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Changes seen in Faculty Senate at University of Montana

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MISSOULA, Mont.--

Something has happened to the Faculty Senate at the University of Montana.

During recent months the ordinarily conservative body has considered and passed far-reaching decisions on matters it barely acknowledged when the organization was established 10 years ago.

The decisions are:

'Certain designated students are now admitted to Faculty Senate meetings, which previously were closed to all students.

'Finals Week, the last week of every quarter when final examinations traditionally were given, has been discontinued.

'The establishment of a pass-fail system will be recommended to the administration by two Senate Committees, the Curriculum Committee and the Admissions, Graduation and Academic Standards Committee, according to Dr. Gordon Browder, Faculty Senate chairman and sociology professor. Under such a system, students would receive letter grades only in their major or minor subjects and grades of pass or fail in all others.

Dr. Browder said Faculty Senate has tended to be resistant to change, showing a characteristic of many deliberating bodies. Now that the Senate's resistance has broken down somewhat, he said, future decisions may be more easily reached.
Senate lets down bars

The proposal to revise Senate by-laws and admit certain students was first made and rejected two years ago, and the organization was often criticized by the Montana Kaimin, UM's student newspaper, for its action. Kaimin representatives requested permission to attend Faculty Senate meetings in November 1967, and again last quarter, but were refused both times.

Dr. Browder said as long as all students were excluded from Senate meetings they "were bound to feel sensitive--suspicious that something was going on behind closed doors." Normally, meetings are dull and boring, he said, but students had no way of knowing that before the ruling was passed.

Members of the Kaimin editorial staff and officers of the Associated Students of UM are now admitted as observers as a result of the new by-law, which was adopted in December.

Members of the Student Advisory Committee to the Budget and Policy Committee and student members of other Senate committees will be admitted when business concerning them is on the Senate's agenda.

Some students have objected to the inclusion of some students to meeting and exclusion of others. Dr. Browder said since Senate members were largely in favor of admitting these designated people, the real importance of the decision was "the cracking of the exclusiveness of Faculty Senate."

Another objection raised by students is of a clause in the new by-law which reads: "It is expressly understood that the students designated above may be excluded at the discretion of the Chairman of the Senate."

Dr. Browder said the ruling "may on the surface appear discriminatory," but it merely states the power of all deliberating bodies to go into executive session; thus faculty members, too, would be excluded.

(more)
For example, if something that involved the private business of a faculty member were to be discussed, the meeting would be closed to both students and faculty, he explained.

The phrase, "at the discretion of the chairman," is also misleading, Dr. Browder said, because the Senate votes itself into executive session. The chairman must comply with the Senate's wishes.

The Budget and Policy Committee proposed last November that the by-law articles of organization be revised to admit certain designated students. The Senate then voted to submit this recommendation to the whole faculty, which voted substantially in favor of the change.

The students on the list began receiving agenda and meeting notices in January.

Other universities

Now that the Senate has taken the initial step in opening its meetings, Dr. Browder said, perhaps the organization may someday open its meetings to everyone.

Other universities and colleges, he said, have open meetings, but instead term them University Senates. In this type of organization, voting is not restricted to faculty, but extends to the administration and students.

As long as Faculty Senate is designated as such, the voting membership must naturally be limited to faculty only, Dr. Browder emphasized.

The practice of other schools, now including UM, is to invite faculty members and some students to observe meetings without voting privileges. Such observers may speak at the invitation of the chair.

Finals week debate

Faculty Senate's decision to eliminate finals week last spring brought much criticism and caused the Senate to reaffirm its position last quarter by voting to uphold its Spring decision.
Finals week was eliminated beginning Fall Quarter to ensure that students and faculty members would attend classes up to and including the last day of the quarter. Some professors had allegedly given early final examinations so they could begin the break between quarters earlier.

Dr. Browder said he does not think finals week will be reinstated this academic year. The no-finals-week system should be employed the entire year to give the Senate and administration time to decide whether to continue the present system, he explained.

Many student and faculty members complained about the confusion which arose from the elimination of finals week. Some professors did not give finals, others gave take-home examinations, and still others gave examinations on the last day of classes, thus burdening the student with several tests on one day.

Other professors, like Dr. Browder, did not give finals last quarter but evenly weighed exams throughout the quarter, including the last test given during the last week in the quarter.

An ad hoc committee appointed by the Budget and Policy Committee is studying the no-finals-week system and must make a recommendation to Faculty Senate by April 15.

Thus, Faculty Senate, like many other establishment institutions, is becoming more liberal in its decisions to end some of the University of Montana's long-standing policies.

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