

Faculty, Governing Boards, and Institutional Governance

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This paper was also published by TIAA-CREF Institute in December 2009 in the *Advancing Higher Education* series.

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Executive Summary

Research reveals that college and university presidents, chief academic officers, and board chairs view faculty-board engagement and relations as generally healthy and constructive. Just as important, presidents and chief academic officers express understanding of the causes for less-productive interaction, even if solutions remain elusive. One challenge is the increasing number of part-time, contingent, and non-tenure track faculty who lack either the time or the opportunity for meaningful participation in institutional governance. The vitality and viability of institutional governance are threatened when faculty-board relations suffer; as demands for greater accountability continue, especially with respect to educational quality, boards will benefit from efforts to obtain faculty insight.

Barriers to successful board-faculty interaction include insufficient time, lack of mutual understanding and respect, governance policies and practices that are unclear or out-of-date, the complexities of higher education, and a general lack of interest. Recommendations to address these barriers include: better orientation and continuing education of trustees and faculty; opportunities for faculty and trustee service on key committees and work groups; frequent communication, especially by the president; greater transparency in decision-making and clarity about respective responsibilities of faculty, administrators, and the governing board; current and accessible governance policies; and presidential leadership in facilitating shared institutional governance.

Many good practices seem practical and generally applicable to a wide variety of colleges and universities, such as adding trustees to the board who have experience working in higher education and including faculty presentations at board meetings. Any attempts to enhance faculty-board interaction will have to be tailored to the particular history and culture of the institution and will rely to a great extent on the leadership of the president.

How boards, presidents, and faculty contribute to and engage one another in institutional governance speaks to the health of a particular college or university as well as to the broader principles of autonomy, self-regulation, and accountability of higher education. The findings presented here from the Project on Faculty and Institutional Governance offer insights about governance policies and practices and the state of faculty-board relationships as viewed primarily by board chairs, presidents, and chief academic officers. The project was undertaken by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) with generous support from the TIAA-CREF Institute. Findings suggest that governance works well at most institutions and that these relationships are relatively healthy. At the same time, there is room for concern as well as improvement on some points. Governance of colleges and universities depends upon the appropriate participation of faculty, administrators, and governing boards; this is not easily achieved and some institutions fall short.

A convergence of economic and societal forces has increased pressure on higher education institutions and heightened the tension in relationships among boards, faculty, and presidents. Concern about access, affordability, and achievement as well as the competitiveness of the American labor force has increased expectations for colleges and universities to do more with less, and this during an economic crisis. These forces and pressures present challenges to institutions because they more often than not entail changes—sometimes significant changes and often changes to well-established practices and policies, such as the terms of faculty employment and shared governance.

Just as intense are the calls for increased accountability from colleges and universities. Higher education institutions are challenged, for example, to explain rising prices and to justify their independence, self-regulation through voluntary accreditation, and tenure for the professoriate. Many such calls are legitimate and important precisely because they address fundamental higher education principles, such as institutional autonomy and citizen trusteeship.

Greater public scrutiny of higher education policies and practices is likely to persist, and governing boards, presidents, and faculty need to respond thoughtfully and effectively. They also need to address together the circumstances that prompt scrutiny, examine how they conduct themselves, and act where change is warranted.

In this context, this study of board-faculty relations is a well-timed examination of the relationship between boards and faculty and the role of presidents in facilitating this relationship. Surveys and focus group comments from board chairs, presidents, and chief academic officers provide insight into the current state of affairs.

Research Design

This project examined those institutional policies and practices involving faculty and the board in particular, but also the president, collaborating on matters of strategic importance. Specific objectives were to:

- identify factors that promote or deter successful collaboration as well as patterns of problems that detract from productive engagement;
- examine activities that constitute “good practice”;
- offer recommendations for improving institutional governance and leadership; and
- produce knowledge that can be shared with institutions.

For the purposes of this study, the focus was on governance at the institutional level where faculty and the board are most likely to interact directly, and on such areas as institutional priorities, strategic planning, and budgeting. Research included a review of the literature as well as focus groups, interviews, meetings, and surveys involving trustees, presidents, chief academic officers, higher education researchers, and faculty. Two lead questions were: How might faculty, boards, and chief executives develop a collaborative strategic relationship (which AGB has referred to as “integral leadership”)? Is it possible, worthwhile, and politically feasible to advance such a message? In addition, the project considered updates to the 10-year old AGB Statement on Institutional Governance which informs the perspectives of the nearly 1,300 AGB member-boards.

Presidents, board chairs, and chief academic officers were interviewed by telephone and in person regarding what was and was not working on their campuses, including:

- factors related to successful collaboration and patterns of problems;
- successful models and best practices;
- involvement of the faculty senate and its leaders; and
- recommendations for improving institutional governance and leadership.

