

Memo

To: Gaylene Fasenko, NMSU Faculty Senate Chair
Karen Kopera-Frye, NMSU Faculty Senate-Vice Chair

From: NMSU Faculty Senators Susan Beck, Tanya Allred, Colleen Bond, Chris Erickson, Kellie Sharp-Hoskins, Jamie Bronstein, Glenn Duff, Gus Pino, Erik Lenhoff, Jessica Schulz, Brian Hampton, Tawny Aguirre

Date: September 20, 2023

Re: Recommendations to strengthen NMSU Faculty Senate

As we understand it, the Faculty Senate has the opportunity and responsibility to represent faculty across the NMSU system, and, as a body represented by an elected Chair and Vice Chair, advocate on their behalf. As Faculty Senators, elected by our peers, we are committed to ensuring that the processes, practices, and culture of the Senate are conducive to fulfilling this responsibility. Such a culture requires leadership, organization, and efficiency adequate to the complexity of a large body. It also demands careful communication and deliberation, even when such deliberation is difficult.

As a body, we believe that some of the behaviors evidenced by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Senate have not been conducive to the successful functioning of the Senate. We also believe that such behaviors have emerged in response to specific—and complicated—conditions: it is not easy to run a meeting on Zoom for 70+ people. It is not easy to coordinate Senate responses to NMSU system issues in the face of time pressures and wildly differing opinions. It is certainly not easy to work with such a variety of people, within and beyond the Senate, each of whom has differing priorities, motivations, and personalities.

Rather than record a lack of confidence in the Senate Chair and Vice Chair, then, we use this opportunity to record what we see as important requirements of Senate Administration and invite the Chair and Vice Chair to commit, with us, to the following:

Interacting as a Deliberative Body

The Senate is an important space for information exchange and deliberation, and sometimes there is disagreement and dissension. While disagreement, especially when expressed with strong feelings, can *feel* uncomfortable, it is critical for Senators to be able to express different perspectives without being cut off or shut down.

Commitments

- Actively foster open dialogue
- Keep a queue for discussion
- Allow speakers to speak without cutting them off
- Refrain from responding to every speaker with the perspective of the Chair/Vice Chair

- Avoid muting senator microphones and video access

Creating Inclusive, Accessible Meetings

As reflected in our bylaws changes that encouraged the ongoing use of Zoom to enable folks throughout the NMSU system to attend Senate meetings, the Senate is more accessible (and better attended!), when Senators can attend digitally. Like all issues of accessibility, this practice that is good for some (i.e. folks across the system), ends up creating more accessibility for all (allowing folks with tight schedules to attend, allowing folks with mobility or child care needs to attend, etc.). While electronic meetings create some complexities (around, for example, caucusing and voting), they allow Senators more options for attendance and participation, which is vital to recruiting and maintaining Senate participation.

Commitments

- Understand the functionality of Zoom (what gets recorded and how, where and how it is saved, etc.)
- Enable the chat to allow multiple forms of participation
- Use formal orientation each year to help new Senators understand the processes of Senate meetings (generally) as well as Zoom functionalities

Prioritizing Senate Business

Although communication from non-Senators—including information sharing with administrators across campus—is vital to keeping the Senate informed of the goings on of the NMSU system, it can also interfere with the Senate being able to conduct its primary business: proposing, discussing, and voting on matters *it has* prioritized. Senate meetings should thus prioritize Senate business. Additionally, the number and substance of propositions should match the seriousness of our charge as a Senate: to oversee all issues relevant to the governance and reputation of the NMSU system.

Commitments

- Move any guest speakers until after Senate business is completed and limit time for their presentations/reports
- Invite guests to pre-record videos that can be shared outside of Senate meetings
- Minimize time given to Chair/Vice Chair reports and prioritize timely sharing of written reports

Timely Communication of Information

The Senate Chair and Vice Chair represent the Senate and, by extension, the entire faculty, in many meetings with administrators and campus groups. They are thus privy to information otherwise unavailable to the faculty at large. In this context, it is imperative that information be shared quickly and regularly with both the Faculty Senate and faculty at large, as appropriate.

Commitments

- Timely written reports from the Chair, Vice Chair, and Standing Committee Chairs, uploaded prior to (or very shortly after) full senate meetings
- Send regular updates to the faculty on the concerns and business of the Senate
- Freely share & distribute, rather than interpret, reports from the Board of Regents and NMSU Administration

Relentless Advocacy on Behalf of NMSU System Faculty

As we see it, the most difficult role of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Senate is their responsibility to relentlessly advocate on behalf of the faculty while maintaining relationships of trust and respect with the NMSU administration. This balance is difficult because it requires frank conversations, disagreements, and obstinacy coupled with productive dialogue and listening. We encourage the Faculty Senate Leadership to err on the side of advocacy rather than complaisance, even when it is uncomfortable, lest the Senate lose its power to impact administrative decisions.

Commitments

- Prioritize faculty concerns in all meetings with the NMSU Administration
- Delegate Senate business to appropriate Senate Standing Committees
- Pursue *all* avenues for holding the NMSU administration accountable for its actions
- Both Chair/ Vice Chair should both independently and with SLC hold monthly meetings with NMSU administration, where dialogue, rather than monologue is the modus operandi

Lastly, we request an apology to the Senate in its entirety, from the Chair and Vice Chair. The actions taken and decisions made at the September 7, 2023 Faculty Senate meeting created an environment where many senators did not feel welcome to participate, shaped as it was by an explicit commitment to efficiency at the expense of dialogue. While we understand that some decisions were made in the context of a graduate student union representative, these decisions were neither announced nor explained, and questions about decisions were summarily dismissed. We believe discussion and deliberation should precede any changes to Senate processes (tacit or explicit). While the Chair has the right to make decisions about Senate participation, she also has the responsibility to encourage a culture of shared governance.