POSITION PAPER ON
A REPRESENTATIVE ACADEMIC SENATE

Authors: Don Kaiper, Mitch Schweickert, Lois Yamakoshi and Dave Zimny

Introduction

**Purpose:** To replace the current Academic Senate of the Whole with a Representative Academic Senate in order to enhance efficiency, inclusiveness, communication and accountability.

Attendance at meetings of the Academic Senate in recent months has averaged less than 20% of our current full-time faculty of 106 members. Many academic departments have no representation at all at our periodic Senate meetings. President Rodriguez has recently raised the question whether the Academic Senate is in compliance with the Brown Act governing public meetings. The Senate has no stated quorum for doing business and requires no recorded votes.

The authors recognize the legitimacy of the president’s objections (and we hope he will ask the same questions regarding all other policy-making and advisory bodies at the college). Several solutions suggest themselves. The Senate might [1] set the kind of quorum customary for public bodies (generally a majority of the entire membership) and undertake measures to increase Senate attendance. We might [2] set a much lower quorum of 15-20%, thus matching current attendance with Senate bylaws. Or we might [3] replace the Senate as currently organized with a Representative Academic Senate, whose members are specially charged with representing the faculty in their academic departments.

**Values:** The Academic Senate of the Whole was originally established when Los Medanos College was a newer, more compact and more unified institution. The charge of deciding basic policies and molding a fledgling college brought almost all faculty together in a highly energetic and well attended forum. As the years passed, the college became necessarily more differentiated. Faculty were tasked with many instructional and administrative responsibilities that kept them from regular Senate attendance. College governance continued to demand a high level of faculty participation, but the structure of professional incentives made it more and more difficult to maintain that level.

We cannot and should not deal with this dilemma by trying to coerce or cajole faculty into attending Senate meetings (Option 1 above), or by settling for lower participation (Option 2). A Representative Academic Senate, supplemented by a yearly Convocation of the Whole Faculty, can help attain several important values:

**Efficiency.** A Representative Senate would include only faculty members specially designated to attend meetings, vote in behalf of their departments, and facilitate communications between the Senate and the faculty. Representative Senators would be more likely to take an active interest in Senate proceedings. A reasonable quorum would guarantee that no decisions were taken without widespread support. A
Representative Senate could be easily divided into operational committees, thus spreading assignments more equitably and fostering more efficient deliberation. Chairs of major shared governance committees, if not designated as Senators by their departments, would sit in the Senate ex officio, as would the Academic Senate President and the Past President.

Inclusiveness. A Representative Senate would be less inclusive than a perfectly attended Senate of the Whole, but much more inclusive than the current poorly attended Senate. Departments might prefer to rotate Senatorial assignments among full-time faculty to guarantee wider participation. The inclusion of both full-time and part-time Senators elected at large will broaden participation even further.

Communication. In a Representative Senate, each member would have the responsibility of explaining Senate proposals and votes to his/her departmental faculty, and conveying their views in policy deliberation. This would make for more reliable two-way communication.

Accountability. In a Representative Senate, each member would represent a determinate segment of the faculty with common perspectives and interests. The deliberations and decisions of the new Senate would be accountable to a broader segment of the faculty than they are under the current regime of low and irregular attendance.

This proposal is admittedly incomplete. It leaves several specific features of the new model to be decided by the faculty. Among the questions still to be answered are:

♦ Should there be a Senate Vice President or other officers in addition to the President?

♦ Should there be a Senate Council – and if so, what duties should it perform?

♦ How should Senate officers be elected?

♦ Should Senators and Senate officers be subject to recall?

♦ Should standing committees of the Senate be formed to deal with specific policies or issues?

The authors hope, however, that they have sketched the outline of a worthy reform, one that will renew and reinvigorate the Academic Senate.
Proposal

1. All meetings of the Academic Senate will continue to be open to all faculty. All faculty have the right to speak at Senate meetings, but only duly appointed Senators will have a vote in the body.

2. Sixteen Senators will be selected from divisions or departments within one week after instruction begins each Fall Semester. Senators will hold office for one academic year. Senators may succeed themselves. Senators may be selected through any equitable procedure chosen by the division/department(s) they represent.

3. In addition to these 16 Senators, 2 full-time Senators (1 from each Deanery) and 3 part-time Senators will be elected at large. Nominations for these at-large Senators will be accepted during Mandatory Faculty Service Day each Fall Semester. They will be chosen by a written ballot of all full-time and part-time faculty, respectively. At-large Senators will serve for one academic year, and may succeed themselves.

4. The jurisdiction and powers of the new Representative Senate will be identical to those of the current Senate of the Whole. In order to do business, at least 2/3 of the entire Senate membership (14 of 21 Senators) must be present. When required by the Brown Act, the votes of individual Senators will be recorded.

5. The Academic Senate President will preside over the Representative Senate, but will vote only in the event of a tie.

6. Every year a Convocation of the Whole Faculty will convene on the Required Faculty Service Day of Fall Semester, for the purpose of giving general guidance and direction to the Representative Senate. All measures considered by a Convocation will be expressed as Resolutions. Proposed resolutions may be introduced by any member of the faculty. Resolutions passed by majority vote will be mandatory agenda items for subsequent meetings of the Representative Senate. Resolutions which involve the organization, powers or responsibilities of the Representative Senate must be passed by a two-thirds vote.

7. The quorum for a Convocation meeting will be one half of the number of full-time faculty; both full-time and part-time faculty shall be eligible to speak and vote. If part-time faculty cast more than one third of all votes, their votes will be differentially weighted to one third of the final total.

8. The agenda for the Convocation of the Whole Faculty will be determined by the Representative Senate, but new agenda items may be added by majority vote. Convocation meetings will be scheduled to last two hours. Meetings may be lengthened by majority vote of those attending. If issues arise that cannot be resolved in a single meeting, additional meetings may be scheduled by majority vote.

If this proposal is chosen, we will vote between divisional or departmental representation for the 16 Senators in the Spring 2001 semester. The Representative Academic Senate will begin operation at the start of Fall Semester 2001. The Convocation of the Whole Faculty meeting at the start of Fall Semester 2002 will consider a resolution to continue the Representative Senate. If this resolution fails to pass by a two-thirds vote, operation of the Academic Senate will revert to the traditional model.
The following amendment to the position paper establishing the change to a Representative Academic was passed by the Academic Senate at its meeting Oct. 13, 2003:

"The establishment of the office of Senate VICE PRESIDENT was authorized by a majority faculty vote and Senate approval during the academic year 2002-02. Any LMC faculty member in good standing may become a VP candidate. The term of office is two years with remuneration to be determined by the Senate annually. Election for the VP will be held in the FALL semester, involving the whole faculty. There is an expectation that the winning candidate will 'shadow' the VP incumbent during the following Spring semester and will assume office that Fall. The essential tasks and responsibilities will be reviewed and authorized by BYLAWS when written."