The insights gained from these interviews informed the surveying of presidents, board chairs, and chief academic officers of AGB member institutions to learn how faculty and boards are collaborating on institutional governance.¹

¹ In May 2009, surveys were sent to 2,033 individuals at 2,007 AGB member institutions. Usable surveys were completed by 532 participants at 417 institutions, a response rate of 26%. This included 232 chief executive officers (28% response rate), 182 chief academic officers (32%), 98 board chairs (18%), and 20 system heads (30%). Participating institutions included 337 independent colleges and universities (142 baccalaureate, 108 master's, 51 specialized, 28 research and 8 associates) and 80 public colleges and universities (31 research, 30 master's, 9 associates, 8 baccalaureate, and 2 specialized). This was generally representative of higher education, other than two-year colleges.

Faculty Governing Body

Most colleges and universities (90%) have an institution-wide faculty governing body and describe its role as “policy-influencing” (59%); less common is a role that is “advisory” (29%) or “policy-making” (13%). The influence of the faculty governing body is described by most as either “important” (50%) or “very important” (42%). Faculty governing bodies were more often described as “advisory” in public institutions (40%) than in private institutions (26%), and more often described as “very important” in independent institutions (44%) than in public institutions (32%). While many critics have expressed concern regarding faculty senates that lack influence, these presidents, chief academic officers, and board chairs said they are ubiquitous and influential.

Promotion and Tenure

While promotion and tenure recommendations are traditionally the result of a peer review process, governing boards are typically involved in granting promotion and tenure to faculty (68%). A majority of boards (61%) routinely approve the recommendations of the administration, with 23% reviewing the qualifications of candidates as part of this process, while 7% of boards confine their review to resource implications. Boards of public institutions were less apt to review qualifications of candidates (8%) than were boards of independent institutions (26%).

New Faculty and Trustee Orientation

According to presidents and chief academic officers, more than 95% of colleges and universities conduct an orientation for new faculty.² Most orientations (about 70%) include a review of the roles and responsibilities of faculty in institutional governance as well as opportunities for faculty participation. Only about 30% cover the roles and responsibilities of the governing board. About three-quarters of the respondents said the typical faculty member understands the authority of the governing board “fairly well” (45%) or “slightly” (29%), and about one-quarter “well” (23%) or “very well” (3%). Faculty of independent institutions were more likely than their counterparts at public institutions to understand the responsibilities and authority of the board “well” (24% versus 14%) and less often “slightly” (27% versus 38%); the large scale of many public institutions or their governance by system boards may contribute to this lack of faculty familiarity.

Similarly, most new trustees (over 90%) are provided an orientation that almost certainly (88%) includes roles and responsibilities of the governing board. More than half also include the roles and responsibilities of faculty in institutional governance (56%) and the culture of academic decision-making (60%). More than one-third cover promotion and tenure (37%) and academic freedom (39%), though more independent than public institutions do so. The typical trustee’s understanding of the role of faculty in institutional governance is comparable to that of the typical faculty member’s understanding of the role of the governing board: about three-quarters of respondents said “fairly well” (54%) or “slightly” (21%), and about one-quarter “well” (20%) or “very well” (3%).

Not including the president or other employees, the average number of governing board members with experience working in higher education is 3.3. The mean for public boards is 1.3 and independent boards is 3.7; since the average size of independent boards is about three times the size

² Responses of board chairs were excluded due to the large number who responded “don’t know.”

of public boards, the proportion of members with experience working in higher education is about the same.

Selection of Faculty for Service

Faculty can influence policies and interact with board members through service on institution-wide committees. Respondents reported the ways faculty are selected to serve on their college or university's most prominent institution-wide committees and councils. Multiple responses were allowed since methods of selection may vary.

Faculty are most commonly elected by the faculty governing body (68% of the time) to serve on prominent institution-wide committees and councils, and appointed by a senior administrator with faculty consultation (54%). Faculty are also nominated (45%) and appointed (46%) by the faculty governing body, and appointed by senior administrators (52%), nominated by senior administrators with faculty consultation (45%) and nominated by senior administrators (40%).

Collective bargaining impacts faculty selection for participation in institutional governance in a minority of institutions, primarily public: 38% of public institutions and 4% of private institutions. Faculty at public institutions are selected for this service by a collective bargaining organization by appointment (15%), nomination (9%), or election (7%).

Recognition for Faculty Service in Governance

Respondents reported that most faculty (74%) are “recognized for their service” in institutional governance, less than half (41%) have release time from work load, and a few (15%) receive additional compensation. Faculty in public college or university systems are almost twice as likely to have release time from workload (75%) and to receive additional compensation (35%) for their participation in governance.

