

The First Twenty-Five Years of the Faculty Senate at the University of Alabama

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(Endorsed by UA Faculty Senate at it 11/17/00 meeting)

The absence of a representative faculty body on the campus of the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa was felt by the faculty during the administration of President Frank Rose, in the 1960s. All committees were appointed solely by the President, and faculty had little actual say in University governance, even with respect to academic policy, certainly not with regard to resource allocation or review of administrators. There was also no established grievance process. Rose, however, consulted with faculty in some regards, appeared affable and approachable, and served during a time of adequate funding.

Matters began to become more acute with the accession to the Presidency by David Mathews in the summer of 1969, when (as many faculty saw it) his informal "kitchen cabinet" of faculty advisers foundered because Mathews asked for little advice and accepted less. Tensions mounted because of what many faculty saw as the central administration's remote and heavy-handed treatment of student protest and complaints during the Kent State/Jackson State disturbances in the spring of 1970, and because of the administration's transformation of the faculty/student-generated and -run "free university" into a regular division of the University (New College). Students and faculty faced extreme difficulty in obtaining a meeting with Dr. Mathews. The University budget was kept totally secret from faculty.

Needing a voice, and with what faculty considered to be important and worsening grievances, faculty members founded a local of the American Federation of Teachers union in spring 1972. At its height the union had more than 200 members. After desultory negotiation and more faculty agitation, Dr. Mathews attempted to stave off possibly more confrontational faculty action by establishing a short-lived, purely advisory Faculty Advisory Council. However, a voting majority of its members were Deans and other administrators. Since all important votes went against faculty interests, the faculty was not satisfied and continued to agitate.

Beleaguered by continuing and rising faculty opposition, and contemplating a federal Cabinet post, Mathews wearily granted the faculty a Senate in 1975. Faculty leadership in the negotiation which led to the Senate's establishment was centered not in the union but in the University's chapter of AAUP. Particularly strong and effective were Annabel Hagood, then of the College of Arts and Sciences, Carl Cecil of the College of Education, Joe Lane of the College of Commerce and Business Administration, Dallas Sands of the Law School, and Harold Mott of the College of Engineering. Hagood was elected the first President of the Senate by her peers, while Lane and Cecil also served in the presidency in succeeding years.

In drafting its Constitution, the faculty did not accept the model used for the Auburn Senate, which includes administrative personnel such as Deans. Rather, the faculty adopted a model in which any person with less than a 0.5 FTE in teaching and research is ineligible for membership, because such persons were deemed to be spending too much time on administrative matters to be considered faculty. Born from faculty concern through faculty pressure, and with the distinction between faculty and administration well appreciated from the history of power relations between the two, our Senate is reserved exclusively for the faculty. While its task is to join with the administration in the governance of the University in those aspects which concern faculty, and while the

Senate and the administration have worked well together in countless ways, the Faculty Senate is not a subordinate part of the University's administration.

Dr. Mathews became a member of President Gerald Ford's Cabinet for two years, leaving Prof. Richard Thigpen as acting President, and faculty relations with the central administration improved. Thigpen granted a faculty grievance process, after much agitation led by Leon Weinberger of A&S. This was the second administrative recognition of faculty governance. (Later, the grievance process was improved under Acting President Howard Gundy.) In fall 1976, an executive session of the Senate's steering committee drafted a resolution requesting that Mathews be replaced by Thigpen. Timidity reappeared, however, and as passed, the resolution merely gave great commendation to Thigpen. When Mathews returned in 1977, relations with the faculty worsened immediately and continued to deteriorate.

The youngest university president in the United States upon his initial appointment, Dr. Mathews seemed to have much promise. However, faculty had two pressing grievances. First, the academic part of the University was increasingly inadequately funded. With state money becoming less sufficient, and with economic stagnation (and consequent budget proration) eating away periodically at the funds that were made available from the state, Mathews committed a large and constantly growing part of state contributions to provide matching money for federal grants which supported several newly-minted centers of study. Several of the centers performed useful research but all employed few faculty, usually choosing to hire experts who did not have faculty status. Professors saw their funds and infrastructure diminishing while the centers blossomed. Second, faculty often found the style of the Mathews administration to be arrogant and dictatorial. Faculty were barred from access both to participation in general University governance and to specific University fiscal information. Moreover, faculty expertise and opinion were not asked for, were usually rejected when offered, and were often treated with condescension. These flaws loomed ever larger in the second, post-Cabinet phase of Mathews' administration with the termination of the post-New Deal era of generous funding for higher education from the federal government.

