Faculty Service on Elected, Standing, and Special Committees

A Statement of Principles from the Faculty Executive Committee

Introduction

The role of faculty committees in the governance of colleges and universities is deeply rooted in tradition. For Kalamazoo College this is codified broadly in the Faculty Bylaws and occurs in part through elected, standing, and special or ad hoc committees and in faculty meetings. The elected committees include the Faculty Executive Committee (named the Executive Committee of the Faculty in the bylaws) and the Faculty Personnel Committee (named the Personnel Committee of the Faculty in the bylaws). The Faculty Bylaws delegate oversight of these committees to the Faculty Executive Committee. For standing committees this involves assigning faculty members to these committees, approving or setting the agendas of standing committees in consultation with those committees, assisting committees in achieving their goals, and periodically reviewing their charges and compositions. In addition, there are special committees established by administrators or others that call upon the services of faculty colleagues. Membership on faculty committees may include administrators or students in addition to faculty members.

What follows is a statement from the Faculty Executive Committee on faculty committee service that results from the work of restructuring faculty committees over the past several years. The goal of this statement is to clarify faculty committee function with regard to responsibilities of and protections for faculty members; administrator and student membership; general committee operation; and committee chair duties.

Role of Faculty Members

1. Primary Mission – We assume that the primary mission of the faculty is teaching and advising, scholarship, and service.

2. Governance – We assume that faculty members value the role of faculty governance in the life of the College. We assume further that the notion of shared governance involving interaction among faculty, administrators, and trustees is an important goal. This does not mean that faculty members necessarily share with administrators and trustees responsibility and accountability for major decision-making at the College.

3. Faculty Role on Committees – Because much of faculty governance is accomplished through the work of committees, service on them should be seen as an important task for all professors for whom this is a position expectation. Faculty members need to be competent and engaged enough to consider the complex issues that individual committees may address but not necessarily expert in the details of those issues. A critical role for the Faculty Executive Committee is the protection of faculty members’ time, and colleagues are encouraged not to assume too many committee assignments at one time.

4. Special or ad hoc Committees – Creation and staffing of special committees requiring faculty participation should normally go through the Faculty Executive Committee. Duplication of
effort with existing groups, especially faculty standing committees, should be avoided, and whenever possible business should be routed through standing committees. Faculty representatives cannot be provided for every meritorious purpose, and the Executive Committee is often unaware of generation of special committees. Administrators responsible for establishing these committees usually approach those faculty members who will become members but should do so with the concurrence of the Executive Committee.

**Role of Administrators**

1. **Professionalization** – As more functions in the academic realm have been assumed by professional administrators, the ability of faculty members to master technically demanding aspects of higher education has declined. Thus certain faculty committees require the input of administrative colleagues. The strength of the faculty governance structure in this regard lies in faculty members’ ability to provide alternative perspectives on important issues, including institutional memory, disciplinary expertise, and direct academic contact with students.

2. **Numbers of Administrators on Committees** – Administrators should not outnumber faculty members on standing committees of the faculty.

3. **Membership by Administrators on Several Committees** – This aspect capitalizes on the benefit of administrative insight into specific issues handled by different committees. Advantage conferred to administrators by this detailed knowledge should be used to direct the agenda of a given committee with great care.

4. **Exclusion of Administrators in Committee Meetings** – Standing committees vary in their approach to meeting with administrators whose expertise may be necessary for success in achieving the committee’s mission. Faculty committees should define the circumstances under which administrators, particularly those specified for membership in committee charge and composition statements, should be excluded from meetings.

5. **Administrator Voting** – Individual committees determine procedures for formal voting by administrator members of faculty committees.

**Role of Students**

1. **Investment** – Having a major stake in the College’s operation and distinctive perspectives, students may contribute to the work of faculty committees. At the same time they are also limited by their experience in contributing substantively to accomplishing a committee’s agenda.

2. **Selection of Student Representatives** – Student representatives are normally elected by the students as a whole or are appointed by the Student Commission.

3. **Numbers of students on committees** – Students should not outnumber faculty members on standing committees of the faculty.
4. Responsibilities – In order that student representatives function effectively on faculty committees, they should attend committee meetings regularly and read carefully any materials distributed in advance of meetings.

