Shared Governance in The State University of New York

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What is shared governance?
Meeting the challenge of supporting and measuring effective shared governance can usefully begin with both a definition of and a rationale for shared governance. The 1967 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities" published by the American Association of University Professors (and subsequently endorsed by two other representative national academic governance organizations) for the first time formally articulated and made legitimate the faculty role in academic governance.

What came to be known as the Joint Statement on Government described the relationship among trustees, presidents, and faculty as intertwined through "mutual understanding, joint effort, and inescapable interdependence." The document (also for the first time) articulated two basic principles: "1.) important areas of action involve at one time or another the initiating capacity and decision making participation of all the institutional components, and 2.) difference in the weight of each voice, from one point to the next, should be determined by the reference to the responsibility of each component for the particular matter at hand." According to Robert Birnbaum, a scholar of governance, this was the introduction of the term "shared governance" (p. 3). More than establishing the faculty’s "primary responsibility" for educational matters such as faculty status, and programs of instruction and research," Birnbaum contends that the Joint Statement "also articulated the importance of faculty involvement in educational policy more generally, including the setting of institutional objectives, planning, budgeting, and the selection of administrators" (p. 3). This inclusive idea of governance would engage all campus sectors in ownership of the future of their institutions. This can be seen as the origin of the concept of "stakeholders."

What is the policy context for "Shared Governance" for New York’s public Institutions of Higher Education?

The now canonical "Statement" served to stimulate policies across the country. There are parallels within each of the parts of SUNY, with specific explanations for each (e.g., the establishment of governance and roles within Community Colleges and State-Operated Colleges). The Policies of the SUNY Board of Trustees defines and clarifies (Article VI) the responsibilities of the "university faculty for the University’s instruction, research and service program" and establishes a University Faculty Senate, which is "the official agency through which the University Faculty engages in the governance of the University."

Students, a group slighted in the introduction of the term "shared governance" (p. 3), also became involved. In 1996 "Statement," students are accorded official standing by the Board Policies (Article XVII), in which students are acknowledged as "stakeholders." (p. 3)

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the Student Assembly is designated the "official organization by which State University students participate in University-wide governance." Within SUNY, then, the system of shared governance occurs among a multiplicity of groups across many different pathways:

> the relationship between governing boards and the Chancellor and campus presidents
> the system wide governance organizations with representatives from campuses (e.g., the University Faculty Senate, the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, Student Assembly, etc.)
> the campus governance organizations, which may be faculty-only, professional staff-only, or college-wide
> the student governance groups on each campus

These groups and their relationships assume different characters as changes occur—in the nature of the issue under discussion, the decision-making locus (system or campus), as well as the personnel. What remains constant is the commitment to define and operate within an explicit covenant to involve multiple constituencies in governance activities.

**What core principles should frame and inspire shared governance?**

The following organization of key ideas can serve as general guiding principles for designing resources for governance organizations. Although not meant to be inclusive, this set of principles is designed to illustrate the complexity of considerations that must be included in the development of meaningful resources and measurement tools. The principles will be organized by using Lee Bolman & Terrence Deal’s four frames, designed to examine aspects of leadership within organizations.

1. **Structural.** Providing easy access to the "structural" aspects of a governance process can facilitate an organized approach to review of topics, and guide steps required for action. For example, orientation sessions for new members and trouble-free access to updated governance documents (such as by-laws and handbooks) avoid schisms between "insiders" and "outsiders" within governance organizations. "Shared governance" can be improved when all members understand what is involved in proposing and approving governance rules. Bolman & Deal stress that using this approach enables the organization to make sure that essential structural elements within the organization are complete and up-to-date.

2. **Human resource.** The second Bolman & Deal frame focuses on the issues and concerns of people involved in organizations. In the case of "shared governance," this could be seen as concerns for facilitating meaningful constituent involvement. Maximizing transparency and communication, concerns that have received increased visibility in recent years, are consistent with this frame. Discontent within a campus, when governance is called upon to serve in a mediating role, is also relevant to this frame. It should be noted that "shared governance" differs from the representation by unions of constituents. Although, at times, interests between governance and collective bargaining units may overlap, they are not identical.

Principles related to the human resource frame could include references to ways the organization can pay attention to representational issues, such as those related to diversity, which include empowerment, morale, and access to resources. Note that SUNY’s commitment to broad representation involves every group, including students. In fact, there is a voting student member of the SUNY Board of Trustees.

Awareness of concern for constituents, consistent with the human resource frame, is included in one of the seminal documents of SUNY. Although more than three decades old, the excerpt below from Chancellor’s Statement (1973), has been affirmed by each SUNY Chancellor since 1973 and appears as a definition of "Campus Governance" in the 1982 Policy Manual (p. 123):

"There is no single model of shared governance. However, there is general agreement about the elements of effective shared governance. Such governance requires:

> well-defined areas of authority that are the primary responsibilities of each of the governance components (i.e., faculty, administration, governing board, students, etc.);
> recognition that various areas are interrelated and that all components have a stake in the overall governance of the institution; and
> collegial and cooperative relationships among all components.

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"The University reaffirms the validity of governance as the appropriate and organic process for the involvement of constituent groups in campus decision making. University faculty, staff, and administration are reminded of the charge contained in the 1972 Master Plan that the governance arrangements within the University will be increasingly clarified and improved methods of consultation will be developed to reflect the need for effective governance based upon widespread participation... Since these challenges go to the very heart of the University, it is appropriate to underscore the traditional legal framework which establishes and protects University governance.” (Emphasis added)

Recognition of the empathetic aspect of “shared governance” can serve to highlight the human dimension of the sometimes abstract concept of “shared governance.”

**3. Political.** Inherent in the very nature of governance is politics. All governance leaders must, at times, intentionally address concerns that are more important to one group than another. How this is handled can go a long way toward building, or undermining, the credibility of the governance organization. This is particularly of concern at critical times (e.g., when a search for a campus administrator is underway, when dire budget circumstances require triaging of resources). Birnbaum argues that effective shared governance is concomitant with progress within institutions of higher education. Referencing Derek Bok’s 2003 analysis of governance, he emphasizes the way in which governance effectiveness contributes to the potential for an institution of higher education to achieve its mission. He suggests that:

“governance and institutional purpose are related ... proposals that suggest, either explicitly or implicitly, that the faculty role in shared governance should be reduced or limited [are] more likely to diminish rather than improve institutional effectiveness.” (p. 6)
It is to the benefit of all to address differing points of view before these differences become politicized. Examples of concerns that might move from disharmony to disenfranchisement are included in Middle States, e.g., the following expectations:

- a process for providing updates for current members of the governing body on the institution’s mission, organization, and academic programs and objectives;
- a procedure in place for the periodic objective assessment of the governing body in meeting stated governing body objectives;
- a chief executive officer, appointed by the governing board, with primary responsibility to the institution; and
- periodic assessment of the effectiveness of institutional leadership and governance.

