

Reforming Committees:

Making Students' Council Efficient, Effective, and Relevant



*A submission to the Committee for Council Reform and Progress
by M. Mustafa Hirji*

Date: August 12, 2004
To: Gregory Harlow, Chair of the Committee for Council Reform and Progress
From: M. Mustafa Hirji, Student-at-Large, Academic Affairs Board
Re: Submission on Committee Reform

I would like to thank the Committee for Council Reform and Progress (CCRAP) for the opportunity to comment on the Committee's current initiative to reform the committee system of Students' Council. I am pleased to have been given the chance to provide my thoughts on this issue.

Although the request for a submission provided a set of specific questions, I have chosen to deviate from providing simple responses to those questions. Rather, I find it is more logically coherent to begin from first principles and build to a conclusion, explaining in the process why Council's committee system is lacking, and how it should be repaired. As such, my submission has grouped topics into categories reflecting a logical build-up and progression. I have included a section entitled *Summary of Responses to Questions Posed by CCRAP* where I summarize the response to each question posed by CCRAP that is argued more thoroughly within the document. As well, I included have a final section entitled *Summary of Recommendations* which summarizes all the recommendations enclosed in this report, organized by topic. Both should provide convenient references for CCRAP as its members use this document.

In writing this submission, I have drawn from my experience on Students' Union Committees, University of Alberta governance bodies and committees, as well as the governance bodies and committees of student groups such as the Engineering Students' Society and the Alberta Public Interest Research Group. Specifically, I have primarily drawn from experience on the Students' Union Communications Advisory Committee (2000–2002), the Students' Union Academic Affairs Board (2001–2002, 2003–present), the Students' Union Committee for the Finding and Realization of Changes to Elections (2002), the Students' Union Internal Review Board (2003–2004), as well as visits to the Tuition Undertakings, Planning and Action Committee (2003–2004), the External Affairs Board (2002–2004), the Internal Review Board (2001–2002), and the Committee for Council Reform and Progress (2002–2003). External to the Students' Union, I have drawn on experience from General Faculties Council (GFC) (2000–present), the GFC Academic Planning Committee (2001–2003), the GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (2003–present), the GFC Nominating Committee (2004–present), and the GFC Executive Committee (2004–present). I believe my breadth of committee experience provides me with a unique perspective to the role and function of committees in different governance systems.

Once again I thank CCRAP for the opportunity to present this submission. Should the Committee wish to follow-up on any matter presented herein, I would be happy to respond to any questions or potentially even meet with the Committee.

Sincerely,



M. Mustafa Hirji
Student-at-Large, Academic Affairs Board

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Introduction

Committees normally exist within a larger governance structure. They are bodies created to carry out work delegated to it by a superior-ranking assembly. The first question this raises is why bodies choose to delegate their responsibilities to subordinate committees.

Reasons for Delegation

There are three common reasons why matters are delegated.

1. Reduction of workload

The work of governing an organization is often too much for one body, especially one body composed of volunteers, to perform. Not all members of a governing body can devote large amounts of time to governance.

Often the workload problem results when there is too much debate resulting from too many people considering one matter of business. Too many opinions, often not much different from each other, stretch out the length of a meeting leading to some concerns being unresolved, some concerns considered only superficially, or no decision being made.

A committee can help in this situation because it calls upon a smaller group with more time to consider the matter for the larger assembly, or to consider the matter before the larger assembly does. This smaller group, by virtue of having fewer voices, can consider more matters of business in less time. As such, this committee can go into further depth and deal with concerns raised more thoroughly. This is a more efficient way of dealing with the problem. Even if the matter requires further consideration by the full assembly, usually through thorough consideration, committee members will have found most if not all of the concerns of the larger assembly without having to hear them from the larger assembly. At worst, the committee members will have dealt with all of the committee members' concerns leaving the full assembly to deal with only new concerns not yet mentioned—this still leads to a shorter meeting time for the assembly.

Committees also increase efficiency by becoming experts at thorough analysis of the business the committee is charged with handling. As such, they become faster and more adept at dealing with similar and related business in the future.

Committees thus reduce the workload of an assembly by allowing small groups with more time to delve deeper into an issue, by giving a matter more thorough consideration more quickly than the full assembly could, and by creating a body of experts who will gain experience and adeptness which will help deal efficiently with similar and related business in the future.

2. Expediency

Debate can be long and cumbersome. This is necessary in order to properly deliberate on matters and to ensure all comments, criticisms, and suggestions are aired and considered.

Unfortunately, there is not always time to fully debate a matter. Sometimes a matter is urgent and needs immediate resolution. In such circumstances, it is difficult to convene a large assembly in a short period of time. There are many people to contact, many to schedule around to ensure quorum, and many people who need to be briefed. It's a daunting task to have an urgent item dealt with by a full assembly.

Committees, however, have much smaller and more manageable memberships. In a crunch, they can deal with matters much more easily than a full assembly. Delegating matters to a committee will often allow for urgent matters to be dealt with without having to convene a full assembly.

3. Preventing Conflicts of Interest and Commitment

A conflict of interest exists when a person or body is exercising a power that could be used for personal advantage. For example, a corporate executive charged with contracting out some work would be in conflict of interest if he had a financial stake in one of the bidding contractors.

A conflict of commitment exists when a person or body exercising a power is playing multiple roles and, depending on how the power is used, the person or body could preferentially achieve the aims of one role to

the detriment of another role. For example, an engineer doing some external consulting on a project could be forced to advise on a matter of direct financial interest to both his normal employer and the organization he is consulting for. In this case, the person has two conflicting commitments: should he do what is best for his normal employer or for his consulting employer?

Both of these conflicts, and especially the former, arise when one person has too many powers or duties. Delegating some of those powers to another body can prevent such conflicts from arising. In the case of a conflict of interest, a delegate will exercise power that could have been abused by the superior. This is why governments have an independent officer to run elections—to prevent abuse that would help one candidate. In the case of a conflict of commitment, delegation can separate two conflicting roles. This is why governments separate their judicial role from their legislative and executive roles.

Committees are useful for removing power that could be abused by the larger assembly and for removing a conflicting role of the larger assembly.

Conduct of a Delegated Relationship

The key to a successful delegation is to allow a delegate to exercise the power the delegate has been charged with. Delegates should be given their instructions and direction in full before commencing their work. However, once the delegate begins work, the delegate should be given the freedom to act as he or she sees fit. If a superior interferes with the work of a delegate, the superior is undermining the very purpose of the delegation. By interfering, the superior is now doing the work that he or she was trying to delegate. As well, any expertise the delegate has gained or any depth of knowledge the delegate has gained will be wasted as the less-knowledgeable superior overrules the delegate eliminating the sought-after efficiency. Worst of all, the superior may interfere where a conflict of interest or conflict of commitment is present thereby eliminating the separation needed for proper decisions to be made in such conflicts.

To be sure, a delegate should be overseen. They should be questioned to ensure that they have been thorough. They should be forced to justify questionable decisions. Oversight may involve periodic reporting or step-wise approvals to ensure that delegated work is being done adequately along the way.

Delegates should also be given clear instructions and expectations when assigned a task. Such prior direction does not interfere with the delegation since the delegate has not yet begun work. Rather it lays out what the delegate should accomplish and within which constraints the delegate should operate. The problem with interference is that it attempts to overrule the thoroughness and expertise of the delegate while sacrificing the efficiencies and the separation the delegation was supposed to provide. If there are conditions and criteria that need to be met and adhered to, they should be known beforehand and should be stated then. That way efficiencies are not lost. If comprehensive instructions are given up-front and upon seeing what the delegate has produced, the superior is not happy, the superior is likely having a personal reaction, or has pre-determined the desired outcome. Neither of these should not be entering into decision making. Both should give way to thoroughness, expert analysis, and impartiality.

Where proper oversight discovers problems in the work of a delegate, the delegate should be made to correct their work; not overruled. In an extreme case, the delegate may need to be dismissed. But both should occur because oversight has discovered a failure or failings in the delegate. Disagreement or dislike of what a delegate has produced is not a failure or failing of the delegate but rather that of the superior. Any action based on such failure or failings will undermine the efficiencies, thoroughness, expertise, and impartiality that delegation should create.

