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April 13, 2010

Dr. Elise-Miller Hooks
Chair, University Senate
1100 Marie Mount Hall
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742-7541

Dear Dr. Miller-Hooks:

The Senate Staff Affairs Committee, as a large committee, often has difficulty achieving a quorum at standing meetings. It is our understanding that other committees have similar difficulty. The Staff Affairs Committee is currently composed of 29 members, 11 of whom are voting ex-officios. The committee recognizes the importance of holding official votes, and is discouraged by the lack of ability to do so month after month. Of the 7 meetings we've held this year, we barely achieved a quorum at only 3 of the meetings. Our turnout normally includes a mix of both regular and voting ex-officio members.

Currently, Standing Committees of the Senate follow the practice of calculating a quorum by dividing the total number of members in half and adding one. This number does not change. While the committees follow this practice, no rules for calculating the quorums of committees are listed in the Senate Bylaws. For the Executive Committee, the Bylaws simply state that "a quorum of the Executive Committee shall be seven (7) voting members," which follows the practice explained above, as the SEC has 12 voting members.

However, concern for larger committees has been raised in the past. For instance, the 1997-1998 ERG Committee stated in its Annual Report that the following two additions to the Senate Bylaws were considered, approved, and sent to the floor of the Senate for action:

- A quorum for meetings of Standing Committees shall be one third of the voting members of the committee. Business transacted by a Standing Committee in the absence of a quorum must be specified as such in any report on committee activities. *Presented on the Senate floor at its April 2, 1998 meeting, but failed.*
- A quorum for meetings of Standing Committees shall be 1/3 of the voting members for committees with 18 or more members; for committees with fewer than 18 voting members, the smaller of 6 of the voting members or 50% of the voting members must be present. Business transacted by a Standing Committee in the absence of a quorum must be specified as such in any report on committee activities. *It is noted that this alternate motion was later proposed by the committee but not acted upon.*

The Senate sets the following precedence for calculating quorums at Senate meetings:

- A quorum for meetings shall be defined as a majority of elected Senators who have not received prior approval for absence from the Office of the University Senate, or fifty (50) Senators, whichever number is higher. For the purpose of determining a quorum, ex officio members with or without vote shall not be considered. *Bylaws, 3.4.b*

The Staff Affairs Committee would like to request that this issue be reviewed again, as some of the other Standing Senate Committees are also large and might benefit from an alternate quorum calculation procedure (e.g., Student Affairs–29 members, Human Relations–23 members). Most ex-officios on Standing Committees are voting members, in accordance with specifications in the Bylaws (5.5c). There are only 3 explicit instances in which the Bylaws state that certain ex-officios are non-voting Standing Committee members, aside from those on the SEC. As such, voting ex-officio members must be counted when determining a quorum.

Perhaps a calculation procedure could be developed that would allow for excused absences to be subtracted from the total number. According to Committee Coordinators, many committee members send notification of their absence prior to committee meetings, but they must still be counted when determining a quorum.

We respectfully request that an appropriate Senate Committee be charged with reviewing this issue, perhaps with a consideration to adopt one of the proposed motions above, or to create a practice by which excused absences are taken into consideration when calculating committee quorums.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Shaw
Chair, University Senate Staff Affairs Committee

CS/cb

Cc: Reka Montfort, Executive Secretary and Director, University Senate