Through the Middle States review process (self-study followed by external review), campuses can make manifest their explicit depoliticizing of their governance process. The toolkit of resources, to be provided via the “Shared Governance Transformation Team” will be designed to assist in this process.

4. Symbolic. “Symbolic” is the most unexpected of the four frames, and with it, Bolman & Deal encourage consideration of how organizations can inspire ideas and actions. Evidence of symbolism can be tangible (e.g., location for meetings of the governance organization, awards related to governance, the governance leader carries the mace at the campus convocation, the governance leader regularly introduces the president at events), or more abstract (e.g., use of a campus “theme” to stimulate conversation, arts activities, or symposia, that relate to governance, design of a “Conversations about Governance” series, modeled along the lines of the “Conversations in the Disciplines” series).

When shared governance on a campus includes a symbolic dimension, constituents can identify and connected to the meaning of governance, as well as governance actions. In Bolman & Deal’s model, an organization that incorporates the “symbolic” will pay attention to making sure the work of the organization is important and meaningful. For example, incorporating traditions and ceremonies that express the mission of the organization illustrates the symbolic. An example of the symbolic is evidenced in the University Faculty Senate document, Traditions. This product of the Student Life Committee of the University Faculty Senate in 2008 (updated several times since then) includes descriptions of symbolic activities on many campuses. Copies have been distributed to all SUNY and Community College campuses. The wording of the introduction highlights the symbolic nature of this document, explaining that “Traditions are a significant part of the college experience. At best, they celebrate life, recognize individual or group achievement, and contribute to the development of a distinct campus identity.” (“Introduction, n.p.)

Symbolic activities by governance organizations can facilitate involvement by constituents at all levels.


4The Role of Faculty in Shared Governance, Statement approved by the Faculty Council of Community Colleges, October 18, 2008.


SUNY System

Shared Governance: A Commentary

KENNETH P. O’BRIEN
President, University Faculty Senate

It was almost a half century ago when I first got involved with “shared” governance, although at the time it was a nameless state of affairs. The food service at my college had decided that it would host a dinner for the state bankers association, not a bad thing in and of itself, even in the 1960’s. But, scheduling proved difficult, so without notice the administration decided that they would cut the dining hours one evening, in order to clear the hall to prepare for the banquet. Well, we, the offending, paying students, decided “we would not be moved.” Unarmed campus police were called, the upper level administrators began arriving, and negotiations quickly ensued, negotiations that eventuated in me spending a good part of the next year of my student life on the campus food committee.

More than a tale of collegiate high jinks, the story of the Rutgers food hall sit-in actually taught me a good deal about campus shared governance, beginning with the fact that it was the administrators who had the power to invite people to the table. We had created something of a problem that they had to solve quickly; after all, the bankers could not be kept waiting. But they were ones who found the framework for the next steps, a continuing conversation that actually made changes in the accountability of services provided for students by the college.

I still think that’s the case on most campuses and within most systems: the tone of shared governance is most often in the hands of the administrators who have the formal authority for many of the decisions that govern campus life. While that is a long way from what many think of as the ideal of the medieval university with faculty in control of every decision affecting institutional life, most of us, faculty and professional staff alike, have little interest—and less time—to become engaged in the often tedious process of governance, leaving it to those for whom it is a professional obligation.

Yet, almost all of us, faculty, professional staff and administrators, acknowledge that our institutions work best when they work collaboratively, and the more important the issue, the more pressing the need for collaboration. All of which is complicated for a system of thirty four state-operated campuses, each with its own administration, governance structure, history, mission and distinct traditions. My experience is that collaboration is even more crucial when the system administration is geographically apart from a campus, where the real work of the institution is on constant display.

And, for all these reasons, we need to recognize Chancellor Nancy Zimpher for her open invitation to faculty governance representatives to participate as fully as possible in the administration’s deliberations. This has been something of a mutual learning curve, but we now have representatives sitting on her Cabinet, on every major SUNY committee, and on the Board of Trustees. In fact, it is remarkable that the two governance leaders of the Board, non-voting though we may be, each chair an important Board Committee.

Is the current SUNY system of shared governance ideal? Of course not. None is, nor ever will be. But, the system that has evolved in the past three years provides a means by which faculty, staff and student voices have become part of the larger governance process, and that has led to specific, tangible results in a number of different areas, the new presidential search guidelines to name but one.

Let’s be clear. Counsel, advice, voice, none of these is determinative in making decisions; they were never meant to be. Neither the power to make final decisions, nor the responsibility that such power carries with it, rests with faculty, staff or student governance representatives. That remains with the administration and the Board.

This underscores the critical importance of our active participation in the governance process.
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We must define for others the implications of pending decisions, their real-world consequences for our campuses, our students, our colleagues, even our communities. While every upper-level administrator will praise shared governance in the abstract, especially during job interviews, few are confident enough, smart enough, experienced enough to realize the critical importance of faculty—staff—student voices to their success as they move to foster institutional change. We are fortunate that Nancy Zimpher is among the few.

A final consideration: System governance also relies on widespread participation in our own deliberations. Despite the miracles of modern communication technologies, many of us realize that we cannot engage every member of the thirty-four state operated campuses in every decision. But, effective representation in decision-making—and equally effective communication about both the processes and substance of decisions affecting campuses—remain realistic and necessary goals of our internal processes.

Ten years ago, the SUNY shared governance system was in tatters, with a Board that seemed more engaged in criticizing parts of university life and practice than representing its interests to other crucial constituencies. The legitimate oversight function that every Board must play to meet its responsibilities had been abandoned for a closed system of micro-managers, each intent on making certain that his or her vision dominated some area of university life. And, with weakened senior academic leadership, the system was dysfunctional at its highest levels.

Today, that is past. This current Board is deeply and productively engaged in the critical policy deliberations necessary for effective university governance. It responds quickly to incidents that affect campus life, academic and otherwise, or reputation, and it is enthusiastic in its vocal, public support of the even-greater promise offered by SUNY in the future.

The administration, for its part, honors shared governance, with material support as well as places at the table, whatever the issues under discussion may be. This is not to say that the system does not face problems, some of which—the SUNY hospitals, for instance—appear intractable.

Yet, I believe we are in the best position in decades to work through to solution. In a sense, we are in the most enviable—and challenging—of governance circumstances, where the contribution we can make to effective university governance is limited not by access, but by our talent and dedication to the task. This reminds me of the ancient nugget of wisdom attributed to the Chinese: “Be careful what you wish for.”

