Task Force on Electronic Meetings 4/8/08 Senate Agenda Committee 4/14/08 University Senate 4/24/08

Procedures for an emergency synchronous e-meeting for the University Senate

- 1. The Senate will include in its standing rules each year a provision for the electronic mode to be used during synchronous e-meetings.
- 2. The standing rules of the Senate will be followed. For example, as with regular senate meetings all motions must be seconded and passed. Special modifications are needed to accommodate electronic forums.
- 3. Starting the meeting: The chairperson will send an e-mail to all senators notifying them that the official start of the meeting will begin on a particular date at least three business days in the future.
- 4. This notification will include an agenda, times to begin and end the meeting, and links to all other materials necessary to conduct the anticipated meeting, such as electronic forum, reading materials, reports from officers, and minutes from the previous meeting.
- 5. At the specified time, senators shall register to establish a quorum. Substitutes must register their names and for whom they are substituting.
- 6. Once a quorum is reached, as defined by the standing rules of the Senate, the chairperson may begin the meeting.
- 7. The names of senators and contact information for the specified forum will serve as the basis of the "meeting roster," and these senators constitute the deliberative assembly. The roster must be included in the minutes.
- 8. The chairperson announces that a quorum has been reached, lists the names of the senators, and starts the meeting. It is assumed that once the meeting begins the quorum is maintained until the chairperson announces that the meeting is adjourned. To be considered "present" at a meeting means that one has access to a computer and access to the ongoing messages during the time of the meeting. Therefore, being present is defined as having the ability, electronically, to follow the ongoing conversation of the meeting and participate fully over the meeting time.
- 9. Senators who were not a part of the opening quorum may participate in the meeting, respond to the electronic discourse, and vote as appropriate after being added to the meeting roster.
- 10. The meeting will automatically adjourn at the stated time unless a senator makes a motion to extend the meeting and the motion is passed.
- 11. The chairperson will officially declare the meeting is adjourned after a motion to adjourn has passed.
- 12. Senators in the deliberative process shall structure their messages with the following sections: a) a heading indicating motion number; b) whether they are "for," "against," or asking for a "point of information"; and c) a closing to the message including the senator's name. Each message must pertain to the motion under consideration.
- 13. Senators may electronically comment upon and respond to others' statements, but all messages must be addressed to the chairperson and accessible to all senators.
- 14. All motions are recorded in the minutes.
- 15. The chairperson must "recognize" individual senators to speak since simultaneous messages would bring disorder to a synchronous meeting. Contributions should be succinct.
- 16. Secondary motions (including point of information inquiries) are addressed in the order they are received. A legitimate point of order may interrupt the proceedings. The chairperson would send out a message explaining the "interruption." All messages that arrive while the "point of order" is addressed are set aside until the "point of order" is settled. If the "point of order" ruling is appealed by a senator, the chairperson will temporarily suspend discussion on the motion until a final ruling is made by vote of the senate as a whole.

- 17. General rules for voting: senators will forward their votes electronically to all participating senators, including the chairperson, who will tabulate them. Eligible senators may vote "yes," vote "no," or abstain. Votes will be structured in the following manner: a) a heading indicating motion number; b) whether they vote "yes," vote "no," or abstain; and c) a closing to the message including the senator's name. A numerical majority of those present and voting must vote "yes" to pass an item unless otherwise mentioned by Robert's Rules (e.g., a motion to end debate requiring two-thirds). Abstentions do not count as a vote. The chairperson will allow sufficient time for senators to cast their votes. The numerical results of all e-votes will be entered in the minutes of the next regularly scheduled meeting, but no senator identification on votes will be preserved.
- 18. The secretary and undersecretary of the Senate will take the electronic record and produce the minutes of the meeting. If available, time/date stamps will be used when preparing the minutes.

Glossary:

E-meeting would include listservs, blackboard discussion boards, e-mail, etc.

Synchronous e-meeting: a meeting for which the senators are in multiple physical locations and are all participating simultaneously. Listservs and Blackboard chat are examples a synchronous meeting forum. Since e-mail is inherently an asynchronous forum, it cannot be used to conduct synchronous meetings.

