

Effective Shared Governance: Academic Governance as a Win-Win Proposition

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Recent analyses of the academy often describe increased struggles between academics and administrators—struggles arising from the rapidly expanding role of administration in collegial governance. This expansion challenges faculty preference for slower, deliberate change, and for collegial, consensual decision-making. “You will find universities that 10 years ago were run in a collegial fashion now completely structured to look from the outside as if they were manufacturing or banking firms,” wrote former Yale president A. Bartlett Giamatti. “And when you add to the new corporate management structure the traditional academic distrust of the corporate world, then you have a very interesting situation.”¹

Administrators are not oblivious to the welfare of the whole, but the capacity for innovation and a preoccupation with efficiency often isolate them from their faculty.² And when collaboration and shared governance *do* occur, or when administrative, academic, and oversight entities *do* intersect or overlap, these interactions may *reduce* faculty prerogatives. Faculty hiring, development, compensation, and retention—areas traditionally in the faculty domain—are subject to increased administrator and trustee oversight and review. Faculty hiring, from the administrative point of view, resembles staff hiring: administrators determine salaries, years of service credit, starting dates, and conditions of employment. Administrators may not have deliberately co-opted faculty prerogatives. Instead the shift probably resulted from the growing tension between administrators with business expertise and scholars who preserve, extend, and transmit knowledge.

Embracing business models, note some critics, may affect students as well as faculty.³ Disagreement about the purposes of higher education, some analysts say, results in a college experience that is little more than training for the corporate world.⁴ Corporate sponsorship of research, academic units, and even departments, combined with institutional attempts to define and implement a “value-added” college education corroborate this assertion.⁵ Revenue from big-time college athletics, another observer adds, diverts attention from practices that permit illiterate athletes to graduate.⁶

In any case, contested views of higher education may have spurred growth in collective bargaining. Colleges lacking defined, universally embraced goals may find their faculty and staff seeking written guarantees of employment security, fair treatment, personnel and management rights, and fair compensation. The power of unions, their leaders note, goes beyond guarantees: pay differentials usually favor unionized faculty members over non-unionized colleagues.

A contract may resolve questions of role definition and authority, but most unionized faculty members also wish to collaborate in decision-making and priority setting. Faculty members at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC), fought to maintain such a relationship with administrators. But overwhelming disregard for their input led to a decision to organize.⁷

One key vehicle for collaboration: informal, yet protocol-driven senates. Faculty representatives, who collectively act as an “advisory body” in shared governance, can hope to make recommendations in a trusting environment, and can hope for respect from administrators. Collegial participation is the rule. But senates that do not adhere to this rule may ratify an administrative predisposition towards viewing these bodies as reactionary entities that challenge administrative policy.⁸ The predilection of some senates to venture beyond curriculum into non-academic areas, such as landscaping, investments, and parking, may provide more ammunition for administrators.⁹ Some administrators call the occasional senate political pronouncement—such as Wisconsin-Platteville’s debate on the war in Iraq—inappropriate, untrustworthy and even irresponsible. Of course, other issues affect shared governance, including the optimal pace for decision-making, the impact of special interest groups, and a willingness to make sacrifices. Conflicts over these issues can result in a confusing, inefficient, and largely ineffective model of shared governance.

This chapter provides a framework for successful collaboration between senates, bargaining units, and administrators. We analyze variables affecting academic governance, and then offer a vision of win-win shared governance. Throughout, we contrast an ideal of

academic governance with the reality of the contemporary university.

ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE: CONTEXTUAL VARIABLES

Higher education scholars love to classify: they catalogue, for example, the characteristics of successful college administrators and faculty members, and even the functions, services, and cultures of higher education institutions.¹⁰ But these classifications neglect many complexities and dynamics, including how core values integrated into a shared vision can transform the culture of decision-making. Such a shared or unified vision can also promote moral behavior that underlies a sense of shared responsibility between faculty and administrators.

