Abstract:

Cabrini is a Roman Catholic liberal arts college with approximately 1,300 undergraduates and 1,500 graduate students. It was founded in 1957 by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Initially a women's college, it became coed in 1970. At the time of the new governance structure's implementation, the college had sixty-four full-time faculty members. This number had increased to seventy-five by 2012. In 2005, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the regional accrediting body for Cabrini College, mandated that the college put in place a revised faculty handbook within two years. Built into this new structure was a recommendation from the current college president to evaluate the structure's performance after three years. The task-force members knew that both qualitative and quantitative measures would be needed. They determined that, qualitatively, a SWOT analysis done by committees and the faculty as a whole would provide the best insight into the experiences of faculty members and administrators within the faculty committee structure and within faculty governance more broadly.

***

A case study from Cabrini College presents an approach to making shared governance work. During the 2010-11 academic year, Cabrini College began an evaluation of a faculty governance structure that had been implemented in fall 2007. The processes involved might serve as a roadmap for faculty members and administrators at other institutions who seek to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their governance model and improve shared leadership on campus.

Cabrini is a Roman Catholic liberal arts college with approximately 1,300 undergraduates and 1,500 graduate students. It was founded in 1957 by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Initially a women's college, it became coed in 1970. At the time of the new governance structure's implementation, the college had sixty-four full-time faculty members. This number had increased to seventy-five by 2012.

Prior to 1983, the college's governance model consisted of an academic council (department heads chaired by the vice president of academic affairs), a general assembly of the faculty, and an AAUP chapter. The general assembly was replaced by a faculty senate in the mid-1980s.

In 1983, concurrent with the development of a new core curriculum, the governance structure evolved into an academic council consisting of department chairs; the Curriculum Committee, which consisted of elected members; and a body referred to as the faculty of the whole, which involved both administrators and faculty members. The faculty senate continued to focus on professional matters, leaving the respective committees responsible for issues related to the majors and the core curriculum. Professional areas managed by the faculty senate included promotion and tenure, salaries and benefits, faculty handbook revisions, and general working conditions.

In 2005, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the regional accrediting body for Cabrini College, mandated that the college put in place a revised faculty handbook within two years. Although this directive came from Middle States, the faculty and the administration had already agreed that the handbook needed revision.
In response to the directive, the board of trustees requested that a faculty handbook steering committee work on the handbook. The board was concerned that prior lack of progress on the faculty handbook revision resulted from a lack of shared governance at Cabrini. The board of trustees stressed to the steering committee that the revised handbook had to reflect an appropriate faculty role in governance. It recommended major revisions to the first chapter of the handbook, which dealt with the institution's governance structure, to reflect better the role of the administration and faculty in shared governance. The steering committee was made up of working groups charged with revising the different chapters of the faculty handbook, and the working group for chapter 1 constructed a draft shared governance model and conducted several open forums to gather feedback. Members of the faculty senate had a series of animated debates on the proposed new governance model, after which the working group revised the model. An outside consultant collaborated with the working group on revisions and recommendations.

EVALUATION MECHANISM

The governance structure articulated in the adopted faculty handbook consisted of a faculty assembly, which included all full-time faculty members and replaced the faculty senate. Reporting to the faculty assembly were three committees with varying administrative and governance responsibilities: the Academic Planning Committee, the College Council, and the Faculty Development and Advancement Committee.

Built into this new structure was a recommendation from the current college president to evaluate the structure's performance after three years. In 2010, the faculty cabinet (a body made up of four faculty members, the president, and the provost) asked the faculty to create a task force that would develop the process for review of the new structure. The cabinet intended this review to be a collaborative process that would build on both internal and external analysis of experiences with the governance model over the past three years. The charge of the task force was:

1. create an internal process for a self-study of the faculty governance model, to take place during the 2010-11 academic year;
2. bring the process to the faculty assembly for approval during the fall 2010 semester; and
3. choose an external consultant to evaluate the faculty governance model during the 2011-12 academic year.