Conditions, Policies, and Practices for Shared Governance

The climate for interaction among faculty, administrators, and trustees appears generally good. Most respondents agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (54%) that trustees, administrators, and faculty typically demonstrate collegiality, respect, tolerance, and civility towards each other. They were positive, but slightly less so, in reporting that typically discussion and communication among trustees, administrators, and faculty are open, carried out in good faith and in an atmosphere of trust (52% agreed and 39% strongly agreed). More respondents at independent than public colleges and universities strongly agreed in both questions.

Most respondents agreed (54%) or strongly agreed (20%) that policies and practices of shared governance are known, understood, and accepted by trustees, administrators, and the faculty; system heads were more likely to strongly agree (26%). Still, about one-quarter “don't know” (10%) or “disagreed” (15%); board chairs were more likely to respond “don't know” (15%).

How trustees, presidents, administrators, and faculty develop their understanding of shared governance is important and may define how they view their own and others' roles and responsibilities. This study found that most institutions model their policies for shared governance after the AAUP Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities (1966) as described in the survey—that shared governance may be understood as the principle that final institutional authority resides ultimately in the governing board, and that the board entrusts day-to-day administration to the president who then delegates specific decision-making power to the faculty in their areas of expertise, namely “curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process.”

In response to a question about the extent to which the AAUP concept of shared governance describes their own policies and practices in regard to board and faculty participation in governance, almost all respondents reported that their policies were similar (36%), very similar (56%), or the same (4%) and that their practices were similar (39%), very similar (51%), or the same (3%).

Faculty Influence and Joint Engagement of Faculty and Trustees

Most respondents regard the faculty governing body as “important” (35%) or “very important” (58%) in those areas for which it has been delegated authority. Most also report that faculty are engaged “enough” (78%), though 18% reported “not enough” and 5% “too much.”

There are many ways in which faculty and governing board members interact, be they social or more substantive (Table 1). About one-fourth of the respondents include faculty as members of the governing board (27%) or the head of the faculty senate as a member of the governing board (14%). Faculty membership on board committees was reported by more than half of respondents (56%). It was almost twice as common for faculty to serve on committees of boards of independent colleges and universities (61%) as on boards of public institutions (32%).

Table 1: Most Common Ways that the Governing Board and Faculty Interact %

Academic ceremonies, athletic contests, and other social events	92
Faculty membership on presidential search committee	88
Faculty presentations to the board	87
Meals, receptions, and social events in conjunction with board meetings	86
Faculty membership on president-established organizations (planning, budget, etc.)	81
Faculty advice on presidential searches	73
Faculty and trustee involvement in alumni activities	69
Faculty and trustee involvement in fund raising	60
Faculty membership on board committees	56
Trustee classroom, laboratory, or studio visitation	50

Substantive interaction occurs most often in connection with presidential search committees (88%) or advice on presidential searches (73%), faculty presentations to the board (87%), faculty membership on president-established budget, planning, and other entities (81%), fundraising (60%), faculty membership on governing board committees (56%), and trustee visits to classrooms, labs,

or studios (50%). Social interaction is most common at academic ceremonies, athletic contests, and other social events (92%); meals, receptions, and social events in conjunction with board meetings (86%); and alumni events (69%).

There are some differences by sector. Faculty and trustees are more likely to interact by serving as members of a committee or board of an institutionally related foundation of a public institution (35%) than an independent institution (10%), while interaction related to fund-raising is more common among faculty and trustees of independent institutions (62%) than public institutions (49%), as is involvement in enrollment activities (40% of independent institutions and 23% of public institutions).

Fourteen percent of institutions reported that faculty, administrators, and board members interact through a committee established for the purpose of improving or maintaining communication among the parties. This is more than twice as common at systems (30%), where perhaps distance and size create a greater need.

The most common issues faculty and trustees are engaged in addressing together are curricula, presidential search, budget/finance, student assessment, enrollment management, student diversity and access, and degree requirements (Table 2). Two issues that jointly engage faculty and trustees more often in public systems are student diversity and access and online teaching and learning.

