



Preliminary Review of the Specifications on the Special Committee on University Finance (SCUF)

PRESENTED BY	Alan Peel, Chair
REVIEW DATES	SEC – April 14, 2020 SENATE – April 22, 2020
VOTING METHOD	For information only
RELEVANT POLICY/DOCUMENT	Bylaws of the University Senate
NECESSARY APPROVALS	N/A

ISSUE

In 2018, the Elections, Representation, & Governance (ERG) Committee was charged with considering a proposal to create a body that could advise on University resources and planning. The ERG Committee’s report recommended the creation of a new Special Committee on University Finance (SCUF), which the Senate approved in April 2019. Among its recommendations, the ERG Committee asked that the chair of SCUF provide annual updates to the ERG Committee on SCUF’s progress and operations in spring 2020 and spring 2021 in order to allow the ERG Committee to consider modifications to address any issues in implementation, as well as to inform its future work to consider codifying a permanent body. In January 2020, the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) charged the ERG Committee with reviewing the report that recommended SCUF be created, consulting with the chair of the Special Committee, considering questions related to representation and member replacement procedures, and recommending changes to the Senate Bylaws, as appropriate.

COMMITTEE WORK

Over the course of two meetings in February 2020, the ERG Committee reviewed its report on Enhancing Senate Input on University Planning and Resources (Senate Document #17-18-20) and met with the chair of SCUF. The committee did not identify any concerns that would necessitate changes to the committee’s structure of operations as established in the Senate Bylaws. The committee also reviewed language regarding student term lengths. The committee reviewed the rationale behind the provision in the Bylaws as documented in the committee’s report. The ERG Committee reaffirmed its original intention—that the provision in the Bylaws should permit student members to decide to continue serving on the committee for up to two additional years without having to run for re-election—and recommended that the Senate Office adopt this interpretation in implementing the Bylaws.

ALTERNATIVES

Not applicable.

RISKS

There are no known risks to the University.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no known financial implications.



Preliminary Review of the Specifications on the Special Committee on University Finance (SCUF)

2019-2020 Committee Members

Alan Peel (Chair)
MacKenzie Allen (Undergraduate Student)
Sarah Babineau (Ex-Officio Director of Human Resources Rep)
Holly Brewer (Faculty)
Nicole Catanzarite (Graduate Student)
Leigh Ann DePope (Faculty)
Alexander Houck (Non-Exempt Staff)
Christine Johnston (Faculty)
Robert Koulish (Faculty)

Elizabeth Lathrop (Faculty)
Sharon La Voy (Ex-Officio Associate VP IRPA Rep)
Ngam Kenneth Ngong (Graduate Student)
Calvin Oates (Exempt Staff)
Bria Parker (Faculty)
Nicholas Torre (Undergraduate Student)

Date of Submission

April 2020

BACKGROUND

In 2018, the Elections, Representation, & Governance (ERG) Committee was charged with considering a proposal to create a body that could advise on University resources and planning. The ERG Committee's report recommended the creation of a new Special Committee on University Finance (SCUF), which the Senate approved in April 2019 (Appendix 1). Among its recommendations, the ERG Committee asked that the chair of SCUF provide annual updates to the ERG Committee on SCUF's progress and operations in spring 2020 and spring 2021 in order to allow the ERG Committee to consider modifications to address any issues in implementation, as well as to inform its future work to consider codifying a permanent body.

In January 2020, the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) charged the ERG Committee with reviewing the report that recommended SCUF be created, consulting with the chair of the Special Committee, considering questions related to representation and member replacement procedures, and recommending changes to the Senate Bylaws, as appropriate (Appendix 3).

COMMITTEE WORK

Over the course of two meetings in February 2020, the ERG Committee reviewed its report on Enhancing Senate Input on University Planning and Resources (Senate Document #17-18-20) and met with the chair of SCUF. The chair reported that the task of becoming knowledgeable about the University's budget has proven a significant undertaking (the chair also provided an overview of SCUF's operations to the Senate at its meeting on March 3, 2020, which may be found in Appendix 2). The Special Committee's progress was impacted by the departure of the University's Associate Vice President for Finance and Chief Financial Officer (CFO), who had been instrumental in planning to help members establish a baseline of knowledge on the budget. The Special Committee is methodically accumulating knowledge and expertise, and is starting to consider the question of what role it might play in informing the broader campus community about budget issues. SCUF members are also considering the most effective ways to channel campus input to the administration. In the future, it may establish and expand a collection of budget-related resources on the Senate webpage.

The chair shared that it has been challenging to gather budget information that moves from the aggregate to the granular. The Special Committee needs to avoid becoming focused on particular spending decisions rather than the overall budget, but granular data can help illuminate broader questions. The University and USM budgets are not public until they have already been submitted to the governor. SCUF is considering whether there would be value in analyzing the previous year's budget and considering it in relation to the University's Strategic Plan. That review could then inform recommendations on priorities to emphasize in the following year's budget planning process.

SCUF has not had any issues with attendance, nor has it identified any additional individuals with unique knowledge who should be added as ex-officio members. Some members of the ERG Committee expressed concern that not every College and School is represented on SCUF. In discussion with the SCUF chair it became clear to the ERG Committee that ensuring representation from every College and School would make SCUF unworkably large. It is also the case that when envisioning SCUF, the ERG Committee did not intend that members would represent particular interests or units, but instead hoped that members would be selected for their willingness to engage in the difficult task of developing a familiarity with the University's complex budgeting process.

The ERG Committee reviewed the membership of SCUF and provisions in the Senate Bylaws for filling vacancies. The Bylaws establish different procedures depending on when in the academic year a vacancy occurs. Replacements for any mid-year vacancies are selected from the original pool of nominees for the committee, while vacancies that occur after the Senate's annual Transition Meeting are selected through a new nomination process. To date, SCUF has not had any vacancies.

The ERG Committee also reviewed language regarding student term lengths. The Bylaws indicate that students serve one-year terms that may be "renewed" up to two times; the terms for faculty and staff members are three years. It is unclear from the text itself whether students may be re-elected up to two times, or whether they may extend their membership beyond their one-year term at their discretion. The ERG Committee reviewed the rationale behind the provision on student term lengths. In keeping with a desire to create a body that could develop expertise over time, the ERG Committee's intention had been to allow student members to serve as long as their faculty and staff colleagues on the committee. To avoid dissuading juniors and seniors from running, however, ERG decided not to require three-year terms, but to leave decisions on how long to serve to the individual student members. As the committee's 2019 report notes: "Given the importance of building knowledge of the budget, the student terms can be extended up to two times if the members are interested in continuing" (Appendix 1). **The ERG Committee reaffirmed its original intention—that the provision in the Bylaws should permit student members to decide to continue serving on the committee for up to two additional years without having to run for re-election—and recommended that the Senate Office adopt this interpretation in implementing the Bylaws.**

The committee did not identify any concerns that were pressing enough to justify changes to the Senate Bylaws.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1—ERG Report on Senate Document #17-18-20

Appendix 2—Overview of SCUF's Operations

Appendix 3—Charge from the Senate Executive Committee