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***A PARLIAMENTARY PRIMER FOR THE  
 ASSOCIATION OF ACADEMIC STAFF OF  
 THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA***

This document is intended to clarify procedural issues for AASUA Council meetings.

The information in this primer is drawn from Eli Mina’s workshop material and from the current edition of Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised (**RONR**).

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**1. Robert’s Rules Quotes**

(from Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised, or RONR, 11<sup>th</sup> edition)

RONR page 449, line 12-14: “... any presiding officer will do well to bear in mind that no rules can take the place of tact and common sense on the part of the chair...”

RONR p. 456, lines 13-21: “The president should never be technical or more strict than is necessary for the good of the meeting. Good judgment is essential; the assembly may be of such a nature, through its unfamiliarity with parliamentary usage and its peaceable disposition, that strict enforcement of the rules, instead of assisting, would greatly hinder business. But in large assemblies where there is much work to be done, and especially where there is the likelihood of trouble, the only safe course is to require a strict observance of the rules.”

RONR page 250, lines 11-15: “In ordinary meetings it is undesirable to raise points of order on minor irregularities of a purely technical character, if it is clear that no one’s rights are being infringed upon and no real harm is done to the proper transaction of business.”

**2. Fundamental Principles for Debates**

**Order** (one person speaks at a time; Chair or designated person keeps the speakers’ lineup)

**Focus** (focusing on the group’s core mandate; staying on topic; establishing outcomes)

**Efficiency** (on a per topic basis and on a per person basis)

**Equality** (ensuring equal opportunities to speak and share insights)

**Decorum** (remaining civilized and respectful; focusing on issues, not personalities)

**Safe environment** (making it safe for unpopular but necessary points to emerge)

**3. Shared Decision Making**

The goals of shared decision making are to achieve quality decisions, to achieve them together, and to do so at a comfortable pace (not too quickly nor too slowly).

Substantive Goals for the Decisions	Goals for the Decision Making Process
Thoughtful, knowledge-based, logical	Gradual, orderly (advance notices given)
Elevated, strategic, value-driven	Transparent, honest, trust worthy
Weighing ideology vs. legalities, finances	Democratic, inclusive
Weighing tangible and intangible outcomes	Fair, equal (‘level playing field’)
Balancing short versus long term outcomes	Respectful, safe (welcomes dissent)
Balancing individual versus collective needs	Efficient, but not rushed

**Habits that can Negatively Affect Decision-Making**

1. Silent members withhold ‘out of the box’ observations.
2. No preparation for meetings.
3. A rush at the latter part of a meeting.
4. Short tempers (overt or passive).
5. Last minute agenda items.
6. A member blurts out a motion “on the fly.”
7. Members commit their votes before a meeting (pre-meeting promises).
8. Members send text messages or post entries on social media during meetings.

## **4. Decision-Making Parameters**

### **Duty to Accept Collective Decisions**

Many decisions are reached by consensus, after all relevant views, facts, risks and opportunities are considered. If members come to meetings with **open minds**, and if all legitimate perspectives are truly considered, the likelihood of a narrow majority is low.

However, when insisting on unanimity may dilute the strength of a decision, a formal vote may be needed to bring closure to an issue. In such instances, there will be 'a winning side' (a majority) and 'a losing side' (a minority). It should be clear that, once a decision is made, it is no longer a majority decision. It is a collective decision, and the minority is duty bound to accept it as a legitimate collective decision and move on. If there is a need to revisit the decision later, this can be done by following established processes.

### **Balancing Constituency and Organizational Interests**

Members who are supported by or represent a constituency must remember that their ultimate duty is to serve the organization as a whole, and to place its interests ahead of any other interests. Although they may share knowledge, insights and ideas from constituencies, they must also listen and learn from other views, and then vote with the full organization in mind. All represented constituencies should be made aware of how the decision-making process works.

### **Conflict of Interest Guidelines**

Conflict of Interest (COI) guidelines are intended to protect the integrity of the decision making process. They exclude from decision making individuals whose ability to act impartially may be substantially impaired by personal interest. Such guidelines should increase the likelihood that decisions are balanced and fair to all affected parties.

A decision maker who believes she or he has a personal COI should proceed as follows

- Declare the COI publicly in a timely manner.
- Leave the meeting after making the declaration and before discussion on the issue starts, so as to avoid any possibility of influencing the votes of other members on the issue.
- Avoid influencing the decision in any way (whether at the meeting or away from it).

The minutes of the meeting should capture the COI declaration and the fact that the member was absent while the issue was debated and voted on.

A Member who receives feedback that he or she is perceived to have a COI on a given issue should not react defensively. Instead, the member should examine the issue openly and act with the best interests of the organization in mind.

