

GUIDE FOR WORKING WITH THE FACULTY SENATE

Version 3.1, approved by faculty-senate vote on 4 October, 2024, with the understanding that this is a trial document that might evolve as we experiment across the year.

Introduction and context

This document provides guidance about working with the Lehigh Faculty Senate. Its intended audience is heads of administrative units and potentially faculty committees who wish to or are required to consult with the faculty as represented by the senate. We have a separate guide for individual faculty members who want to communicate or work with the senate ([LINK](#)). Please note that as much as we are describing specific procedures, *written rules about collaboration and engagement can only succeed if they are underpinned by a culture of willing cooperation and transparency.*

Consultation and collaboration are important for faculty and staff morale and the smooth operation of policies and programs across the university. As summarized in **Appendix A**, the [Rules and Procedures of the Faculty](#) (R&P) gives official guidelines on a **minimum** range of issues that **require** engagement with the faculty. **Appendix A** also includes R&P's framing of the nature of shared governance. The current document blends elements from R&P, common sense, and new procedures designed to make collaboration more effective and efficient.

Faculty senates across higher education are diverse in their procedures, but a common thread among many is some form of formal consultation process that involves clear steps and outcomes. In this guide, we use “engagement” to refer to the complete spectrum of interactions that might be involved in healthy dialog and collaboration, and “consultation” to refer to a formal process.

Engagement with the faculty through the faculty senate might take one of several overlapping forms, as follows, listed by degree of engagement.

(1) Informal communication and brainstorming with the faculty senate

We ***strongly encourage*** informal communications and conversations of all types with senate leadership, the senate executive committee (FSEC), senate working groups, or individual senators. However, such ongoing engagement should be treated as informal and off the record. Valuable as it is, such communication is in no way “Consultation with the Faculty.”

(2) Briefings, and campus updates and news intended for the general faculty

If it is important that all faculty be alerted to an issue or to updates to procedures or policies, the senate is **not a good outlet** for many briefings. Emails, town halls, and focused meetings with department chairs, colleges, and departments are far more effective if you wish to get your message out to larger numbers of individual faculty. Again, valuable as it is, such communication is not sufficient to be considered “Consultation with the Faculty.” If you are uncertain about how to reach out to the general faculty on a particular issue, feel free to contact

FSEC via the senate chair or vice-chair – it's actually advisable to let us know what you're planning so that we can stay coordinated.

(3) Explorations of new ideas with the goal of getting initial feedback from the senate. If you're interested in **initial** feedback from representatives of the faculty on a possible new initiative or a problem you hope to address, this would be the avenue to choose. FSEC can provide advice and help steer engagement. We ask that you take the following steps:

1. Contact FSEC through the senate chair or vice-chair as soon as possible. Note that the senate meets monthly, usually with a full agenda, so it will take some time to be scheduled into a meeting. FSEC sets the senate agenda and will either get you scheduled or recommend another course of action – this might just be a request to provide the senate with briefing materials, or use of some other venue.
2. Once you are scheduled, provide briefing materials 10 or more days in advance of the scheduled Faculty Senate meeting (these could be documents, slide decks, or even videos). If you can't make this deadline, your visit will be rescheduled.
3. Your visit to the senate must focus on Q&A and discussion, not presentation – your briefing documents and media will be viewed by senators in advance (keep this in mind as you prepare this material).
4. **Important:** within a week after your visit, provide a brief followup document that highlights what you heard from the senate and, if relevant, how you did or did not respond, and why. If you plan to move ahead with a plan, it would be highly valuable to note a timeline, plans for next steps, and whether you will want a formal consultation with the senate once you can provide more complete materials. This response will be posted on the senate website. In turn, the senate via FSEC will post a brief comment on the response, either verifying that all parties are on the same page or noting any disagreement with the response.

This more informal engagement process exploring an initial idea still would not constitute a formal "Consultation with the Faculty."

(4) Request for Consultation (RFC): request for a formal senate (and faculty) response

For important matters that will impact large parts or all of the campus community, you should initiate a formal Request for Consultation, as we describe below. This could include both items for which faculty consultation is required by R&P (see **Appendix A**) or other issues over which an effective outcome clearly would require faculty consultation.

To clarify, reasons to initiate an RFC will vary but should be focused on matters of wide and long-term impact. RFC's would often not be needed if an existing governance process can handle the issue (e.g., proposal of a new academic program). On the other hand, an RFC might be valuable or necessary to address an important non-programmatic issue related, say, to adoption of a campus-wide plan or its components. Because the senate and the faculty have only limited time to manage their work, FSEC will work to manage proposed RFC's, and if FSEC feels the senate cannot respond on a reasonable time scale, it will cooperate with the requestor

on an alternative plan. **Appendix B** provides some concrete examples related to engagement with the senate and when an RFC might be warranted.

Timing is critically important for an RFC to be effective. In general RFC's need to be sufficiently developed and concrete in order for the senate to be able to make an informed and timely response, but not so far developed and so invested with resources that the proposal is in effect a done deal for which input can have no impact. However, there may be cases where, in **supplement** to a standard RFC, there is merit in requesting that the senate and possibly the entire faculty consider an RFC for a final plan that leads to a binary approve/reject vote. Note that in the latter case, please view a faculty vote not as a potential obstacle but as a potentially invaluable measure of support.