Writers on business often demonstrate the power of “a shared cultural ethos” within effective institutions.¹¹ In these businesses, all key constituents accept and embrace core values that are integrated into a compelling mission—everyone “pulls the train in the same direction.” Successful academic democracy—where shared, consensual decision-making follows serious dialogue—requires participants to create and accept such a shared vision of institutional life. One advantage for academic bodies: a self-referential hiring process still often allows faculty members to hire other faculty members and administrators to hire each other. Self-selection preserves values; agreement on a new or alternative vision of institutional life is difficult. But absent such a vision, the process of natural selection will not contribute to the institution’s efforts at self-improvement.

This concept of a moral institutional life is predicated on the notion of trust between faculty and administrators, faculty and their bargaining representatives, and administrators and the bargaining unit. It is also predicated on trust between these three constituents and students and trustees. This level of trust creates a form of social capital,¹² and becomes a primary element in constructive relationships between groups.¹³ Enforcing decisions depends on sufficient trust; conversely, faculty mistrust of administrators obstructs the implementation of shared governance through faculty senates. Observers consider

the level of trust to be a core variable for describing institutional culture;¹⁴ faculty loss of trust in Baylor president Robert Sloan led to the recent no confidence vote.¹⁵

Exceptional trust exists at some independent liberal arts colleges where administrators are often seen as “on loan” from faculty ranks. Distrust is extreme at some large bureaucratic universities, where administrative careers and agendas dominate institutional life.

To assess capacity for shared authority, let’s posit a continuum measuring levels of trust. As trust increases, individuals are more likely to demonstrate concern for the welfare of others. At one end of the continuum, routinized reciprocity is based on shared community values, not on *quid quo pros*. Selecting faculty members and administrators means finding individuals who best “fit” an institution. At the other end of the continuum, we expect formality and official communication if distrust characterizes faculty-administrator relationships.

A breakdown in trust and a deterioration of shared decision-making often leads to external mediation and unionization. Collective bargaining recognizes the existence of adversarial relationships between faculty and administrators, and provides an avenue for the repair and reconstruction of an academic culture. At SIUC, faculty distrust became overwhelming when the administration ignored the card collection drive and the attempt to organize; the faculty then voted to create a bargaining unit.¹⁶ The current attempt to organize graduate students further demonstrates the power of distrust. New York University denied tenure to Joel Westheimer after he publicly supported a graduate student organizing effort.¹⁷ The university later reinstated Westheimer and dismissed several key administrators, but meanwhile trust broke down between individuals and between key constituencies and emergent “classes” of working professionals.

One key indicator of trust: do faculty members and administrators accept a common value system that permeates key areas of a campus? Values may be accepted in two ways: “strong normation”—embraced and internalized values—and “weak normation”—values that are accepted as rules of thumb, as instruments for getting along. Take punctuality. One

may view punctuality as a prudent useful behavior—a technical directive for behaving properly in a social setting (weak normation). But punctuality attains the force of moral authority (strong normation) when applied with ferocity. Violating the norm results in painful self-assessment, “typically the feelings of shame, guilt, anxiety, embarrassment, the emotions of self-assessment, and sometimes, fear, sorrow and even pain.”¹⁸

Individuals who work in an environment characterized by strong normation may experience outrage, indignation, pain, and offense when others depart from the rule. Consider honesty. The punishment meted out to researchers who construct phony results or who alter their results to fit a hypothesis goes beyond chastisement. Violators lose credibility and become ostracized; they are dishonored for disobeying an essential tenet of science: honest reporting of real results.

If administrators and faculty members accept core values under strong normation—we do not know definitively the conditions producing this acceptance—shared governance takes on a qualitatively different meaning. Why? Normative values would regulate and define such practices, just as the rules of football define valid plays and penalties.

An analysis of institutional governance cannot ignore the role of distinctive campus histories and traditions—established rites, rituals, and symbols. Campus tradition becomes a determining correlate of trust and a shared value set. Successful collaboration requires faculty, administrators, and students to evince mutual respect, as well as respect for academic integrity and intellectual curiosity. One example: a tradition of presidential involvement in a faculty senate meeting where all opinions, ideas, and attitudes are treated respectfully. But a senate could promote more than “involvement” and “respectful treatment of ideas” if true “collaboration” became a strongly held norm. What would “collaboration” mean absent mutual respect? A tradition of relying upon bargaining units to mediate any disagreement, regardless of scope, might erode any hope of a cooperation. Repeated faculty strikes signify the absence of respect.

