

UFS Role in Supporting Campus-Level Shared Governance: Discussion, Campus Consultation, and Campus Visitation.¹

Occasionally, shared governance leaders and administrators on a campus experience conflict as they carry on their efforts to foster responsible participation and consultation on campus affairs, or need advice on shared governance questions.

One role of the University Faculty Senate (UFS) is to serve and benefit faculty and staff shared governance. UFS's priority in this respect is to help campuses make their shared governance processes as good as they can be, including improving productive dialogue with others (e.g., administrators, students, etc.). Sometimes this may result in sharing resources, sometimes it may result in informal conversations, and sometimes it may result in more formal visits.

When friction arises between faculty/staff and administration, it rarely begins as an intense, unsolvable problem. Initially, some minor disagreement between administration and faculty can, if not addressed and resolved, escalate to a more serious conflict. The UFS has three options which may be undertaken to address and find resolution to this conflict: informal discussion as well as two separate formal procedures. In the instance of a serious, but not major, conflict, "Campus Consultation" should be considered. Where a major, severe conflict exists, which may lead to a vote of no confidence, "Campus Visitation" should be used.

I. Discussion

The UFS President has considerable experience with local and SUNY-wide shared governance, and has resources at their disposal to support shared governance on a SUNY campus or help resolve a campus conflict over shared governance, including access to other experts in shared governance, UFS Fellows, and the UFS Parliamentarian. The President often visits campuses simply to meet faculty, staff and administration, or at the request of campus governance leaders. These invited visits could be focused on "what is shared governance?", various models of faculty governance, or local concerns, including informal means of resolving a campus conflict. In each instance, the UFS President or persons delegated by the President can help address these issues. These visits might involve just the campus governance leader(s), or campus administrators, or additional personnel as desired or requested. As befitting the informal nature of these visits, there typically will not be a written report following them.

II. Campus Consultation

A campus consultation is a process that leverages shared governance expertise across SUNY to assist a campus experiencing appreciable governance issues. It should be viewed as a faculty to faculty process that can be utilized proactively to prevent a major communication breakdown

¹ This section of the Handbook was presented to the University Faculty Senate at the October 2007 147th University Faculty Senate Plenary meeting, and approved by the body: Resolution 147-03-1.

between groups of faculty, between faculty and other campus constituencies, or between faculty and campus administration.

A campus consultation is recommended in situations where there is a serious conflict in which there have been repeated unsuccessful efforts to address and resolve the situation, but where there is not a likelihood of an imminent crisis such as a vote of no confidence.

In appropriate circumstances, the campus consultation has several distinct advantages over a campus visitation: (a) it may be of assistance in solving problems before a crisis is reached, (b) the process is much less visible than a visitation and is far less likely to be noticed in the public media, (c) it can be arranged quickly and quietly, and (d) it is less costly to the Senate.

A. Process

A request for a campus consultation should be directed to the UFS President by the campus governance leader (CGL), with concurrence of the campus executive committee. A joint invitation with the campus president is not expected for a consultation. The request may be either written or oral, providing the UFS President with sufficient detail to permit the drafting of a charge to the consultants.

The UFS President prepares a charge to the Consultation Committee, which should include the scope of the problem(s) to be examined, an expected completion date, and a budget. The President, after discussions with the UFS Executive Committee and the Chair of the UFS Governance Committee, appoints a team of two or three consultants, naming one as the chair. In identifying possible consultants, the President should give preference to current or past members of the Governance Committee.

The Senate office will assist the Consultation Committee in making travel arrangements and in scheduling appointments with persons identified by the chair. Costs will be paid by the UFS.

The Consultation Committee will accept such oral, written, and electronic submissions that are provided to them; unattributed or anonymous documents or statements shall neither be accepted nor considered. Contributors may seek confidentiality with respect to their submissions, and the Consultation Committee will maintain the confidentiality of all documents, and names of those submitting testimony, to the extent allowed by law.

The Chair of the Consultation Committee shall keep the UFS President apprised of the progress of the Committee and any difficulties that may arise with respect to either the charge or the budget. Any communication with the press that might arise should be channeled through the Chair, whose public comments should be limited to process, not substance.

Following the visit, a written report will be provided by the Consultation Committee to the UFS President. This report will be disseminated to those parties who requested the consultation, who then have independent authority over its distribution.

III. Campus Visitation

In the event of a serious, prolonged conflict about shared governance between faculty/staff and administration, and where there is serious consideration of a vote of “no confidence,” a request for a campus visitation can be made to the UFS to help resolve the dispute.

A request for a campus visitation should be directed to the UFS President by the CGL, with concurrence of the campus executive committee and/or campus governance body. A joint invitation with the campus president is strongly recommended, but not required. The request, in the form of a letter of invitation to the UFS President, should include sufficient detail to permit the drafting of a charge to the Visitation Committee.

A. Function and Charge

The Visitation Committee will serve in the capacity of making an inquiry, in cooperation with the CGL and the campus president, and of submitting a report. The report may include suggestions and recommendations to the local governance body and administration. [Copies of sample letters of invitation are on file in the University Faculty Senate Office in Albany.]

The UFS President, after consulting with the UFS Executive Committee, appoints the Visitation Committee, names its chair, convenes it for its first meeting, and prepares a carefully developed charge. The UFS President will share the charge with the Visitation Committee, and others as appropriate.