In this crisis, the faculty who were chafing under Mathews finally began to stand up for themselves. The Senate was intimately involved with faculty assertiveness, eventually becoming its locus. In November 1978, Jim Raymond of A&S offered to the Senate a proposal for faculty evaluation of administrators. Many Senators liked it, and the Senate approved sending it to a committee, but the proposal was not favored by a Senate leadership that was not yet ready to oppose the President and it never came out of committee. In the Arts and Sciences faculty meeting at the beginning of fall 1979, Peggy Dobbins, who always seemed to be on the losing end of votes, slyly offered a "Confidence in President Mathews" motion. After angry debate, it was (to her delight) overwhelmingly defeated. The whispers of revolt had begun to become murmurs.

The academic year 1979-80 proved to be electric with activity and excitement. The Senate began meeting weekly, and eventually daily, to air the faculty's grievances against the Mathews administration and to provide a locus of faculty sentiment. Throngs of standing-room-only visitors crowded the Senate's always-open galleries to hear the speeches of their representatives, while reporter Jack Wheat provided full coverage of the ongoing confrontation in the *Tuscaloosa News*. On October 23, 1979, over the objection of the Senate's leadership, Bob Barfield of Engineering proposed an amendment changing a "confidence in the Mathews administration" motion into a "no confidence" motion. In a stunning moment of truth, the Senate voted "no confidence" in Mathews by a large majority. Three days later, led by Barfield, faculty braved direct threats from Mathews' lieutenants to attend en masse a University Board of Trustees meeting on campus. A united faculty so impressed the Board that it invited faculty representatives to attend a private meeting the next day. The University AAUP

chapter unanimously endorsed these actions. "Truth squads" comprised of rebelling Senators from each division of the University quietly visited the *Tuscaloosa News* and each of the Trustees to provide information about the ways each saw the University deteriorating under Mathews.

Senate leaders, however, continued to refuse openly to oppose the beleaguered but still- unmoved Mathews. When a vacancy occurred in the office of Secretary of the Senate in December, insurgent Salli Davis of A&S was elected over the candidate favored by Senate leadership. At the end of the school year the founding group was completely replaced in Senate leadership positions.

During the summer of 1980, Dr. Mathews finally gave up and submitted his resignation.

The successful revolt was led by Barfield, Davis, Bill Fullmer of C&BA, and Elizabeth Meese of A&S. Other prominent faculty leaders included Jim Black, Jack Brown, Marvin McKinley, and Jim Walters of Engineering, Claudia Johnson and Don DeSmet (a former union President) of A&S, Becky Ladewig of what is now the College of Human Environmental Sciences, Joe Lane, Don Phillips, and Art Thompson of C&BA, Nina Martin of the School of Library Science, David Vold of Education, Rusty Cain of the School of Social Work, and Jerry Hoffman of the Law School. Barfield was the chief orchestrator and spokesperson, but, following the anti-sexist example set earlier, Nina Martin was elected President of the Senate. In later years Barfield, Fullmer, Johnson, and Phillips enjoyed effective Senate presidencies.

The success of the Senate in standing up for faculty interests, in voicing faculty opinion, and in ousting Mathews, all through orderly (if not always calm) democratic procedures, greatly enhanced the stature of the Senate in the eyes both of faculty and the central administration. The Senate gained more effectiveness in presenting faculty positions and in demanding power-sharing on academic matters, and received more respect from administrators wary of sharing power. It has since then reasonably regularly been consulted by the administration of each President on University matters in which the faculty is interested. The greatest evidence of the increased respect shown to the Senate was the establishment of a "Council of Deans," as it was desired that Deans have their own organ of voice and power. In contrast to the Senate, the Council of Deans meets in secret. For many years it refused to cooperate with the Senate, but recently there have been instances where the two bodies have worked together, with most of the thanks due to Senate Presidents Amy Ward of A&S and Margaret Garner of the College of Community Health Sciences.

The most important activities pursued by the Senate since the "Revolution of 1979" have encompassed the solidification of faculty governance within the University; attempting to rid the University fraternity/sorority system of racism; attempting to ensure that proper attention and reward are given to the faculty duties of teaching and service in an era increasingly dominated by research and publication; defusing attempts to force upon University courses a cost-benefit type of analysis which would disfavor graduate education, research, and small classes; and joining with the administration to lobby the legislature for increased appropriations. In terms of faculty governance, Presidents Claudia Johnson, Don Phillips, Pat Green of A&S (a former member of Mathews's kitchen cabinet), Bob Halli of A&S, Amy Ward of A&S, and Norman Stein of the Law School, and long-time Senate member Jim Walters of Engineering, proved especially sturdy and eloquent advocates of faculty rights and privileges when such were threatened. In addition, Green established a process for familiarizing faculty with the Senate, and Stein both protected many of our benefits and convinced the administration that the Senate should have major input into the selection of the University's Faculty Athletic Representative to the NCAA. At former president Johnson's urging, Stein appointed her chair of an ad hoc committee to establish a system of faculty mentoring for recently-appointed new faculty. The system was eventually implemented, and though it did

not last, it provides an excellent precedent and basis for an improved mentoring system in the future.

