

THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS

December 6, 1973

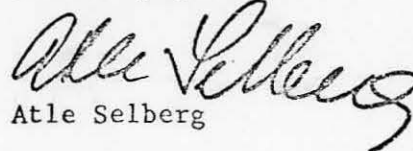
To the Faculty
Institute for Advanced Study

Dear Colleagues:

The enclosed proposal, with its somewhat lengthy introduction setting forth some of the considerations on which it is based, will be discussed at the meeting of the Committee on Governance this coming Saturday.

I do, however, think it more important that the faculty should meet to discuss this and other proposals for procedure, in order that we may determine what common ground (if any) we have on which we could base an alternative with wide enough support not only to be adopted, but to function well.

Sincerely yours,


Atle Selberg

Enclosure

Professors Cherniss, Clagett, Elliott, Gilbert, Gilliam, Habicht, Kennan,
Lavin, Meiss, Setton, Thompson, White

Professors Gödel, Harish-Chandra, Langlands, Milnor, Montgomery,
Weil, Whitney

Professors Adler, Bahcall, Dashen, Dyson, Regge, Rosenbluth

Professors Geertz, Kaysen

CC: Professor Borel

PROPOSAL FOR A PROCEDURE FOR CONSIDERATION OF NOMINATIONS
FOR FACULTY APPOINTMENTS

Atle Selberg

Introductory remarks:

It is an old academic tradition that the "Republic of Learning" is neither a democracy nor a dictatorship, but a "meritocracy," where in particular only the faculty (that is, the full professors) of a university have the right and responsibility to pass judgement on the fitness or competence of a candidate for appointment to that faculty, and that such appointment cannot take place without faculty approval.

The procedures, or mechanisms, whereby the faculty passes this judgement do vary considerably. As institutions have grown larger, these procedures often involve delegation of this power of the faculty to smaller parts of it, often in several stages. But as long as such procedures have come about by faculty agreement and can be changed by faculty agreement, they are but different manifestations of the same basic academic right or freedom.

At the Institute for Advanced Study it is quite apparent that during most of its existence this academic tradition was de facto adhered to. There was actually a change in procedure during the later part of Oppenheimer's directorship, when it was decided to abolish the mandatory faculty vote and have a vote only when there appeared to be sufficient grounds to ask for it. But it was a change initiated by the faculty (for good and valid reasons I still think).

At no time during those years was it thought possible that an appointment to the faculty could be made without faculty approval (the absence of a vote being one form of such approval). As far as I know, during most of this time, the offers of appointment that new faculty members received were in fact formulated so as to strongly suggest this state of affairs. One may wonder how many of us would have accepted the offer of appointment had it been indicated that the situation was different; I doubt that I would have. And unless it can be conveyed to the academic world at large that the faculty of the Institute is again accorded this basic academic freedom and right, despite the deplorable aberration of last spring, it may become difficult to attract new faculty members of the highest standard.

While I feel that the faculty rights in connection with appointments to the faculty should not be questioned, I believe also that the procedure that the faculty chooses to follow needs to have not only majority support, but a sufficiently wide support, so as not to make the procedure a divisive issue in itself. It is, I think, desirable to retain the "autonomy" of the schools, by not having a mandatory faculty vote, and also desirable to discourage the erosion of this through excessive appeal to the faculty vote.

2.

I also strongly urge that we go back to the principle, adhered to during Aydelotte's and Oppenheimer's directorships, that no approach be made to a candidate for faculty appointment until the formal offer of appointment can be made. This can not only save embarrassment, but also leaves the faculty free of any feeling that a commitment has been made to the candidate.

Further, I propose that we restore the rule, followed during most of Oppenheimer's directorship, that the faculty vote on an appointment be taken, not at the meeting at which the question is discussed, but at a second meeting called within a stated interval (this used to be between one to two weeks after the first meeting). I believe this rule provides several advantages and have therefore incorporated it in my proposal.

The proposal contains, in some places, more than one alternative. Which, if any, is preferable can only emerge from a full faculty discussion of these questions. With regard to point 3 in the following proposal, my own strong preference would be to stay with the first formulation 3a, since in the long run a rule that is not too explicit in its provisions but relies on the discretion and judgement of the faculty may work better. The other two versions are included since they are more explicit on the most sensitive aspect of the question and therefore, at present, may have a wider base of support in the faculty. My own guess would be that the formulation 3a, in the long run, would lead to fewer calls for a vote than either of the other two.

The procedure outlined below covers the case of appointments in the established schools (that is, with at least three members of the school faculty). For appointments in a new school that has not yet reached this number, and also for an appointment that would fall in the category of "major academic innovation," I would recommend that we keep the present rules more or less.

Proposal:

1. When a school has reached the decision to make a nomination for a faculty appointment, the faculty is given ample documentation of the case.

2a. A faculty meeting is called to discuss the proposal.

2b. A faculty meeting is called to discuss the proposal, if within a period of two weeks after the documents have been distributed some part of the faculty asks that a meeting be called. If a meeting is not called for, this constitutes faculty approval of the proposal.

3. At the meeting held to discuss the nomination, a faculty vote on the proposal may be called for by a majority of the faculty.

3a. It is understood that to call for a faculty vote is a grave step which should be undertaken only when there are very serious grounds for questioning the judgement of the nominating school.

3.

3b. If the nomination is questioned solely on the grounds of the scholarly or scientific merits of the nominee, a vote cannot be taken on the nomination unless the nominating school is less than unanimous in its support of the proposal.

3c. If the nomination is questioned solely on the grounds of the scholarly or scientific merits of the nominee, and the school is unanimous in its support of the proposal, more than a simple majority is required (60 percent or two-thirds, or somewhere between?) to defeat the proposal.

4. The vote on the nomination shall take place at a meeting to be held not less than two, nor more than ten days after the meeting at which the nomination was discussed.

5. A nomination which has passed through this procedure without being defeated by a faculty vote is thereby considered approved by the faculty and is forwarded by the Director to the Board.

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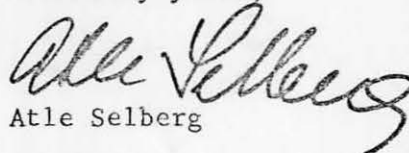
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