How might we categorize campus traditions? We posit three categories: traditions that (1) encourage or (2) discourage collaboration, and (3) traditions that promote one group

over another. We'd categorize the holding of tenure and promotion reviews in an administrative setting as "non-collaborative" or as "promoting one group over another" since this tradition gives a provost a distinct advantage over faculty participants.

Let's summarize. An adequate analysis of academic governance must take into account three variables: the levels of trust and mistrust among faculty and administrators; the presence or absence of a shared vision and a common value set; and an understanding of campus traditions. But we cannot neglect another contextual variable—the level of sophistication and complexity of decision-making on a campus. Sophisticated decision-making often emerges from the statutory assignment of roles, computerization, and the levels of bureaucracy found on a campus. This variable may be critical in examining decision-making related to financial matters. The complexities of determining payroll timelines, cash flow, tuition payments, bond sales, and leasing payments can restrict the ability of a group to participate effectively.

SHARED GOVERNANCE: IDEAL AND REAL

The myths of collegiality and a detached ivory tower have long histories; they constitute a "fable about a lost kingdom."¹⁹ In reality, special interests have long exerted demands on higher education. Nor are structural complexity, fragmentation, and competition new conditions. Today, external pressures may promote student performance measures, curricular modifications, business practices, and structural change.²⁰ The growing complexity of campus operations further hinders professors, administrators, and staff from developing cohesive goals, underlying values, and unifying behavior patterns. Instead, academic and business units compete intensely in a fragmented environment for resources, qualified personnel, and administrative attention. Responsibility-centered budgeting further encourages competition and fragmentation by forcing fiscal independence on individual cost centers—such as schools and colleges—at the price of unity and coherence.²¹

At best, *weak normative behavior* defines today's colleges. Most faculty members, staff,

and administrators do not behave out of a deep sense of Kantian mutual respect that acknowledges the right of others to make informed decisions in their own interests. Instead, decision-makers act with superficial "respectfulness" and "civility," even when they know they will ignore the opinions of their colleagues. They rely on norms that function as technical, prudent directives or as "rules of thumb." These norms enable members of the campus community to compromise on principle, to get along, and to avoid confrontation. They militate against painstaking, enduring, and respectful dialogue leading to consensus and, in turn, to deeper commitments.

High levels of individualist behavior define weakly normed environments. Faculty and staff alienation and disengagement often result in further exclusion from critical decisions, save at token levels that placate interest groups or that defuse potentially explosive situations. Administrators, for example, may make key budgetary decisions in summer when few faculty members can participate.

Short of attaining a mythical "lost kingdom," academic leaders must foster a strong normative environment featuring common vision and priorities. Faculty and staff "buy into" and are guided by this vision in this environment. Where shared values and consensual decision-making exist, faculty and administrative collaboration and commitment to representation become common practice. Leaders provide key information and data to faculty, and open lines of communication between constituencies. Trust—keeping promises, and practicing what one preaches—is high on the list of "strong" norms. So is deep, abiding respect—not mere respectfulness—among all campus participants. Last comes honest communication needed to establish trust and integrity in relationships. Adherence to these norms promotes collegiality; conversely, violators of accepted norms face academic ostracism.

Strong normative behavior remains an ideal—suggestive of John Dewey's model, in which "democracy" defines the social form of life, not just the political form of governance. But some current practices suggest the possibilities.²² Peers at many independent liberal arts colleges hire, develop, and foster faculty

colleagues through promotion and tenure. Other actors may blame and stigmatize the sponsoring department if a probationary faculty member fails to earn tenure. Collegiality becomes a source of power, social structure, and governance.²³

Moving from weakly to strongly normed university environments may be impossible if business interests and external constituents influence institutional behavior, since these constitutive normative values presuppose ability to control the campus environment.²⁴ But the vision can guide thought and action even at campuses that fall short of the ideal. In any case, many characteristics of a strong normative-based university—trust, respect, honesty, and a shared commitment to the welfare of the institution—promote collaboration and decision-making.