Unless it can be shown the delegate was mistaken or acted improperly, the delegate's work should be accepted.

Disadvantages of Delegation

Delegation does have one major drawback: the delegate is not the superior. The delegate can never know exactly what the superior wants or what the superior would do. Oversight of a delegate is needed to minimize the differences that may arise. However, oversight can only go so far. The superior can never get exactly the same results from a delegate.

This problem is compounded when there are multiple levels of delegation. A delegate may take orders from someone who, himself, is a delegate. Knowing what a superior wants is difficult. Knowing what the superior of a superior wants is even more difficult. Minimizing this problem requires indirect action: overseeing he who oversees the final delegate. This can be extremely difficult.

Delegation is, therefore, undesirable where deviations from the superior would be critical. Ideally, delegation would be on matters of only minor import where some inaccuracy would cause little damage. While it is likely impossible to meet this ideal for all cases, it is nonetheless an important concern when deciding what to delegate.

Council and Its Committees

In general, the purpose of a committee is to allow for speedier and more efficient stewarding of business. Committees also enable some expertise to be gained in the types of work the committee considers. A good committee should be a well-conducted delegation that enables and empowers an assembly to execute its work more efficiently and more effectively.

Role of Council

Council is itself a delegate body. It is charged with carrying out the will of the student body. It would be impossible to convene every undergraduate student at the University of Alberta to make decisions. Council acts as the student body's delegate in asserting the student will in the Students' Union and making sure that the Students' Union is working for students as effectively as students would want. Elections and recall as well as interaction between Councillors and constituents (e.g. consultation) direct Council and ensure oversight.

Council carries out its representation of students through two types of activities: the creation and amendment of legislation (bylaws, political policies, and budgets); and the oversight of the Executive. Committees of Council should therefore play a role that enhances these two activities.

Specific Role of Council Committees

Enhancing the consideration of legislation can be facilitated by committees in a few different ways.

1. Shorter meetings

Council has a large volume of work to deal with. Its agendas always have more business on them than Council manages to deal with in a given meeting. More thorough committee consideration of business should result in less debate at Council and a greater delegation to committees should shorten Council agendas. Both would together enable shorter meetings.

2. Thorough consideration

A small group of students especially interested in the general topic at hand will be a far more efficient and thorough analysts of legislation. Such a committee will delve deeper into the problems of the legislation. As well, the smaller group will enable a speedier and more dynamic debate on business.

3. Deeper legislation

Because committees will create small groups of experts in different fields, legislation will receive a more expert analysis than by Council as a whole. This should enable the creation of better legislation with more depth as committee members' greater knowledge of topics will be borne onto the legislation created by the committee. This will allow a more accurate and stronger assertion of the student will leaving less to improvisation by entities other than Council.

Committees should also enable the better oversight of the Executive. Instead of just questioning Executives during question period, committees with expertise in certain areas will be able to query Executives with more probing questions. This will ensure that mistakes of the Executive are discovered more frequently and that infrequent attempts by the Executive to break the rules are caught.

Current Council Committees

The current arrangement of Council committees was formed during the late 1990s right after a rearrangement of Executive portfolios. At the time, committees were viewed as bodies to help the Executive out. As such, they were chaired by Executives and were aligned towards the Executive portfolios in most cases.

As sounding boards for the Executive, these committees have worked very well. However, by being Executive-centric committees, they have done little to enhance Council. These committees do not lessen the workload of Council, make Council more efficient, allow more through vetting of Council business, nor result in deeper and more detailed legislation. The result is that Council is inefficient and overloaded.

Council meetings tend to run late into the evening. Council never gets through its entire agenda and items are pushed back for weeks on end. For example, the recent motion to create a House Committee close to two months on Council's agenda before reaching first reading. This is a clear sign there is too much work.

When items finally are considered by Council, they are debated for hours. That so much debate is needed is an indication that motions are not well-vetted when they hit Council.

Both are problems that plague Council because it does not have a good committee system. A good committee system should lessen Council's workload and should ensure that when matters reach Council, they do not need hours of debate, excepting rare cases.

Restructuring of the committee system should address these issues and allow Council to work less and more efficiently.

Specific Problems with Council's Committee System

1. Disconnect from Council

The biggest problem with Council's committee system is that the committees are currently not responsive to Council; they are responsive to the Executive. They are chaired by Executives and are aligned to Executive portfolios. And on most committees (until recently, it was all), Councillors are greatly outnumbered. This means that those who understand and represent Council cannot exert Council's will on committees. This means that committees don't reflect Council's will.

A quick look at the business of the Academic Affairs Board or the External Affairs Board will show how out of touch these two committees are with Council. So far this year, neither has dealt with business that has proceeded to Council or been referred to it by Council. Both committees' agenda are filled with discussions for helping the respective Vice-President who chairs the committee. Until recently, the Internal Review Board and the Financial Affairs Board were no different.

But beyond just not dealing with Council's business, on the occasion that these committees do deal with Council business, they both fail to have the confidence of Council in their recommendations. This is, in part, a consequence of the committee's membership being so different from that of Council. Committee business routinely is given a thorough debate and vetting by Council. Debate done in committee is needlessly repeated at Council. The impression at Council seems to be that committee decisions are arbitrary and that they do not reflect Council.

The worst cases of committee disconnect from Council occurred in 2002—2003 on the External Affairs Board. That year, the Vice-President used to try to use the committee's support of his motions to argue for Council's support. However, committee members who lost the vote at committee used to take their fight to Council thereby stretching out debate and killing any help the committee's support would have given to the motion. In that year, that committee became a pawn in political battles; it certainly did not help with advancing Council's agenda more efficiently or effectively.

2. Integration of Committees with Council

If Council is to get maximum value from its committees, it needs to integrate itself into a committee system so that committees are an integral part of how Council carries out its business.

It is somewhat of a misnomer to call the committees of Council a committee "system." At present, committees act independently of each other. Most have a very weak connection to Council. And most are not an integral piece in Council's legislative workflow. Council has committees, they sometimes make recommendations to Council, and that are sometimes referred motions. Excepting the Internal Review Board and the Budget Committee, were committees to be eliminated, Council would not notice the difference.

What makes the Internal Review Board and the Budget Committee bodies whose elimination would be noticed is that both of these committees have an integral place within Council's workflow. The Budget Committee deals

with budget matters before they hit Council. Many of the decisions made in Budget Committee are decisions that Council does not subsequently need to consider and usually does not consider. The Internal Review Board fleshes out first readings of bylaws and recommends on changes to the bylaws. This saves Council a great deal of time and hassle in drafting legislation. The value of both these committees comes from their being integral to how Council conducts its business.

The problem with all other committees not being integrated into a committee system for Council is that Council reaps none of the benefits of committees. If a committee is supposed to reduce the workload of Council, is supposed to make Council more efficient, and is supposed to bring expertise to bear on the business of Council, then these committees need to be exploited for what they offer Council. If committees are not dealing with Council's business, then they can do nothing to improve Council's operation and handling of its business. Having disparate committees that happen to exist will not help Council. Council needs to make a conscious and concerted effort to use the committees to their fullest extent. And that means they need to be integrated into how Council conducts business.

All of the business of Council should leverage committees for what they have to offer. Just as every bylaw is passed through the Internal Review Board for drafting and making coherent with the rest of the Students' Union's body of legislation, so too should all but the most trivial motions and emergency motions pass through some committee for thorough vetting, analysis, and improvement. Only then will Council be exploiting the benefits of committees to their fullest.

By integrating committees into the handling of Council's business, a true committee system will arise, a system against which Council can lean for improved handling of Council business.

A Restructure of the Committee System

The goals of this restructuring are simple: to establish confidence in the committee system and to integrate it into the stewardship of Council's business. In doing so, care should be taken to protect the democratic legitimacy and representative role of Council.