Procedures for an emergency asynchronous meeting for the University Senate

- 1. Starting the meeting: The chairperson sends an e-mail to all senators notifying them that the official start of the meeting will begin on a particular date at least three business days in the future.
- 2. This notification will include an agenda and links to all other materials necessary to conduct the anticipated meeting, such as electronic forum, reading materials, reports from officers, and minutes from the previous meeting. The chairperson will ensure that the text of a proposed motion is clear and unambiguous and that explanations and reasons for any suggested actions are provided. The agenda must specify a sign-in period to establish the quorum, the start and end dates for discussion, and a time period for voting. The time period for voting shall be no less than 24 hours and no more than 72 hours. The act of forwarding the motion to the senators is the "stating of the question on the motion."
- 3. On the specified date, in order to establish a quorum, senators shall reply stating that they are "ready to meet and will be available to vote" during the meeting and voting periods specified by the chairperson. Although a specific start time is not necessary, the chairperson shall indicate that all senators should reply within the specified period that they are participating in the meeting.
- 4. Since a quorum is necessary to conduct business, a quorum is defined by the standing rules of the Senate. Once a quorum is reached (as defined by the number of senators stating that they are participating), the chairperson may begin the meeting. If, on the other hand, a quorum is not reached the chairperson may either extend the participation deadline and/or inform all senators through e-mail of an alternative meeting or voting period. Senators without access to the specified forum should designate a substitute to act on their behalf. Should a senator be unable to designate a substitute, the senator waives the right to participate.
- 5. The names of senators and contact information for the specified forum will serve as the basis of The "meeting roster," and these senators constitute the deliberative assembly.
- 6. The chairperson announces that a quorum has been reached, lists the names of the senators, and starts the meeting. It is assumed that once the meeting begins the quorum is maintained until the chairperson announces that the meeting is adjourned. Although not all senators may be constantly following the discussion and responding immediately to the conversation that unfolds during the e-meeting, it is the responsibility of each senator to periodically engage in the meeting process. To be considered "present" at a meeting means that one has access to a computer and access to the ongoing messages during the time of the meeting. Therefore, being present is defined as having the ability, electronically, to follow the on-going conversation of the meeting and participate fully over the meeting time.
- 7. Senators who were not a part of the opening quorum may participate in the meeting, respond to the electronic discourse by asking the chairperson to add their names to the meeting roster, and vote as appropriate.
- 8. The chairperson shall set an end date with the idea that all senators shall have sufficient time to participate in the electronic discussion. A proposed time for the vote to begin will be designated. The meeting will not end prior to the announced deadline. Should a senator make a motion to extend the meeting, the chair has the discretion to grant an extension of no less than 24 hours and no more than 72 hours to allow complete discussion of the issue(s). During the extension, the meeting may be adjourned by a formal motion or by the chairperson declaring that the business of the meeting is completed. The vote automatically moves to the end of the extension period.
- 9. Senators in the deliberative process shall structure their messages with the following sections: a) a heading indicating motion number; b) whether they are "for," "against," or asking for a "point of information"; and c) a closing to the message including the senator's name. Each message will be limited to a single motion.
- 10. Senators may electronically comment upon and respond to others' statements, but all messages must be addressed to the chairperson and accessible to all senators.

