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April 11, 2023

ACADEMIC SENATE DIVISION CHAIRS

Re: Best Practices for Using Chat in Virtual Academic Senate Meetings

Dear Colleagues:

At its March 29 meeting, the Academic Council endorsed the attached letter from the University Committee on Rules and Jurisdiction (UCRJ). The letter outlines several considerations and best practices for the effective use of chat in virtual meetings of Academic Senate committees.

Every Senate committee chair is well aware of the challenges involved in conducting an orderly, fair, and transparent virtual meeting with the chat function enabled. This is especially true when it comes to debates and votes on formal motions. The recommendations put forth by UCRJ are designed to ensure that virtual Senate meetings are conducted in a manner that promotes organized discourse and decision-making, in line with established parliamentary procedures.

I encourage you to share the UCRJ letter and its recommendations with your committees and other interested faculty for the purpose of discussion and implementation as they deem appropriate. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Cochran".

Susan Cochran, Chair
Academic Council

Cc: Academic Council
UCRJ
Campus Senate Executive Directors
Executive Director Lin



University Committee on Rules and Jurisdiction
Mijung Park, Chair
Mijung.Park@ucsf.edu

University of California
Academic Senate
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
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March 21, 2023

SUSAN COCHRAN, CHAIR
ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Re: Use of Chat in Virtual Academic Senate Meetings

Dear Susan:

UCRJ discussed your request for advice about how virtual (Zoom) Academic Senate committee meetings should be run in accordance with parliamentary procedures, and specifically how to treat Zoom chat conversations within the normative meeting rules and procedures outlined in the *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* (Sturgis).

We understand the Zoom chat feature can help foster a sense of community and convey or clarify information during a meeting. However, the feature can also be used (intentionally or unintentionally) to disrupt meetings and distract meeting participants, particularly if side conversations occur about a motion, or if personal topics or business unrelated to the meeting agenda are discussed via chat messages.

Standard parliamentary procedures include speaking rules that ensure fair and equal treatment of each committee member in a meeting. They include the right to debate a motion, the right to equal time for debate, and the opportunity to speak once before any member speaks a second time. The rules of order require individuals who wish to speak to wait to be recognized by the chair or presiding Senate officer before speaking. They require that only one person be permitted to speak at a time and forbid parallel discussion from occurring or being recognized by the chair.

The chat feature in a virtual meeting makes it possible for anyone to communicate as often or for as long as they would like, which can weaken the controls and protocols essential for maintaining order and encroach on a member's right to call for the chair's attention. The open chat feature can help give members a voice, but it does not guarantee the same opportunity for a voice for everyone.

For these reasons, some professional parliamentarians have suggested turning off the chat function or restricting its use to sharing of technical information through the chair; however, we recognize that this may not be feasible. We recommend the following considerations and best practices around the use of chat, if it is enabled at all, in virtual meetings of Senate committees:

- In general, the use of the chat function in virtual meetings should be guided by the norms and parliamentary procedures set by *Sturgis* for in-person meetings. Side conversations are

inappropriate during an in-person meeting and should also be considered inappropriate during a virtual meeting.

- Extensive use of chat beyond the distribution of information and discussion of technical issues should be discouraged in general and prohibited during debates on motions. Meeting participants should be especially careful to avoid using the chat to comment on issues unrelated to the agenda item being discussed.
- The meeting chair or presiding Senate officer should avoid recognizing questions or business occurring in the chat.
- Virtual meeting technology platforms such as Zoom include non-chat functions that can be used to facilitate communication and ensure that all participants have equal opportunity to contribute to the meeting. For example, participants who wish to speak should use the “raise hand” feature; those who wish to convey their support for a comment can select the green “✓”; those wanting to express opposition can select the red “X.”
- The chat function should be disabled during debates on a formal motion unless otherwise agreed upon in advance.
- Faculty should be aware that chat conversations are part of the public record and subject to Public Records Act requests. The chat function should be disabled during executive sessions or other sensitive discussions to reduce unauthorized sharing of information.
- The meeting chair or a staff moderator should monitor the chat to ensure that it is being used in accordance with proper parliamentary procedure.
- The Senate should also be mindful of accessibility issues. The chat function can exclude people with visual disabilities, but it can also benefit people with auditory disabilities.
- Finally, all chat records should be treated the same as Zoom meeting recordings and preserved for the same duration as the Zoom recordings.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Mijung Park, Chair
University Committee on Rules and Jurisdiction

Cc: UCRJ
Monica Lin, Academic Senate Executive Director