Table 2: Issues that Faculty and Trustees Address Together

	All	Independents	Publics	Public Systems
	%	%	%	%
Curricula	61	61	59	60
Presidential Search	59	58	63	50
Budget and/or financial matters	55	55	55	40
Student outcomes assessment	46	46	46	60
Enrollment management	45	48	33	30
Student diversity and access	41	41	44	70
Degree requirements	40	38	47	55
Presidential assessment	30	30	30	20
Student conduct	30	30	30	30
Campus safety	29	28	37	40
Organizational Restructuring	28	28	28	40
Public/community needs	27	26	33	40
Intercollegiate athletics	27	28	24	25
Online teaching and learning	25	24	33	50

Characterization of Faculty and Board Interactions

About half of the presidents characterized the relationship between their governing board and faculty as good or positive.³ Another 20% or so were neutral or described it as satisfactory, including answers such as “fine,” “polite,” “professional,” and “cordial but limited.” About 15% described either bad relationships or relationships that are struggling but showing signs of improvement. Many respondents suggested that relationships could be better if there were time for them to be cultivated. Whether describing healthy or poor relationships, 15% of presidents said that contact between the two parties was limited or infrequent.

Comments of chief academic officers were similar in tone to those of presidents. More board chairs (about two-thirds) were positive in their characterization of board-faculty interactions.

Common themes were found among all respondents’ comments describing negative or bad interactions:

- interaction between faculty and trustees is infrequent and contentious when issues arise;
- trustees are viewed by faculty through an adversarial labor vs. management lens;
- faculty are viewed by trustees as privileged, too powerful, and overpaid;
- there’s no structure to develop strong relationships or to interact;
- the faculty body isn’t structured properly and fails to make meaningful recommendations to the board;
- the contact faculty do have with trustees is used to lobby for personal interests or to complain, which turns trustees off;
- there’s not enough time—board members are out of town between board meetings, and agendas leave little time for interaction at meetings;
- there’s confusion about respective roles and lack of knowledge about respective activities; and
- faculty respect the board, but sense that the board doesn’t respect the role of faculty in governance.

Below are representative quotations from presidents, characterizing negative faculty-board interaction:

The quality of the interactions is not great, because we seldom seek such opportunities for the interaction. There is certainly no hostility; there is just no structured form for strong relationships or interactions.

Strained—new governing board members believe faculty have too much power, too many rights and are overpaid.

Faculty wish to complain instead of bringing ideas to solve problems.

Not surprisingly, the characteristics of positive or good interactions between faculty and boards were typically the inverse:

- faculty have frequent, effective, official ways to communicate with the board that limit “back-channel” interference;

³ This question was open-ended allowing the participant to respond in his or her own words.

- the board invites or initiates faculty interaction;
- relationships are cordial and respectful;
- faculty serve on the board or board committees and there are additional faculty who interact with the board;
- faculty and trustees express mutual respect for each other's work and dedication;
- there are official channels for communicating board activity to the faculty;
- governance documents are kept up-to-date and their revision educates faculty about governance and the governing board;
- trustees and faculty know their own and respective roles;
- trustees learn about everyday lives of faculty and understand faculty careers by meeting with faculty and spending time on campus; and
- mutual respect and frequent communication make it possible to discuss contentious issues productively and resolve problems.

Below are quotations from presidents characterizing positive faculty-board interactions:

Interaction at appropriate level and frequency. Board is respectful of faculty and vice versa. Board believes our faculty does a very good job. Periodically we create opportunities for board members and faculty members to interact. At most recent board meeting, we held a two-hour session on the "life cycle" of a faculty member, including presentations from three faculty members at different career stages. Last fall we held a similar session on shared governance, with faculty participation.

Our board makes regular outreach efforts to the faculty to include them in their meetings and social events. I regularly report on board actions at faculty meetings. While newer faculty members admittedly don't know much about the governing board, the more senior members are quite well informed. I would characterize trustee-faculty interaction as good.

You Just Don't Understand

Mutual respect and understanding undergird successful communication and decision-making in any relationship. Faculty and trustees generally share a common commitment to the institutions they serve, and while they may not share the same priorities or agree on the means to achieve them, they generally want what is best for their institutions. Disputed turf—priorities and the means to achieve them—encompasses much of the decision-making terrain for institutional governance.

Faculty and trustees bring very different backgrounds, responsibilities, and skill sets to the table. Trustees, as fiduciaries, bear ultimate responsibility for ensuring sound financial decisions as well as sound academic quality, but most trustees have business backgrounds and few have ever worked in higher education. They are dependent upon the administration for leading and managing the institution and for the expert professional judgment of faculty in regard to curricula, degree requirements, and peer review. Trustees are generally more familiar with decision-making processes in a traditional business environment of managerial authority. Frustrated by the pace of decision-making in the academy, they may expect the president to make decisions quickly with other administrators and “get results.” Trustees usually learn about shared governance on the job.

Faculty participation in institutional governance isn't a privilege; it's a necessary part of decision-making in colleges and universities. Faculty are accustomed to decision-making by collegial bodies and often take on leadership roles in addition to their work responsibilities, with little recognition for the time involved. They are usually elected or nominated by their peers, senior administrators, or both for service on institution-wide committees. In many ways, like trustees, they volunteer their time for this governance work. Also like trustees, they learn on the job about institutional governance.

