

The Development of the University of Guam Faculty Senate: A Personal Recollection

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The beginnings of the UOG Faculty Senate can be dated to March 14, 2000. As John Jenson and I were walking out of the CAS Lecture Hall at the close of the WASC Visiting Team's exit address, John asked me if I had noted Dr. Esteban's statements regarding the need for an effective faculty governance system at UOG. I had indeed been interested in those remarks because I had become increasingly aware over the past several years that the faculty had little voice in the affairs of the University, despite the existence of a fairly substantial array of academic committees upon which faculty served. John encouraged me to think about organizing an effort to design a faculty senate that would give the faculty a real voice in academic matters and also meet the accreditation expectations of WASC.

I had been, for several years, involved in UAAC (the University Academic Affairs Committee) and in the Faculty Union; I knew the shortcomings of the existing system, and I became excited to try to come up with something better.

After mulling the issue over for a few days, I sent John an email briefly outlining my ideas for a new faculty governance system. I thought that it should be a representative body that would combine and replace the functions of UAAC and the Faculty Council, with a membership limited to faculty; that members should be elected and should be apportioned in some equitable way among units; that it should deal directly with the University President rather than a vice president; and that its functions should be clearly separated from those of the Faculty Union, which has legal standing to represent the faculty in matters of wages, hours, and working conditions.

John was in full agreement, and we began to consider strategy--how could we design and implement a new faculty governance system? Three things initially concerned us:

1) We did not think that a new governance system could be created by working through the existing committee system. Existing committees were busy with other matters and did not meet frequently enough to devote the time and effort that we felt were required to design a new system. Perhaps most importantly, both UAAC and the Faculty Council reported to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and we did not want the design of the faculty senate to have to meet the approval of the VPAA. Thus, we decided that we would have to form a new faculty group to do the work of developing a faculty senate and to present the finished product directly to the Board of Regents.

2) This group needed to have a strong mandate from the faculty to proceed in this effort, because we wanted the senate to be something that the faculty would support, and we wanted to make it clear to the administration that this was not just the wild ravings of a small group of "disgruntled faculty."

3) We wanted our group to claim "ownership" of the faculty senate idea, to prevent the possible creation of several competing efforts to design a senate, and particularly to prevent the administration from appointing some group to create a senate which met the needs of the administration rather than what we felt were the needs of the faculty.

Our first move was to call together a group of faculty whom we felt would be interested in improving faculty governance to discuss the idea of creating a faculty senate. On April 3, John Jenson, John Keck, Lee Yudin, Leroy Heitz, Don Platt, Ross Miller, Larry Kodiyanplakkal, Harley Manner, and I met and agreed that the idea was worth pursuing and suggested that a meeting should be held to which all faculty were invited.

Such a meeting was held on April 7. Although it was held at the unfashionable hour of 8:00 a.m. on a Friday, some 26 faculty showed up, from all of the colleges as well as the library, student affairs, and the research units. This group also favored the development of a faculty senate and recommended that a poll of the entire faculty be held to gauge faculty support for the concept.

On April 26 a faculty-wide poll was conducted by the Faculty Election Commission. Of the 90 faculty participants, 85 indicated that they believed "there is a need for a reorganization of the governance system and the creation of a Faculty Senate," while only 5 indicated that "the current committee system works fine and needs no change." It looked like a mandate for change!

Added endorsement for the new faculty senate came at about this time when John Jenson was elected chair of the Faculty Council, running on a platform of support for the new faculty governance system.

Two more general faculty meetings were held, on April 28 and May 5, to discuss the design of the faculty senate and how to proceed with its development. As summer was approaching and many faculty would be off-island, a drafting committee was established consisting of faculty who would be available over the summer and were interested in working on the bylaws for the faculty senate. This group, which came to be known as the Faculty Senate Organizing Committee (FSOC), consisted of Mike Ehlert, Nick Goetzfridt, John Jenson, Harley Manner, Bob Morgan, Don Platt, Velma Sablan, Nancy Schmitz, and myself.

The FSOC met weekly over the summer. We consulted the bylaws of faculty senates at other universities that we downloaded from the Internet. We also had considerable collective experience of the existing university committee system and its weaknesses and strengths. As we began developing the senate bylaws, some provisions proved to be quite contentious, while others found ready agreement among the committee members. Among the most complex issues were the membership of the senate, its officers, and its subsidiary committee system.

