

(Not So) Frequently Asked Questions About Faculty Meetings

September 2007, David Harvey, chair (harvey@depauw.edu)

Who may attend faculty meetings?

The By-Laws specify that all faculty members with academic or nominal rank, both full-time and part-time, may attend faculty meetings. The Standing Rules of the Faculty allow the following students to attend faculty meetings: student members of coordinating committees, the President of the student body, and two representatives each from *The DePauw*, WGRE and the Student TV Board of Directors. Vice-Presidents and other senior administrators, as designated by the President, also may attend. The Chair of the Faculty may admit other individuals at his or her discretion.

Who may participate during faculty meetings?

The By-Laws specify that all faculty members entitled to attend faculty meeting may participate in discussions. The Standing Rules of the Faculty also allow participation by the Vice-Presidents and any senior administrators designated by the President. Other individuals seeking to participate need permission from the Chair of the Faculty or a majority vote by the faculty at the beginning of the meeting.

Who has voting privileges at faculty meetings?

The By-Laws limit voting privileges to full-time faculty members with academic or nominal rank, the President, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs and the Registrar. Senior (Emeriti) Professors may vote during any semester in which they are teaching at least one course.

What does it mean for the faculty to go into Executive Session?

At times the faculty considers business that must remain confidential. When the faculty enters into an Executive Session, only voting members of the faculty may remain.

Is a quorum necessary for faculty meeting?

Yes. Our quorum is set at 40% of those faculty members eligible to vote and not on an approved leave. The quorum is set each semester and is announced at the beginning of the September and February faculty meetings. Faculty meetings cannot begin in the absence of a quorum. According to *Robert's Rules*, a quorum is presumed to exist until either the Chair of the Faculty notes the absence of a quorum or a Call for a Quorum leads to a count verifying that a quorum no longer exists.

What are *Robert's Rules of Order*?

Robert's Rules of Order outline proper parliamentary procedures and serves as the basis for conducting faculty meeting. Many organizations follow *Robert's Rules of Order*

when conducting business, although local modifications to the rules, both formal (published in our By-Laws and Standing Rules) and informal, are common. *Robert's Rules* has two guiding principles:

- The majority rules. A simple majority of those present and voting decides most motions; however,
- The majority cannot suppress the rights of individual members or absentee members, or the rights of those in the minority. Motions and actions placing limits on their rights require either previous notice or a super-majority of 2/3 of those present and voting.

What is previous notice?

To give previous notice is to inform the faculty of your intention to make a motion at the next faculty meeting. According to our By-Laws and Standing Rules, certain motions cannot be considered without previous notice; these are:

- a motion from a committee must be printed in the agenda for the meeting in which a vote is to be taken,
- a motion to amend the By-Laws, or to change graduation requirements, academic policies and personnel policies must be presented to the faculty at the meeting preceding the meeting in which a vote is to be taken. The motion is then set aside (often called “tabling the motion”) until the next meeting,
- a motion to suspend the By-Laws, other than a change in the order of business or method of election, must be printed in the agenda for the meeting in which a vote is to be taken.

In addition, *Robert's Rules* requires previous notice for any motion that changes or rescinds a previous action of the faculty if the motion is to carry with a simple majority. Without previous notice such motions require a 2/3 majority of those present and voting, or a simple majority of all eligible voting members of the faculty.

What types of motions are there?

There are five types of motions: main motions, subsidiary motions, privileged motions, incidental motions, and motions that bring a question again before the faculty. Motions have an order of precedence and differ with respect to the need for a second, whether debate is allowed, whether they can be amended, and the vote need to adopt the motion. A separate handout lists common motions and their characteristics.

How does a standing committee bring a main motion to the faculty?

A main motion from a committee must be published in the meeting's agenda if it is to voted upon by the faculty (a requirement of our By-Laws). A committee may bring an unpublished main motion to a faculty meeting, but a vote on the motion must wait until

the next faculty meeting. It has been our tradition to not require a second for any motion brought by a standing committee.

How can I bring a main motion to the faculty?

Any faculty member can make a main motion during faculty meeting. Motions in response to a committee's report may be presented at the end of the report and other motions may be put forward during New Business. With the exception of motions requiring previous notice, a motion from the floor of the faculty does not need to be published in the meeting's agenda; however, whenever possible, placing your motion in the agenda is encouraged. To be considered by the faculty, your motion must receive a second.

What happens when a main motion is before the faculty?

Once a main motion is before the faculty it is open for debate. During this debate each faculty member is entitled to speak once either for or against the motion and to explain the reasons for his or her position. It has been our tradition to allow faculty members to speak more than once if no one else is waiting to speak for the first time. Asking for clarification or for additional information does not count as speaking for or against the motion. When the debate has been exhausted, the faculty votes on the motion. For a main motion, a simple majority is required to pass the motion.

Is it possible to propose a change to a main motion?

Anyone can propose an amendment suggesting changes to the main motion. Such amendments generally seek either to clarify the motion by improving its wording, or to extend or limit the motion's scope. A motion to amend may be to insert words, sentences or paragraphs, to strike out words, sentences or paragraphs, or to strike out and insert words or sentences (but not paragraphs, sections, articles or the whole motion). The proposed amendment must be germane to the main motion. Once a motion to amend has been made and seconded, debate must focus on the amendment and not the main motion until such time as the motion to amend is passed or defeated. A motion to amend this primary amendment is allowed, but the secondary amendment cannot be amended.

What is a friendly amendment?