Shared Governance Drives Our Greatest Accomplishments

NANCY L. ZIMPHER
Chancellor, The State University of New York

The State University of New York’s future success rests predominantly on the willingness and ability of the system’s central administration, campus leadership, and all of our stakeholders alike to embrace the comprehensive vision laid out in The Power of SUNY, our strategic plan and roadmap for the next decade and beyond, in which we aim to uphold the traditional values of teaching and learning in higher education but also to embrace our capacity to have an impact beyond our campuses, driving economic development and creating a higher quality of life for all of New York’s citizens. The SUNY campuses and all of the individuals they serve—faculty, staff, students, communities—embody our state’s potential to rebuild its own economy, to improve the delivery of public education from cradle to career, and to populate a workforce that is relevant in the 21st century.

These are daunting tasks that no one group should dare tackle on their own. Rather, it will take the full force of an effective university system to rise to these occasions; a system in which all involved are committed to the overall vision and willing to work together to see that it is achieved. Shared governance is a critically important first step toward this end.

Shared governance in higher education refers to the structures and processes through which administration, faculty, professional staff, governing boards, and students participate in the development of policies and in decisions that affect the whole institution. Carried out effectively, shared governance serves as the foundation for a sustainable system of higher education that is operating at its highest potential in service to each of these groups as well as its other stakeholders in government, businesses, and communities.

So important is this notion that it was included as part of the implementation phase of SUNY’s strategic plan. Our Shared Governance Transformation Team examined the current patterns and procedures for shared governance across SUNY and asserted recommendations for additional documents, policies, and procedures that would strengthen our shared governance system-wide. The result, which is getting off the ground this semester and will be entirely up and running by next fall, is SUNY Voices—an initiative to provide support for strengthening shared governance at the system level, on individual campuses, and among all of SUNY’s components. The objectives of SUNY Voices are twofold—to increase visibility of our focus on shared governance given the unique and complex nature of the SUNY system, and to improve communication and shared decision-making processes throughout SUNY. Specifically, SUNY Voices will include a new website that will support our work and serve as a forum for discussions on the topic; regular publications; and scheduled workshops and presentations at orientations and meetings like that of new trustees, council members, and campus governance leaders as well as the UFS and FCCC plenaries.

Naturally, the presidents of SUNY’s University Faculty Senate (UFS) and Faculty Council of Community Colleges (FCCC), Ken O’Brien and Tina Good, respectively, co-chaired the Shared Governance Transformation Team. I cannot thank them enough for their contributions thus far and commend them for their continued work as they manage SUNY Voices, in collaboration with SUNY’s various governance groups, including System Administration, the SUNY Board of Trustees, the presidents at each of our 64 campuses, the Faculty Council of Community Colleges (FCCC), Student Assembly (SA), New York Community College Trustees (NYCCT), the Association for College Trustees and College Council members (ACT), and the SUNY chief academic officers.

As we rollout SUNY Voices, we will rely on the continued support of the UFS and others to help us increase awareness throughout SUNY of the important role that shared governance plays as our system of higher education—the largest in the country—navigates its many challenges, seizes its most promising opportunities, and achieves its most ambitious goals.

Shared governance alone does not create jobs or generate funds, but the shared decision-making processes and collaboration that effective shared governance brings to our system is at the heart of these opportunities, and the benefits that our collective leadership brings to our students, faculty, and staff are substantial.
one, at every level of the University: a six-person departmental executive committee in a large multidisciplinary department; the college of arts and sciences executive committee, the college administrative council; the faculty advisory committee on campus affairs (working with the UM-Dearborn chancellor); the academic affairs advisory committee (the provost’s committee); and the University Senate Assembly (representing faculty at all three U of M campuses at the system level). All of these bodies had both governance and advisory functions, though the highest body, the Senate Assembly, had relatively more of an advisory than governance role. Nonetheless, the Senate Assembly Committee on University Affairs played a strong role in determining policy and direction at the University level, with direct access to the senior administration (and in some cases the Regents), as the voice of the faculty as a whole. Its Committee on the Economic Status of the Faculty monitored salary conditions closely, though it obviously didn’t engage in formal negotiations. As a dean in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, whose faculty members were represented by a faculty union, I encountered two parallel mechanisms, both at the campus level: a faculty senate and a strong parallel local bargaining unit structure. Shared governance for faculty remained at the campus level, however. Our shared governance structure in SUNY, with the University Faculty Senate at the system level and strong college senates, along with provision for representation of faculty and professionals under the UUP contract, lies somewhere between the arrangements at Michigan and Pennsylvania. After 40 years’ participation in shared governance, I sometimes feel as if I have measured out my life, not in J. Alfred Prufrock’s coffee spoons, but in committee meetings.

What have I learned in these forty years inside shared governance—and especially in my 18 years at Geneseo? At the outset, I should point out that governance is more widely shared at Geneseo than at many campuses since our College Senate (a product of changes in American higher education in the turbulent 1970s) includes students, professional staff, and administrators, as well as faculty, all of them as full voting members. The Senate is composed predominantly of teaching faculty, but not overwhelmingly so. Under the leadership of our current Senate chair, Professor Dennis Showers, shared governance at Geneseo is undergoing a multi-year review. Issues include the role of faculty, better coordination of Senate and College committees, and exploring ways to make Senate and its committees more relevant to the campus. In its most recent Middle States review, Geneseo was commended for its governance reform efforts.

How do we know effective shared governance when we see it? First and foremost, effective shared governance is marked by open and frequent communication among the participants. At Geneseo, for example, both the president and the provost are members of the executive committee of the College Senate. The committee sets the agenda for the monthly meetings of Senate and watches over the work of the various Senate committees. It also plays a role in deciding how—or in what forum—to handle issues that come to Senate from individuals and committees outside the formal Senate structure. In part because of this regular consultative mechanism, there is a real working relationship between the two senior administrators of the College and the faculty leaders of Senate. This relationship requires time and attention, but I have found that such attention pays real dividends in better policy-making and a greater sense of cohesion in the College community.

As part of the regular agenda of College Senate, both the president and the provost provide regular reports. Until this year, both senior officers held voting privileges in Senate. Since, under the SUNY Trustees Policies, the actions of the Senate are advisory to the president, this did not seem to make sense, and the constitution of the Senate was amended to make both administrators ex officio without vote. In the name of more effective governance, we have sought to limit the length of reports at Senate in order to permit more time for debate and discussion. As president, I am also a faculty member, and I regard myself as an intellectual leader as well as chief administrative officer of the campus. Although the two roles must be separated, I do on occasion participate in debates in Senate and frequently provide information or clarification from the floor. I share in governance in this respect as well.

