Writing Effective ASCSU Resolutions

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Overview
Resolutions are the mechanism used by the ASCSU to take a position or call for some entity to take action. An effective resolution is one that has an impact. Although not every resolution will evoke the desired response, resolutions can play an important role in giving a “sense of the Senate.”

Resolutions typically come from one or more of the standing committees of the ASCSU. Frequently, the resolution being brought forth falls within the purview of more than one standing committee and, in such cases, it may be co-sponsored. Thus, before a resolution gets to the floor of the Senate, it will typically be debated and “perfected” within the standing committee(s).

Occasionally, a resolution will be introduced by one or more individual Senators and will not have been vetted by a standing committee. While this is not a common occurrence, it is an option provided for by Robert’s Rules of Order.

Resolutions are given a number followed by the academic year of introduction and an abbreviation for the standing committee(s) that have sponsored the resolution.

The Mechanics
Unlike resolutions at the campus senates, which frequently have a series of Whereas clauses ending with a “Therefore be it” followed by one or more Resolved clauses, the ASCSU resolutions are a series of Resolved clauses followed by a Rationale section.

Resolved clauses contain the ASCSU position on an issue or call for some entity to take action; the last resolved clause specifies who should receive a copy of the resolution. The one exception to this rule is that resolutions of commendation generally follow the Whereas format.
Another difference between the ASCSU and some campus Senates is that we generally have First and Second Readings on resolutions. At the First Reading, resolutions are introduced and input to perfect the resolution is given from the entire body. First Reading items are then sent to the campus senate offices so that the campus senate can discuss the item and give input to its ASCSU senators. At the Second Reading, the resolution is debated and the ASCSU votes on it.

There are, however, items for which immediate action should be taken, and it is possible to ask for a waiver of the rules to allow the item to be voted on during the meeting it is introduced. The downside of this is that the item is voted on without any input from the campuses. At the final meeting of the academic year in May, all items which have not been approved by the ASCSU “die.” It has been standard practice to give a waiver for all first reading items at the May meeting so that action can be taken.

Resolutions can be viewed at: http://www.calstate.edu/AcadSen/Records/Resolutions/. They are categorized by academic year of passage. One can also do a key word search for past resolutions in the search box provided. A key word search makes it relatively easy to find out if previous resolutions on a similar topic have been acted on by the ASCSU. At the same URL there is a link to find the Chancellor’s Office Response to the resolutions passed by the ASCSU.

**Key Points to Writing an Effective Resolution**

As already mentioned, resolutions have two parts, *Resolved* clauses and a *Rationale*. Resolved clauses contain the ASCSU position on an issue or request for an entity to take action and the rationale justifies the position/call for action. Resolved clauses move from the general to the specific. They often start with an affirmation/reaffirmation of general principles or positions the ASCSU has taken in the past, and then move to the specific current situation. When a resolution reiterates a call for action that was previously made in a prior resolution, it is standard practice to have a resolved clause referencing such prior resolutions.

The *Rationale* begins with a summary or description of the current situation, then builds an argument making the case for the position/request contained in the resolved clauses. The argument will typically include reference to past resolutions, positions taken by other bodies, factual material, and/or an explanation or elaboration of key Resolved clauses.

There are stylistic conventions used in resolutions as well. When an entity with a formal title is first referred to, its name is written out in full followed by an abbreviation in parentheses. The abbreviation is used in subsequent references to the entity. Examples would be Academic Senate CSU (ASCSU) or California State Student Association (CSSA).

In terms of grammar, although the ASCSU is one body, grammatically it is treated as being in the plural, so the subjunctive verb form is used. Hence, *Resolved* clauses begin with “the ASCSU reaffirm” rather than the “ASCSU reaffirms.” When reference is
made to past resolutions or other documents available online, the relevant URLs should be included in the resolution.

An Example
As an illustration of the format for a resolution, consider Request for a Task Force to Study CSU Student Tuition Fees and Financial Aid Support AS-3113-13/AA/FGA (Rev) (see http://www.calstate.edu/acadsen/Records/Resolutions/2012-2013/documents/3113.shtml). This resolution, which was approved unanimously in March 2013, is presented below.

As you can see, the first Resolved clause reaffirms a previous ASCSU resolution, the second requests that a specific action be taken, and the third indicates the distribution list for the document. The rationale is written in persuasive language and builds the case from a specific fact to reasons why the action requested in the resolution is appropriate.

Example Resolution

Request for a Task Force to Study CSU Student Tuition Fees and Financial Aid Support
AS-3113-13/AA/FGA

RESOLVED: That the Academic Senate of the California State University (ASCSU) reaffirm AS-2774-06/AA, Request for a Task Force to Study California State University (CSU) Student Fee Policy (http://www.calstate.edu/AcadSen/Records/Resolutions/2006-2007/documents/2774.pdf); and be it further

RESOLVED: That the ASCSU request that the Chancellor’s Office, in conjunction with the ASCSU and the California State Student Association (CSSA), undertake a study of CSU student tuition fees and financial aid support (including Pell grants, Cal Grants and State University Grants, funding levels and eligibility criteria) to determine what changes, if any, may be made to existing policies, procedures, funding levels, and eligibility criteria that results in an allocation of resources that enhances academic achievement, facilitates graduation, and promotes student success; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the ASCSU distribute this resolution to the CSU Board of Trustees, the CSU Chancellor, CSU campus Presidents, CSU campus Provosts, CSU campus Senate Chairs, and the California State Student Association.

RATIONALE: Now that the percentage of state support has dipped below 50 percent of the actual costs of attaining a CSU degree, while this system continues to be asked to increase capacity without concomitant state support, it is incumbent to insure that such limited resources be distributed to best serve students while insuring academic quality and integrity. Tuition structures and financial aid support programs currently in place may be too inflexible to do so. Exploring alternative fee structures, such as charging per unit, might begin to restore some of the original intentions of the Master Plan and could well discourage certain counter-productive student behaviors, such as making course load decisions based on economic incentives rather than on academic priorities.