The task force formed to evaluate the governance model included five faculty members of varying rank, the provost and vice president of academic affairs, and the academic dean. The faculty as a whole voted on the faculty membership and worked to ensure that all three full-time faculty ranks (assistant, associate, and full professor), all of the major faculty committees, and relevant administrators would be represented.

The task force approached the charge with both process and political questions in mind. After an initial review of "best practices," it became clear that few assessment models existed for the group to follow. A number of questions had to be addressed in the assessment: Does the current governance structure foster an equal distribution of faculty involvement and move decision making along in a reasonable fashion? Does it create a balance of power within the college? Is it structured in a way that is understandable to all faculty members? Does it facilitate proper communication between committees? Is it too bureaucratic? Does it meet the administration's needs?

The group determined that it should focus on the original intentions of the new faculty governance structure and best practices as described in the AAUP’s Policy Documents and Reports, commonly known as the "Redbook." The assessment would examine four dimensions of the governance structure: (1) equitable distribution of labor, (2) shared authority and responsibility, (3) communication, and (4) effective decision making.
SWOT ANALYSIS
The task-force members knew that both qualitative and quantitative measures would be needed. They determined that, qualitatively, a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis done by committees and the faculty as a whole would provide the best insight into the experiences of faculty members and administrators within the faculty committee structure and within faculty governance more broadly.

SWOT analysis is a strategic-marketing tool frequently used to define and analyze internal and external factors affecting an organization. SWOT analyses are common in the corporate world, and their use has increased in universities and colleges as these organizations vie for market share and as senior administrators and boards of trustees increasingly bring marketing and cost-benefit perspectives to their work. Although the recommended SWOT evaluation process would be time-consuming, the task force decided that it would be worthwhile not only for the data that would be collected but also for the discussion that would take place. Each member of the governance committees and subcommittees as well as department chairs and administrators would conduct SWOT analyses. In addition, all full-time faculty members-tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure track- would conduct a SWOT analysis of the faculty assembly as a whole.

The task force also believed that quantitative analysis of the data would be essential for demonstrating objectivity in data collection and assessment. To this end, an electronic survey would be created to collect faculty and administrator responses. This approach would allow for individual anonymity, helping to ensure honest responses. At the same time, it would provide concrete data on faculty workload for both governance and nongovernance committees.

The task force determined that it would be essential to have all faculty members review and comment on the data before final analysis was handed to the external reviewer. Aggregate data would be presented in a forum. Faculty members would then split into focus groups, determined by rank, to discuss findings. Notes would be compiled from these focus groups, with no names attached, and given to the external reviewer.

Members of the task force recognized that this would not be an easy process to manage. The task force had been created to propose a process but not to implement it. Supervision of the process brought up the same political concerns that were present at the beginning of these discussions, and yet task-force members strongly believed that it was feasible to create an accountability structure that would carry the proposed process through to final assessment. The task force recommended that a new working group be convened to monitor the self-study as it was conducted and to compile the data to be presented to the faculty cabinet and the external reviewer. This new task force would be composed of five members: two members with assessment protocol experience newly elected by the faculty; one member of the current task force, for continuity; the provost, also vice president for academic affairs; and the dean for academic affairs.

Once the proposal was developed and submitted to the entire faculty, a tenured member of the committee presented the process to the entire faculty in three stages. The faculty approved this assessment model by a majority vote. It was then time to implement the plan.

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT
Extensive discussion took place among the five members of the new task force regarding how to communicate the SWOT discussions throughout the faculty governance structure. Ultimately, committee chairs were asked to commit at least half of one of their committee meetings to the SWOT analysis (some ended up scheduling an extra meeting). A memorandum was also sent to all committee members, asking them to fill out a SWOT
analysis sheet. Knowing that personalities can often get confused with committee and governance effectiveness, participants were encouraged to evaluate the governance structure and not the chair of their committee.

Individual committee members submitted results electronically to a faculty support office that compiled the responses from each committee member and sent a summary document to the committee chair. To ensure anonymity, all identifying information was deleted.