Membership of Committees

Size

The size chosen for a committee is a pragmatic decision. The body needs to be large enough that quorum can be made with a couple of absences and that there is enough breadth of membership to ensure accurate representation of Council. However, the committee should not be so large that there are not enough interested Councillors to sit on the committee.

From experience, a size between five members and eleven members tends to work well, with seven to nine members being optimal.

Students-at-Large

The issue of students-at-large on committees has been a pervasive one for a few years. While some see them as bringing a regular student voice to committees and of allowing ordinary students to get involved with the Students' Union, others feel that they are inherently undemocratic and have no legitimacy on committees of Council.

The argument of legitimacy is completely fabricated. By virtue of appointment by Council, students-at-large gain legitimacy from Council. Council actively confers that legitimacy to them. Students-at-large have as much legitimacy as the Speaker or the Chief Returning Officer. If we are to argue that unelected students should not be given responsibilities, then we should also cease to allow the Executive to hire staff to do the Executive's bidding. Simply put, students-at-large have as much legitimacy as Council wishes to give them. Arguments to the contrary are driven by flawed principles.

That being said, there are pragmatic problems to including students-at-large on committees.

1. Students-at-large are not ordinary students, broadly representative of the student body.

If students-at-large are to be broadly representative of the student body, they need to be selected by a mechanism that allows them to be evaluated against the student body. Unfortunately, the students-at-large selected tend not to be ordinary students.

A simple look towards the Academic Affairs Board, the External Affairs Board, and the Internal Review Board in the 2003—2004 term would find, that only about half of the students-at-large were ordinary students. Of these, over the course of the year most became heavily involved in the Students' Union with one even running to become a Vice-President. By winter term, only a single student-at-large could be characterized as an ordinary student. Every other member of those committees was involved in the Students' Union in other significant ways. This remaining "ordinary" student has since moved on to work for the Students' Union Executive. It seems that uninvolved students who serve as students-at-large tend to become heavily involved students and cease to be any sort of voice of normal students.

Clearly, the students-at-large selected are not ordinary students. In fact, if it is assumed that Council and the Executive are not adequately representative of students hence necessitating students-at-large, it would follow that any mechanism to choose students-at-large by Council, the Executive, or a delegate of one or both of the former would also be a mechanism that does not involve adequate representation. Put more simply, if Council and the Executive are not sufficiently in touch with students to govern, then they are also not sufficiently in touch with students to choose broadly representative students-at-large. The only mechanism of selection that would work would be elections. We already elect student representatives: Councillors. Whatever faults of politicians befall Councillors would also befall the student politicians who would inevitably run for student-at-large positions. Likely they would be worse since student who lost during Councillor elections would run for student-at-large positions.

Students-at-large do not seem to be ordinary students who are broadly representative of the student body. Moreover, were Council so out of touch that it needed students-at-large, it seems as though Council would be unable to select such students .

2. Legislative Expertise

Producing legislation requires some degree of skill. Good legislation should fit coherently into the present legislative structure of the Students' Union. It takes practice to gain proficiency in doing this.

Unfortunately, uninvolved students will tend not to have this ability. And since they will play a much smaller role within the Students' Union than Councillors, they will not have the same opportunity to gain those skills. Through no fault of their own, students-at-large will tend not to have the same ability to make good legislation.

3. Entrenched State of Membership

Occasionally it arises that someone is creating a negative dynamic on a committee, or that someone is not competent to serve on that committee. In these cases, it would be necessary for Council to remove that student. While it is not too difficult to remove a Councillor, it is exceedingly difficult to remove a student-at-large. It is akin to firing a volunteer and it would be very insulting. This creates a discouragement to remove poor students-at-large which allows a committee to worsen as a result.

4. Detracts from the Representative Role of Councillors

Councillors are elected to represent students. By having students-at-large, Councillors effectively pass their duty to represent students onto students-at-large. However, unlike Councillors, students-at-large do not represent a broad cross-section of campus. Nor are they accountable to students; rather they are accountable to Council who appoints them.

But herein lies the absurdity of this position. If students-at-large are accountable to Council for representing students, then Council needs to know what students think in order to hold students-at-large for accurate

representation of students. However, at the same time, Council appoints students-at-large because it does not feel it can represent students.

If Council cannot accurately represent students, the use of students-at-large will not solve the problem—Council will be unable to choose a broadly representative set of students-at-large nor will it be able to hold that group accountable for accurate representation of students.

The student body best knows what the student body wants. And so, the direct selection of representatives by the student body should yield the best possible group of representatives. Councillors fulfill the requirements of such a group. When Council appoints students-at-large, it is adding a layer between the student body and those who will make decisions for students. That makes accountability indirect. Moreover, it results in Councillors passing of their duty to others less capable of carrying them out.

As the directly-chosen representatives of students, Council should represent students. Passing this duty to others will not improve representation. Rather it will increase separation between the student body and decision-makers. There is no good reason for Councillors to avoid the job they were elected to do.

5. Confidence in Committees

Council does not know in any detail who the students-at-large it appoints to committees are. And because Council does not know who they are, Council is not inclined to trust them. If Council does not trust its committee members, then Council will not benefit from committees. As explained earlier, this is causing Council's agenda to be overloaded as Council redoes all the work originally done by committee. However, often Council's mistrust is well founded: the 2003–2004 Internal Review Board was not representative of Council at all, in part because of two student-at-large members who, lacking first-hand knowledge of what Councillors would support, skewed committee votes away from how Council would have voted.

General Faculties Council committees in the early 1990s experienced a similar problem. The solution used was to increase the number of General Faculties Councillors on committees to ensure a tighter link between committees and General Faculties Council.

Council should increase the number of Councillors on its committees to increase confidence in them. To maximize confidence, Council should eliminate students-at-large, though strictly that may not be necessary to create sufficient confidence. However, considering the other problems with having students-at-large, it seems that there is little value and some harm to keeping students-at-large. I recommend complete elimination.

Executives

Some thought needs to be given to whether Executives should remain members of Committees. Having Executives on committees is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, since Council's job is in part to oversee the work of the Executive, Council is rightly suspicious of what the Executive does. However, on a committee, that may lead Council to be suspicious of the committee by extension. That undermines our goal of making committees deserving of more confidence from Council.

Second, Executives are in a conflict of commitment on a committee. If Council's job is, in part, to oversee the Executive, then that job extends to committees. However, with Executives as members of committees, we find a situation in which Executives are supposed to be overseeing and evaluation themselves. This is a ludicrous arrangement. Executives should be overseen by non-Executives. Else, they could abuse their position on the committee to protect themselves from criticism.

However, taking this to its logical extension, Executives should not be members of Council either. For whatever reason, Council has decided to work with a ludicrous arrangement where Executives play a role in overseeing themselves. Worse, Council has gone so far as to create a quota to ensure that the Executive is always represented on these committees. So long as this persists, there is an argument that committees should include Executives to make sure that committees are reflective of Council.

In one instance, Council has recognized that Executives do not make sense on committees in all cases. Council has forbidden Executives from being members of the Audit Committee. However, why Council has chosen to forbid Executives in this case and to protect Executive representation with quotas in other cases has no coherent argument. All committees are involved to some degree in Executive oversight. One could not, for example, argue that the Budget

Committee is not performing oversight of the Executive when it considers and amends the Executive's proposed budget. There is no logic in allowing Executives on Council and some committees but not other committees. And there is a clear conflict of commitment to allowing Executives to sit on Council or its committees. How Council chooses to resolve these irrationalities, I will leave to Council.

Membership Quotas

Currently the Executive have quotas that guarantee them representation on committees. As well, some have suggested that small Faculties should have their voice protected by quotas.

Quotas exist to protect the rights of minorities by ensuring that the majority cannot use its power to exclude the minority. There is no other reason to have quotas.

In light of this, it is preposterous that there are quotas for the Executive. It is well understood that the Executive wield substantial power and influence within the Students' Union and Council. The Executive controls the agenda of the Students' Union and much of that of Council. And the Executive does wield the overwhelming respect of Council even if it does not always have the agreement of Council. These are not signs of a group that needs protection of its voice. The protection of Executive representation via quotas should stop. It is both unnecessary and unjustified. Council should choose on a case-by-case basis whether an Executive is a sufficiently good person to appoint to a committee and then the Executive should proceed accordingly either selecting or passing that Executive member as a committee member.

