Faculty Senate Electronic Voting  
Scott Cutler, 2/22/2017

The Charge
Currently, most Faculty Senate votes are done with a show of hands. Voting is in the open, visible to other senators and guests. While it is easy to see if a vote has few or no objections, there is no accounting for completeness allowing Senators to abstain by neither voting yea nor neigh. Actual vote counts are rarely taken unless the vote looks close.

A desire was stated by Senate leadership to explore electronic voting systems to see if they could improve the Senate voting process.

Considerations
There are several factors to consider when choosing an electronic voting system.

- Security – Does the system need to be as secure and bullet proof as desired in a federal election or would authentication through Rice’s central authentication system (CAS) be sufficient?
- Privacy – Who gets to see the votes: Only the computer, the Parliamentarian, Senate Chair, Senate Admin, Exec Committee, Senate, the Faculty, etc.?
- Permanency of record – Should the votes be stored for permanent record or only the results?
- How should the votes be cast – Cell phones, Laptops, Clickers or combination of these?
- Ease of use – Does the Senate install and maintain the system or leverage OIT
- Cost

Leveraging Existing Classroom Response Efforts
There is an active effort under way this semester by the Academic Subcommittee of Rice’s IT Committee. The effort is led by Jane Puthaaroon (Instructional Technology Specialist, OIT) and Angela Rabuck (Manager, Teaching & Scholarly Learning, OIT). Their focus is on classroom usage.

The Senate currently needs only a subset of the capabilities of the features used in a classroom system; however, the Senate needs are often easily met within classroom response systems. There is an operational benefit from using the same system that is supported by OIT for classroom usage if it meets the policy considerations of the Senate.
Possible Approaches

- We can easily create a custom web or phone based tool using either student or OIT resources; however, then we would have to maintain it and the costs could be high.

- The Senate could choose an independent vendor solution that meets its needs; however, then the Senate would be responsible for upgrades and maintenance issues.

- Adopt the solution proposed by OIT for classroom usage. This would be the best approach if it meets the needs of the Senate and the extra features needed for classroom usage did not interfere with the way it will be used by the Senate.

iClicker

- iClicker by REEF Education (a Macmillan Learning company) is the current leading candidate by OIT for classroom usage. This is not set in stone, but reasonably likely.

- The system can be accessed by a variety of means including a web interface for laptops, iOS and Android apps for phones and tablets and a dedicated, hand held clicker. Votes could be taken using a combination of such devices.

- iClicker would allow real time polling and could display results dynamically on the screen.

- It can operate in identified or anonymous modes.

- It’s integrated ‘gradebook’ could be used to capture votes if desired or the results downloaded to a spreadsheet.

- iClicker is relatively low cost for our use. Licenses for web and cellphone use will be about $15 per senator per year. We could purchase a handful (10?) of clicker devices for approximately $50 each or for under $2,000 have one device for every Senator.

Recommendation

- OIT expects to conclude their study this semester. Assuming iClicker remains their choice, we should adopt their solution. If not, we should evaluate their choice to see if it meets our needs.

- We should be ready to roll out the system for Senate usage by the beginning of next semester; sooner if needed.