

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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To: Senate

From: Agenda and Nominating Committees

Subject: **Roles, Responsibilities and Procedures of Senate Committees (information)**

At the September 2007 meeting of Senate, it was suggested that the Agenda and Nominating Committees and the Senate Secretariat would work together to seek to clarify the roles, responsibilities and procedures of Senate Committees, as necessary. The present report to Senate provides an update for information on the status of this matter.

The Committees have accepted the above responsibility and have determined that the Senate would be well served by the development of a comprehensive statement for each committee, developed jointly by the Nominating Committee and each respective standing committee that includes:

1. Committee terms of reference (as approved by Senate),
2. The Committee's composition, quorum for the transaction of business, and voting rights (as approved by Senate),
3. An expanded description of the roles and responsibilities of the Committee, including areas of interaction with other Committees of Senate,
4. A listing of any powers delegated by the Senate to the Committee,
5. A listing of any relevant arrangements whereby responsibilities are delegated to or shared with various academic and non-academic units and officers of UBC, and
6. Any regular reporting responsibilities.

The remainder of this report provides a background to the Committees' thinking regarding the need for such an approach.

The University Act [Section 37 (1)] gives the Senate a broad range of powers with respect to the academic governance of the University. These powers have traditionally been exercised through a complex balance of Senate policies, meeting minutes, interpretations of "current practice", University Calendar statements, and the explicit and implicit delegation of various Senate

powers to its committees, and in turn to various academic and non-academic units and officers of UBC.

The terms of reference of Senate Committees are often so succinct that they may not provide sufficient guidance to the Committees to enable them to realize the full potential of their assigned roles. As well, terms of reference may contain insufficient detail to avoid ambiguities relating to their roles.

A number of circumstances relating to the activities of the current Senate have suggested a need for greater clarity about the roles, responsibilities and procedures of Senate committees. Examples include the following:

- At the September 2007 Senate meeting, the Chair of the Admissions Committee commented on the University's recent decision to void the terms contained in letters of offer to some applicants, contrary to the wishes of the admitting faculty and without the endorsement of the Committee itself. The Chair indicated that the Committee has been primarily concerned with the consideration of changes to the UBC Calendar (Minutes of Senate, vol. 07/08, p. 12). On the other hand, the University Act gives the Senate broad powers "*to determine all questions relating to the academic and other qualifications required of applicants for admission as students to the university or to any faculty ...*".
- Section 27 (2) (f) of the *University Act* requires the approval of the Senate to establish procedures for the recommendation and selection of senior academic administrators. However, Senate approval for revisions to these policies from 2000 to 2006 had not been sought, and the Nominating Committee's attempts over the past year to harmonize Board and Senate policies and procedures regarding such appointments have yet to be successful.
- In a number of instances, there has been ambiguity as to whether items need to be brought to Senate at all, and if so, for approval or for information.
- The May 2005 report on the review of Senate stated: "*there was a general consensus that Senate has largely lost its role as the primary body for academic governance. Senate was viewed as being "reactive" rather than "proactive" in academic policy, and as having become marginalized in some areas. Policies were viewed as deriving largely from the senior administration, with the vice-presidents, especially the Vice-President, Academic and Provost, and the Associate Vice-Presidents reporting to the Provost having taken on an increasingly enlarged role in academic policy.*" In this context, there is a view that Senate committees remain insufficiently engaged in the development of academic policy and academic governance, and are increasingly requested to consider reports derived from the senior administration for their approval and transmittal to the Senate.
- In a number of instances, opportunities afforded by a Committees' terms of reference are not being fully exercised and reported on to the Senate. As a particular example, the terms of reference of the Academic Building Needs Committee include: "to review annually all building project priorities"; "to recommend priorities on new academic buildings ..."; "to review the impact of every development, whether building or landscape, ..."; and "to report

annually to Senate on the status of building projects ...” In cases such as this, clarifications and specific procedures may be needed to enable a Committee to carry out its mandate.

- It is acknowledged that some Committees, such as the Committee on Appeals on Academic Standing, the Committee on Student Appeals on Academic Discipline, and the Tributes Committee, already have well established rules and procedures, and that additional clarifications may not be needed in such cases.

The Nominating Committee proposes to work with each of the standing committees in turn to develop the proposed statements. The Committee hopes to complete this work and report to the Senate by April 2008. Once completed, a consistently formatted document for each committee will be posted on the Senate website for reference by all.