Small faculties do not have as much representation on committees. While a large faculty like Science or Arts can expect to be represented on nearly all if not all committees, a small Faculty like Medicine and Dentistry cannot expect for its representative to be appointed to every committee. This does show a case of possible different treatment.

However, the nature of being small in population in a democracy means that you are entitled to less representation. It would make no sense for every Faculty to be guaranteed a seat on a committee as that would mean that small Faculties would be over-represented on committee. If we are only to protect "small" Faculties, what defines a "small" Faculty. Such a designation would be arbitrary at best. Moreover, it would create multiple classes of Councillors and eliminate the uniformity of rights and privileges that currently exist among Councillors. That equality is important to ensuring good relations among Councillors and fostering a collaborative environment. Considering there is no history of small Faculties being abused, there really seems to be little reason to protect small Faculties.

At this time, there is no good reason to institution quotas for membership of any group on committees. The quotas protecting Executive membership should likewise be abolished for lack of a good reason to exist.

Selection

In selecting the members of a committee, Council needs to ensure broad representation. It makes no sense for one committee to be composed of only Arts students. Such a committee would lack any perspective of non-Arts students and would end up recommending proposals that Council did not favour. The challenge for Council is to find a method whereby committees are selected with broad representation. Of particular importance is to avoid scenarios where the majority stacks a committee to ensure passage of items it favours.

The current nominating procedure used is not ideal. A majority on a nominating committee is just as prone to majority stacking as is the full Council. And a nominating committee makes it easy to do so. More importantly though, it creates a layer between Council and the Councillors vying for a committee seat. That does not further our goal of reducing the disconnect between Council and its committees: we want Council to intentionally and carefully select a committee's members to reflect Council.

Elections allow for a direct selection of committee members which helps us eliminate disconnect between Council and its committees. However we should try and restrict the ability of majorities to stack a committee. Voting on slates of nominees is thus undesirable—while it may allow for an up front balancing of perspective from many Faculties, it also makes it easy for a majority to nominate a slate whose members will unanimously support measures favoured by the majority. Likewise, approval voting is problematic—the majority can use its power to force its favoured candidate on every single vote. Minorities could lack any representation on committees under these scenarios.

Ideally preferential voting or multi-member plurality voting would work best. As there is only one vote, minorities cannot be drowned out by the majority but rather we will see a selection of committee members spanning a spectrum:

many will be of the majority's favouring, but a few will be of the minority's favouring. This will ensure that committee compositions are generally reflective of Council.

Chairpersonship

Role of the Chairperson

The chairperson of a committee, as the name suggests, chairs meetings. As well, the chairperson is the voice of the committee—the chairperson speaks to others on behalf of the committee. At Council, the chairperson will present findings of a committee and answer questions directed to the committee. To the media and the outside world, the chairperson will speak on behalf of the committee commenting on its decisions and business, and the chairperson will represent the committee in the execution of the committee's duties (e.g. if the committee wishes to meet with a guest, the chairperson will contact that guest and invite him). In light of these roles, the chairperson should be someone who is fair and can be trusted not to abuse the power to conduct the meeting, nor the power to speak for the committee.

Chairpersons often play a leadership role in running a committee. While technically the chairperson has no more formal powers than procedural stewardship of the committee, chairing a discussion does allow a fair bit of control over the direction and content of a discussion. Moreover, a committee may delegate to the chairperson duties such as preparation of an agenda. The order of items on an agenda and the content of an agenda determine what a committee does. Through control of it, a chairperson can have a fairly solid hold on the committee's business and direction.

It is not advisable for a chairperson to exercise power to control a committee. Council appoints a committee so that the committee may reach decisions. If Council wished for a single person to make decisions, Council would have delegated power to that person and not to the committee. The chairperson should therefore use his power solely to guide debate and help the committee reach its goals. The way to ensure that a chairperson does not abuse power is for power over the chairperson to be invested in the committee and only exercised by the chairperson. This is discussed further later on.

Who the Chairperson Should Be

As explained earlier, it is ludicrous for an Executive to be given membership on a committee. It puts the Executive into conflict of commitment. For example, in our current system, having the Vice-President (Operations and Finance) both make the budget and chair the committee that then scrutinizes the budget gives that Vice-President enormous ability to manipulate the committee to ensure passage of the budget as the Vice-President prepared. The Vice-President can guide debate away from matters he does not want discussed, he can focus the committee on minor details and extend debate on these so that problem areas in the budget are not examined, etc. Executives are wholly unsuitable to be chairing committees that scrutinize for Council the work of that Executive.

And beyond just abusing their chairpersonship, since Executives are officers of the Students' Union charged with a major political role just like Council, Executives will have a tendency to focus their committees on matters of interest to the Executives; not matters of interest to Council. This, in part, defeats the purpose of a committee—to speed up and make efficient Council's operations. Executives do not make sense as the chairpersons of committees of Council.

An outsider to Council is also problematic as chairpersonship of a committee. As a chairperson is often called to represent the committee and since the committee is representative of Council, indirectly, the chairperson represents Council. However, if the chairperson is not on Council, then a layer of separation will exist between Council and the chairperson. Moreover, the chairperson, by virtue of not being intimately acquainted with Council, may misrepresent Council in his representations. As well, since a chairperson is supposed to represent the committee to Council, an outsider to Council will be called upon to tell Council what Councillors have been doing for Council. This is silly in that it effectively distances Council from its own members! It adds a layer of separation in official communication between Council and its committees. As well, it requires that someone who does not know Council deal with Council.

These problems of being disconnected from Council also make it difficult for a committee to delegate responsibility to the chairperson. The outside chairperson is not of a common background to other committee members (he is not a Councillor) and so he cannot assess the committee members' views nor will committee members likely embrace him as one of their own.

Lastly, if the outsider does not fit well into the committee or does not exercise his duties as well as the committee wishes him to, the removal of the chairperson would be tantamount to firing an employee. That is a rather extreme move to make and somewhat difficult. Unless the chairperson is actively manipulating the committee, it is unlikely

that the committee or Council would feel confident in firing the chairperson. However, they would then in many cases be putting up with a poor chair which would hold up the business of Council. Since an outsider as chairperson of a committee would not be able to speak for the committee well, would not be a good person to delegate to, and would be hard to remove if not a very good chairperson, choosing an outsider as chairperson is not recommended.

I would recommend that the chairperson be a member of the committee. By doing so, and assuming that the committee is composed only of Councillors, the committee would have someone that can speak for the committee, that is suitable to delegate additional duties, and that can be removed without difficulty or much guilt.

I would also recommend that the chairperson be permanent and not a rotating chair. A permanent chairperson would bring consistency to the conduct of meetings and would allow one to learn from mistakes and improve over the course of a term as chairperson. Moreover, it is difficult to get someone to represent the committee to Council and others and to have the confidence to be delegated some administrative responsibilities if that person is going to change every few days. The example of the Audit Committee shows that Councillors can chair committees effectively.

Selection of the Chairperson

There are two popular ways of selecting a chairperson of a committee. First, there is selection by the assembly and second, there is selection by the committee itself.

Appointment of the chairperson by the assembly is very popular in most governments. However, this has nothing to do with merit and everything to do with politics. Houses of legislatures are controlled by the dominant political party and leaders of the dominant party in the House tend to control the House. They like to choose their lackeys to be committee chairpersons so that they can expand their personal control to committees as well. Clearly, this is not something Council wishes to emulate.

Supporters of giving Council the power to control a committee's chairperson cite greater control and accountability of the chairperson to Council. While this would exist if Council chose the chairpersons, it is not desirable that Council have this control for four reasons.

1. This violates the principle of independence of a delegate.

If committees are to be the experts in an area of Council's business, should not the experts choose who should chair the committee? Should not the committee, the experts, control the committee's business and not the non-expert, Council? Council interference in choosing the chairperson does little more than weaken the committee and ensure that Council is not maximizing benefit of the expertise on the committee.