- 11. Seconds to motions are not required since time is more flexible in asynchronous e-meetings. All motions are recorded in the minutes.
- 12. There is no need to "recognize" individual senators to speak since simultaneous messages would not bring disorder to an asynchronous meeting. Input, however, is limited to no more than 1,000 words (a short message rule) and shall not include attachments.
- 13. Subsequent motions are addressed in the order they are received, according to their respective time stamps. A legitimate point of order may interrupt the proceedings. The chairperson would send out a message explaining the "interruption." All messages that arrive while the "point of order" is addressed are set aside until the "point of order" is settled. If the "point of order" ruling is appealed by a senator, the chairperson will temporarily suspend discussion on the motion until a final ruling is made by vote of the committee as a whole.
- 14. General rules for voting: senators will forward their votes electronically to all participating senators, including the chairperson, who will tabulate them. Eligible senators may vote "yes," "no," or "abstain." Votes will be structured in the following manner: a) a heading indicating motion number; b) whether they vote "yes," vote "no," or abstain; and c) a closing to the message including the senator's name. A numerical majority of those senators present and voting must vote "yes" to pass an item unless otherwise mentioned by Robert's Rules (e.g., a motion to end debate requiring two-thirds). Abstentions do not count as votes. The numerical results of all evotes will be entered in the minutes of the next regularly scheduled meeting, but no senator identification on votes will be preserved.
- 15. The secretary and undersecretary of the Senate will take the electronic record and produce the minutes of the meeting. Time/date stamps are used when preparing the minutes.

Glossary:

E-meeting would include listservs, blackboard discussion boards, e-mail, etc.

Asynchronous e-meeting: a meeting for which the senators are in multiple physical locations and are not all participating simultaneously. E-mail and Blackboard discussion boards are examples of asynchronous forums.

RATIONALE FOR RULES AND POLICIES FOR EMERGENCY E-MEETINGS

All handbooks and guides for conducting committee business by electronic means state that Roberts' Rules of Order should be followed as much as possible, with adjustments as necessary to accommodate the logistical requirements inherent in such a medium. The basic guiding philosophy in making such rules and adjustments shall continue to be to allow all members a fair and reasonable opportunity to participate, to protect the rights of a minority to express their views, and to provide the means for a body to make decisions after a thorough discussion. For example, in a traditional meeting of the University Senate the chairperson recognizes only one senator to speak at a time; in a synchronous e-meeting (one with all senators participating on-line simultaneously), several members might send messages simultaneously and the chair would need to intervene to decide which message shall have priority in being considered.

If circumstances do not allow a synchronous e-meeting to be convened, then the Senate may need to resort to an a-synchronous e-meeting (one in which not all senators are participating on-line at the beginning of the meeting or at any one particular time during the course of the meeting.) During such a meeting extra time must, therefore, be allowed for senators who are not on-line continuously to catch up with the flow of messages. For similar reasons not all senators will be able to vote at the same time and a voting period must be announced sufficiently long to give all senators the chance to vote electronically.

A **traditional meeting** as described by Roberts' Rules of Order with all senators present in the same room at the same time is the most efficient way to conduct official business quickly and effectively. For this reason, such a meeting is preferable when conveners wish to transact Senate business using the shortest possible meeting time.

However, if it is not possible to assemble all senators (or at least a quorum of them) together in the same physical space, then a **synchronous e-meeting** would be the second preference in terms of efficiency of action. Because senators would be in various physically separate locations and because moderating simultaneous e-messages by participants is more complex and burdensome for the presider, a synchronous e-meeting may take somewhat longer to transact business compared to a traditional meeting. However, because all senators would be on-line and participating in real time, such a meeting could still be reasonably efficient.

A third alternative, an **a-synchronous e-meeting** must necessarily take longer, probably days instead of hours, because the participating senators would not necessarily be engaged continuously or simultaneously. The chief virtue of such a meeting is expediency: when circumstances do not allow a quorum of senators to meet together in the same room nor even at the same time, it does allow a format for conducting official business. The essential criterion for convening an emergency asynchronous e-

meeting is that the agenda item must be truly urgent, requiring attention before the next scheduled meeting of the Senate. Because a meeting in this format will take longer to complete, all participants should strive to avoid wasting time. For example, a participant should carefully draft and revise an e-mail message before sending it to be considered by the meeting.

It is suggested that the Senate decide upon the electronic medium to be used for its e-meetings before scheduling such meetings, ensure that all senators have access to the chosen medium and are familiar with its operation, and conduct a trial meeting to reveal any technological or ergonomic problems. As senators become more familiar with the nature of e-meetings, some modification of these rules may be necessary or beneficial.