As this suggests, shared governance in SUNY is just that: shared. We do not have faculty governance, on the one hand, or total top-down administrative control on the other. Although there are gray areas, academic policies and curriculum are the province of the faculty, as are recommendations for promotion and tenure, which at Geneseo come out of departments and go on to an elected faculty personnel committee at the campus level before reaching the provost and president. On our campus, too, the provost and president each meet with the faculty personnel committee, at separate times, to discuss the committee’s recommendations before the final decisions are made (by the president on recommendation of the provost). In the Senate, committees on curriculum and academic policy are composed of students and professional staff as well as faculty. This mixed responsibility for considering course and program proposals seems to have worked relatively well over the years, and there is no strong sentiment for changing it. Despite the primacy of faculty governance in academic matters, the fact remains that the final authority for implementation of academic programs (and obviously promotion and tenure) resides in the administration (and, ultimately, in the Chancellor and Trustees). The role of shared governance in major budgetary decisions is less clear, however, and the issues become more complex.

Over the years, I have also come to believe that shared governance can be enhanced, especially in the areas of planning and budget, by what I call a healthy overlap of structures. At Geneseo, we have created two campus-wide bodies among the five defined in the By-Laws of the College, as opposed to the Senate: The Strategic Planning Group and the Budget Priorities Committee. Both make use of structural overlaps between Senate and administration. The Strategic Planning Group is in charge of the College’s strategic plan, monitoring progress against goals and recommending priorities for action under the plan. It is chaired by the provost and recommends to the president. It includes not only the four vice-presidents (Administration and Finance, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Advancement), but also faculty, staff, and students (selected by the Student Association). Faculty membership includes—or overlaps with—Senate leadership (the chair and vice-chair are automatically members). Additional faculty members are chosen jointly, by the president in consultation with the Senate Executive Committee. The Budget Priorities Committee (BPC) makes use of similar overlaps in membership. It is co-chaired by the Vice President for Administration and Finance and the past chair of College Senate and likewise includes all the other vice-presidents, a student, a staff member, and faculty chosen jointly. The Strategic Planning Group sets annual priorities for the budget process based on the College’s plan, and in good times (very few in recent years) the BPC makes allocation recommendations. The BPC is also a standing advisory committee on all aspects of the College budget. The college administration shares data on the budget regularly with its members; in fact, Geneseo’s current year’s budget has been available on the college website for several years. Such openness and transparency fosters shared governance.

Like any system, no matter how well conceived, shared governance has its limitations and flaws—its discontents of various sorts. As Dennis Showers and I pointed out in an article in the Spring 2011 issue of the Bulletin, Geneseo made extensive use of the overlapping shared governance structures mentioned...
In the final analysis, thinking about shared governance tells us something essential about higher education. Colleges and universities are organizations, to be sure, bureaucratic institutions (especially in a public university system), not-for-profit corporations chartered in our case under state law. They are also voluntary organizations—there isn’t a lot you can compel a tenured professor to do. But they are, above all, communities of discourse.

A place like Geneseo, especially in its nature as public liberal arts college of modest size, seeks to be a true community of discourse. Given this fact, the truest indicator of successful shared governance is a rich, widespread, and continuing conversation—ultimately an educational conversation, ideally in sync with the teaching and research mission of the institution—regarding the collective purposes and direction of the college. That’s the highest purpose of shared governance and the ideal toward which it should strive.

So, this was a very imperfect process. But as our University Faculty Senate President Ken O’Brien said in his position as a member of the Board of Trustees, a flawed process can still lead to a positive result. And that certainly appears to be the case.

President Stenger “hit the ground running” in January with tremendous energy and a clear commitment to shared governance in both the narrow and widest senses. He has consulted in an extraordinarily wide fashion on campus, visiting all of the units on campus, even individual departments within our larger colleges/schools, all in order to learn about the campus. And he has outlined a very inclusive process for defining the “Road Map” to lead Binghamton forward in our continuing evolution as a premier public research university (see the article in the Spring 2012 University Faculty Senate Bulletin about Binghamton’s history). Indeed, his desire to listen and learn and to involve all campus constituencies in moving the University forward is a model that we hope many other new presidents will embrace.

The secretive nature of the Binghamton presidential search certainly isn’t unique, as the University Centers at Stony Brook, Buffalo and now Albany are well aware (except for the shift from a public to completely secretive search in the second phase). Was the uproar over the process on our campus heard at System Administration and by the Board of Trustees? That remains to be seen, despite progress. Thanks to the efforts of President O’Brien and others, wording was inserted into the new Guidelines for Presidential Searches that provides for (though it does not guarantee) meetings with Campus Governance Leaders (CGLs) with the semi-finalists in a presidential search, even when the search is secretive (or, in the words of the Guidelines, “representational”). This set of guidelines was being used in the search for a president at U Albany, but the breach of confidentiality seems to have resulted in a return to full secrecy and a lack of participation by any campus groups outside of...
For several years there was disagreement between faculty and the administration over the issue of faculty review of the academic deans. The faculty felt that evaluations needed to be done for their school deans. In fact, several evaluations were done using anonymous surveys over the years. The bylaws of the School of Arts and Sciences even included a time table for faculty review of the school’s dean.

The bylaws’ inclusion of the faculty evaluation of the school’s dean was not supported by our administration on the grounds that it was against SUNY policy. In 2005, I was President of the University Faculty Senate when the UFS Governance Committee prepared and presented a report that supported faculty evaluations of senior administrators. The UFS received the report and passed a resolution that affirmed the prerogative of local governance bodies to engage in evaluation of administrators. In addition, the resolution urged campuses to engage in this process.

In 2005, John R. Ryan was Chancellor of the State University. He responded to the UFS resolution of support for faculty evaluation of administrators with this statement: “I appreciate the Senate’s interest in the evaluation of administrators and believe that such an evaluation is a campus prerogative.”

As Potsdam’s UFS Senator, I shared this information with my campus. The faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences voted to support the bylaws inclusion of faculty evaluation of the school dean. The administration continued to resist this concept on the grounds that only senior administration is responsible for the evaluation of the academic deans. This disagreement lasted until 2010.

**The Committee**

In 2009, our local governance leader, Chris Lanz, asked me to lead a committee to work toward an agreement with the administration on the issue of faculty evaluation of academic deans. In addition, the Faculty Evaluation of the Academic Deans Committee was charged with the development of college-wide guidelines for this evaluation process. My committee consisted of representatives from each of our three schools and an academic dean.

The representatives from the three schools were all volunteers. It must have been luck that all of them were faculty of wisdom, intelligence, experience and good judgment. They were David Curry, Chair of Philosophy, School of Arts and Sciences, Paul Siskind, composer, Crane School of Music and Don Straight, Chair Secondary Education, School of Education and Professional Studies. Bill Amoriell, Dean, School of Education represented the administration on the committee. Each member of the committee contributed to the development of our objectives, the wording of the guidelines and the communication of the effort to their respective schools. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to work with a committee of such high quality.

