MSU Faculty Senate briefing paper for President Cruzado

Faculty Senate charge. According to its bylaws: “Faculty Council (now Faculty Senate) is the chief governance body of the faculty of Montana State University-Bozeman and, together with Professional Council, a constituent of University Governance Council. Within the authority and constraints of the Montana University System powers as described in the Constitution of the State of Montana, Council has authority to frame the policies, procedures and standards of the Faculty Handbook. These policies, which are incorporated in and made part of the faculty member’s annual Professional Employment (Board of Regents) Contract foster a climate of academic freedom throughout the University; promote equity in tenure, promotion in academic rank, workload, and salary; uphold academic standards, and uphold standards and procedures of accountability concerning faculty ethics and responsibilities. Council provides a means for faculty and administration to interact and discuss University business including long range and strategic planning, budgeting, curriculum, accreditation, and graduation requirements.” In addition to Faculty Senate standing committees (e.g., University Governance Council Steering Committee, Faculty Affairs Committee, and Academic Affairs Committee) faculty representatives, either appointed from the Faculty Senate membership or elected from the general faculty, serve on most major MSU planning, governance, and curriculum committees. Among these, the most important are the University Budget Planning and Analysis Committee (UPBAC), the Strategic Planning Committee, the University Facilities Planning Committee, and the University Promotion and Tenure Committee. In light of recent approval of two new collective bargaining units, known jointly as the Associated Faculty of Montana State University (AFMSU), some aspects of the above charge, particularly regarding salary and working conditions, will certainly need revision once contract negotiations are completed. According to current procedures the Faculty Senate (FS) chair and chair-elect meet weekly with the president, provost, and vice-provost for academic affairs to discuss faculty and administrative concerns and issues. The agendas for these meetings are prepared by the FS chair. In addition, the president meets privately with FS leaders approximately once each month.

Membership. According to FS bylaws: “Voting members on Faculty Council (Senate) are elected by their constituencies from the tenurable faculty who hold appointments of .25 FTE or greater and do not hold administrative appointments at the level of department head and above. Individual constituencies for the purpose of electing members of Faculty Council are as follows: 1) Each academic department is an individual constituency. 2) Each college wherein faculty [sic] are not further subdivided into departments is an individual constituency.” Further, “each individual constituency shall elect one (1) faculty representative, except the College of Nursing and MSU Extension which shall each elect one additional member to represent the off campus interests of their faculty.” Current FS membership includes 40 constituent departments/colleges (3 currently vacant). The names of members and alternates can be found at: http://www.montana.edu/aircj/coms/faccoun.html.

Recent efforts and successes. A major effort to revise Faculty Handbook (FH) policies on promotion and tenure is ongoing. Over the past two years, several committees including the Faculty Affairs committee of FS and various ad hoc committees composed of Senate members, deans, and central administrators, have grappled with proposed policy changes in three areas: 1) standards for assessment of the “potential for excellence” in teaching and research, 2) methods of soliciting external letters for tenure and promotion, and 3) definitions of and methods for the “in-depth assessment of teaching.” We hope to conclude this effort before the end of the current academic year.

Other major efforts/successes include the following:

- Senate adopted a novel post-tenure review policy in 2005-06.
- Senate’s annual evaluation of department heads, deans, and VPs became FH policy in 2005-06. Recent revisions now require supervisors to use the results of these evaluations “…in a substantive manner” during their annual review of subordinates.
- Successful lobbying of the BoR in 2007 led to a temporary change in Regents’ policy allowing multi-year contracts for adjunct faculty. This policy became permanent in 2009.
- Parental leave options for faculty were expanded and revised FH language was adopted in 2006-07.
- Legislative lobbying in 2007-08 led to a 1% increase in the state’s contribution to the so-called “optional retirement plan” (ORP) for faculty members; the ORP has been the only retirement plan available to
MSU faculty since 1993. In 2008 a Senate resolution sent to the Board of Regents (BoR), governor and legislature, requesting an additional 1% increase in state contribution to the ORP, was unsuccessful. The differential in state contribution to the ORP versus the older Teacher’s Retirement System (TRS) remains unacceptable.

