

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

Proposal 11-08

(Voting Units: Academic)

Faculty Referendum on Terms of Department Chairs / School Deans

Background

In the early 1990's, departments in the university had a mixture of Heads and Chairs. In 1992 several governance proposals were put up for referendum by the Senate. Proposal 4-92 said the title of department supervisor will be Chair and gave the following definitions of Heads and Chairs:

Head: A head is understood to be an agent of the administration with a secondary responsibility as liaison from the department to the administration. The head may establish and disband any committees without the approval or counsel of the department faculty. The head alone is responsible for the smooth operation of the department. The dean selects the head with input from the department. The head serves for an indefinite period of time at the pleasure of the administration.

Chair: A chair is understood to be an agent of the department faculty with a secondary responsibility as liaison from the administration to the faculty. Under a Chair, the departmental governance is defined by a departmental charter created with input from all departmental faculty. This charter may not be altered without the faculty's consent. The faculty and the Chair share responsibility for the smooth operation of the department. Selection procedures for the Chair are determined by the faculty with input from the Dean. The Chair serves for a definite period of time, often with the possibility for reappointment.

Proposal 5-92 dealt with establishment of department charters in order to delineate the responsibilities of the Chair from those of the unit faculty. The charter requirement was also considered necessary for Schools. Proposal 4-92 received 148 *yes* votes (83.6%) and 29 *no* votes (16.4%). Proposal 5-92 received 172 *yes* votes (80.8%) and 41 *no* votes (19.2%). However, the Senate had established that the passage of the proposals required 50% of the voting constituency for which the two proposals fell short by 2 and 5 votes, respectively. The Senate then created Proposal 16-92 on charters and the administration subsequently approved the charter proposal as well as the title of all supervisors as Chairs.

Since the passage of Proposal 16-92 on Charters in 1992, several departments have voted in favor of putting constraints on the number of terms their representative (department Chair) can serve continuously. These charter amendments have not been accepted or acted upon by the Deans of colleges.

There are many reasons for limiting the number of terms of a department Chair or school Dean. Some of these reasons are:

- built-in structure for change in unit leadership after a reasonable time;
- orderly change without passing judgment on a colleague;
- promoting stronger committee structures in the unit that reduce administrative costs;
- building a pool of diverse people with administrative experience that can fill interim or permanent positions at various levels of the university thus providing greater stability and diversity to the university;
- ensure faculty do not lose touch with teaching or research in their field due to a long duration in administrative position.

A unit may not want any constraint on the number of terms their department Chair / school Dean can serve, while other units may choose a variety of constraints, such as: a mandatory search after 2 terms to which the current Chair / Dean could apply; Chair / Dean could serve 2 terms continuously but could apply again after a hiatus of one term. Furthermore a unit may change its view over time on constraints (or no constraint). All this can be accommodated by building into the Charter a required item defining the constraint on the number of terms a department Chair / school Dean can serve. It is time for the Senate to provide the opportunity to the faculty to weigh in on the constraints on the number of terms their representative to the administration can serve.

Motion

Faculty in units that have a department Chair or school Dean will vote on the ballot attached. If the ballot is approved, the Senate will forward the results of the referendum (vote tally) to the University President and Board of Control with its recommendation that it be adopted.

Ballot

The unit charter must include a statement describing the constraint on the number of terms the department Chair (school Dean) may serve continuously. The unit may choose to have no constraint. The statement must be approved by a secret ballot.

I approve

I disapprove

Some examples of constraints:

(a) The school Dean (department Chair) can serve at most two terms of three years continuously. After a hiatus of one term the individual is free to return to the position of school Dean (department Chair).

(b) After two terms of a department Chair (school Dean) there will be a mandatory search to which the Chair (Dean) can apply. Note the decision for external search will be made by college Dean or Provost.

Introduced to Senate: 5 December 2007

Withdrawn: 3 April 2008