Institutional governance is important work, often voluntary, and often unfamiliar to those who participate. What can presidents and chief academic officers, trustees, and faculty do to enhance the participation of faculty in institutional governance and to support productive faculty-board engagement? The research findings suggest several areas for improvement.

Trustee and Faculty Orientation

Participants consistently expressed the importance of faculty and trustees understanding their own and each other's responsibilities for governance. Faculty and trustees need to get to know one another and understand the work each contributes to the institution. This was seen as a way to combat cynicism of faculty who view trustees as out of touch or unnecessary, to help trustees leave behind corporate perspectives and appreciate the workload of typical faculty, and to build trust and respect. It was important, too, for faculty and trustees to respect the role of the administration and recognize when faculty could expect to make decisions, offer recommendations, or be consulted, and when trustees were treading on responsibilities of the administration. In addition, there should be transparency about the way decisions are made.

Good orientation programs for new trustees and faculty are one way to start building this foundation of understanding. Trustee orientation could be enhanced by including information about promotion and tenure. Although promotion and tenure are governing board responsibilities at most institutions, relatively few include this topic in trustee orientation. Even fewer involve faculty in the orientation of

new trustees. Discussion of promotion and tenure could also be an appropriate topic for continuing education of trustees as part of a board meeting. The level of understanding the typical trustee has of the work and responsibilities of faculty suggests that this would help board members better understand the academy.

Faculty orientation is even less likely to delve into the work and responsibilities of the governing board. Importantly, for faculty who are part-time, untenured, or not tenure-track, opportunities to participate in governance may be limited or non-existent; it's unclear whether this will change, despite their growing numbers in the academic workforce. If orienting faculty to governance responsibilities doesn't occur early on, other ways need to be found to communicate to faculty about their own governance responsibilities as well as about the responsibilities of the governing board.

Orientation programs for new faculty may not be the ideal occasion for discussion of their own responsibilities for governance or the responsibilities of the governing board, beyond a cursory overview. Nonetheless, it's important to start here, and to continue the process. Professional development programs about institutional governance and faculty responsibilities may have greater impact later in the careers of faculty, once technical expertise is established and particularly when tenure is conferred. It is at this stage that faculty may be most committed to the institution and the institution to individual faculty. Programs for recently tenured faculty should inculcate the values and ethics of the profession and the expectations for faculty to be good citizens in their college and university communities, including participation in governance.

It may be best to think about orienting faculty and trustees to governance responsibilities as an ongoing process, not a one-time event. Faculty development and board education programs that build understanding over time may work best.

Typical comments and suggestions for board and faculty orientation included:

Better instruction, orientation, and professional development of the board on what faculty work is like and how institutions of higher education are similar [to] and more importantly how they are different than businesses.

Faculty members often have difficulty looking beyond their view of the institution or their department. They look at the college as an insider. Conversely, board members bring the broader perspective but often lack the knowledge of the institutional culture that must be considered and dealt with whenever change is to be implemented.

Governance Policies and Practices

Another important facet of understanding governance is familiarity of trustees, administrators, and faculty with the institution's policies and practices for institutional governance. While most agreed that there was such understanding, one-quarter did not. This question received fewer favorable responses and signaled a greater concern than the quality of relationships or communication among faculty, administrators, and trustees and may indicate a need for improving the quality and accessibility of information about governance. Increasing knowledge and understanding of policies and practices for institutional governance among faculty, administrators, and trustees is an important, achievable goal.

Chief academic officers specifically mentioned the need for up-to-date faculty handbooks. Revising handbooks regularly, as problems are identified and board policies and faculty resolutions are passed, was one suggestion to avoid the nearly overwhelming task of occasional and massive updating. Those who described it as a living document seemed most satisfied. The process of making changes was considered a valuable educational experience, for trustees and faculty.

In talking about the importance of the faculty handbook, one provost commented:

Any changes to the Faculty Handbook, which governs all aspects of the structure and conduct of the faculty (and is, in essence, the detailed contract between the institution and the faculty) must be approved by both the faculty as a whole and the board of trustees. This leads to fruitful discussions and give-and-take between these two bodies, with eventual buy-in by both on policies and practices.

One president also cited the handbook as well as other policies as important for reminding board members when consultation with faculty was required. He found involving board members in the revision of these documents to be an important learning experience.

