Frequently Asked Question on WMU Faculty Senate Operations during COVID-19 Pandemic

Questions and Answers

Question: While other units have moved to virtual participation why hasn’t the Faculty Senate?
Answer: Taking action by holding formal meetings online and remotely is sometimes less about the technical challenges and equally, or more so related to parliamentary guidance.

The Faculty Senate operates under *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*. Remote meeting processes must be created and approved by the Faculty Senate in order to for decisions to have legitimacy. As a partner in shared governance we must be able to back up our decisions. To be clear, even Robert’s Rules of Order have virtual meeting restrictions.

Question: Can Faculty Senate, council and committee meetings be held virtually for normal business and actions?
Answer: Not at this time. The Faculty Senate Executive Board began work on virtual meeting protocol and processes to permit them in June 2020.

Question: Do our bylaws or constitution forbid this?
Answer: No, the Parliamentary authority demands that meeting and voting remotely must be an “opt in” process and without specific guidelines, agreed to in advance and published in our bylaws, such things are not permitted by that core Parliamentary authority.

A set of proposals from the Faculty Senate Executive Board had been moving forward to look at changing our bylaws to permit remote action and perhaps even meetings in a more general way, but ironically the first introduction of that initiative was to have taken place at the March 2020 Senate that had to be cancelled. Therefore, we will move forward with the tools available to us.

The Executive Board cannot unilaterally modify the constitution and bylaws, but it can in all other ways act on behalf of the Senate, its councils and committees. The Executive Board adopted an emergency resolution allowing it to meet via Webex to deal with the core mission and provide guidance to all concerned parties. Any actions taken will be able to be reviewed by the entire Senate when it can next convene following the pandemic.

Question: Can the Executive Board simply authorize others to meet virtually?
Answer: No. The Executive Board cannot unilaterally change the bylaws, and a change in bylaws is required to permit the body of the Senate, its councils and committees to hold meetings virtually.
**Question:** Is the Executive Board acting in isolation?

**Answer:** No. In fact, the Executive Board has encouraged informal meetings as necessary related to ongoing initiatives. Matters relating to research have been referred to the Research Policies Council to provide input and guidance; graduate issues have been referred to the Graduate Studies Council for advice and comment. It is merely that those bodies cannot act in any formal way.

Many of our initiatives are moving forward, though things that had been incomplete must, out of necessity, be postponed. The administration is actively engaging the Executive Board in soliciting advice and input and the Executive Board is actively advancing the interests of the faculty and the entire institution (excluding those issues reserved to collective bargaining agreements).

While normally you might ask a council member or chair to take up an issue, during these times we reiterate, it is necessary that all questions, concerns potential action items be directed to the Faculty Senate office.

**Question:** How will the Faculty Senate operate during summer I/summer II 2020?

**Answer:** The Faculty Senate Executive Board will meet regularly through virtual means, during the summer. The Senate leadership will establish and maintain regular contact with the various members of the administration and partners in share governance. Councils and committees have the option to meet (informally at this time) virtually during June and should complete their annual reports. Fall meetings will be scheduled for the Senate, councils and committees with back-up virtual options (assuming Senate approval of proposed processes being developed). Reviews and researching best practices for returning to face to face meetings will be initiated. Please remember that even in normal times, it is the Executive Board that operates on behalf of the Senate during the summer months. That has not changed.

**Question:** How will the newly elected Senate communicate with the faculty?

**Answer:** During the latter part of spring semester 2020, there was irregular communication with some members of the administration because of the rapidly evolving Covid-19 pandemic. We are making every effort to resume regular communication with a variety of University constituents. During summer 2020, the Faculty Senate Executive Board will communicate regularly with the entire faculty to the fullest extent possible. When the University resumes normal operations, regular communication will be disseminated to your Department’s faculty Senator.

On April 10, 2020 a motion of the Faculty Senate Executive Board on behalf of the Faculty Senate was passed which states: *no action taken by the Faculty Senate, or its agents, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic shall be considered precedence setting.*