full regular meeting to sorting its workload and prioritizing its issues in such a way that it can identify, locate and effectively deal with priority items so that the Senate can return to its primary mission to foster better teaching and learning.

It has never been nor is it now the intention of the Senate to usurp administrative functions.

## **A2. Role and Responsibilities in Matters Directly Related to Curriculum (Finding 8)**

The Report contends in Finding 8 that Senate Bylaws do not “explicitly support” its authority over curricular review. Although the Finding recognizes the existence of precedent and practice, it suggests that the absence of explicit support in the Bylaws poses some undefined issue. The Finding misstates history, misreads the Bylaws and overlooks the context within which the Senate was formed.

*Finding 8 reads: . While there is precedent and prior practice for some of the Senate’s current roles (especially curriculum “approval”), the Senate bylaws (which refer to the Senate “reviewing structures of programs, curricula, and schools”) do not explicitly support these expanded roles. (See See Exhibit A)*

As stated in points 1, 2 and 3 of the memo, the Senate was formed specifically to give faculty a meaningful voice in key academic decisions, particularly those in curriculum.

Historically, the Senate’s authority in curricular matters has not expanded. On the contrary, Senate authority in academic policies and procedures has diminished in recent years. The reduction has come from administrative fiat and as a consequence of the Provost’s circumvention of standing academic policies and procedures (see Archives of Senate Resolutions, [HTTP://WWW.PRATTSENATE.ORG/ACTIONS](http://www.prattsenate.org/actions)). The Senate adheres to established Institute policies and, where applicable, accreditation requirements and New York State Education Regulations. Conflicts are inevitable when administrative circumvention departs from standing policies and regulatory requirements.

Where the Senate appears to have “expanded” in this context are in administrative functions, such as oversight of procedures, providing a forum for administrative input into policy and curricular matters as well as ensuring compliance with institute policies as well as accreditation requirements and New York State Education Regulations. This expansion occurred as a matter of course and by default, as curricular paperwork and applications made their way to the Senate.

## **Lack of Administrative Structures and Oversight**

The apparent lack of administrative oversight related to academic policies and procedures are noted as follows in the Report:

*There are broader, Institute-wide, issues relative to written policies and procedures (extent to which policies/procedures exist, are current, are accessible, and are followed); Finding 14.*

*Process-wise, there is insufficient distinction between major curriculum planning and policy issues and those of lesser importance; Finding 9.*

*There is very limited delegation of authority relative to academic decision-making. Even when decision-making appears to have been moved “downward,” multiple levels of further review or approval are required; Finding 10.*

*There is insufficient definition of shared or distinct roles within the various arenas of academic decision-making and governance and little common understanding of or adherence to these roles where defined. For example, curriculum planning and review may be hindered by a lack of clear definition of roles in curriculum planning and review for Chairs and Deans. Furthermore, the role and responsibilities of the Deans’ Council seems not well-defined or understood; Finding 11.*

The Report further distinguishes between issues of administrative function and governance in Finding 13:

*The need for greater clarity of responsibilities, as well as improved communication and transparency, extends beyond this project’s limited focus on academic governance and decision-making.*

Findings 9, 10, 11 and 14 do not relate to academic governance and decision-making processes. They pertain to administrative functions, to which the Report recommends the following remedies:

*The Provost’s Office should facilitate and coordinate appropriate guidance, support, and development opportunities for Deans, Chairs, and Departmental/School curriculum committees, so that individuals understand requirements and process expectations for new course proposals, new program proposals, and other assigned responsibilities (Recommendation 7).*

*Evaluate the adequacy of staff and other resources needed by the Provost’s Office to carry out its responsibilities (Recommendation 9).*

### **A3. Infrastructural Support for Faculty and Chairs**

Recommendation 1 iii: *“Move decision-making downward to the extent possible”*

The Senate supports this, with a strong recommendation that the institute provide the appropriate infrastructure and support resourced directly to Chairs, to enable faculty - the majority of who teach part-time - to meaningfully participate. The Senate also notes that this *would* and *should not* preclude faculty and chair participation in decision-making at the institute level through its duly elected and chartered governance body, the Academic Senate.

As noted in Middle States’ 1991 Report to Pratt Institute: *“An equally important function is the senate’s potential role in curriculum development, and in ensuring that the curriculum is delivered effectively and efficiently. As a body charged with curricular and program review, the Academic Senate is a safeguard against both curricular omissions and redundancies. It also serves as a forum for candid and professional discussions about a core curriculum and the appropriateness and location of additional offerings outside the core. The Academic Senate can also contribute most usefully to discussion and decisions about the ranking of academic priorities, consonant with the Institute’s mission statement.”*

(emphasis provided) (See Exhibit D-2).

### **A4. Communication, Consensus-Building and Cooperation**

The Senate enthusiastically supports Recommendation 4, *“Schedule regular meetings between the Provost and the Academic Senate President...”* as it is a basis for communication, consensus-building and cooperation.

Having recently requested such dialog and cooperation, the Senate asks that the meetings occur between the Provost **and the full Senate**. We suggest that discussion should center on educational issues, such as the pending Middle States’ Periodic Review, including but not limited to the Institute’s commitment to Student Learning Outcomes Assessment and the Report and Assessment of General Education. Other topics of discussion include the six principles underlying Recommendation 1 and the Academic Decision-Making Matrix (Recommendation 1) and the Senate budget (Recommendation 8) vis-à-vis the Senate’s role and function.