**Research**

The resources presented in the UFS report on Faculty Evaluation of Administrators were studied by the Committee. The document produced by Sharon Miller et al entitled “Evaluating Administrators: Designing the Process in a Shared Governance Environment” was especially helpful. In addition, each of Potsdam’s three schools had conducted a faculty evaluation of the dean in the past. The experiences of those efforts were discussed as well.

Early in the process, the Committee met with Potsdam Provost Margaret Madden. We wanted to have an in-depth discussion on the reason for the objection to this practice. We found that the word “evaluation” was a major reason. Our Provost believes that Potsdam’s senior administration has ownership of and the responsibility for the “evaluation” of the deans. Faculty input is desirable, but the administration wanted to retain the ownership and the responsibility for the actual evaluation.

In our discussion, we agreed that if the faculty engaged in a “review” of the deans, this would provide the administration with “faculty input” and provide the reviewed dean with needed performance feedback. This simple agreement provided our Committee with the needed pathway forward. Consequently, we changed the name of our Committee to the Faculty Review of Academic Dean Committee.

**Guidelines and Procedures**

The Committee worked for over a year developing the Guidelines and Procedures for Faculty Review of Academic Deans. These contained a timetable, the description of a Dean Review Committee, the Review Procedure and a Review Instrument. The basic points of the timetable were the decision to review the dean every five years and to provide a formative review of a newly hired dean in the third year.

Our Review Instrument provides a common template for use in all three schools. It consists of 31 review items in the following categories: Academic Leadership, Administration, Budget, and Management Style. It was agreed that each school could add a few additional questions based on its particular needs for each evaluation cycle.

The Committee agreed that our Office of Institutional Effectiveness would administer the review instrument in such a way that responses would be anonymous. That Office would then prepare summary statistics and make the data available to the Dean, the Provost, and the Chair of the Dean Review Committee. The Dean will report to the faculty of the School on the results of the review and future plans to address the identified issues.

**Process Adoption**

Following the development of the Guidelines and Procedures and Review Instrument, each member of the Committee presented the documents to the constituency that they represented. Each School voted to accept the Committee’s work and the Guidelines and Review Instrument. Dean Amoriell retired and was replaced by the new Dean of the School of Education and Professional Studies, Peter Brouwer. He presented the Committee’s work to the Senior Administration. After several meetings and additional editing of the Guidelines and Procedures, the Administration agreed to the process outlined in the Guidelines.

The final step was the acceptance and endorsement of the Guidelines and Review Instrument by the Potsdam Faculty Senate in the Fall 2011 Semester. This endorsement was passed with a substantial majority vote.

**Conclusion**

As I write this article, the first faculty review is being implemented for the newly hired dean of the Crane School of Music. The Potsdam faculty is pleased to have a procedure to provide their input on the performance of their academic dean. The reviewed dean now has the opportunity to receive honest, formative input from the faculty of the school. The administration has data that reflect the opinion of the faculty on the performance of the school’s dean. All constituencies believe the faculty review will improve the performance of the dean and enhance the administration’s evaluation. Perhaps the most important result of this experience is that agreement was achieved via shared governance. As with most things, time will tell, but from this vantage point the future looks good for shared governance at Potsdam.
Institutional Governance: Navigating An Uneasy Equilibrium for Progress

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Effective institutional governance is essential for two general and related purposes: operational stability and productive advancement of the institution. If the dynamic forces that govern institutions are in harmony, operational stability can prevail for significant periods.

The physical image of a marble rolling around inside a curved surface, such as a cooking wok, is instructive. In a stable equilibrium the marble moves about but never attains enough height to reach a new plateau. The institutional governing forces—boards, chancellors or presidents, faculty—can feel quite comfortable under stable conditions.

Institutions can “keep the peace” by compromising on issues that dampen controversy and appeasing individuals or units of the institution. Colleges and universities exist, however, in a larger societal and economic context, and so comfort in stability will over time be fleeting. We re-learn this lesson during budget crises—all was well until we didn’t have enough money.

Other issues that arise from day to day, the major tensions over governance result, in considerable part, over what constitutes productive advancement. If an institution aspires to more than stability of operation, which in my view it must, then the tensions that arise concern who, or what combination of voices, provides the leadership for advancement and what form will that advancement take. Here are two short cases.

In case one, a board decides that an institution is falling behind, that the greater forces in education and society are overcoming the institution. It is a proper role of the board to assess the larger context and provide guidance. Although most board members are not specialists in higher education, they collectively are—for the better, in my view—diverse and embedded in various sectors of the society and economy. If the board has accurately analyzed the situation, then it might provide a valuable service by changing the institution’s president.

These were essentially the circumstances at the University of Virginia earlier this year when the board’s leaders, in concert with the entire board, decided that the President was not providing leadership in what was perceived to be a rapidly changing national educational landscape. The board apparently thought it was performing a great service on behalf of the university’s future and summarily forced the president’s resignation. As Andrew Rice wrote, however, the campus faculty and staff “did not greet (the president’s) enemies as liberators.” A monumental failure of governance ensued and within days the president was restored to office.

This is a complex event with many questions for institutional governance. Had the board accurately perceived the trends in education and was thus correct in its actions to remove a president who, in the board’s view, was unaware or unwilling to foment change? Is the faculty oblivious to the changing nature of education, comfortable with its operational stability as the institution heads into decline?

The view of the faculty, and most alumni apparently, was that removing the president was a mistake and that the board’s perception of the imminent threat of educational change was wrong. (The source of the board’s learning was reported, in at least some instances, to be opinion articles in major newspapers by columnists who had no special expertise in education.) The faculty believed that massively open online courses will not engulf higher education and eliminate traditional campus operation, and so the university should not rush to develop distance education as a major endeavor. Either view could be proven correct—although some combination of factors is more likely. In either case, however, the board, the president, and the faculty were not in concert on the greater questions of institutional direction.

Boards are characteristically comprised of diverse membership, coming from business and finance, education, non-profit organizations, and other professions and occupations. A challenge for the boards of public institutions is that its members are volunteers, often with major responsibility in their own professional lives (it is informative to see in annual reports of corporations the levels of board member compensation). And so one great challenge is for board members to become educated to their role and provide cohesive leadership. Chait, et. al. extensively surveyed private consultants who work with non-profit boards and found that the greatest hindrance to effective boards was that members did not understand their roles.

In case two, the new president assumes responsibility for a historically successful but currently struggling institution. He possesses a strong leadership style, forged in a business environment. The president’s leadership is in concert with the board, most of whose members are from the business world and are accustomed to such style. In fact, the board perceived serious problems and judged this president’s experience and style to be appropriate for the current challenges confronting the institution. The “turnaround” president moves quickly to make radical changes, aligns administrative authority with his agenda, cuts costs, demands increased productivity, ignores consultation that is a time-honored tradition in higher education.

