

8-27-2014

Governance Review Commission General Rationale

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Governance Review Commission
General Rationale

(drafted by: Oversight Writing Committee
Draft: 8/27/2014)

This revision makes three significant changes to the Otterbein University Governance Structure, and a number of smaller changes to specific articles and sections of the By-Laws. (The changes and rationales for all of the specific changes are included in a Google Document, available at _____.) The three most significant changes are:

1. A change to a “representative” model for University Senate, with a set of four “constituent assemblies” (Student Senate, Faculty Senate, Administrator Assembly, and Staff Council). Each constituent assembly would elect members to the Senate, who would then be responsible for representing their constituency, and communicating with them. Several constituent assemblies (at this point, Faculty Senate, and Student Senate) have increased authority.
2. A change in the size of Senate, and changes in some of the proportions of representation.
3. A significant change in the number of standing committees and subcommittees, and some change in reporting relationship.

For clarity, this section will describe each of these changes in more detail, and provide an explanation and justification for each.

1. A change in model. This actually captures four significant changes: 1) the addition of a student government, with defined responsibilities; 2) a change to a representative system for faculty (students and staff members are already elected from their constituencies) and 3) a change in the ways that members of Administrator Assembly are selected (currently all administrative members, including cabinet level administrators and others, are appointed by the President and VPs; in the new system, there would still be some appointed senior administrators, but all other administrators would be elected from the administrative assembly); and 4) an expectation that the constituent assemblies would have control over the processes by which their representatives are selected and that representatives would have responsibility for communicating to and from their constituencies concerning senate actions (as a consequence, we have also changed the deadlines and processes for communicating senate business and agendas to the campus community).

Another related change is to move some responsibilities that fallen under Senate to Student Government and the Faculty Senate. Responsibilities that have been housed in the Student Life Committee to the Student Government, and the model adds responsibility over Student Activity fees to that group. The Faculty Personnel Committee, Center for Teaching and Learning Advisory Committee, Sabbatical Leaves Committee and Faculty Scholars Committee have been moved under the Faculty Senate.

We made these changes for several reasons. First, since early in our process of soliciting ideas for improvement, we have heard multiple calls for reducing the size of Senate, in some

cases to increase efficiency, in others to reduce the size of the overall workloads for faculty, in others to reflect the fact that attendance was significantly smaller than membership.

We also heard a call for a “representative model” in order to improve communication with constituencies. The argument was made that, because senators don’t represent constituencies, they don’t feel a need to communicate with the other members of their constituencies. For example, because all faculty are members of Senate, those faculty who do attend meetings don’t feel a responsibility to communicate with colleagues who were not in attendance; in fact, they may not even know that those colleagues were not present. Therefore, it was argued, a constituent model would increase transparency and communication.

We discussed and tested these arguments in multiple forums and at multiple Senate meetings, and the general consensus at those sessions was to favor a “middle sized” Senate in a representative structure.

In addition, we are convinced that it is important for members of Administrative Assembly to be elected by the assembly rather than appointed. This increases the authority of that assembly and should lead to increased transparency and an increased sense among the members of that assembly of representation and inclusion in the governance process.

We also believe that a representative model better meets the goals of transparency and accountability for all members and that streamlining the system will increase clarity.

Finally, it is clear from previous attendance patterns that a significant number of eligible senators do not attend meetings (see attached chart), and we believe that a representative model comes closer to mirroring historical attendance patterns and the call to the committee.