2. The chairperson becomes unresponsive to the committee.

If the chairperson serves Council, then the chairperson will not serve the committee first and foremost. The chairperson will not be inclined to always defer to the committee because he would have been entrusted with a duty to control the committee. This will frustrate the committee in execution of its duties. And it will deter the committee from ever delegating to the chairperson—the committee will not want to delegate to a person it does not ultimately control.

If the chairperson is to represent the committee, it makes little sense for an outsider to choose who will represent the committee. It is a basic principle that the represented choose their representative. Council choosing a chairperson for the committee will ensure that the committee's chairperson represents Council and not the committee. This weakens the value of a chairperson.

3. It is difficult to remove a bad chairperson.

In order for the committee to remove an abusive chairperson, or just a chairperson the committee cannot work well with, the committee will need to ask Council. This will be cumbersome. Moreover, Council will not have firsthand knowledge of the committee's meetings and will not be able to independently evaluate the validity of the case for removal of the chairperson. If the chairperson defends his actions as being necessary to do his duty of exerting Council's control over the committee, Council will be called to arbitrate between the committee and the chairperson with no independent knowledge of who is correct.

4. **There will be Council-chairperson accountability, not Council-committee responsibility.**

If the committee is supposed to serve Council, then the committee should be responsible to Council. However, if the committee is not in complete control over itself, it may blame the chairperson for impeding its work instead of being forced to accept responsibility. And since Council chose the chairperson for the committee for this reason exactly: to control the committee, Council will have to accept that the chairperson is ultimately responsible for the committee's actions.

However, the chairperson has only partial control over a committee. Most significantly, the chairperson does not make the committee's decisions or recommendations; the committee does that itself. It is unfair to hold the chairperson responsible for all that the committee does.

Lastly, it should be noted that in such an arrangement where Council's focus is on the chairperson and not the committee, Council's focus is also on an administrator and on the administration of the committee rather than on the decision-makers and the results of the committee's work. Not only does a Council-chairperson accountability prevent a clear identification of who is responsible for the committee's work, it also distracts Council from results (which are important) to process (which should matter only so far as they enable good results). Simply put, Council's focus is not in the right place when the chairperson is chosen by Council.

In light of the unsuitability of having a chairperson selected by Council, the chairperson should be selected by the committee. This leaves the selection of the chairperson in the hands of the body most qualified to determine the chairperson, it ensures that the chair is held accountable by the body that best knows the work of the chairperson. It ensures that the chairperson is responsive to the committee and that an abusive chairperson can easily be removed, it lessens Council's workload, and it establishes a direct accountability between the committee, the decision-maker, and Council.

Operation and Logistics

Organizing Meetings

When, how often, and how long meetings of a committee should be held are a function of the availability of members, of the amount of business the committee needs to deal with, and of any deadlines on the committee's business. Only the committee will be well acquainted with these details and so logically the committee should determine when, how often, and how long the committee should meet.

Likely some degree of delegation to the chairperson should be arranged to call meetings. For example, the chairperson should be able to call meetings when there are emergency items to be dealt with. The standing orders of the committee should establish these details.

It has been suggested that perhaps Council should set the meetings of committees in advance. As discussed above, Council is not well-positioned to be making these decisions as the committee knows best what is needed. Council interference would effectively be a violation of the principle of giving delegates discretion to make decisions.

The main appeal of pre-determined committee meeting times is so that members will be sure they can attend prior to appointment to committee. However, the sacrifice of this, aside from interfering in the delegation and not letting decisions be made on merit as determined by the committee, is that one's decision to be a member of a committee will no longer be based primarily around one's interests or one's ability to contribute most effectively, but rather around one's schedule. This is hardly the way to empower Councillors and make Council more effective.

The argument for pre-determined committee meeting times is also based on a couple of flawed assumptions. First, it assumes that students know their schedules in May. They do not. Some students are still looking for jobs and may not be available at the time they signed up for once they are employed. Likewise in May, not all students know their class schedules or work schedules for fall and winter term. It's incorrect to assume that students will be able to meet at the time they sign up for in May. Flexible dates determined by the committee are more likely to accommodate student schedules.

Second it is assumed that students tend not to be able to make meetings resulting in difficulty making and keeping quorum. It is true that many committees do not meet with full membership or even quorate membership. But this is the case because these committees have no set meeting date or schedule. Where a pre-determined meeting schedule set by committee exists, students are sure to schedule around the meeting date. When committees meet on the whim,

students cannot schedule around them. The problem is not that committees are setting the meeting dates instead of Council; it is that committees are not setting meeting dates in advance.

Meeting dates should be set by the committee well in advance so that students can schedule around them.

Administrative Support

Currently the historical records of committee meetings are shoddy at best. Minutes have been taken poorly with no common format or standards. Tracing old decisions is difficult. In order to have a proper historical record, minutes, or preferably transcripts, need to be kept of meetings. Electronic recordings can serve as a poor substitute if necessary, but they are very poor for research purposes. Administrative support for committees is needed to take minutes.

If Council committees do end up with a member of Council chairing, there will be some degree of photocopying, research, and other administrative work associated with the position of chairperson. Administrative support would be useful to assist with these activities thus leaving the chairperson more time to deal with substantial matters such as preparing documents for the committee, contacting guests, and planning meetings.

In order to meet these administrative demands, I recommend hiring staff for Council. These would be akin to the old Recording Secretary of Council in that they would work only a few hours. This staff would likely be coordinated by the Speaker of Council (though other arrangements may work). They would adhere to common standards for minute-taking and would maintain files of documentation that would be filed with the Speaker (or other coordinator) for archiving. While there is undoubtedly some expense attached to this, it should not be very large.

I am opposed to the paying of chairpersons for their administrative contributions. It creates an inequality on Council as some people are paid for their work on Council and some are not. Just as serving on committees is prestigious and confers influence on a person that enables him to influence policy, chairpersonships should be another prestigious ranking which confers the opportunity to shape and guide a committee. The prestige and influence should be reward enough. Monetary compensation is not necessary and would be excessive.

Reporting

As committees serve Council, they should report to Council directly. Normally, the chairperson should draft reports and have the committee approve them. However, the details of exactly how should be left to the committees themselves.

I would advise that committee minutes or, at least, votes and proceedings should be filed with Council immediately upon approval. This is necessary to keep Council informed of what its committees are doing. As these should be prepared anyway, it should require minimal work to have them filed with Council.

Although Council should decide how often it wants reports, a year-end report should definitely be prepared. Such a report will allow recommendations to be made for the following year. It will give new Councillors the opportunity to learn about the committees before applying for membership on any. Year-end reports will also provide holistic summaries for doing historical research.

However, the most important reason to have year-end reports is to force both the committee and Council to look at the report and draw links, recommendations, and evaluations from it. It should serve effectively as a document for a managerial-style review.

While year-end reports have historically not been completed, if the chairperson became a member of Council rather than an Executive, it is likely that more importance would be attached to the year-end report by the chairperson. Executives tend to favour their executive work over work for Council. A Councillor likely will not have such a bias.

Systematize

It is key that committees become integral to how Council conducts its business. Systematizing the committees will be a major part of achieving this.

Integrate Committees into Council's Legislative Workflow

Committees should be integrated into the legislative workflow of Council. Most motions considered by Council should pass through one or more committee at some point for scrutiny and refinement. By having committees consider

business before that business is considered by Council, Council will have a much more mature motion to approve or disapprove. Debate on Council will centre on the principles of the motion rather than the details or the actual implementation, both of which should be sufficiently refined prior to consideration. Committees should filter motions so that only well-developed motions reach Council; poor ones should be sent back for redevelopment. Motions can be debated in committee so that they can be improved before reaching Council. And the expert analysis afforded by committees should make motions that reach Council much better both in content and style.