B. Membership

Before forming the Visitation Committee, the UFS President may consult with the UFS’s Executive Committee, the Chair of the Governance Committee, past UFS presidents, or persons who have previously chaired visitation committees. The President then appoints a team of three members, naming one as the chair.

For Visitation Committee membership, the UFS President seeks people with broad governance experience. They should be distinguished by reputations for reasonableness and integrity, and for their capacity to avoid being either advocates or adversaries in their dealings with administrators and faculty. The UFS President will also aim to establish a committee that is representative of the diversity of the SUNY campuses.

The Visitation Committee’s membership always includes a person from SUNY System Administration. This individual, selected by UFS, will act as a member of the committee for the UFS and not in an official capacity as a SUNY System administrator. Such a person will often have had prior service with local campus governance or the UFS.

It is not required that the members of the Visitation Committee be current members of the UFS. Experience in shared governance is the most important qualification. It is, however,

recommended that the Visitation Committee include the current Chair of the Governance Committee or their designee.

C. Materials and Documentation

The UFS President or Visitation Committee Chair solicits all relevant campus documents from the CGL and the campus president. Both the campus president and the CGL may send materials independently; however, they are obligated to share with one another all the materials they transmit. The Visitation Committee will accept all documents and materials that are provided, as long as they have appropriate attribution of source. No anonymous materials will be accepted. Contributors may seek confidentiality with respect to their submissions, and the Visitation Committee will seek to maintain the confidentiality of all documents provided to the extent allowed by law. Members of the campus community or other relevant persons may choose to talk to the Visitation Committee in person, by phone, or by synchronous video technology. Again, while the confidentiality of the source will be maintained to the extent possible by the Visitation Committee, such sources must identify themselves to the Visitation Committee.

D. Process

After the collation and review of materials from the campus, the Visitation Committee will schedule a visit to the campus. During this Campus Visitation, the Committee will expect to meet with the campus president, the CGL(s), and key members of both the administration and shared governance bodies. Faculty, staff, students, or others in the larger campus community (for example, alumni, donors, or college council members) may also meet with the Visitation Committee. The scheduling of such meetings may occur on-campus or off-campus in order to protect confidentiality.

In all interactions throughout this process, the UFS President and the Visitation Committee will be careful to respect the authority, prerogatives, and responsibilities of the campus president and the CGL(s).

After the campus visit, the UFS President or designee will write a report with recommendations that represent the Visitation Committee's findings. It is most fitting that the draft Visitation Report, pending corrections, be delivered to the campus in person, if feasible, by the UFS President and the Chair of the Visitation Committee, and that they present it to the CGL(s) and the campus president in a meeting with both parties present. This meeting is intended to provide an opportunity for discussion of the report, and an occasion to answer any questions that might arise.

The CGL(s) and the campus president will have one week from the date of the presentation of the draft Visitation Report to respond to the report. If there are errors or omissions of fact in the draft Visitation Report, notification of such errors should be sent in written form to the Chair of the Visitation Committee. The Chair of the Visitation Committee may choose to convene the Visitation Committee to consider these responses, and any subsequent corrections that may be made to the draft Visitation Report. The Chair of the Visitation Committee will send the final

Visitation Report to the UFS President who will submit the final Visitation Report to the CGL(s), the campus president, and the Chancellor. A copy will also be archived in the Office of the University Faculty Senate.

It should be understood that the final Visitation Report, once given to the president of the campus and the leader(s) of the campus shared governance body or bodies, becomes the property of those parties, who then have independent authority over its distribution. While decisions about the specific distribution of this report do not lie with the Visitation Committee, and must rest on the parties concerned, it is urged that both parties recognize the sensitivity of the content of the report, and give careful consideration to the scope and means of the distribution.

The Visitation Committee may recommend within the final Visitation Report that a joint committee of faculty, staff, and administration be convened to consider the recommendations in the report and develop a plan for implementation. The UFS President will follow up with the CGL(s) to discuss progress since the final Visitation Report was delivered.

The Chair of the Visitation Committee or the UFS President may be asked, and may choose to comment on the visitation process, to the University Faculty Senate, the campus community, or the public about the visitation process. Members of the Visitation Committee should recognize that the substance of the deliberations, the content of the report, and its recommendations are sensitive issues, and should exercise care in maintaining the confidentiality of these issues.

E. Timeline for Visitation Process

It is anticipated that the total time for the visitation process should not exceed three calendar months.

1. A letter of request for Campus Visitation from the CGL(s) (jointly with the campus president, if possible) is sent to the UFS President.
2. The UFS President appoints the Visitation Committee.
3. The campus president and CGL assemble documentation for the Visitation Committee. Documentation is exchanged between parties on campus, and is then forwarded to the University Faculty Senate office.
4. Documentation is shared by the UFS office with the Visitation Committee.
5. Committee meetings and scheduling of Campus Visitation takes place.
6. Campus Visitation.
7. The Visitation Committee convenes to write the draft Visitation Report.

8. The draft Visitation Report is submitted to the UFS President, who schedules a joint meeting with the campus president and CGL(s).
9. The draft report is simultaneously given to the campus president and CGL(s).
10. Within one week, written responses to the draft Visitation Report are sent to the Chair of the Visitation Committee.
11. The final Visitation Report is sent to the UFS President who sends it to the campus president, the CGL(s), and the Chancellor.
12. The UFS President will follow up with the CGL(s) to discuss progress since the final Visitation Report was delivered.