There was little controversy over the decision that the membership of the faculty senate should be strictly faculty. Administrators had the Administrative Council; students had the SGA; staff had the Staff Council; and so the faculty should have its own Faculty Senate. By

limiting the membership to faculty, the faculty senate would be the "substantial and independent" faculty voice called for by the WASC standards.

There was not much more controversy among the members of the FSOC regarding whether the number of faculty senators from each college should be proportional to the number of faculty in each college. We wanted the senate to be the voice of the faculty not the voice of the colleges, and so it seemed reasonable to give equal representation to all faculty. We played around with a few different formulas and decided that one senator for each 15 faculty members per college would give us a reasonably-sized faculty senate. The consequence of this decision was that a large college such as CAS would have more senators than a small college such as CNHS, but each faculty member, regardless of college, would be equally represented. A survey of faculty senate bylaws from other institutions showed that proportional representation was by far the most common system.

An issue that we revisited several times was the selection of officers. We agreed early on that the senate should have a president, vice president, and secretary, but we were not so easily agreed how those officers should be elected. Members of the committee who had experience with UAAC tended to favor election of the officers from among the elected senators; those who had served in the Faculty Council tended to favor a faculty-wide election of officers who would serve in addition to the elected college senators. The advantage of electing the officers at large is that they have a clear electoral mandate to act for the faculty. The advantage of election from within is that the officers will have a clear mandate to act for the faculty senate. After much debate, the FSOC opted for the election-from-within process.

Designing a committee system to complement the faculty senate was particularly difficult because we were trying to accomplish two seemingly contradictory goals: to expand the role of faculty into areas such as planning, budgeting, and policy-making that were called for by WASC but were not provided for by the existing committee system, and to reduce the "proliferation" of committees for which the university had been criticized by earlier WASC teams. How could we have fewer committees and yet do more? The solution to this problem was one of the neatest tricks of the FSOC: the creation of "standing committees" of the senate, made up of senators, to deal with the new roles of the faculty in governance without actually requiring more elected committee members. The four senate standing committees and the five separately elected academic committees would submit their recommendations to the faculty senate. Three other committees, the Faculty Election Commission, the P&T Committee, and the Student Disciplinary and Appeals Committee were retained intact from the existing system.

By August 16, a draft of the faculty senate bylaws was completed and distributed to the faculty (as well as to administrators, regents, and members of the student government) for their review and comments. On August 22, the Faculty Election Commission conducted a poll to determine whether faculty wanted to move forward on the faculty senate quickly so that it could be in place by the beginning of the Spring 2001 semester, or whether they would prefer to move with more deliberate speed to have the senate in place by the beginning of the Fall 2001 semester. There was overwhelming support for the "fast track" schedule.

Suggestions received from faculty, administrators, and students were considered, and many led to changes in the bylaws. A second draft was distributed to faculty, the student government, the administration, and the regents on September 18. Meetings with various committees, with the Acting President and Acting Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Regent John Beamer, as well as two faculty forums, were held to solicit more input to the bylaws, and a final draft was distributed on October 18. A meeting was held in the CAS Lecture Hall for a final discussion of the bylaws prior to a faculty ratification vote.

The ratification vote was almost derailed at the last minute by a group of faculty who wanted to delay the ratification vote until they had more time to propose changes to the bylaws. In a tempestuous meeting, the FSOC decided that there had been ample opportunity for input already and that the rest of the faculty were ready to vote.

On October 26 the Faculty Senate Bylaws were ratified by a 70% to 30% margin in a vote of the entire faculty. The faculty also ratified an implementation plan that would get the Faculty Senate up and running by January 2001 and the rest of the Academic Committees in place by the Fall 2001 semester.

By this time I was no longer a faculty member, having been appointed Director of the Marine Lab, and so my involvement in the establishment of the Faculty Senate was transformed from direct participation to rooting from the sidelines. The rest of the story is best told by other members of the FSOC and the members and officers of the new Faculty Senate who were able to carry out successful negotiations with the President and the Board of Regents so that the Faculty Senate was chartered by the Board on January 18, 2001, and took up its work, almost on schedule, on February 1, 2001.