The recent changes to bylaw creation and amendment are a good example of integrating a committee into Council's workflow to leverage maximal benefits from committee. Now, bylaws are of a coherent format and style, are written to correspond with all other legislation, and the details of wording are removed from debate at Council allowing Council to focus on the principles at stake, an activity more befitting their representative role. More importantly, a small group of interested students is now looking at the Students' Union body of bylaws holistically to see how Council can better structure them to meet the aims of students. Bylaws are now created by Council independent of the Executive in many instances, reflective of the goal of Council and not just the Executive.

This model should be extended to budgeting and political policy. Currently, budgeting is a reactive activity performed by Council only in response to the Executive with the Executive's recommended budget serving as the template and Council working only on the margins of it. If Council is to properly exert student priorities onto the budget, it needs to have its own independent vision for what the budget should contain. In the United States, Congress, through the Congressional Budget Office, makes its own version of the budget. Such an approach could work here as well. A committee charged with dealing with the budget should study the organization year-round and should try to build a budget that reflects the priorities of Council. While such a budget will likely not be perfect for the first few years, it will provide Council with an independent Council-created template for the budget which can be augmented by the Executive's recommended budget. Between the committee's budget and the Executive's recommended budget, the committee should be able to produce a budget that better involves the priorities of the student body.

Political policy can also be better handled in committee. Currently political policy does not drive the Executive agenda as political policy is supposed to because political policy merely codifies current Executive priorities. This is particularly a problem with academic policies which are never created on the initiative of non-Executives. This is largely because ordinary Councillors lack the knowledge to deal effectively with the details of political policy. The University of Alberta and the government are very complex and need to be studied to be understood. Committees devoted to political policy, however, could study and develop that knowledge to better allow the creation of political policy reflective of Council's concerns.

In order to ensure that legislation flows through the committee system, Council needs to alter how legislation is normally created by Councillors. Currently, Councillors move their motions directly at Council. While this is fine for bylaws which will see committee scrutiny before being voted on a second time, political policy and spending authorizations do not get such consideration. A mechanism should be created for motions to be placed into a workflow of the committee system rather than onto the order paper for Council. While the right to place motions on Council's order paper should be retained so that the committee system cannot kill a motion by letting it wallow in committees forever, it should be made clear that working through the committee workflow is the preferred method of creating legislation. If Council feels that motions were put on the order paper prematurely, Council should refer them to the committee system.

Executive Oversight

Currently oversight of the Executives is restricted to question period and questions based on the Executive reports to Council. Nothing else is done. This constitutes a very superficial oversight. While it ensures that the Executive does not get out of line in any big way, it does nothing to evaluate their effectiveness in their normal course of work.

If committees are now going to be experts in different parts of the organization, then they will also be able to bring that expertise to bear in overseeing the Executive. For example, a committee dealing with academic policies could better oversee the academic advocacy of the Students' Union by asking the Vice-President (Academic) more in depth questions. I recommend that Council have Executives meet with a relevant committee once per term to undergo a thorough questioning and defense of that Executive's progress and work. This should bring better oversight to the Executive.

As well, the work of the Audit Committee in overseeing the implementation of the budget should be continued for the same reasons.

Other Delegations

Delegate committees are useful for handling minor and routine items that do not warrant the active consideration of Council. Council affairs (approving meeting dates, recommending on standing orders, setting agenda) should be delegated to committee to minimize the investment of Council's time on these issues. Likewise routine approvals such as approving a list of award winners should be delegated to committee. Lastly a provision should exist for approving emergency items in committee when Council cannot be convened. Only one committee should be given this power so that it is applied in a uniform manner and that it can be controlled. If the power to act in an urgent manner is spread too widely, it will be difficult to control.

Setting the Business of a Committee

At the start of the year, Council should be polled for which issues matter to them the most. These issues, once identified, should then be subjected to ranking by Council so that the priorities of Council are clear. These priorities should be the focus of committees' agenda.

Each committee should also hold a retreat early in its term to develop a plan to address the priorities of Council. As well, matters of interest to the committee should be integrated into this plan. Of course, sufficient flexibility should exist for new business raised by Councillors to be integrated into the committee's workload. Ideally, the committee retreats could be part of a larger Council retreat.

Building Culture

As this systematic use of committees will involve much greater use of committees than has previously been the case, some transition of culture is in order. Training for Councillors in how the system works would be advisable. As well, a section on this in the Councillor manual would be useful.

More generally, it will be necessary to emphasize that using committees is the normal course of business of the Students' Union. While committees may seem to slow the process down, it must be understood that committees are playing an important role.

A Proposed Set of Committees

Committee mandates should be build around synergy. Where a logical grouping of topics exist such that one can be leveraged for the other or where the information is common to more than one topic, a single committee should be charged with a mandate for all those topics.

I would propose the following set of committees.

Audit Committee

This committee would mirror the current Audit Committee. It would examine the implementation of the Students' Union budget and ensure that the budget is being implemented according to policy. This committee would be the financial oversight committee.

Budget and Appropriations Committee

This committee would produce a budget for approval by Students' Council. It would meet all year to develop its own vision for the budget as described earlier. And it would also meet to approve appropriations to dedicated fee units and other restricted accounts. As well, this committee would examine the performance of businesses and services and recommend budgetary changes as appropriate. This would provide some oversight of the operations side of the organization and of the Vice-President (Operations and Finance)'s execution of operations. The Vice-President (Student Life) might also need to be called to this committee for those portions of the organization's operations that this Vice-President sometimes commands.

External Policy Committee

This committee would develop political policy on external matters and would generally be the expert in this field. It should meet with the Vice-President (External) periodically to review performance of that Vice-President.

Academic Policy Committee

This committee would mirror the External Policy Committee except that it would deal with academic and student life matters. Academic and student life policy are converging at most universities; indeed student life policies at the University of Alberta fall under the Provost and Vice-President (Academic)'s supervision. This committee would review performance of the Vice-President (Academic) and the Vice-President (Student Life).

Bylaw Review and Governance Affairs Committee

This committee would mirror the current Internal Review Board in its mandate. It would draft and review the bylaws of the Students' Union. As well, it would review the larger issues of the governance system of the organization and recommend changes to it to Council.

Administrative Committee

This committee would deal with the day-to-day issues of Council. It would recommend agendas, recommend changes to standing orders, and it would set standards for recording of Council's minutes and storing of Council's documentation. It would also deal with the more minor issues of oversight of Officers of Council, though ultimate oversight of those officers should remain with Council—elections and the coordination of Council by the Speaker are both important enough to require the full assembly's attention. This committee should also oversee and manage the committee system. It should plan the workflow of the committee system, it should integrate motions into the workflow, and it should make sure these motions are stewarded through the system in a reasonable amount of time. It should also identify to which committees and in which order motions should flow. As well, it should set standards for the taking and archiving of committee minutes and documentation. Lastly, the Committee should be charged with sole authority to act in an emergency for Council.

Ad Hoc Committees, Taskforces, Commissions, and Executive Boards

Ad Hoc Committees, Taskforces, and Commissions should be special and rarely-struck committees. Ad Hoc committees should be used only when an issue has no appropriate place within the committee system. A taskforce should be struck only when an issue is too large to fit within the committee system without disrupting the system's normal activities. And commissions are special committees which involve external experts and students-at-large for issues that are large in scope and need external expertise. Each of these three disrupts the committee system because it acts outside of the committee system and separates issues from the tried and tested bodies and from the synergy afforded in some committees. These special committees should be used rarely and only when an overwhelming reason exists to do so.

Executive Boards should be created by the Executive to continue the Executive advisory role played by current Council committees. Council should not interfere in the Executive Boards; the Executive should know best whose advice they need.

Conclusion

The restructuring I have proposed should eliminate the problems of the current committee system. By aligning committees to Council's work, by having a mechanism for Council to set the committees' agenda, and by having a Councillor as chairperson, committees will be more tightly tied to Council's agenda and work. This should eliminate the disconnect between Council and its committees. As well, by having a reliable, fixed membership that Council knows well and that understands Council well, Council should have confidence in its committees.

The proposed committee system integrates committees into a system with Council. Council will be able to set the agenda of committees and the work of Council will be embedded into the committee system this ensuring that committees help Council in an active way to achieve Council's agenda. A solid reporting mechanism and administrative support should enhance this integration.