Starting in AY2425, we are experimenting with a new procedure for such formal consultation. We hope this will lead to faster and better resolution of significant issues requiring formal faculty engagement, aka "Faculty Consultation." Bear with us as we fine-tune the details. Here is the proposed process for this year. Note that while we can receive an RFC at any time, parts of the process involving FSEC, the senate, and the faculty can only move forward during the academic year.

1. Contact the Senate Chair to propose a formal senate consultation, describing the matter, any time lines involved, and why the matter warrants formal consultation.
2. Within seven days, the senate chair and vice-chair will consult on whether the request is something the senate should and can handle within a reasonable time.
3. If your request goes forward, you will be asked to provide sufficient information to inform and guide a senate response – e.g. feature-complete proposals or text of proposed motions, with supporting data, a summary of any relevant research, and impact statements (funding, infrastructure, staff and faculty time needed, etc.).
4. The chair will bring your proposal and materials to the next FSEC meeting (which will usually be within two weeks) to discuss a response plan. This might include directly forwarding the RFC to the senate for consideration, delegation to a standing committee or *ad hoc* senate subcommittee for detailed review, or consulting senators and/or faculty broadly. You might be invited to talk with FSEC or the senate about your RFC. FSEC will also set a firm timeline for a Senate response, taking into account the effort involved, whether the broader faculty need to be consulted, and whether a senate and/or faculty vote would be required.
5. The senate response will also request your formal reaction to the consultation: will senate feedback be used or not, and why; what were the outcomes of the consultation? This reaction should be provided within two weeks.
6. Depending on your reaction, the senate may write for the record a final comment on your reaction.
7. All Requests for Consultation, senate responses, reactions, and any comments to reactions will be posted on the faculty-senate website along with dates, open for viewing by all in the on-campus community (in special cases requiring confidentiality, scope of posting will be limited to just the faculty).

The goal of this process is to provide a timely, thoughtful, and documented faculty response to significant issues, and to keep decision-making as transparent as possible while keeping a focus on concrete outcomes. Because RFC's could vary in complexity, we imagine that the process will vary in length, depending on the timing of submission and its nature. Generally, we expect that well documented, concrete proposals can be acted on within about two months.

(5) Senate Request for Consultation (SRFC): request by the senate for a formal response

At times, campus issues might arise related to proposed actions by college or university administrative units for which the **senate** wishes a formal response on behalf of the faculty. Here is the proposed process.

1. A suggestion for a formal consultation external to the senate can be made by any senator (or any faculty member via a senator), by FSEC, or by the senate chair or vice-chair.
2. After approval by FSEC, all suggestions for such a consultation will be placed on the senate agenda and subject to a vote by the senate to proceed.
3. Suggestions for a formal external consultation should describe the issue, describe any desired action, remedy, or response, specify a notional timeline, and name the units or individuals to be consulted.
4. The senate chair will convey the approved SRFC to the relevant units or individuals involved, along with an expected response date.
5. If the consultation request is not approved by the senate, FSEC will consider whether the matter should be addressed by some other process.
6. The individual or groups who initiated the SRFC can draft a reaction to the response. Such reactions will be offered to the senate for approval on behalf of the faculty. Whether or not the reaction is approved, it will still be posted along with the rest of the SRFC documents.
7. The Senate Request for Consultation, responses, and any senate reactions will be posted on the senate website along with dates, open for viewing by all in the on-campus community (in special cases requiring confidentiality, scope of posting will be limited to just the faculty).

A general word about timelines

It's important to remember that members of the Lehigh community are busy with many responsibilities. Moreover, while everyone wants to avoid unneeded bureaucracy and be agile, complex institutions do require oversight and managed compromise. In the case of the senate, it holds about eight two-hour business meetings a year, and FSEC meets about twice as often. Proposals that at some point require changes to Sections 1 and 2 of R&P require senate and all-faculty votes followed by review by Board of Trustees subcommittees and then a vote by the entire BOT, which meets only three times per year. RFCs will be sleeved into the senate workflow and generally be subject to similar time constraints. Please keep this under consideration during your planning and be patient. This also applies to program development or changes that require course and curriculum changes – while we are trying to streamline the

processes involved, some degree of oversight is required and engaging the relevant parties simply takes some time.

Contacts for AY2425

Senate Chair: Prof. Peter Zeitler, EES (pkz0@lehigh.edu)

Senate Vice-Chair: Prof. Jenna Lay, English, (jd1210@lehigh.edu)

Senate liaison: Jessica Jackson, Program Manager, Provost's Office (jej221@lehigh.edu)

Faculty senate website: <https://facultysenate.lehigh.edu/>

APPENDIX A – R&P on engagement with faculty and shared governance

Actions requiring senate involvement

Lehigh's current rules specify a number of cases where some degree of faculty engagement is **required**. Please be sure to familiarize yourself with these to avoid conflict with R&P and general university policies, and confusion that could lead to conflicts. Note that some of the required engagement might occur via elected standing committees (which coordinate with and report to the faculty senate).

