



February 24, 2009

Dear voting faculty, other members of the UNM community, and guests:

Welcome to the Special Faculty Meeting of February 25, 2009. The UNM Faculty Constitution provides for such meetings. We are here today as a result of a petition to the president calling for a meeting to discuss issues pertaining to shared governance and institutional aims.

Special Faculty Meetings are a powerful but fairly blunt instrument of governance of the University: They are too unwieldy to address all the issues that arise in running a university, or all the issues that individual faculty members may wish to raise. The normal channels of university governance – the Faculty Senate, the Academic Freedom & Tenure Committee, and the administrative structure under the Chairs, Deans, Provost, President and Regents – are the appropriate venue for most such issues. However, the general faculty is empowered through special faculty meetings to deliberate and weigh in on major issues that affect the university as a whole.

Under the UNM Constitution, the Committee on Governance is tasked with establishing the Meeting agenda, and the UNM President or his designate is tasked with presiding at the meeting. The meeting will be run under parliamentary procedure as established in Robert's Rules of Order. We will have the services of Dr. Beulah Woodfin as Parliamentarian; questions of proper procedure can be referred to her. Robert's Rules recommend that when complex matters must be discussed under time pressure, the assembly may choose to limit discussion in terms of both time and content. At the start of the meeting, the Committee on Governance will propose motions: a) to limit each speaker from the floor to 2 minutes; b) to limit the length of time spent on each agenda item; and c) to limit discussion of the main motions to the wording as presented; that is, amendments to the main motions would not be considered. Each of these will require a two-thirds vote to be approved.

In order to run an efficient meeting addressing the issues we face, the Committee on Governance (CoG) solicited (from all voting faculty members) proposals for motions to be considered today. Many were received, and the CoG sought to synthesize them into a handful of motions that could be effectively addressed in one meeting. In writing the main motions to be considered at this meeting, we pared down and simplified many draft motions, and had to choose some rather than others – always striving to bring forward what appear to be the concerns shared by significant numbers of faculty. In doing so, we shortened the submitted texts considerably, often by eliminating some of the “whereas” clauses introducing the motion or the background context and rationale for the motion. During the course of the discussion on motion, please feel free to present the necessary context and rationale. Resolutions will be introduced by the Committee on Governance for discussion and voting. Under Roberts' Rules no second is necessary. These motions should not be interpreted as the “official position” of the CoG, nor as supported by a particular CoG member. We invite you to speak from the floor to lay out your point of view regarding each motion, and why it should be approved or rejected.

Finally, a few notes on process: Under our constitution, only members of the “voting faculty” have the right to address the meeting (though voting faculty may delegate their slot to someone of their choosing, whether faculty or not). To allow broad participation, speakers are limited to speaking no more than twice to any agenda item, and further limited in how long they may speak. Votes on the final resolutions will be taken by secret ballot, with results announced later. Minor votes, for example on a particular amendment to a resolution, will be taken by show of hands or in another way at the discretion of the president. Under the constitution, general faculty meetings are two hours or less. By vote of the assembly the meeting can be extended *once* for a half hour.

The University faces serious challenges. For the good of this public institution through which we serve the people of New Mexico, we ask for frank dialogue, professional civility, and courage in meeting these challenges.

Sincerely,

The Committee on Governance

Robert's Rules are complex because they foresee a vast variety of procedural situations, and must cover all of them. But my experience is that 90% of the time, a half dozen or so basic understandings can guide participants toward constructive, efficient meetings. Here are some quick tools for moving meeting forward and keeping it on track. -- RLW

1. Point of order: Can be asserted from floor without recognition by the presider; used to assure the meeting proceeds according to parliamentary rules and any procedural rules passed at the meeting itself.
2. Make a motion: Seeks to move the body to take a specific action (which is stated in reasonably precise terms in the motion). Can only be done when no other motion is under consideration.
3. Propose an amendment: Seeks to change the language of the motion under consideration, and only that motion. In our meeting this week, we hope to pass a measure that would limit discussion to the motion language proposed by the Committee on Governance – i.e. no amendments would be allowed to the proposed motions; after discussion, vote would be an up-or-down vote on the motions as worded. If the measure to limit discussion succeeds by a 2/3 vote, “proposing an amendment” would be out of order. However, if any additional motions are brought forward later in the meeting, these would be subject to amendment.
4. Call the question: Seeks to close debate and move toward voting on the motion before the faculty. The effort to call the question must be approved by vote (may be a voice vote or show of cards). If approved, then the actual vote on the motion itself will occur (in our meeting this week, votes on all main motions will be by secret ballot).
5. Table the motion, or “lay the motion on the table”: Seeks to defer consideration of a motion until later in the meeting, or until a future meeting.
6. Point of information: Seeks to ask the presider for a specific piece of procedural information.