Finally, the committee system proposed should enhance Council in other ways. It will enable better oversight of the Executive. It will result in political policy that is made which reflects Council's priorities. And it will create a clear pathway and approach for changes to be made.

There are, however, some disadvantages to this system. First, ordinary students will no longer have Council committees to get involved as students-at-large. It is expected that the Executive branch's committees will continue to provide such a role, but the loss of a legislative experience for these students is unfortunate. Second, there will likely be cases where it is unclear whether to delegate an isolated item to the Executive or to a committee. Care needs to be taken that Council's business

remains within Council's purview. Third Council needs to resist micromanaging matters recommended by committee. Council should trust committees and their expertise. Micromanaging will only undermine the committee system. Lastly, care should be taken that wide-open discussion do occur at Council from time-to-time. If committee members are to ensure business is refined with the key concerns of Council, then committee members need to know what Council thinks. Wide-open debates on major issues are needed so that common understanding can be reached.

If these dangers are avoided, Council and its committee system should be more connected and responsive, better integrated into the a system that empowers Council, and should enhance Council's stewardship of the student agenda.

Summary of Responses to Questions Posed by CCRAP

1. *What committees have you served on? For how long?*

I have served on the following Students' Union committees:

- Communications Advisory Committee (2000–2002)
- Academic Affairs Board (2001–2002, 2003–present)
- Committee for the Finding and Realization of Changes to Elections (2002)
- Internal Review Board (2003–2004).

As well as I frequently attended meetings of

- Tuition Undertakings, Planning and Action Committee (2003–2004)
- External Affairs Board (2002–2004)
- Internal Review Board (2001–2002)
- Committee for Council Reform and Progress (2002–2003)

External to the Students' Union, I have served on numerous University of Alberta committees including

- General Faculties Council (GFC) (2000–present)
- GFC Academic Planning Committee (2001–2003)
- GFC Committee on the Learning Environment (2003–present)
- GFC Nominating Committee (2004–present)
- GFC Executive Committee (2004–present)
- Engineering Faculty Council (2000–2002)
- Arts Faculty Council (2003–present)
- Arts Academic Affairs Committee (2003–present).

Other committees on which I have served include

- GFC Executive Subcommittee on UAPPOL (2003–2004)
- GFC Executive Subcommittee to Review Policy Conversion to UAPPOL (2004–present)
- GFC Committee on the Learning Environment Subcommittee on Faculty Evaluation Committees (2004–present)
- GFC Committee on the Learning Environment Subcommittee on the Undergraduate Experience (2004–present)
- Engineering Students' Society Board of Directors (non-voting) (2003–2004)
- Engineering Students' Society Legislation Review Committee (2003–2004)
- Alberta Public Interest Research Group Board of Directors (2003–2004)

2. *What role do you see for students-at-large on the committees, if any?*

Students-at-large are supposed to better connect students to the Students' Union legislative structure. However, they largely fail to do so since students-at-large tend to be no better gauges of ordinary students than Councillors, they lack the legislative expertise to be effective on committees, they detract from the representative role of Councillors, and they decrease Council's confidence in its committees. As well, students-at-large are hard to hold accountable because it is emotionally difficult to tell volunteers they are not wanted.

Students-at-large do not enhance committees and they pose a few pragmatic problems to committee operation. I recommend they be removed from legislative committees.

Students-at-large are, however, on sounding boards, more so than even Councillors. I recommend they continue to be employed on the Executive's array of sounding boards should they continue to exist.

Detailed discussion of students-at-large begins on page 5 of the submission (under *Students-at-Large*).

3. *Who should the chair of a committee be selected? Should Council determine in advance who the Chair should be? Should the Chair be elected?*

The chairperson of a committee should be elected by and from the committee's membership. This will ensure the chairperson is selected by those who know the committee and its business best and it will ensure that the chairperson is a good "fit" with the committee and can be held accountable by those who are best acquainted with his performance.

The chairperson should not be an outsider to Council as they will likely not "fit" well with the committee nor will they understand the business of Council well. As well, the chairperson should not be an Executive. An Executive as chairperson will skew the committee to the political agenda of the Executive and will put that Executive in a conflict of commitment. That being noted, there is a conflict of commitment with having Executives on both Council and on Council's committees so Council seems to feel that conflicts of commitments are of minor concern.

Detailed discussion of who the chairperson should be and how he should be selected begin on page 9 (under *Who the Chairperson Should Be*) and page 10, respectively (*Selection of the Chairperson*).

4. *What is the role of a committee chair? Are they purely procedural? Are they to lead discussion?*

The role of a committee chairperson is to conduct meetings, to guide the committee's discussions to be most productive, to be the official spokesperson for the committee, and to perform any delegated duties. Chairpersons are not purely procedural, but they should not be leaders of discussion; they should be guides of it. Committees are charged with responsibilities by Council; not chairpersons. It would be undemocratic for chairpersons to exert political control over the committee.

Further discussion on the role of chairpersons can be found beginning on page 9 under *Role of the Chairperson*.

5. *What should the composition of a committee be? What is the ideal size? Max size? Min Size?*

The composition of committees should not include students-at-large (as explained above) nor should it include Executives. Executives are in conflict of commitment as members of committees and, since they have their own political agendas, they do not always have the complete confidence of Council. However, by extension, this should disqualify them from membership on Council as well. While the membership of Executive make committees and Council less effective, currently they do sit on the latter and if committees are to be reflective of Council, committees might need Executives.

I recommend that Executives be treated as any other Councillor and require election amongst a field of Councillors to sit on a committee. That way they can be appointed if Council feels their presence is necessary. As well, Council may want to reconsider the logic around having Executives on Council.

The size of a committee is really a pragmatic decision balancing the need for broad representation and flexibility with the requirement that there be enough interested Councillors to fill the membership. Based on my experience I would recommend between five and eleven members with seven to nine members being optimal.

Further discussion on the size and composition of committees can be found beginning on page 5 under *Membership of Committees*.

6. *What is the role of the committee? General? Specific?*

The role of a committee is, in general, to assist Council in the stewardship of its duties by performing those duties delegated to it. Specifically, committees should bring efficiency, through analysis, and expertise to Council's creation and amendment of legislation and Council's oversight of the work of the Executive.

Discussion on the role of Council's committees can be found on page 5 under *Role of Council* and *Specific Role of Council Committees*.

7. *Is there sufficient administrative support for the committee to function? If yes what is provided? If no what is lacking?*

Administrative support to Council's committees is currently lacking. There is a need for minutes to be taken accurately and based on a set of common standards. As well, if chairpersons are to be Councillors, then additional administrative support will be needed to help them prepare documentation and to archive that documentation. I recommend that administrative support be added in the form of several casual employees similar to the old Council Recording Secretary.

A discussion on administrative support needs for Council's committees can be found on page 12 under *Administrative Support*.

8. *Who/What does the committee serve?*

A committee serves Council and should be directly accountable to it. Committees of Council should be created to help Council steward its duties. The work of the committee should reflect Council's priorities as well as the concerns the committee feels Council has not noticed.

Discussion on Council and its relationship to committees can be found beginning on page 3 under *Council and its Committees*. Discussion on how a committee's agenda should be determined can be found on page 14 under the title *Setting the Business of a Committee*.

9. *How often does the committee meet? Who should call meetings? Should the meeting schedule be set in advance or left to the committee to determine?*

Committees should meet as often as they need to in order to perform their mandate. Meetings should be called and scheduled in advance by the committee. Council should not pre-determine the meeting schedule of a committee since this would make the schedule of meetings inflexible to the schedules of the committee's membership and the workload of the committee. As well, a schedule pre-determined by Council would cause Councillors to sit on a committee because the schedule works for that Councillor not because the committee's mandate aligns well with that Councillor's interests or expertise. This will lessen the effectiveness of committees. However, schedules pre-determined by the committee is highly recommended to ensure that members can plan ahead to attend.

Discussion on the frequency and calling of meetings can be found on page 11 under *Organizing of Meetings*.