Needless to say, in Rice’s terms, this president will not be greeted as a liberator, and destructive dissension will almost always ensue. Numerous examples of this pattern exist, in both higher education and the corporate domain. Jim Collins poignantly summarizes the likely outcome this way: “Those who launch revolutions, dramatic change programs, and wrenching restructurings will almost always fail to make the leap from good to great.”

Successful revolutions in institutions of higher education are extremely rare, and presidents with revolutionary inclinations either learn and adapt to the governance structures or their terms are relatively short. Meanwhile considerable institutional damage occurs, and the struggling institution’s turnaround is set back with a longer recovery ahead.

These two cases are helpful to understand the extremes of damaged governance. In both, serious and legitimate concern existed about the institution’s future. However, the day-to-day, year-to-year detailed practice of governance in most institutions is usually less dramatic, but nevertheless very important in the search for productive institutional advancement. The more common occurrences ultimately lead to the essential tensions in governance.

Boards will more frequently perceive too slow change and lack of progress in addressing greater issues, asking pointed questions. Why are we not producing graduates who are ready for the workplace, as we are hearing from employers? Why are we not producing enough graduates in disciplines needed by the economy and too many in majors where there are no jobs for them? Such questioning can generate creative tension.

Faculty often perceive major curriculum change or financial reallocation as destabilizing to the operational stability that is enjoyed by all. And they may be correct, while admitting that some form of change is needed. They value academic freedom and the protection of tenure, even more than compensation, some would say. And faculty universally recognize their prerogative to make and implement curriculum in consultation with institutional leadership.

An example of conflict over governance and prerogatives arose within SUNY during the late 1990s when the board, or a significant contingent of it, felt that faculties had given over general education to a distribution of courses that served the interests of the faculty and their academic disciplines, but not the best interests of providing a basic educational foundation for all students. And so the board adopted a system-wide general education curriculum. It is a proper role of the board to ask whether students are getting a credible general education and to ask for
evidence of such. That’s generating creative tension. For the board to proceed to establish a curriculum, however, is rare and an infringement of traditional faculty prerogatives.

Faculties sometimes perceive a kind of false independence that is portrayed by this comment: “Administrators and staff come and go, but the faculty are the heart and soul of the college.” The opinion that boards and administrators do not matter is misguided. The very crisis within which this quote is made concerns a failure of leadership and governance that ultimately seriously endangers an institution, and a faculty has a vested interest in caring about boards and administrators as critical partners on behalf of the institution. Navigating the creative and essential tensions among the partners over the nature and direction of productive advancement can lead to institutional improvement.

Because relationships among the components of governance are largely linear, board-president-faculty, with much less frequent communication between board and faculty, the key person in institutional governance systems is the president. This is not to imply that the president is always the idea leader, a role that can be played by board or faculty, but that she is in the key position of overall orchestration. The president’s judgment about the balance of forces and the pace of productive change are critical. If she misperceives, fails to address points of potential dissonance, doesn’t manage the discussion about matters of change, then the governance system can become unstable.

To extend the physical metaphor of the marble inside a container, cited at the beginning of this article, a president’s failure to perceive and address issues confronting an institution are tantamount to lowering the perimeter of the curved surface of the container—it’s a marble on a pizza pan with no rim—thereby creating instability.


A Tale of Two Styles of Governance at Stony Brook University

NORMAN GOODMAN
Stony Brook University

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was a time of wisdom, it was an age of foolishness, it was an epoch of belief, it was an epoch of incredulity...it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair...” -Charles Dickens

No age, nor any institution for that matter, is without its contradictory elements. This is true of a university today as it was for the late 18th century England and France of Charles Dickens’ novel, A Tale of Two Cities. Such contradictory elements are clearly evident in the way in which “shared governance” has been both practiced and ignored at Stony Brook University. In the “best of times,” shared governance would be a routine feature of university decision-making.

“The best of times:”

Two examples of effective shared governance

In collegial institutions like universities, shared governance requires a collaborative, mutually respectful, and trusting relationship between administration and appropriate governance organizations. When that occurs, policies and programs jointly developed can be supported by those who have to carry them out more effectively than if this were not the case, whether or not those involved initially agreed with them. Here are two of several possible examples of the “best of times.”

Responsibility Center Management (RCM) Model of Budgeting: The administration at Stony Brook, primarily through the offices of the Provost and the Assistant Vice-President of Strategy, Planning and Analysis, had begun to develop the RCM. At an early stage in the development, the President of the University Senate was provided with relevant information about this new budgetary plan. Shortly thereafter, the Provost and the Assistant Vice-President for Strategy, Planning and Analysis provided and discussed a draft of the RCM to the Committee on Academic Planning and Resource Allocation (CAPRA) of the University Senate—a committee that includes faculty, professional staff, graduate and undergraduate students, as well as those two administrators. A subcommittee of CAPRA conducted a detailed analysis of the RCM proposal and reviewed some of the professional literature on this model of budgeting. After discussion at a meeting of CAPRA, modified report of this subcommittee was submitted to the Provost and the Assistant Vice President for Strategy, Planning and Analysis, as well as to the President of the University Senate. The Provost and the Assistant Vice President indicated their appreciation of the report and agreed to take its provisions into account in the further development of this model. They also agreed to include four faculty members from three standing committees of the University Senate (two from CAPRA and one each from the Graduate Council and the Undergraduate Council) to the Finance and Budget Committee established under the RCM model. Moreover, CAPRA will play a significant advisory role to this committee.

All-in-all, this process for the initial stage of developing the RCM model of budgeting was an exemplary model of shared governance, of collegial and respectful cooperation between the administration and the University Senate through its relevant standing committee. While there is still a good deal of work remaining on this new campus budget model, if the level of administrative-governance cooperation that was exhibited in the earlier stages continues, the outcome of this shared process will likely lead to greater acceptance of this change in campus budgeting practices.

Class time vectors: For many years, classes were scheduled to meet at “odd” times (e.g., 9:50 to 11:10 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays; 2:20 to 3:15 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; 6:50 to 8:10 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays). To schedule the classes on a more standard time basis, and also to gain additional teaching slots to relieve enrollment pressure on many courses, the administration, working with some technically expert faculty, developed a new model of class schedules. In the written report of that model, the administration provided a chart of the “old” and “new” class schedules as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed change. This proposal was then presented to and discussed with a wide range of governance bodies (e.g., several standing committees of the University Senate, the University Senate, the Undergraduate Student Government) and non-governance bodies (e.g., department chairs, directors of graduate studies) over several months. These discussions led to some changes to the original model, which was then adopted and put into effect for the 2012-2013 academic year.