Robert's Rules does not allow for a friendly amendment, in which the committee or individual making the main motion agrees to accept the proposed amendment. When a motion is before the faculty it no longer belongs to the committee or individual who made the motion. Many organizations using *Robert's Rules*, however, allow for a "friendly amendment" if there is no objection from the members of the assembly; this is simply a form of unanimous consent that avoids the need for debate and a formal vote. The use of unanimous consent in this instance is best limited to amendments offering minor clarifications to the main motion. If there is any objection to the friendly amendment, it must be seconded, discussed and voted upon.

What is a motion to substitute?

A motion to strike out an entire paragraph, section, article or motion and to replace it with a different paragraph, section, article or motion is a motion to substitute. When offered and seconded, amendments to the original motion must first be accepted and handled. Amendments to the substitute motion may then be made. Once the two motions are in order, a vote is taken as to whether to accept or reject the substitute motion. A vote to accept a substitute motion is not the same as approving the substitute motion. Whichever motion emerges is still subject to debate and to further amendments, and must come before the assembly for a final vote.

Is it possible to prevent others from amending a motion?

No. Once a motion is before the faculty it belongs to the faculty, which is free to make changes. A committee may ask that the faculty refrain from amending a motion and, instead, to return the motion to the committee for further work; it is up to the faculty to decide whether to honor this request.

If I don't like the changes being made to my motion, may I withdraw it?

You may request that your motion be withdrawn and, if there is no objection from the faculty, then it is considered withdrawn. If there is an objection, then the motion to withdraw must be voted upon. If defeated, then the original motion remains before the faculty.

When a motion contains several parts, can I ask that they be considered separately?

When a motion has several parts it is possible to consider them separately provided that each part can stand alone as a motion. A motion to Divide the Question must specify the division and must receive a second. If the motion is approved, each part of the original motion is treated as a separate motion. In our meetings, the most common example of dividing a motion has been when the faculty is considering the approval of several new courses, which typically is presented as a single motion.

What if I think a motion needs more work before the faculty takes a formal vote on whether to approve or reject the motion?

You can make a motion to refer the motion back to committee (or, if the motion did not come from a committee, you may refer it to a specific committee). This motion should specify the committee and may include specific instructions to the committee.

What if I think the faculty needs more time to consider a motion before taking a vote, or that absent faculty members should be aware of the motion?

Make a motion to postpone further consideration until the next faculty meeting. If your motion is approved, the motion is moved to the agenda for the next faculty meeting. In our Standing Rules this is referred to as tabling the motion.

Can I force an end to debate even if other faculty members are waiting to speak?

Yes, by making a motion to Call the Question (actually, a call for the Previous Question). Because such a motion suppresses the right of those who wish to continue the debate, it requires a 2/3 majority to pass.

How are votes taken?

Normally voting is by a show of hands. If the result is clear, the Chair may choose to announce the result without officially counting individual votes, or the Chair may count votes and announce the result. Our By-Laws allow any voting member of the faculty to ask for a secret ballot, which must then be honored.. The Chair may appoint tellers to count votes.

How can I ask for a verification of a vote?

To question the outcome of a vote, you can make a motion calling for a Division of the Assembly. In this case there must be a formal counting of votes.

Once a motion passes, can it be changed by a subsequent motion?

The answer depends upon when the interest in revisiting the motion arises. In the same meeting in which a motion is passed, a Motion to Reconsider (when allowed) may be made by someone who voted with the majority. If approved, the motion in question returns before the faculty for its consideration. In a subsequent meeting, anyone can make a motion to rescind or to amend a previously approved motion. If previous notice has been given in the published agenda for the meeting, then the motion requires a simple majority; without previous notice the motion requires a 2/3 majority of those present and voting or a simple majority of all eligible voting members of the faculty.

Suggestions for Improving the Efficiency of Faculty Meetings

Usually the faculty efficiently takes care of business during faculty meetings. At times, however, the discussion of a motion becomes overly chaotic and confusing. This usually happens when the motion is poorly worded, when faculty members are not sure of the reasons for the motion, and when faculty members do not limit comments to the pending motion. Here are some suggestions:

1. When bringing a main motion to the faculty, pay careful attention to the wording to ensure that the motion's intention is clear and that it accomplishes your goals.
2. When presenting your main motion, clearly explain the reasons for the motion and what it accomplishes. Committees, in particular, may wish to explain the process leading to the motion and review some of the committee's discussions of the motion. Including a written explanation in the agenda might be the most efficient way to accomplish this.
3. When a motion must sit on the table before voting, use the time between faculty meetings to ask questions of the committee or individual making the motion. They may limit the need to ask for a Point of Information during debate.
4. If you plan to offer an amendment to a motion or a substitute motion, be sure that the proposed changes are clearly understood by the faculty and that they accomplish your goal. If approved, the changes cannot be easily altered by further amendments.
5. During debate, those speaking must limit their comments to:
 - speaking in favor of the pending motion or against the pending motion,
 - asking for a point of information regarding the pending motion, or
 - making a new motion (which then becomes the pending motion).
6. If a main motion is worthy but has many problems, consider referring it to committee rather than trying to rewrite it through a series of amendments.

It is hard to maintain a quorum when faculty meetings become too long. Here are some suggestions for increasing efficiency:

1. Committees wishing to make a report at a faculty meeting may include the text of the report in the agenda, in lieu of reading the report to the faculty, and then rise to take questions.
2. Faculty members and committees with announcements may include them in the printed agenda rather than rising to speak. Questions about an announcement should be limited to those of general interest to the faculty; other questions are best asked at the end of the meeting.