Faculty Service on Board Committees and Other Interactions

Faculty service on boards is relatively rare and is not recommended by AGB or the authors, unless it is current practice. Taking away faculty representation on the governing board is not recommended, either. However, including higher education expertise on the board is highly desirable. Corporate boards are often made up of industry experts. The survey found that the average number of members with experience working in higher education was one on public boards and three on independent boards; this includes those reporting faculty representatives (but not the president). An infusion of higher education expertise can be achieved while upholding the principle that the board should represent the long-term interests of the whole institution rather than constituent interests by seeking outside experts. The addition of a former president, faculty member, or CFO from another college or university can be invaluable to the board as well as to the president and faculty, and can avoid the conflict of interest inherent in including as board members faculty from the same institution.

Faculty service on board committees where policies are developed is another matter. It is hard to imagine a well-informed academic affairs, finance, or student affairs committee without the membership of faculty. The value of faculty service on board committees was noted by many respondents, particularly chief academic officers. Roughly 40% of independent boards and two-thirds of public boards do not include faculty as committee members, and this is something they might consider. Membership with “voice but not vote” might work for public boards with restrictions.

Respondents mentioned the value of faculty-trustee interaction in social situations and as part of substantive work. Inviting faculty to make presentations at board meetings, inviting trustees to attend classes and events on campus, and creating task forces that include faculty and trustees all provide opportunities to learn about respective responsibilities and build understanding.

Presentations at board meetings were mentioned in survey responses and focus groups as particularly useful when they helped trustees understand faculty work and student learning; this was valued even more than those presentations highlighting outstanding faculty work. One focus group participant

said, “Don’t limit it to showcasing prize-winning stars, though that is valuable. Have faculty talk about every day, real work.” One president described a discussion at a board meeting led by a faculty member who used his appointment calendar to describe day-by-day, hour-by-hour a typical work week. He said that helped trustees appreciate the work faculty do beyond the hours they teach. Another president described round table discussions about service learning led by faculty as part of the social hour at a board meeting. Rather than their typical informal interaction, faculty and trustees enjoyed refreshments while they talked about substantive issues in small groups. Another president had faculty talk to the board about the ways in which email had changed their work. These and many other examples were offered as means to help trustees understand faculty work in a more complex way, build mutual respect, and enhance understanding.

The Right People in the Right Places

Another important facet of faculty participation was described as having the right people in the right places. This related to faculty governance bodies as well as faculty on the governing board, board committees, and other campus-wide committees. Faculty who were respected leading scholars and who were able to see the needs of the whole institution, broadly represent faculty views, and get beyond personal interests were especially valued. Having broader participation, not just the same few faculty, was also suggested to spread more evenly experience in governance and information throughout the institution:

Broader participation by more members of the faculty would bring greater understanding to those who may be marginalized (often through their own choices). If more members of the faculty were directly involved in governance issues, there would be fewer occasions when confusion or anger results from misinformation.

The collective bargaining environment appears to present many additional challenges for governance. Confusion about leadership roles in the faculty governance body and leadership roles in the bargaining unit were especially problematic when the same faculty members served as leaders in both bodies or when leaders moved back and forth between the two. Presidents and provosts emphasized the importance of attracting leading scholars to serve in the faculty governance body and the need to provide clear processes for that body to contribute to decision-making with the administration and board. These were recommended as ways to strengthen and clarify the work of the faculty governance body, which holds true for all types of institutions but especially in a collective bargaining environment.

The President as the Nexus of Communication

The president was mentioned in this research as the person most responsible for determining the quality of interaction between the board and faculty, and the main means for communicating information to the faculty, board, and campus community. In small institutions and large ones, those with a history of conflict, lethargy, or success, whether governance worked well or not was seen to rely in large measure on the president.

Asked one trustee (who was a former college president), “What role is the president willing to play?” He indicated that some presidents are eager to engage faculty and boards while others want to keep them apart. Trustees also expressed concern about undermining the president by creating avenues for

communication between faculty and board members. Presidents appeared particularly interested in clarifying the respective responsibilities of governing boards and faculty, and mentioned this whether it was to bring them together without confusion about overlapping authority, or to cleanly divide the responsibilities of faculty and trustees so they could work well separately. Faculty-board interaction makes many uncomfortable; the president will play a key role in creating agreed-upon means for engagement.

On a cautionary note, one president offered: “Our practice of leaving faculty completely alone to address curriculum and standards is salutary. Leaving the faculty and administration alone to address promotion and tenure is salutary. I am reluctant to risk those benefits in pursuit of greater engagement that trustees do not want and for which faculty are ill prepared.” And another said: “Faculty have areas in which they are very engaged and make decisions (curriculum, admissions, etc.). The board really has a separate set of responsibilities that are heavy in the area of finance—budget, endowment, etc. The governance is shared, but not necessarily integrated.”