Though both of the above examples of changes in campus policy involved effective shared governance, inevitably some members of the academic community are still unhappy that these changes have taken place. Frankly, that is a consequence of the fact that there is no perfect resource allocation system or class schedule that will satisfy every member of the academic community because of the diverse interests and individual preferences in a university (or any large scale organization), and the fact that there are always some individuals who resist any change. But the process by means of which these programs were developed and put into place substantially reduced the level of potential disagreement and conflict about these changes.

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“The worst of times:”  Two examples of the absence of shared governance

The lack of shared governance, the failure to consult the legitimate representatives of the various campus constituencies, may well result in the inability of the changes to be carried out in an appropriate manner and/or may result in needless controversies that undermine the mutual trust and respect that is essential in collegial organizations. Here are two examples of the “worst of times,” the failure of the administration to engage the appropriate governance organization in a timely manner in effecting change in campus policy or practice.

The academic calendar: For many decades, the academic calendar at Stony Brook was developed on a five-year basis by a committee chaired by a representative of the Provost, and consisting of representatives of the Interfaith Center, the Registrar’s Office, and three relevant standing committees of the University Senate: the Undergraduate Council, the Graduate Council, and the Student Life Committee. The most recent committee established a calendar that ran from the 2009-2010 to the 2014-2015 academic years, and was based on a set rules for establishing an academic calendar that took into account pragmatic issues such as time needed for grades to be submitted and student housing to be made appropriately habitable, as well as the importance of taking into account the need for energy conservation and a respect for major religious holidays that are observed by many students and faculty. However, in the Spring 2012 semester, that carefully established process of shared governance was not followed.

Without the knowledge of any of the faculty, staff, or student government organizations, the administration established a committee to plan a new and, in its view, a more “efficient” academic calendar that, among other things, overturned a long-standing practice of not holding classes on major religious holidays. The existence of this committee, and its new calendar, became public for the first time at a meeting of the University Council (essentially, the President’s Cabinet), at which time approval of it was sought and received. This body included the President of the University Senate, who had not previously been apprised of this committee or its charge. Consequently, he properly requested that this new calendar be discussed with the University Senate and its Executive Committee before its implementation. At a set of contentious meetings with these and other groups (e.g., the campus chaplains, the Undergraduate Student Government), the new calendar was presented by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and met with considerable, though not universal, disagreement. Some minor changes to it were made as a result of student complaints about holding final examinations on the weekend and the omission of “reading days” prior to final examinations.

While there were some differences among members of the campus community about the suitability of the new calendar, there was essentially no disagreement on campus that the nature of establishing the new committee, its lack of consultation with affected constituencies, its unilateral overturning of a long-established and effective process of creating an academic calendar were clear examples of an unnecessary omission of shared governance. Since this change involved a situation of extreme sensitivity to the religiously observant students and faculty of this campus, prior discussion with the appropriate governance bodies would seem a prior requisite. Absent that appropriate consultation, it was a needless cause of controversy both on and off the campus (involving parents of present and future students, many members of the clergy, as well as members of the Long Island delegation of the New York State Legislature). The controversy surrounding this change continues, and has the potential to adversely affect student recruitment and community support for this campus.

“Rebranding” the university: On January 23, 2012, as faculty, staff, and students returned for the second semester, they were greeted with an e-mail announcement from President Stanley that “we are refreshing and modernizing our logo and brand identity.” The logo that former President Kenny had created with the help of the renowned Milton Glazer, and without cost, was now deemed unsuitable for this campus though with no rationale or discussion with appropriate governance groups prior to the change. Once more, a significant change that affected the identity of all members of this community was accomplished without their prior knowledge or consultation. There was no shared governance discussion that indicated a need for “rebranding” or, if such a change was necessary, what form it should take. There was also no shared governance discussion about the justification of both the short-term and long-term cost of this rebranding at a time of severe budgetary constraints.

While there was some disparagement on the campus about the actual new logo, with some calling it the “Slomin shield” in a reference to the logo representing an oil company that operates in this area, the issue was less the actual logo and “brand” than the manner in which, once again, this decision was made: the absence of discussion and consultation with the legitimate representatives of the campus constituencies on an issue that affects them all; in short, an absence of shared governance.

The case for the change was neither made publicly clear nor subject to question prior to its implementation—a process not commensurate with the university as a collegial organization and certainly not a model of collegial shared governance.

Conclusion

The importance of shared governance is evident in the AAUP Policies and Documents and in the standards established by the accrediting bodies for institutions of higher education. Its importance is not just a technical matter, one to be evaluated by external bodies. It is, at its core, a prescription for the successful functioning of a university as a collegial organization. The lack of shared governance undermines the trust and support of the various campus constituencies that are needed if the shared goals of the institution are to be successfully accomplished.

The controversy that was unnecessarily generated at Stony Brook University by the manner in which the academic calendar was changed and the university was “rebranded” illustrate the potential damage to the collegial fabric of the university by a failure to engage in shared governance. However, the use of shared governance to collaborate on a new budgetary model (the RCM) and a change in the class time schedules illustrate not only the lack of (or, at least, the minimization of) controversy over these changes, but also the support that can be generated for policy and programmatic changes.

The experience at Stony Brook is interesting in demonstrating a situation in which some offices of the administration involved governance on a collegial basis regarding changes in policy or programs while others did not. Perhaps more interestingly, it also illustrated a situation in which a particular administration office engaged in shared governance on some issues but not on others. The former practice in each of these is a better model for creating and maintaining a successful and collegial university of high quality than the latter—a point that is stressed in the AAUP Policies and Documents; The Joint Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities of the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges; and Standard 4 (“Leadership and Governance”) of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education that serves as the accrediting body for all colleges and universities in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. These documents state the obvious: along with academic excellence and budgetary stability, shared governance is the hallmark of the quality of institutions of higher education.
As I was preparing for my arrival at SUNY Delhi in the Fall of 1999, I had the opportunity to talk with Arthur Levine, then President of Columbia University's Teacher's College. In welcoming me into what people on campus were saying and not offering my plans for the first six months of my presidency, "In retrospect, this was outstanding advice. It helped start my presidency on a positive way."

At Delhi there is a strong emphasis on faculty and professional staff, but there were some strong voices advocating a return to separate governance organizations for each group. I learned that a vote on the Senate membership, prior to my arrival, resulted in a tie. I was asked to make a decision and remember Dr. Levine's advice, recommended a second vote to settle the issue. That also ended up deadlocked and the future of the College Senate became one of the major decisions of my presidency. I think the incoming president of the College Senate summed it up best when she said that governance should reflect the spirit of the campus. At Delhi there is a true spirit of collaboration and a representative governance model embracing faculty and professional staff was the best fit.