Also, the [University Policy Structure](#) (UPS) addresses the role of faculty in policies. For *university policies*, the faculty are among those who should be involved, and review of proposed policies should include a vote of the faculty. For *faculty policies*, the UPS clarifies faculty roles in both academic employment policies and the university's educational mission. Additionally the UPS welcomes sense-of-the-faculty resolutions on any campus issue. Finally, for *administrative policies* the UPS discusses the importance of representation of faculty and other groups when policies are being proposed or changed, through advisory panels and appropriate faculty standing committees. With regard to the latter, given the need to manage service workloads, in our current interpretation the faculty senate or a subset of the senate can opt to function as an advisory panel on some policies.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of important areas where faculty involvement is mandated or addressed by R&P, as approved by the Board of Trustees.

R&P Section 1.1: shared decision-making in developing policies and programs to implement long-term university plans

R&P Section 1.1: shared decision-making in academic employment policies (much of Section 2)

R&P Section 1.1: faculty control of educational requirements and procedures (all of Section 3)

R&P 1.2.3: engagement of the senate in at least President and Provost search committees

R&P 1.2.3: consultation with FSEC about decisions to hire new Deans, and the Vice Presidents of Research, and LTS

R&P 1.2.3: consultation with FSEC about consideration of creating new senior administrative positions

R&P 1.3.1: coordination with FSEC on the creation of new temporary university committees having faculty participation

R&P 1.3.1: senate approval is required for any new permanent university committees having faculty participation

Note: for the last two items, the senate considers names such as “task force,” “working group,” “panel,” and “advisory board” to be equivalent to “committee.” Committees expected to function for more than two years or that have no specified end date for their work are interpreted as “permanent”.

While the faculty senate generally deals with issues at the university level, the senate can also engage with actions by colleges that fall within the scope of the senate as described in the above R&P sections.

Areas in which to consult the faculty

R&P 1.1 Faculty Shared Governance

Effective shared governance requires faculty to be informed and provide their opinion via consultation and shared decision-making in key areas including, but not limited to, those listed below. However, any such list is, by definition, dynamic and should evolve with changes at the University. Faculty consultation and/or shared decision-making should be sought whenever substantial choices are being considered even if the category is not listed below.

(a) Consultation. Areas of shared governance where the faculty seek greater consultation include: i) Long-term University planning, fundraising, and budget priorities; ii) University operation of facilities and provision of services; and iii) Research facilities and finance.

(b) Shared decision-making. Areas of shared governance where the faculty seek greater shared decision-making include: i) Development of policies and programs to implement long-term university plans; ii) Academic employment policies; and iii) Student conduct and campus culture development.

(c) Faculty responsibility. Areas of shared governance where the faculty retain responsibility encompass undergraduate and graduate educational requirements and procedures.

APPENDIX B – examples of how engagement with faculty might occur

CASE 1: Two colleges are proposing a new interdisciplinary program

Such a case can be handled by the existing course and curriculum process, with the Educational Policy Committee fielding any special questions. No RFC would be needed.

CASE 2: The provost's office has found issue and inconsistencies in R&P section 2.15, which places limits on the number of term faculty

Like many specific issues, this could be referred directly to FSEC for senate action. No RFC would be needed. The exception might be submission of a proposed change that radically changed the composition of the faculty, but generally speaking, more specific issues in which the senate has a formal role obviate the need for an RFC.

CASE 3: The leader of a strategic plan initiative wants to provide updates and gain ongoing feedback about ongoing efforts

This would not rise to the level of an RFC. FSEC should be consulted about a possible advisory committee, and in the meantime the senate could just be provided with update materials, as could the general faculty.

CASE 4: The leader of an initiative or administrative unit proposes new forms of courses and certificates that involve non-faculty instructors (current staff, outside parties).

This would likely require an RFC because faculty control academic procedures and curricula, and such a proposal would likely fall outside the normal course-and-curriculum process.

CASE 5: The university has the opportunity to purchase an independent research entity, and members of the senior administration believe it would be in Lehigh's best interest to do so.

This would require at least one and maybe two formal RFCs, following initial engagement with both FSEC and GRC, and likely involving a faculty task force to consider impacts. The first RFC would include a complete proposal with data and research exploring both the potential benefits and drawbacks of this purchase, as well as the impact on faculty. If recommended by the senate following the first RFC, the second would represent a formal faculty vote of approval or rejection.

CASE 6: Members of the senior administration think it is in the interest of the University to move ahead on the idea of eliminating colleges at the undergraduate level and creating a unified undergraduate curriculum

This certainly would require two formal RFCs, preceded by initial informal gathering of feedback from the campus community (with which the senate can assist), and then assembling a faculty task force to consider models. The first RFC would involve development of a complete proposal with impact statements and ideally several options. The second RFC would represent a formal faculty vote of approval or rejection – depending on the details within this proposal, a second RFC might be supplanted by the normal course and curriculum process, but a change of this magnitude might also benefit from an independent vote of approval by the entire faculty..