Another concern raised was the relationship between the president and the faculty governance body, including whether the president had status as a member of the faculty. In some cases, the president was not “allowed” to address the faculty senate and had a contentious relationship; in another situation, the president was the head of the faculty senate and wanted to develop stronger leadership among the faculty and relinquish that position. In addition to having a workable formal relationship, it mattered greatly whether the president had strong ties to the faculty, included faculty effectively on key decision-making committees and task forces, communicated well, and was known to respect and value the faculty.

Suggestions for making governance work well included frequent and consistent communication by the president. In particular, participants recommended the president use the same language in describing situations to faculty and to trustees, and speak well about one to the other. One chief academic officer said that the president or faculty representatives always addressed the faculty senate after board meetings to report on the board’s activities. Said another chief academic officer, “What causes problems? Talking in two ways to faculty and trustees—blame one when talking to the other—not respectful of faculty and trustees. Common reason for breakdown.” Mutual respect was identified by many as a key factor. In addition, be candid—tell the whole truth about a situation, not selective facts. For example, one president described making a special effort to be transparent during the economic crisis in fall 2008. He included faculty members of board committees in what otherwise would have been a closed executive session of the board. He was concerned about appearances and didn’t want faculty wondering what was really being said about the budget in such difficult times.

What Matters

Higher education is increasingly important to the nation, and support for colleges and universities depends upon the confidence and trust of the public, government, philanthropists, students, and parents. Achieving and maintaining educational quality, affordability, and access will take the full cooperation of trustees, presidents, faculty and administrators. Making institutional governance work may make higher education more responsive as well as more accountable. Boards need to be able to look to faculty for expertise and advice on a wide range of issues, from assessing student learning and educational quality to long-range planning. Boards and presidents can’t govern without the

faculty. As one scholar noted in assessing the current economic crisis and the changing role of faculty, “The role of faculty in [institutional learning] is generally under-appreciated in our management-oriented culture. What needs to be more fully recognized is that faculty expertise cuts across all fields necessary to manage institutions and to meet challenges well, and that faculty cooperation and collaboration is essential for optimal organization efficiency and effectiveness.”⁴

This research offers means by which board-faculty engagement can work well. Presidents identified many ways in which faculty participation in governance was consequential and paid important dividends—in strategic planning, academic program review, curricular changes, policy development, accreditation, budgeting, facilities planning, implementation of program or campus closures, and more. Board chairs added presidential search and assessment to the list. In several instances, dramatic claims were made for the importance of faculty involvement, including the survival of the institution:

Strategic plan discussed, drafted and implemented which resulted in “saving the school” and [accreditation] sanctions were lifted, five year accreditation realized.

The plan developed in 1999-2001 was literally a life saver for the institution, and faculty played a major role.

It is significant when faculty effectively influence board decisions, particularly when unpopular actions are taken. The decision to terminate a program or close a campus was accepted by faculty when they were consulted and able to affect implementation. For example, the date for closure was changed to accommodate currently enrolled students.

Can't do anything strategic or transformative without the faculty. Need their positive insights and knowledge.

⁴ Berberet, J. “Toward the Professoriate of the Future.” *Advancing Higher Education*. (New York: TIAA-CREF Institute, 2008), p. 7.

Barriers, Recommendations, and Questions for Future Research

Recommendations for improving board-faculty interaction were born of frustration and failure as well as a vision of a well-functioning college or university.

Barriers to Effective Governance

- Among the most commonly cited barriers is **inadequate time**. This is mentioned in regard to trustees, faculty, and administrators. Faculty work load, busy board meeting agendas, distance of trustees from campus, complexity of issues, and urgency of budget decisions are all factors.
- The **lack of mutual understanding and respect** is another obstacle. Pejorative views, role confusion, minimal interaction, and lack of information perpetuate stereotypes and make it harder to reach agreement on decisions, especially in a difficult economic environment.
- **Governance policies and practices** that aren't accessible, up-to-date, or understood create confusion about process and roles and hamper governance.
- **Higher education is a complex industry**. Naïveté about the culture of the academy, on one hand, and the business of running a multi-million (or billion) dollar college or university, on the other, is evident. There is an enormous amount to learn in order to govern well.
- Interaction is hampered by **presidents who can't or won't engage boards and faculty**. The quality of interaction—communication, understanding, and work accomplished—is dependent upon the president. It takes the interest and support of all parties to make it work, but interaction in governance work can be thwarted by a president who doesn't see the value or is unable to overcome existing problems.
- In addition to some uncommitted presidents, there is a **lack of interest among some trustees and faculty**. This means there is neither the will to commit the needed time and energy, nor the best people attracted to serve in governance positions.