To promote mutual dialogue and trust, I made a commitment to the Senate. Either the president and or the provost would attend one Senate meeting each month to report and answer questions. I also meet once each semester with the Senate Executive Committee to identify issues and priorities for college and Senate leadership. At the same time, it was clear that if the College Senate was going to be successful, its charge must extend beyond academics and include active participation in planning and decision-making processes.

One priority the Senate enthusiastically accepted was leadership of a major new initiative, a college-wide budget and planning process. The Senate created a Budget and Planning Committee that has co-chairs representing the faculty and professional staff and includes cross-functional representation and the college's chief financial officer. The process, which has been refined on an annual basis, starts at the unit level and incorporates long- and short-term goals and financial needs. Units must demonstrate how each request ties to the college's mission and strategic priorities and identify any potential impact and/or support that would be required from other units at the college. Each unit plan is submitted, members of the Budget and Planning Committee meet with individual unit heads to discuss the requests and other issues that may be impacting the unit. Unit plans and follow-up meeting comments are posted for all to see on Confluence. The committee chairs then compile the requests in a written report to the Cabinet that highlights major themes and identifies each personnel and equipment request with costs and justifications. Budget and Planning co-chairs meet with the President's Cabinet in January at a retreat to discuss in detail the requests and issues or concerns that were raised during the process. The Cabinet next consults with the academic deans for their analysis of the requests and prioritizes based on funding. To close the loop, the president provides a written report to the College Senate and then meets with the Senate to answer questions. I believe this process is an excellent example of how shared governance can positively impact planning and budgeting, which are extremely critical in an era where fiscal resources are extremely limited.

The College Senate has made important contributions to other key areas as well. At its January 2011 Cabinet retreat, a review and revision of the college's mission statement was initiated as part of the Middle States accreditation process. A draft was submitted to the College Senate and its comments led to changes and a mission statement that has been fully embraced by the campus. A poster, celebrating Delhi's commitment to student success, was designed and is now displayed in every office.

A new strategic plan was also developed in 2011. The plan was submitted for review to the Senate and once finalized, returned to the Senate for its approval. Updates on progress are shared with the campus community and posted annually on the provost's web page.

Beyond traditional governance, we are engaging the campus by ensuring cross-campus representation in other important initiatives. A student success group is implementing strategies to increase retention, including expanding Freshman Seminar business courses, scheduling freshmen in classes taught by their advisors, using peer mentors to improve student performances in courses that are particularly academically challenging, and improving the registration process for students entering their second semester at Delhi. A work group is developing strategies to better integrate service learning into the curriculum and provide special recognition for students who complete those courses.

I host campus-wide forums each semester to outline priorities for the upcoming year and celebrate the achievements of faculty and staff. The Cabinet holds meetings with functional areas and "coffees" are held each year to share information and seek faculty and staff input on topics ranging from state funding to probation and retention, and from shared services to the benefits and future of off-site programs.

We now publish a daily electronic newsletter that highlights events of the day and special messages of interest to faculty and staff. Delhi People, a colorful electronic newsletter that focuses on faculty and staff achievements, was introduced to increase the information flow and highlight the great work of our campus community. I am proud that through these initiatives, college leadership has helped strengthen the governance process and engage the College Senate and the campus community in the decision-making process.

SUNY Cobleskill, where I have served as officer-in-charge since August 2011, offers an even broader study on how shared governance can produce positive outcomes by utilizing campus and system-level resources. Cobleskill was facing significant governance issues in 2010 that had divided the campus and the community. It was determined that the governance structure offered the best approach to resolving the conflicts. The then campus president and governance leaders initiated the process, making a formal request to the University Faculty Senate for a Visitation Committee to make recommendations for resolving the dispute. Faculty Senate President Kenneth O'Brien drew on the resources of the Senate and the University to create a team that was led by Distinguished Service Professor Karen Markoe from Maritime, Distinguished Service Professors Joseph Hildreth from Potsdam and Ronald Sarner from SUNY IT, Professor Dennis Showers from Geneseo and Vice Provost and Vice Chancellor Elizabeth Bringsjord from System Administration. The college president and governance leaders provided the visitation committee with background materials and the team then held a face-to-face meeting to discuss the issues and formulate a strategy for a two-day campus visit in March 2011. What followed was a careful analysis of the major issues affecting both campus leadership and governance. It identified major campus issues evolving around "trust, respect, collaboration and communication."

It called on the president to:

"Take immediate steps" to improve his leadership style and communication; and

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The report provided a framework to begin the rebuilding process for governance and for cross-campus communication and engagement. I collaborated with the presiding officer of the Faculty on a formal response to the Visitation Committee that highlighted the positive steps SUNY Cobleskill has made in response to its report.

A daily electronic newsletter, open forums on topical issues, posting Cabinet and College Council meeting minutes on the college web site, bi-weekly meetings with the Faculty Governance leader, meetings with the Faculty Governance Executive Committee, Labor Management meetings and a new budget and planning process have been instituted to provide transparency and feedback to the campus.

Strategic initiatives, including academic program prioritization, new teaching/program delivery methods, closing the loop in assessment practices, increased engagement in the community, support for and celebration of faculty/staff accomplishments, implementation of an enrollment management plan, revision of budgeting methodology, and increased efforts to secure additional resources are being implemented. A draft mission statement was developed, shared and feedback sought from across the campus. The draft was then revised and formally approved by the Cabinet.

Bylaw changes that will enhance communication, create greater transparency and ensure that all committee recommendations will be considered by the Faculty have been approved. These changes were an outcome of a special faculty meeting where Drs. Markoe, Flynn and Showers facilitated a discussion of governance models and processes utilized by SUNY campuses and solicited suggestions for improvement and modifications to the current structure and process at SUNY Cobleskill.

Agreement on a Retention, Tenure and Promotion process will be completed this year. Deans supplemented their regular meetings with the chairs in their respective schools with a monthly meeting of all chairs and deans. The meetings were used to discuss college-wide academic issues such as academic prioritization and extra service. Professional staff from other offices, including Information Technology and Alumni Affairs, has enhanced communication and understanding through presentations at the all-chairs meetings.

The Provost restructured the Academic Council, which makes recommendations regarding academic program review, program prioritization, standards and other academic matters. The Academic Council had been discontinued by the former President. Membership on the Council was expanded to reflect the “Faculty” governance membership, which includes teaching faculty and professional staff. Other members of the campus community are invited to attend meetings as needed. The Cabinet has created a parallel Administrative Council charged with assisting in matters related to administrative assessment, standards and planning. These examples illustrate that building a climate of trust and transparency is filled with many challenges. They also demonstrate that it can be achieved if campus leadership and governance work together to create an environment that encourages communication and broad-based faculty and staff participation in decision-making.