VARIATIONS TO SHARING POWER

We note three variations on governance and campus life.

First, those with formal power and statutory authority are blind to interests outside of their immediate realm, and to alternative conceptions of decision-making, priority setting, and exercising authority. This variation may appear in some information systems management conversations, where high levels of technical knowledge might be deemed a prerequisite even to participate in a conversation.

Second, those with formal power express cynicism toward any sharing. These leaders might acknowledge that forms of participatory decision-making exist, but deem these forms unrealistic or undesirable, thereby guarding their entrenched rights. This cynicism might be found in fiscal decision-making, particularly when reduced state appropriations require quick, difficult decisions about budget reductions.

Third, the college aims for strongly normed practice of shared, collegial decision-making. This culture does not abandon the goal just because shared decision-making authority has not become normative practice. Instead, its attainment requires still more dedication. Normative practice constitutes a “form of social life” that must constantly be reinvigorated by the commitment of its members. Administrators, for example, recognize

the inability of a faculty senate to make quick decisions about budget reductions, but still share critical information, solicit broad-based input, and consider faculty opinions.

To reiterate the distinction between weak and strong normative university cultures: In weak cultures little more than lip service is paid to involving faculty and staff in decision-making, and at best efforts at respectful communication are tentative. Real world pressures, including the need for timely action, affect decision-making. External demands often prevail, and many administrators are uncomfortable sharing their authority. In strong cultures, administrators give up some power and authority to faculty and staff. Participants appreciate all contributions to the welfare of the whole and aim for a sense of ethical community.

When is tension greatest? Little tension exists in cultures dominated by administrative blindness or cynicism, since no one strives for shared decision-making responsibilities. Instead, faculty and staff are disengaged and alienated from critical aspects of university life. Adversarial and distrustful relationships may emerge between administration, unions, and senates. In contrast, tensions may emerge at first—especially among the uncommitted—as a campus community moves to improve the status quo. In these situations, tension should diminish as collegial governance—characterized by consensus, collaboration, representation, trust, respect, and honesty—is attained.

WIN-WIN GOVERNANCE

Effective decision-making made via shared governance presupposes, first, that collegiality as a source of power and motivation can supersede the traditional individualistic reward system. Attaining communality requires faculty members and administrators to focus on the institutional, not the individual benefits of decisions. By putting aside differences, they create an institutional vision with broad-based acceptance. Relying on collegiality as a source of power also indicates an understanding of the converse: individualism blocks effective sharing of authority and responsibility.

Second, shared governance assumes that institutional leaders and decision-makers

share a core belief: that the entire community is committed to and practices democratic behaviors. They work to create, promote, and live democratic ideals and values, such as equality, common goals, respect, and participatory decision-making. This assumption is fundamental; it lays the foundation for the entire belief system governing the culture of the workplace. One difficulty for the contemporary university: growing consumer-oriented behavior of administrative systems, and the transfer of consumerism to the academic realm.²⁵ The opposition of faculty members to efficiency and productivity-motivated behavior of administrators inhibits shared governance, just as a relentless push towards economic efficiency may challenge participatory democracy.

Third, shared governance assumes that legally protected rights and responsibilities are brokered among decision-making bodies, and that one body might voluntarily share a legally granted right for the welfare of an institution. This idea is best illustrated in the area of curriculum. In Minnesota, administrative bodies are responsible for curricular content. Yet these bodies collaborate with faculty in determining content.²⁶ Those who sacrifice authority recognize that consensual decision-making improves the quality of culture. The belief that administrators can make decisions in silos, using singular criteria such as cost effectiveness, productivity, and efficiency, threatens win-win governance.

Faculty members and administrators must accept these three assumptions to forestall unilateralism and the resultant adversarial relationships between administrators and faculty. Realizing core beliefs and consensual decision-making requires collective decision-making and democratic (inclusive) behavior.

