

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
College at Old Westbury

CONVENERS COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting of October 22, 1991

Present: L. Anker, A. Derby, A. Ebrahimi, O. Estes-Hicks, M. Feder-Marcus,
R. Gonzalez, K. Hall, S. Hickey, N. Jung, E. Landy, H. Lewittes,
K. Miranda, P. O'Sullivan, B. Serrano

I. The minutes of the October 8th meeting were approved.

II. Motion on Departments and Chairs

- A. Discussion revealed that the title "Chairperson" was more acceptable than "Chair" (an inanimate object) or the gender-based alternative, Chairman/Chairwoman.
- B. Pat O'Sullivan presented the attached motion. R. Gonzalez seconded it.
- C. In the discussion that followed, several arguments were made in favor of the motion to replace the title of "Convener" with the title "Chair."
 - 1. The current practice of having both titles in use is awkward and causes us to be taken less seriously.
 - 2. Students are confused by the use of different titles for the same position.
 - 3. Outsiders are confused by the title "Convener."
 - 4. We are expected to be and should be accountable for program business over the summer and we could get paid for this work if we moved to the title "Chair."
 - 5. The term "Convener" does not reflect the "new realities" of Old Westbury. The increased responsibilities that have worked a "subtle change" in our role. The title "Chair" would bring greater "recognition" and "a better shot at getting more power."
- D. The following points were made by the skeptics in the group:
 - 1. In the personal experience of some of us, the term Convener has neither been confusing to students, nor a problem with external audiences.

2. The "summer" argument is specious. There have always been summer responsibilities for Conveners or their surrogates, so this cannot be treated as a "new reality." Summer pay is not an issue related to title, as is evident from the fact that currently not all "Chairs" at Old Westbury have been paid in the summer. The matter of summer pay can be dealt with as a separate issue, independent of any change in titles.
 3. The change of title appears to connote a change that is more than semantic, perhaps opening the door to the type of hierarchical "supervisory" responsibilities envisioned for "Chairs" in the Policies of the Board of Trustees.
- E. The following counterpoints were advanced by supporters of the title "Chairperson."
1. The Policies of the Board of Trustees should not be presumed to impose a rigid formula. After all, Old Westbury was never prevented from using the "Convener" title, even though there was no provision for it in Board Policies. We should proceed on the assumption that we can define "Chair" to be synonymous with "Convener" and keep the old definition of the role as it currently exists in our bylaws.
 2. If need be, we could be explicit in our bylaws about the role(s) "Chairpersons" would be prohibited from performing. (Note: The Conveners' Council is unanimously opposed to the traditional practice in higher education of Chairpersons making separate "Chairperson" recommendations in personnel cases.)
 3. It doesn't make sense to hold on to something simply because it existed in the past. Times change. We should be prepared to adapt. For example, the summer work that is now required of Conveners/Chairs is much greater than it used to be. We should recognize this, and move to the title "Chair" which best connotes continuity of responsibility over the summer.
 4. It seems more likely that we will have a chance of getting paid for summer work if we make the full move to the "Chair" title.
- F. Attention then turned to the second part of the motion--to substitute the term "Department" for the term "Program." The following arguments were made in favor:
1. The term "Program" refers to courses, to curriculum, not to an organizational unit. To be consistent, we should adopt the title "Department" which more accurately reflects the reality of the way we are organized on campus.

2. The term "Department" and the term "Chairperson" are related; they're a "package." We'd be inconsistent if we adopted one but not the other.
 3. A "Program" responsible for more than one "program of study" (e.g., Teacher Education) has to deal with the awkwardness of having the same term mean two different things, as in "You should see the Director of the Bilingual Education Program within the Teacher Education Program."
- G. The following exchange occurred over the proposed shift to the term "Department."
1. "Department" connotes "single discipline." For a multidisciplinary program like Comparative Humanities, the name "Department" would be misleading. "Department" is narrower in meaning and in that sense wouldn't be helpful for Comparative Humanities, which is responsible for so many areas of instruction it is more in the nature of a division.
 2. But it is common for multidisciplinary faculties on other campuses to be called "Departments" (e.g. Departments of Women Studies, African-American Studies).
 3. Yes, but in the case of Comparative Humanities the breadth of the Program is much greater, since it covers both multiple disciplines and multidisciplinary perspectives on different regions of the world.
- H. Given the problem with the term "Department" it was decided to break the motion into two parts and vote on them separately.
1. Motion I:

That the operating units of the College, now designated as Programs be called Departments.

The following vote was recorded:
 8 in favor
 5 opposed
 2. Motion II:
 - a. That the person in charge of and responsible for the operations of a Department or Program be called "Chairperson."
 - b. That the Conveners' Council be called "Council of Chairpersons."

- c. That the duties of the Chairperson be those currently enumerated in the bylaws of the College, in Programs' or Departments' bylaws, and those granted by the faculty of the Program or Department.
- d. That the Chairperson be elected by a majority of the voting members of the Department or Program by secret ballot.

The following vote was recorded:

8 in favor

5 opposed

- I. It was agreed that the motions would now be forwarded to the Faculty Council along with copies of the minutes of this meeting and of our previous meetings on the same topic. An amendment to the Bylaws would be required to effectuate the proposed changes. Faculty Council will decide how to proceed.
- J. It was pointed out that one way to handle the reservations some Programs might have about shifting to the term "Department" would be to leave it up to Programs to decide which term suits them better.