On faculty governance issues, two Senate Presidents stand out. Chuck Hobby of A&S was able to engineer a rewriting of the *Faculty Handbook*. He paid close attention to the elaboration of a clear set of standards for promotion and tenure, and established a fair and protective process for candidates to use. After much struggle Hobby convinced the administration to establish regular procedures for faculty participation in the hiring and periodic review of Deans and Department Heads. He also persuaded President Joab Thomas to empower the Senate to appoint its own voting member of each University committee, and to establish the Senate President as an ex officio member of the University Intercollegiate Athletics Committee. The Senate, with Hobby's aid, was instrumental in convincing the administration to adopt a regular procedure for, and strong faculty participation in, the merger or elimination of academic units. In recent years, as the University has had to face downsizing and belt-tightening, the Academic Affairs committee of the Senate has worked closely with the administration in making this procedure more useful.

Wythe Holt of the Law School, the only President of the Senate who had previously served as President of the faculty union, was the first to engage with the administration in the joint creation and staffing of committees (on tax reform, and to lobby the legislature). Holt insisted on appropriate rather than token minority membership on these committees. President Roger Sayers agreed, upon Holt's request, to grant the Senate the power of naming one member of each search committee for University Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Directors having the same status as the Director of Athletics. Holt established an ad hoc Senate Committee on Governance, whose membership also included former Senate Presidents Hobby and Johnson, future Senate President Green, Ladewig, Rhoda Johnson of A&S, and Bob Teare of Social Work, all respected members of the faculty who had long service with the University. The results of their deliberations over 18 months, the Governance Document, were accepted by Dr. Sayers, and many of its provisions have found their way into the *Faculty Handbook* under the insistence of Holt and the guidance of Senate President Margaret Garner. Some provisions, such as a system of regular faculty participation in the review of Vice Presidents and Directors having high status, and the privilege Sayers extended to the Senate to appoint its own representative in the process of hiring University Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Directors, have not yet been accepted by a Provost.

The inadequate faculty/staff salary situation which emerged during the Mathews years has never been resolved, and salary and benefits have increasingly become important faculty concerns. Senate President Bob Halli's memorable and courageous speech to a meeting of the Board of Trustees in fall 1992, pointing out that the personnel of a University was more important than its infrastructure and that raises should be seen as more important than new buildings, provoked a negative reaction from the administration of Dr. Sayers but convinced the Trustees. Since then, salaries and benefits for faculty and staff have usually been placed first in administration budgetary planning and its values hierarchy.

During the administrations of Alabama Governors Guy Hunt and Fob James, appropriations from the state to higher education greatly deteriorated. This has proved quite harmful to the University. The recent Senate presidential tenures of Norman Stein, Amy Ward, Margaret Garner, and Rob Ingram of C&BA have been marked by increasing cooperation of the Senate with the University's central administration in the necessary process of convincing the State Legislature to supply adequate funds for higher education in general and the University in particular. At the urging of Scott Bridges of A&S, Stein established the committee, which became a joint administration-Senate committee, that (under Bridges' energetic chairpersonship) has spearheaded the lobbying effort. Garner has been especially effective in lobbying, in publicity efforts, and in rallying faculty support and participation. Ingram convinced the administration that a tuition hike was necessary in order to fully fund

needed faculty/staff raises.

As in other states, (at the very time it provides less and less financial support) the legislature of Alabama has begun investigating the cost-benefits of the educational money it provides, stressing accountability for the state's institutions of higher education. These inquiries ignore or downplay key elements of state academic and economic success, especially faculty control of curriculum, the importance of graduate work (with small classes), the need for research time for faculty, and the importance of some disciplines which do not (at the moment) attract high enrollment. The 1994 legislature passed an "Articulation and General Studies Act," requiring "articulation" between the states two- and four-year undergraduate programs, and defined that core of studies which all students in such schools would be required to take. This gave rise to much faculty concern about faculty control over the content of the first two years of our undergraduate curriculum, and in general about the autonomy of the faculty in deciding what courses the University offers. Since this threat extended to the faculties of all of Alabama's comprehensive research universities, Amy Ward developed a comprehensive approach. The Senate passed a resolution upholding faculty competence and autonomy in curricular matters which was sent to the other two comprehensive research universities, Auburn and UAB. After some negotiation our resolution became a joint resolution of the faculty senates at all three Universities, and was sent to the Presidents of each and the Board of Trustees of our University. The able leadership of Ward helped to blunt the impact upon the University of these legislative efforts.

