

## **Faculty Governance, Are We There Yet?**

The paradigm:

The variety of things that the University does and its complexity requires that there be an interdependence among the governing boards, administration, faculty, students, and others in decision making. There must be communication between them all and opportunity for joint planning and action. Issues emerge from all the parties, but the important consideration is that all parties are consulted in the decision, and that the weight of the party's role in that decision making process be carefully considered depending on the nature of the issue.

As far as the faculty is concerned, President Henry T Tappan of the University of Michigan said in 1858 that the faculty "enjoy sovereignty over teaching methods and curriculum since scholars are the only workmen who can build up universities". The role of faculty in decision making in matters other than curriculum grew especially in this country following the Second World War. The faculty, then, has primary responsibility in matters of curriculum, teaching methods, research, faculty status, appointments, tenure, and aspects of student life relating to the academic pursuit. Faculty representatives should be selected to the decision making body, as we are here, in a manner prescribed by the faculty. The committee structure is a good way to seek and achieve faculty involvement.

Students should participate in the governance of their university as an educational experience in itself and with the desire to be involved in decisions.

These statements are largely based on the AAUP Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, revised in 1990.

## **Where We Are: A national perspective**

The 2003 study by Tierney and Minor called "Challenges for Governance, a National Report," based on survey data of more than 2000 faculty members with a response rate of 53% indicated that all but 13% of the institutions surveyed had faculty senates or something similar. The results were mixed as to whether the senate was an effective means of faculty participation. Most faculty were dissatisfied about their role in the decision making process except for a strong influence in three areas: curriculum, standards of tenure, and teaching evaluation standards. Faculty felt that more often their voice was heard in departmental proceedings rather than University at large. Most faculty surveyed believed that there was a good trust between the faculty and administration and there is good communication.

## **Shared Governance: The future, achievable?**

The faculty has responsibility--in fact, authority--to share in the governance. The term "professional authority" (Birnbaum, 2003, p.2) is a good term and, at the core, shared governance seems to be working well. Most agree that senates and their leadership have a trust and a good communication with administration. Most agree that shared governance is a highly

respected value among campus people. Yet some say that external pressures have made the role of faculty decision making so cumbersome that it is not happening effectively. Processes are too time-consuming, a small faction can impede, and non interest among faculty can pull down the shared process.

External pressures, such as the entrepreneurial nature of the university, require fast decision processes. However, in the 2003 Bok study, “windy” faculty discourse does not impede progress. Best decisions, he concludes, are those based on deliberations even in the commercial arena. We are, perhaps, facing a discussion of whether a university is to be defined as “market driven” or “academic,” but that is distinct from a discussion of governance, and is a topic for another day. At the base, however, we must emphasize education, research, academic freedom, creativity, critical discourse, and liberal learning as we define our place. (Birnbaum, 2003, p.8).

Shared governance, to review, is generally accepted as a good thing and reducing or doing away with it would have serious impact on the academy. As Bok states, faculty must be involved in “developing and enforcing all the rules that protect academic value.” Shared means just that. All parties are involved, from boards of trustees, students, administrators, and faculty. Governing structures that do not achieve the “shared” in shared often result in failure. Trusted and well-understood baseline norms of the institution are needed to achieve success in the shared approach. The best governance just happens without a long discussion on what and how it should be operated.

### **University of Utah, 2009: Are we there? A personal reaction**

First of all, let me thank you for your support and confidence in me as I led this body this past year and represented the faculty and students in numerous fora. I have considered it an honor and I’ve enjoyed it greatly. I believe I have done a pretty good job.

The level of trust and communication between the faculty and the administration as represented by the Senate’s leadership and the administration and the Board of Trustees is excellent. You may not know that the Senate President meets several times a month, one on one, with the President, once a month with the Trustees and frequently with others in administration. Conversations are frank and pointed. The administration here respects the Senate and its work and values faculty as well as student input.

Our committee structure works well. Our committees, especially Academic Freedom and Faculty Budget have worked diligently this past year.

We have begun to characterize the role of the Senate, say faculty and students, towards what really interests them in decision making, as we relook at the Policies of the University to examine the difference between academic and not academic.

Faculty governance cannot be achieved if faculty do not care to do it. I recognize that much of the work of governance goes on in Departments and Colleges and, in our decentralized structure here, that has been a long standing tradition. Yet I feel concerned that in the past 20 years the

level of participation in University committee work and in Senate business has not increased. A less than scientific study shows that, unchanged for 20 years, about 75 faculty members here do 75% of the university service. Some Senate seats here have had members never attending our meetings. In our big three—research, teaching and service—service is the step child to be sure.

We care. The intensity of debate over issues and the amount of work done to prepare policies for debate and the creative and fabulous proposals does show that we are working hard to make this a better university. A member of the Trustees has said more than once this year, as I presented the Senate's work to the Board, that he values our optimism and our moving forward so forcefully in these times when the budget and its implications are looming over all we do.

We do not share, as some point out, a crisis in shared governance because we do emphasize academic as opposed to corporate values, but we must constantly check ourselves and reaffirm.

Do not give up the vigilance, as what we do is pretty relevant. As John Masfield, Poet Laureate of Great Britain, says "there are few earthly things more splendid than a university."

Thanks.

American Association of University Professors, Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, 1990.

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