

Overview on the Responsibilities of the Academic Senate
Presented by Tracy Ferguson-Johnson, General Counsel
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From College to University what a noble legacy now established by virtue an Act that elevates the role of faculty modelled on full university status and the ideals of shared governance through the newly established Academic Senate. To understand your present position requires a full and proper understanding of your past. So please allow me to look back in time before we move forward.

The University of The Bahamas was chartered on November 10, 2016 by an Act of Parliament of the Commonwealth Of The Bahamas, a development that was an inevitable result of a course chartered long ago in 1977 when the College of The Bahamas was officially opened. Fast forward 39 years of strategic planning the College was finally and formally developed into a University.

The Act was preceded by what can be described only as significant toil by all involved but propelled by a great vision, purposeful expansion of infrastructure through generous public and private donations netted tremendous results in the development of our College now University research capacity and growth.

Each of you involved in that journey, deserve a special thank you for paving the way for UB because without such a continued effort, the bringing together of internal and external stakeholders, the design and roadmap for effecting the transition of COB to UB; would not have been possible today.

Before joining the leadership team, I researched UB's history and noted the tremendous achievements of the present and past Presidents in particular Dr. Keva Bethel, as well as the Chairwoman of the University Transition Secretariat, Mr. Alfred Sears, Dr. Olivia Saunders, the College Council, Senior Administration, faculty staff, students, alumni and the Law Reform Commission of the Office of the Attorney General. The time injected into the creation and passage of the UB Act is recorded as being thousands of professional hours spent.

Each leader and constituent member involved played an integral role in the passage of the UB Bill by the House of Assembly and Senate in the summer of 2016 and but for their combined efforts and unwavering commitment to this Institution, we would not be sitting in this forum and I would not be addressing you today on the subject of the Academic Senate and its responsibilities.

All I can say is what a magnanimous journey, what a legacy and what an amazing prelude for today's discussion.

By its import and intent, the UB Act is world class in stature. It includes all governance core requirements for international accreditation, shared governance and academic freedom which are the basic tenets of world class higher educational institutions.

These critical components are assured within the new governance structure at UB and with the establishment of an Academic Senate, the Faculty assumes greater responsibility than ever before for the academic affairs of UB.

The vision for higher education and the national development of the Bahamas expressed four decades ago is now finally and legally fulfilled in the codification of the University's Mission Statement to advance and expand access to higher education, promote academic freedom, drive national development and build character through teaching, learning, research, scholarship and service.

With that said the law is now in place, it is our guideline, our constitution and framework which we must now implement and thereby continue building and expanding our institutional legacy and by extension the nation.

The Duties and Structure of Academic Senate

Two distinguishing organizational characteristics are to be noted at the outset from The UB Act. The first is the designation of the institution as a public body corporate governed by an independent Board of Trustees with the ability to manage the institution free of undue political, religious or other external or outside interference.

The second is the remarkable power invested in the faculty by the Act, and specifically the Academic Senate, to guide the academic and administrative affairs of the University.

Under the UB Act, the Academic Senate fulfills a decisive role in both the daily management and long-term planning of the University by exercising direct control over all academic matters of central importance to the University, with full advisory powers on all issues relating to the mission of the university inclusive of THE academic program and academic standards of the university as well as the regulation and superintendence of the education of students.

The Senate is defined in the Act as the academic authority and it is mandated to maintain the academic standards and broaden and extend UB's academic programmes.

The senate, through its committees and its leaders, is the voice of the faculty and a major conduit for faculty initiatives.

In accordance with Article 7 of the UB Charter the Academic Senate's chief responsibilities are to:

- Authorize, approve, and supervise all courses of study and ensure the quality of such courses;
- Determine the conditions of admissions, certificates, degrees, other distinctions and awards including honorary degrees;

- Preparing procedural directives (via the Academic Senate Committee) relative to issues of faculty welfare such as new and/or revised policies for tenure and promotion (including consideration of post tenure review and standards for faculty status and work; in this regard and adopting best practices the Academic Senate may need to recommend the establishment of a new ordinance to establish a faculty assembly that elevates the wider voice of faculty into decisions of faculty welfare and other critical processes of the University. Article 7 specifically provides authorization for the Academic Senate to propose to the Board of Trustees new Statutes or Ordinances and to make enabling policies or bye laws in the exercise of its powers, duties and functions. New statutes, ordinances and bye laws constitute more detailed legislation that translates the broad principles enshrined in Charter and Statutes into practical effect.
- Advise on the administration operation and development of the University libraries;
- Conduct periodic reviews of the academic organization and development of the University and effectiveness of its work in relation to its mission
- Advise the University President and Board of Trustees on budget and administrative matters under the rules of "shared governance."

The Senate is also expressly enabled to conduct its work through the formation of committees and standing Sub committees. Standing Committees of the Senate usually include (but are not limited to) A Faculty Personnel Committee, University Libraries Committee, Academic/Educational Policies Committee, a Statutes, Bylaws and Rules Committee, a curriculum and degree programs committee, a FACULTY WELFARE committee (including tenure, promotion, research, and service), GRADUATE AFFAIRS, PLANNING AND BUDGET, and Academic Standards.

The Senate should set its agenda with particular concern for academic programs and structure, personnel and budgetary policies, development of facilities, and community, professional, and educational relations of the University.

The Academic Senate has much work ahead with regard to procedural policies that it will have to create on a multitude of matters involving the internal flow of its decisions, recommendations, reports and other documents through the University, appropriate utilization of expertise in its deliberation of academic affairs, financial affairs, student affairs and other institutional matters concerning the role of faculty generally. The Academic Senate addresses the Board of Trustees through its Academic Affairs Committee and Senate leadership should specifically review all matters with the President and Provost.

Shared Governance

The University of The Bahamas Act has developed a dual-track system of authority and responsibility which presumes that faculty members are best qualified to chart the University's educational course, while administrators are most competent to direct its finances and organization.

In practice, these domains are overlapping and interdependent. To function successfully together, faculty and administrators depend upon a high degree of consultation, trust, mutual respect, and a tradition of collegiality.

Role

The role of the Academic Senate is to effectively move UBs faculty to international accredited standards while simultaneously enhancing and supporting a robust research agenda and broadening of UBs academic programs. In short the Academic Senate should be a pillar of support for UBs strategic plan with elevation of the institution being the paramount goal.