

Rules about Rules  
Compiled by Patrick Wilson, September 2009

The rationale for rules of parliamentary procedure is twofold: to ensure efficiency in the conduct of business and to balance the rights of individuals, absentees, significant minorities, and the majority. In several important respects, the faculty maintains complete control over the rules governing its meetings.

### **Hierarchy**

The following documents, in the following order of priority, constitute parliamentary procedure for Hampden-Sydney faculty meetings:

- Faculty Handbook ([www.hsc.edu/hr/facultyhandbook](http://www.hsc.edu/hr/facultyhandbook))
- Special Rules of Order ([www.hsc.edu/academics/provost/rulesoforder.html](http://www.hsc.edu/academics/provost/rulesoforder.html))
- Current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR)*

Hence, provisions in the Handbook, such as those governing the duties of officers and the constitution of committees, take precedence over anything in *RONR*. Similarly, Special Rules, such as those governing voting procedures, trump the default provisions of *RONR*. Absent a Handbook provision or Special Rule to the contrary, *RONR* supersedes custom.

### **Amendment**

The Handbook (p. i) provides for its own amendment. *RONR* (10<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 17) covers the adoption and amendment of Special Rules of Order. Any faculty custom may, through the proper procedure, be codified as a Special Rule. For obvious reasons, none of the above rules are open to ad hoc, spur-of-the-moment debate at faculty meetings.

### **Suspension**

Although the Handbook cannot be suspended, Special Rules of Order and the procedural aspects of *RONR* can, by a two-thirds vote, be suspended for a specific purpose during a given meeting. But no rule that embodies a fundamental principle of parliamentary procedure (e.g., the right to vote) or that protects absentees (e.g., the requirement of a quorum) or the basic rights of the individual (e.g., to speak in debate) may be suspended, even by a unanimous vote.

### **Enforcement**

Any member, without cause for alarm or embarrassment, may call for the enforcement of the faculty's rules by raising a point of order. The chair may either rule on the point or submit it to the faculty for a vote. Any member may appeal any ruling of the chair and thereby call for a vote by the faculty. No one has a right to criticize a ruling without an appeal, which a wise chair will often welcome.