10. *Do you feel the committee(s)/system function well? Why?*

The committee system does not function well at present. Committees are currently disconnected from Council preventing them from working effectively for Council or having the confidence of Council. As well, committees lack integration with Council so their value to Council cannot be maximized. Long meetings, long order papers for Council, and long debates in Council are a clear sign that Council's committees are not working

These problems are explained in detail beginning on page 3 under *Current Council Committees*.

11. *What is a good committee?*

A good committee is one that assists its superior by providing efficiency, through analysis, and expertise in the execution of the superior's duties. The signs of a good committee is confidence of the superior in what a committee does and less work for the superior.

This topic is discussed in more detail under *Reasons for Delegation* on page 1.

12. *What do you expect out of a committee?*

I expect a committee to discharge the duties it is charged with. Specific to the Students' Union, I expect a committee to improve the problems of Council's overload of work, to empower Council to create better legislation, to better oversee the Executive, and to make Council more effective at representing and enforcing the student will in the Students' Union.

My expectations on committees are discussed in the *Introduction* beginning on page 1 and *Council and its Committees* on beginning on page 3.

13. *What is the relationship between a committee and Students' Council.*

Committees are delegates of Council. They should learn the priorities of Council, help achieve them, and report regularly to Council on their achievement. I recommend that reporting should be done by filing minutes with Council. As well, a comprehensive final report should be done. I recommend that committees poll Council to learn its priorities. Lastly, committees should be given broad latitude to perform their duties so that their expertise in their mandate can be used to its fullest.

Details on good delegation can be found in *Introduction* beginning on page 1. Discussion on how committees should set their agenda can be found on page 17 under *Setting the Business of a Committee*. As well, discussion on reporting can be found on page 15 under *Reporting*.

14. *Add any other comments/recommendations regarding the committee/system.*

Additionally, I recommend the following:

- The quota protecting Executive membership on committees be removed since Executives are not persecuted minorities and do not need protection. (Page 8 under *Membership Quotas*)
- No group be given a quota to protect their membership on a committee. (Page 8 under *Membership Quotas*)
- Electing committee members be done by preferential balloting or multi-member plurality voting so as to ensure that there is no stacking of committees by the majority. (Page 8 under *Selection*)
- Chairpersons should be permanent, not rotating to allow for consistency and personal improvement. (Page 10 under *Who the Chairperson Should Be*)
- Chairpersons not be paid as the prestige of being one should be reward enough. Paid chairpersons will destroy the equality that currently exists among all Councillors. (Page 12 under *Administrative Support*)
- Committees should be integrated into the workflow of Council's legislation to maximize their ability to improve Council's legislation. (Beginning on page 12 under *Integrate Committees into Council's Legislative Workflow*)
- The committee charged with handling the budget make its own budget independent of the Executive to serve as a template for recommendation to Council. (Beginning on page 12 under *Integrate Committees into Council's Legislative Workflow*)
- A new method for initiating business be created whereby Councillors can put motions into the committee system's workflow instead of onto the order paper of Council. (Beginning on page 12 under *Integrate Committees into Council's Legislative Workflow*)
- Committees should, once per term, meet with the Executive(s) closest aligned to their mandate to discuss and question that Executive's performance. This will enhance oversight. (Page 13 under *Executive Oversight*)
- A committee should be delegated oversight of the administration of Council to improve efficiency. (Page 14 under *Other Delegations*)
- A single committee should be delegated the right to make emergency decisions for Council. (Page 14 under *Other Delegations*)
- A culture of using committees should be emphasized to ensure that the committee system works well. (Page 14 under *Building Culture*)
- The following committees should exist (Page 14-15 under *A Proposed Set of Committees*):
- Audit Committee, to oversee implementation of the budget and financial controls.
- Budget and Appropriations Committee to recommend the budget and approve disbursements, as well as oversee the Vice-President (Operations and Finance) and the Vice-President (Student Life).

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- External Policy Committee to recommend external political policy and oversee the Vice-President (External).
 - Academic Policy Committee to recommend on academic political policies and to oversee the Vice-President (Academic) and the advocacy of the Vice-President (Student Life).
 - Bylaw Review and Governance Affairs Committee to draft and recommend improvements to bylaws, and to engage in structural improvement of Students' Union Governance.
 - Administrative Committee to handle minor and routine business, and to manage and coordinate the committee system and legislative workflow.
 - Oversight of Officers of Council be the responsibility of Council, but that the Administrative Committee play a role in handling minor issues. (Page 15 under *Administrative Committee*)
 - Ad Hoc committees, taskforces, and commissions be struck rarely and only where there is overwhelming reason not to use the standing committee system. (Page 15 under *Ad Hoc Committees, Taskforces, Commissions, and Executive Boards*)
 - Wide-open discussions be organized periodically at Council so that committee members understand what Council's opinions are. (Page 15-16 under *Conclusions*)

Summary of Recommendations

All of these recommendations are taken from the section *A Restructure of the Committee System*. Recommendations are organized by the subsection in which they were presented.

Membership

- The size of a committee be a compromise between the need for broad representation and flexibility with the requirement that there be enough interested Councillors to fill the membership. Based on my experience I would recommend between five and eleven members with seven to nine members being optimal.
- Students-at-large be removed from legislative committees.
- Executives be treated as any other Councillor and require election amongst a field of Councillors to sit on a committee. That way they can be appointed if Council feels their presence is necessary.
- Executive membership on committees no longer be protected by a membership quota.
- No membership quotas exist.
- Electing committee members be done by preferential balloting or multi-member plurality voting so as to ensure that there is no stacking of committees by the majority.

Chairpersonship

- The chairperson should not be an outsider or an Executive.
- Chairpersons should be permanent, not rotating to allow for consistency and personal improvement.
- Chairpersons not be paid as the prestige of being one should be reward enough. Paid chairpersons will destroy the equality that currently exists among all Councillors.

Operation and Logistics

- Committees should meet as often as they need to in order to perform their mandate. Meetings should be called and scheduled in advance by the committee. Council should not pre-determine the meeting schedule of a committee.
- I recommend that administrative support be added in the form of casual employees similar to the old Council Recording Secretary. These employees should take minutes and provide administrative support to the committee and the chairperson.
- I recommend that reporting should be done by filing minutes with Council. As well, a comprehensive final report should be done.

Systematize

- Committees should be integrated into the workflow of Council's legislation to maximize their ability to improve Council's legislation.
- The committee charged with handling the budget make its own budget independent of the Executive to serve as a template for recommendation to Council.
- A new method for initiating business be created whereby Councillors can put motions into the committee system's workflow instead of onto the order paper of Council.
- Committees should, once per term, meet with the Executive(s) closest aligned to their mandate to discuss and question that Executive's performance. This will enhance oversight.
- A committee should be delegated oversight of the administration of Council to improve efficiency.
- A single committee should be delegated the right to make emergency decisions for Council.
- Committee agendas should be determined in part by polling of Councillors to learn Council's priorities.
- A culture of using committees should be emphasized to ensure that the committee system works well.

A Proposed Set of Committees

- The following committees should exist:
- Audit Committee, to oversee implementation of the budget and financial controls.
- Budget and Appropriations Committee to recommend the budget and approve disbursements, as well as oversee the Vice-President (Operations and Finance) and the Vice-President (Student Life).
- External Policy Committee to recommend external political policy and oversee the Vice-President (External).
- Academic Policy Committee to recommend on academic political policies and to oversee the Vice-President (Academic) and the advocacy of the Vice-President (Student Life).
- Bylaw Review and Governance Affairs Committee to draft and recommend improvements to bylaws, and to engage in structural improvement of Students' Union Governance.
- Administrative Committee to handle minor and routine business, and to manage and coordinate the committee system and legislative workflow.
- Oversight of Officers of Council be the responsibility of Council, but that the Administrative Committee play a role in handling minor issues.

Ad Hoc Committees, Taskforces, Commissions, and Executive Boards

- Ad Hoc committees, taskforces, and commissions be struck rarely and only where there is overwhelming reason not to use the standing committee system.