5. Learning experience – Faculty members on committees should ensure that committee membership is a constructive learning experience for students.

6. Exclusion of Administrators in Committee Meetings – Faculty committees should define the circumstances under which students should be excluded from meetings. Examples of taking this action might include discussion of issues that name specific faculty or other staff members.

7. Student Voting – In 2007 the Faculty Executive Committee and officers of the Student Commission reached accord on student voting on faculty standing committees that was approved by the faculty standing committees having student representatives. When formal votes are taken, only one student member will vote on a given committee, and that student will be the most experienced representative. He or she will consult with the other student members in advance of the vote. The Student Commission has devised procedures for handling the absence of experienced student representatives.

Committee Function

1. Current Standing Committee Array – The Faculty Executive Committee periodically assesses the array of standing committees to determine if they are the best ones to accomplishing the mission of the faculty.

2. Charges and Compositions for Standing Committees – At this point committee charges and compositions for all standing committees match current practice reasonably closely. So that these remain current, individual committees need to review their charges regularly and suggest changes as needed; this should be done at a minimum at least yearly. The Executive Committee assumes primary responsibility for periodic review of charges and compositions of all committees periodically.

3. Procedures of the Faculty Executive Committee and the Faculty Personnel Committee – These are posted in the Faculty Handbook and on the Intranet.

4. Faculty Service on Committees – For the elected committees the duration of service for faculty colleagues should be defined by the term of office, usually three years with the possibility of reelection once. Academic and other types of leaves do not suspend the service clock. A replacement should be selected to complete the unfinished term or to cover leave absences. Members of elected committees normally do not serve on standing committees.

   Except for unusual circumstances the typical service length for faculty members on standing committees is three years. Exemptions from committee service may be allowed for good reason but must be requested formally; faculty colleagues should not seek exemptions
in successive years. The annual committee preference form allows for requests for exemption. The Executive Committee regards the practice of routinely asking for exemption from committee service as unfair to one’s colleagues and strongly discourages this.

Because of the difficulty in maintaining continuity in standing committee membership and especially in identifying experienced colleagues to act as committee chairs, exemption for faculty members from assignment to standing committees for work on special committees or other duties requires careful consideration by the Executive Committee. Faculty colleagues, especially untenured members, who are in doubt about accepting assignments on special committees, should consult with their Executive Committee representatives or other trusted associates. Service as department or division chair does not usually alter one’s availability for committee service.

5. Committee Member Lists – A list of membership for all elected, standing, advisory, and many special committees is made available at the start of each academic year. This inventory is a resource that should be consulted when committee staffing by members of the College community is undertaken.

Committee Chair Responsibilities

The Faculty Executive Committee acknowledges the considerable burden assumed by faculty colleagues chosen to serve as committee chairs. To assist chairs in accomplishing their duties we suggest the following guidelines:

1. The Chair’s Role – The Executive Committee recognizes the importance of having experienced faculty members assume the role of committee chair and the occasional risk assumed by chairs when committees confront controversial issues. For that reason we believe that untenured colleagues should become committee chairs only when that is absolutely unavoidable.

2. Meeting Times – Committees should find meeting times during regular College business hours that do not impose unreasonable burdens on members. This assumes that faculty colleagues and others show sufficient flexibility in their schedules to permit a range of satisfactory meeting times. If this cannot be done, then the impasse should be referred to the Faculty Executive Committee.

3. Consultation – Committees should work in tandem with other committees as appropriate, particularly when issues overlap with several committees’ portfolios. Progress on realizing each committee’s agenda should be communicated to the Executive Committee.

4. Report at Faculty Meetings – Committee chairs should report on committee business with sufficient frequency to allow the faculty to keep abreast of the committee’s activities. There is, of course, no requirement to report at every faculty meeting.

5. Policy Changes – When committees contemplate bringing major policy or procedure changes to the faculty, the Executive Committee should be informed in advance of such action. This
allows for consultation about matching the agendas of committees having common interests
and about scheduling and strategies for issues brought to the monthly faculty meetings,
among other considerations.

6. Charges and Compositions – Committee chairs should be mindful of the need to review
charge and composition statements at least yearly.

March 31, 2006
Revised May 1, 2007