Attaining win-win shared governance requires sustained administrative and faculty senate collaboration, mutual respect and good faith, and commitment to a consensual process towards achieving clearly defined outcomes. Some areas where win-win governance is feasible: restructuring computer management systems, prioritizing academic budgets, and developing an institutional mission.

Faculty senates and bargaining units must understand their respective roles in decision-making, and must be willing to take on supporting roles when the other body exercises its

authority. One example: clarifying expectations and products related to faculty work life. A senate may have authority and access to decisions in this domain, but the bargaining unit holds legally appointed representation. Collaboration on work life issues requires purposive, well-intentioned, and well-formulated attempts to clarify ambiguities.

Rapport between the bargaining unit and the administration is often difficult to achieve, especially when the emergence of the union was contentious. Comity requires respectful, positive, good-faith communication and negotiation. When those conditions are present, cooperation can defend academic integrity, challenge legislative or other external intrusion, and define institutional direction, mission, and vision. Current state budget cuts, for example, typically require percentage reductions across higher education systems. Bargaining units and administrators can together challenge such macro-level decisions, and can, for example, force legislatures to reduce the cutback or at least specify service reductions commensurate with the cut.

Unifying the three constituent decision-making bodies is more difficult than collaboration between any dyad, because of widely divergent interests and expertise. Effective and successful collaboration requires strong normation. With goodwill and trust, a tri-partite approach to shared governance can produce many win-win decisions, particularly when addressing institutional culture and mission. Increasing the focus on research, for example, would include a collaboratively developed, clear, and well promoted mission statement. The senate would empower faculty to perform in this research culture by promoting relevant lectures and faculty development programs, and by encouraging the proper normative expectations, while unions would bargain for fiscal rewards. This scenario lends hope that collaboration generates the goodwill and trust needed to demonstrate real leadership for the academy.

Tension exists between the ideal and real practice of shared authority on campus. Possible resolutions range from rejection of collaboration, to cynical manipulation, and on to weak and strong normation. Institutional leaders must understand the obstacles to attaining collegial governance, including public

demands for greater responsiveness, and the emergence of proprietary institutions that challenge the norms of the traditional campus. Leaders, if committed to the ideals of scholarship and integrity, must continually search out effective methods to build communities out of disparate constituencies. The need for such leadership has never been greater.

NOTES

- ¹ Giamatti, 1988, 41-42.
- ² The decision of Charles Reed, chancellor of the California State University System, to implement a common management system illustrates the point.
- ³ Aronowitz, 2000, Giroux and Myrsiades, 2001, Sperber, 2000.
- ⁴ Giroux and Myrsiades, 2001.
- ⁵ The argument is not new. Mario Savio protested the emergence of the "multiversity" as leader of Berkeley's free speech movement in the 1960s. See Johnson, Kavanagh, & Mattson, 2003.
- ⁶ Sperber, 2000.
- ⁷ Magney, 1999.
- ⁸ Williams, Gore, Broches, & Lostoski, 1986.
- ⁹ One recent exception: the vote of no confidence in their president by the members of the Baylor University faculty.
- ¹⁰ Birnbaum, 1988.
- ¹¹ Peters & Waterman, 1982.
- ¹² Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993.
- ¹³ Lane, 1998.
- ¹⁴ Miller & Seagren, 1993.
- ¹⁵ A matter further frustrated by the Board of Regents vote of confidence, trust, and faith in President Sloan.
- ¹⁶ Magney, 1999.
- ¹⁷ Green, 1999
- ¹⁸ Green, 1999, 76.
- ¹⁹ Baldrige, 1982.
- ²⁰ Lucas, 1994.
- ²¹ Ehrenberg, 2002.
- ²² Katz, Miller, & Peters, 2002.
- ²³ Birnbaum, 1988.
- ²⁴ Campbell, 2000.
- ²⁵ Giroux, 2002.
- ²⁶ Miles, 1997 provides a good discussion of *Minnesota v. Knight* along with several other legal decisions that restrict a faculty member's involvement on campus.

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