An Introduction to the SJSU Academic Senate

Purpose and Structure

The SJSU Academic Senate is the principal agency for the formulation of University policy. The Senate and its committees communicate recommendations to the President on such matters as faculty affairs, curriculum, instruction, student affairs, finances and other matters relevant to the welfare of SJSU. San José State University was the first California state university to have an official faculty representative body.

We are somewhat unique in that, unlike Faculty Senates, our membership includes faculty, administrators, and students. We believe that shared-governance serves our campus best, as it facilitates collaborative relationships, more frequent communication among faculty, administration, and students, and encourages open discussion of issues of concern to all.

A Brief History of the SJSU Senate

(adapted from Notes on the History of the Academic Senate, Ted Norton, Ph.D., former chair; see http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/history/notes/index.html)

When Thomas MacQuarrie was inaugurated as President of San José State University in 1927, the institution had 2000 students and 100 faculty. When he retired in 1952, there were nearly 6000 students and 400 faculty. In 1964, when his successor, John Wahlquist, retired, there were more than 18000 students and 1000 faculty. The area occupied by college buildings had expanded from about half of Washington Square--three of six blocks--to 20 blocks. Between 1950 and 1960, some 20 new buildings were built; displaced were the San Jose high school and Carnegie library.

The increase in numbers of students and faculty meant more than just new buildings and parking problems. Before World War II, the "old Normal School" at San Jose and other state colleges were quite autonomous, not part of a "system" each with its own budget. It was from these beginnings that San José State grew into a "comprehensive university," and its faculty, through the Academic Senate and its predecessors, gained a voice in the shaping of university policy and the direction of campus affairs.

Key to our development as a campus, and the CSU, was the new administrative structure created by the Master Plan for Higher Education (1960) and a newly formed state college "system". The college system was no longer under the California Department of Education; it had a single board of Trustees, a single budget and a Chancellor and central administration. While this limited the autonomy of the individual campuses, it also limited the powers of campus presidents. The Trustees soon mandated the formation of faculty councils or senates on every campus.

Through a series of deliberations, SJSU proposed the first Academic Council on a state college campus. The Council was authorized to recommend policies to the President and included elected faculty representatives and administrators. The Academic Council's charter, ratified by faculty vote and approved by the Chancellor in 1963.

Now called the Academic Senate, revisions were made long ago to include students and alumni representation. More information about the Senate, its structure and memberships, policies and resolutions can be found on our website:

http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/