Guidelines for Gathering Testimony from Stakeholder Groups

A major tenet of shared governance at The College of New Jersey is the ability for all community members to participate in the development of new policies by offering testimony on any preliminary recommendation developed by Standing Committees.

As part of shared governance, stakeholder groups have the opportunity to provide input and testimony at multiple points in the process. Testimony, either broadly invited from the campus community, or more directly solicited from specialized groups of people, including relevant administrators, will be sought as Committees or Councils develop preliminary recommendations. Testimony from stakeholder groups is required after a preliminary recommendation has been made. At present, there is no prescribed mechanism for soliciting such feedback. Generally, Committees have hosted open forums where community members can offer their reactions to a preliminary recommendation. There is no minimum number of open forums required, nor is there a defined time or place where these occur. Testimony has also been accepted by emailed correspondence, generally sent to the Chair of the specific Committee. Some Committees have also solicited feedback by electronic surveys. The Steering Committee offers the following guidelines for consideration.

1. As a general rule, solicited testimony should not be used as a referendum. While it is important that all stakeholder groups have an opportunity to provide feedback and that a range of campus viewpoints be taken into consideration when developing a recommendation, the Steering Committee recognizes that there may never be consensus on an issue. In addition, most policies are complex and do not conform easily to an up-or-down vote. Each standing Committee or Council needs to weigh the community input they receive and to consider this testimony in their recommendations, but the final recommendations may not be endorsed by all, or even by a majority of the members of each stakeholder group.

2. Solicitation of testimony by surveys may sometimes be appropriate, although when developing such surveys care should be taken to include open-ended questions.

3. Testimony should be solicited from all stakeholder groups that are affected by the recommendation, even if a group does not have a formal representative (for example, graduate students).

4. When soliciting testimony by open forums, times and venues for holding forums should be selected to optimize participation by members of the stakeholder groups.

Committees should clearly report in a cover memo to their final recommendation which groups were targeted as stakeholders, how input was invited, and the substantive content of the feedback. Before forwarding any committee recommendation to the Office of the Provost, the Steering Committee will review the procedures followed by the committee to solicit stakeholder testimony.

Approved by Steering Committee 10-2-13