- A “Recruitment and Retention Task Force,” composed of MSU faculty and staff, recommended that the BoR implement a proactive budget planning process and consider differential funding of units based on differential cost-of-living in communities where these units reside. In 2008 the BoR began proactive budget planning; however differential funding for MUS units has not yet been implemented.
- Faculty representation on UPBAC was increased from one to two voting members (current and past FS chairs). FS chair-elect remains a non-voting member.
- FS organized meetings to discuss the proposed new faculty union, prior to the election in 2008 and 2009.
- A new “sick leave reporting policy” proposed by central administration in 2008-09, was opposed by FS and was ultimately withdrawn.
- As in previous years, the FS played a major role in discussions with central administration about the distribution of faculty salary allocations in AY07-08 and AY08-09. Presumably in the future such discussions will be carried out mainly by AFMSU bargaining teams.
- The Association of Shared Governance Leaders (ASGL) was formally recognized by President Gamble in 2009 as a communication venue for shared governance representing the four main MSU constituencies: faculty, students, professional staff, and classified staff.
- ASGL members actively supported the successful passage of the 6-mill levy, a decennial ballot measure that provides a substantial portion of MT state tax revenue for higher education.
- New FH policy on Emeritus Status was approved in 2008-09 allowing more flexibility in awarding emeritus status to retiring faculty.
- Appointment of an FS representative to the so-called “Faculty Advisory Committee” of the VP for Research resulted in greater faculty input to the development of a new (2009) indirect cost (F&A) distribution procedure by the Office of the VPR.
- Sabbatical application and review procedures were recently (2009) revised and approved by the FS.
- Several current and past FS members were intimately involved in MSU’s recent NWCCU accreditation review, particularly in drafting self-study language for Standard 4 (Faculty) and Standard 6 (Governance).
- MSU Senate leadership has played a key role in organizing and interacting with other faculty leaders in the state via the Montana University System Faculty Association Representatives (MUSFAR).
- MUSFAR recently requested that Commissioner Stearns assure a seat at the table for MUS faculty during all BoR meetings. Commissioner Stearns agreed and appointed Deputy Commissioner Sylvia Moore to serve as liaison to MUSFAR.
- In the past 2 months FS chair and chair-elect have been actively engaged in discussions with the Board of Regents’ workgroup on “reinvention and reform,” to explore ways faculty can meaningfully assist in this effort.

Current and future goals. 1. Work closely with Pres. Cruzado to assure continuation, improvement and institutionalization of the faculty role in shared governance at MSU and across the MUS. 2. Maintain primary FS control of promotion and tenure (P&T) policy while negotiation of the first AFMSU contract goes forward; this is essential because many tenurable faculty members are not represented by AFMSU. 3. Complete P&T revisions and update FH policy accordingly. 4. Develop appropriate FH language for a new “Tenure-at-Hire” policy and clarify/revise existing “Special Review” language, while maintaining FS control of the tenure process. 5. Clarify the organizational and operational relationships among Faculty Senate, Professional Council, and various faculty caucuses. 6. Assure continued meaningful faculty involvement in the ongoing Regents’ “reinvention and reform” process. 7. Increase the annual number of sabbaticals available to MSU faculty. 8. Help AFMSU to bring faculty salaries more in line with peers, while taking account of differences in disciplines and ranks. 9. Establish an early retirement incentive program, thereby deflating the so-called “baby-boom bubble.” 10. Continue lobbying for increases in the state contribution to the ORP. 11. Improve implementation of post-retirement contracts; although BoR policy allows 3-year contracts, MSU administration has limited these contracts to 1 year for fiscal reasons. 12. Improve working relationships among FS, central administration, and the Association of Retired Faculty, toward the goal of more effective utilization of the teaching, research, and outreach talents of retired faculty.

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