The Senate along with the administration have struggled with the issue of segregated fraternity/sorority life on a campus reserved for whites during most of its existence. There has been strong resistance from the white-dominated "Greek" system to any change in its segregated ways. While not demanding instant reversal of all old customs, the Senate has for many years supported various approaches and methods of eliminating this vestige of racism. In the 1999-2000 year, under the leadership of Ingram and Pat Bauch of the College of Education (who became Senate President in 2000), the Senate declared its unequivocal hostility to all forms of racism and to the continuation of such customs. In perhaps the most important resolution ever passed unanimously by the Senate, the Faculty Diversity Statement enjoins all faculty members to celebrate human diversity and to oppose racism (and any other form of irrational prejudice or discrimination) whenever it appears, not allowing hateful jokes, customs, passing references, and silent assumptions to go unchallenged. The Senate continues to work towards an environment free from discrimination and aware of the dangers and hidden staying power of racism.

Thanks in no small part to the work of long-time Senator Nick Stinnett of HES, and more recently that of President Garner, the service and "outreach" activities expected of faculty have become better defined. Drafted by Garner with the help of Stinnett and Betty Bryce of the Libraries, the Outreach Document was quickly accepted by President Andrew Sorensen, eventually was accepted by the Council of Deans after representatives of the Deans met with Garner and Amy Ward to iron out misunderstandings, and has become an appendix to the *Handbook* essentially as written. However, the degree to which "service" is to be taken into account in raises and for other purposes remains disputed.

As publication pressures and requirements have become seemingly paramount in academic value hierarchies, the Senate continues to work on the proper recognition to be given to excellence in teaching, on its proper measurement, and on its due consideration by administrators in the allocation of raises and other duties. Agreement on these difficult questions may be reached in the near future, thanks to assiduous attention to the matter by the Senate.

The Faculty Senate has established a website, thanks to the hard work of Marcus Brown of Engineering and Ray

White of A&S, which gives information not only about Senate activities, policies, minutes, structure, committee assignments and reports, and history, but also about issues facing the University and its academic community. It also provides access for the whole University community to important documents such as the *Faculty Handbook*. White was also instrumental in establishing the first listserv to include all of the University faculty, and (often against opposition from members of the administration) persisted in persuading the University to upgrade its information technology and computer support for administration and faculty in a manner which solved many problems well and also brought millions of dollars in savings.

In its momentous first quarter of a century, the Faculty Senate of the University of Alabama has both established itself as an important element in the governance and administration of the University, and courageously and persistently pursued the interests of the faculty—often against powerful opponents and great odds. The Senate remains sometimes maddeningly obscure, prolix, slow, or byzantine in its deliberations and proceedings, at times riven with personality disputes or pettiness or cynicism. It occasionally yields too soon to an always more powerful central administration, and it is sometimes criticized as "too radical" or (alternatively) "too useless" by some faculty peers. These are all, one should notice, usual characteristics of academia. Despite it all, the Senate and many individual Senators have time and again risen to the occasion. They have ably, eloquently, and (usually) democratically advanced, defended and, where possible, protected the interests of the faculty and of the academic side of the University. Many issues are unresolved and must be faced again; the relative amount of power accruing to the Senate is always under siege and must be eternally reasserted and guarded; and the pressures of teaching, publication, and community life tend to truncate Senate careers and lessen the time any Senator can give to Senate issues. Nevertheless, the Faculty Senate can and will continue to provide the University of Alabama with measured and staunch academic support and participation in governance, so long as faculty and Senators remember the past so as to gain knowledge and courage for the future.

NOTE TO THE READER: I have compiled this short history from my own memory of the events, to which I have added the pertinent recollections (containing many corrections and additions) of several others connected with those events. Let me thank Bill Andreen, Bob Barfield, Salli Davis, Margaret Garner, Pat Green, Bob Halli, Rob Ingram, Claudia Johnson, Jim Raymond, Norman Stein, Amy Ward, Jim Walters, and particularly David Vold, for their excellent memories and gracious help. Let me also thank Rob Ingram (again) and Pat Bauch, for their request that this be written, their faith and support during the perhaps surprisingly long period during which my research and writing was accomplished, and their steadfastness in representing and serving their fellow University of Alabama academicians. I dedicate this history to the memory of Chuck Hobby, who embodied the spirit of the Faculty Senate during his long, effective, low-key tenure in it. *Wythe Holt*

[Senate Officers 1975-present](#)

Recipients, Senate Distinguished Service Award

Bob Barfield

Annabel Hagood

Doug Jones (Dean, A&S)

Claudia Johnson

Wythe Holt

Jim Walters

Roger Sayers (U of A President)

Chuck Hobby.