Comments about Barriers:

- *Faculty and trustees approach the institution with differing perspectives: the faculty tend to look at the present—the students, current programs, their effectiveness. The trustees' responsibility is to approach the institution with a view toward the long-term—the resources, facilities, programs, personnel, students, and alumni—to ensure that the institution moving forward has the ability to deliver its education in increasingly effective ways and with the resources to ensure long-term well-being. That difference in perspective can lead to conflict. Clearly necessary to educate the faculty to take a longer view, and to educate trustees to understand the faculty lens. More engagement and education will be important. (Board chair)*
- *Hyper-negative attitudes of most senior faculty toward anything remotely resembling modern corporate governance. (President)*
- *Board members unable to avoid seeing most issues as labor/management issues; faculty unable to transcend personal or departmental focus. (President)*
- *Faculty confusion of “shared governance” with “independent authority.” Board impatience with slow pace of academic deliberations, lack of business pragmatism, esoteric scholarly interests. (President)*
- *There can be breaches between the cultures, where board members expect a sense of urgency and flexibility that may be difficult to achieve in academic channels. But the board that understands*

and respects academic culture will not try to force issues that need more time. We have such a board, thank goodness. (President)

- *Faculty do not have an institution-wide perspective. Nor are they accountable for the outcomes of decisions related to governance and finances. They lack the ability and experience necessary to run a multi-million dollar business. (President)*

Recommendations for Successful Engagement

1. Enhance mutual understanding and respect through:

- Orient new faculty and trustees regarding board, faculty, and administrative responsibilities for shared governance, and expectations about faculty involvement in governance;
- Continuing education of trustees about faculty work, academic culture, and the academic management of the institution (commensurate with that provided trustees about financial issues);
- Professional development for faculty regarding faculty responsibilities for governance, particularly when tenure is granted;
- Recognition of faculty for service on governance bodies, including in promotion and tenure decisions;
- Opportunities for faculty and trustees to interact in meaningful ways, in formal as well as informal settings;
- Faculty membership on board committees or participation in committee meetings;
- Joint trustee and faculty participation in strategic planning, accreditation, and other key work groups;
- Regular reports by the president or designees about the work of the board to the faculty and the work of the faculty to the board;
- Experienced educators as members of the board;
- Participation of leading faculty scholars in the faculty governance body, institutional planning, presidential search, and other important committees.

2. Clarify governance policies and practices by:

- Establishing comprehensible and accessible policies, procedures, and structures for institutional governance;
- Reviewing and updating essential governance documents, including the faculty handbook;
- Ensuring transparent decision-making ;
- Clarifying the decision-making process and the role of faculty, administrators, the president, and board;
- Acknowledging in the governing board's policies the expectation that faculty exercise expertise and responsibility in certain areas of institutional operations, such as assessing and attesting to the quality of learning;
- Asserting the board's responsibilities, accountability, and authority, along with the limits of faculty prerogative.

3. Enhance presidential leadership

- Find constructive ways to highlight and explain shared governance in meetings and conversations with faculty and board members.
- Ensure meaningful participation of faculty in important decisions regarding planning,

budgeting, personnel, and mission; structure such work to include board members, when appropriate.

- Be consistent in communicating the same message to the board and faculty.
- Build in educational opportunities for trustees and faculty as part of their work in governance.

Questions for Future Research

Concern was expressed about the increasing proportion of contingent faculty, their role in governance, and the critical mass of full-time tenured faculty needed to make governance work. How are contingent faculty involved in institutional governance? Is a sufficient proportion of faculty contributing to governance? What are the consequences of this continuing shift to a contingent faculty workforce? Will the concept and practice of shared governance need to change as the nature of the faculty workforce changes? These issues are worthy of further research.

Also, to better understand faculty and board engagement in governance, this research could be extended to examine the perspectives of faculty leaders. How do faculty views differ from those of chief academic officers, presidents, and board chairs? What do faculty recommend for improving governance?

Conclusion

The diversity of American higher education is regarded by most as one of its greatest strengths. It demands that any governance solution be nuanced and tailored to fit the culture of a particular institution. Faculty roles and responsibilities vary as do those of trustees. Small elected boards, with frequent meetings, whose trustees live nearby, and which work with a largely contingent faculty typically found in community colleges will require different approaches from those of the large boards that meet three times a year, with trustees from across the country, and a largely full-time faculty of prominent scholars typical of private research universities. Many participants reiterated that varying types of institutions will each confront uniquely different challenges in engaging faculty in institutional governance.

We hope that the solutions offered inspire attempts to engage faculty and boards in new and creative ways in governing colleges and universities. Finally, we acknowledge the often impossible position of presidents in mediating this contested turf. As the late Clark Kerr said, “presidents make a difference.”

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The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by Kyle Long, project and research coordinator, AGB, and Emily Miller, graduate student intern, Michigan State University.