If in doubt as to whether a COI exists, it may be prudent to obtain legal advice on this question.

**5. `Defending the Process’**  
**(Sample Scripts for Meeting Participants or the Chair)**

If this occurs:	You can say something like this:
Interruptions, or a shouting match	<p><i>“Point of order.”</i>  <i>When recognized: “Can we please have one person speak at a time?” Or</i>  <i>“Can we please hear people out without interruptions?” Or</i>  <i>“Can we please follow the speakers’ lineup?”</i></p>
Off topic discussions	<p><i>“Point of order.”</i>  <i>When recognized: “Can we please get back on topic?” or</i>  <i>“We’re supposed to debate the amendment. Can we please stay focused?”</i></p>
Time is being wasted	<p>Obtain recognition and say something like:  <i>“Can we please move on? It’s getting late and we have a lot to get done.” or</i>  <i>“Can we please keep our comments brief?”</i></p>
Repetitive or lengthy debate	<p>Obtain recognition and say something like:  <i>“I’m not hearing any new discussion. Given our busy agenda, can we move on to the next agenda item?”</i></p>
Dominated debate	<p>Obtain recognition and say something like:  <i>“Can we please hear from people who have not spoken?”</i></p>
Personal attacks	<p><i>“Point of order.”</i>  <i>When recognized:</i>  <i>“Can we please focus on issues rather than personalities?”; or</i>  <i>“I know the issue is tough, but can we please remain civilized and respectful?”</i></p>
Side conversations	<p><i>“Point of order.”</i>  <i>When recognized: “Can we please have one conversation at time?”</i></p>
The Chair rushes a vote on a motion	<p><i>“Can we please have the motion read out again, so everyone knows precisely what’s being voted on?”</i></p>

## 6. Formal Procedural Options

If this occurs:	Procedural Option:
<p><b>Main Motions:</b> You want to propose a main motion or resolution.</p>	<p>As per AASUA Bylaws and Policy, please submit the main motion in writing at least seven days before the meeting, so it can be circulated to Council, and so Staff can do the research needed for informed decision making.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Under AASUA Bylaws (section 6.9.2), the agenda which is prepared by the President can be amended by Council.</p>
<p><b>Ending Debate:</b> You believe debate is repetitive or very lengthy.</p>	<p>Obtain recognition and then say: <i>“I move to end the debate.”</i> Or <i>“I move the previous question.”</i></p> <p><b>Note:</b> This motion requires a two-thirds vote, but is often voted on informally, by unanimous consent (if no objections).</p>
<p><b>Limiting Debate:</b> You want to propose time limits on debate.</p>	<p>Obtain recognition and then say: <i>“I move that we allow ten minutes of debate for each of the next three agenda items.”</i></p> <p><b>Note:</b> This motion requires a two-thirds vote, but is often voted on informally, by unanimous consent (if no objections).</p>
<p><b>Postponing a Main Motion:</b> A motion is rushed and can wait.</p>	<p>Obtain recognition and then say: <i>“I move that consideration of this motion be <b>postponed</b> until the next Council meeting.”</i></p> <p><b>Note:</b> This motion requires majority vote, but may be voted on informally, by unanimous consent (if no objections).</p>
<p><b>Referral:</b> A main motion needs some study.</p>	<p>Obtain recognition and say: <i>“I move that this main motion be <b>referred</b> to the _____ Committee (or to Staff), to research and report back on _____.”</i></p> <p><b>Note:</b> This motion requires majority vote, but may be voted on informally, by unanimous consent (if no objections).</p>
<p><b>Amendments:</b> The wording of the motion needs to be modified or improved.</p>	<p>Obtain recognition and propose to amend the motion. Please submit the amendment in writing, so it can be repeated by the presiding officer and posted on the overhead screen.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> An amendment requires a majority vote, but non-contentious amendments can be adopted by unanimous consent (if no objections).</p> <p>If the amendment is very brief (e.g.: inserting, striking out, or replacing one or two words), the presiding officer may allow for it to be submitted orally.</p>
<p><b>Postponing Indefinitely:</b> A motion to ‘get rid’ of a pending main motion.</p>	<p>Obtain recognition and then say: <i>“I move that the main motion be postponed indefinitely.”</i></p> <p><b>Note:</b> <i>This motion</i> requires a majority vote.</p>
<p><b>Tabling:</b> A motion to set aside a main motion temporarily, to accommodate something else of immediate urgency.</p>	<p>Obtain recognition and then say: <i>“I see that we have a special visitor and she needs to leave in 15 minutes. I move that we table the main motion, so we can hear from her now.”</i></p> <p><b>Note:</b> This procedure requires a majority vote, but is often voted on by unanimous consent (if no objections).</p>