After individual results were submitted, the committee chair brought the summary document to the committee's SWOT analysis meeting for discussion. In most of these meetings, the conversation produced additional responses that were then added to the assessment. Committee chairs stressed that group members did not need to reach consensus.

The quantitative section of the evaluation was compiled using a survey instrument developed by members of the governance committees. Its purpose was to complement the SWOT data by giving the entire full-time faculty, senior administrators, and students involved in governance committees the opportunity to rate and share their assessment of the individual dimensions of governance along with their overall assessment of the structure. This survey, with the more qualitative committee SWOT data and the final responses to the survey and the initial SWOT elements from the focus groups, allowed for a triangulation of data that offers as much accuracy as possible.

The survey was administered to all full-time faculty members, four senior administrators, and six undergraduate students. It asked for ratings, on a four-point Likert scale, of each of the governance dimensions developed for the SWOT analyses: equitable distribution of labor, shared authority and responsibility, communication, and effective decision making. Four open-ended questions were asked about the four dimensions used in the SWOTs. A fifth and final open-ended question allowed respondents to rate the overall governance structure.

The findings for all respondents showed favorable ratings for each governance dimension, although about one in four responded "neither agree or disagree."

EXTERNAL REVIEW
After the internal process of evaluation was complete and the data compiled, we proceeded to the external stage of assessment. The first task force was responsible for choosing the external reviewer. Rather than advertising for the external reviewer, the task force asked the faculty as a whole for suggestions and pursued different professional networks that might uncover the appropriate person. Ultimately, the task force unanimously approved a full professor at a similar institution who had formerly served as a dean and chair of the faculty senate.

The external reviewer was provided with the SWOT and survey data that had been compiled in the previous year. After reviewing these data, he approached the assessment by concentrating on the four characteristics that were originally established.

The reviewer submitted his report to the provost, who then brought it to the faculty cabinet. The cabinet accepted the document as an external review and requested that both task forces review the internal and the external reports and develop final recommendations based on the data, the SWOTs, and the reviews.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED
The final recommendations were as follows:
Equitable Division of Labor

- Consider ways to use faculty members more efficiently on institutional committees. Shared Authority and Responsibility
- Consider ways to increase full-time faculty participation in the governance of graduate programs.

Communication

- Promote information sessions sponsored by governance committees. These sessions provide a way for all faculty members to get information and provide feedback. They also foster lateral communication within the governance system.
- Post agendas, minutes, and other important documents in a timely manner. Continue the practice of investigating technologies that will facilitate more timely postings.
- Consider approving minutes electronically, with a ten-day deadline for approval. Effective Decision Making
- Give particular attention to the number of committees that are established on campus and how these committees relate to the overall system of governance.
- Clarify the role of the faculty cabinet on the organizational chart in the faculty handbook. Consider better ways of describing and visually portraying the relationship of the faculty cabinet to the rest of the governance structure.
- Encourage committee chairs to discuss SWOT data from the internal assessment and propose clarifications and refinements as appropriate.

A Vision for the Future

- Reinforce a shared vision with the administration each year. The faculty cabinet might want to consider meeting in advance of the new academic year to develop a vision, reinforce roles and responsibilities, and agree on an agenda.

The faculty cabinet began the current academic year with a planning session to determine actions to be taken to implement the recommendations. The chair of the faculty assembly has implemented some of the recommendations; some changes, such as electronic approval of minutes, have already been instituted; and all recommendations to specific committees will be reviewed this year. Ongoing discussions of all of these actions by the full faculty assembly are planned for the remainder of the year.

Like any good assessment process, the "assessment of assessment" was crucial for understanding what worked and what did not. We learned a number of lessons:

- Assessment of shared governance is as much about the process as it is about the outcomes; all of the SWOT discussions led to conversations that helped individuals understand committee roles and the purpose and role of the faculty assembly in a new way.
- Assessment of shared governance is time intensive, but it does not need to be as time intensive as our process was. Still, the time involved impressed upon both the faculty at large and committee members the importance of the process.
- Assessment of shared governance should come out of the faculty and be carried out by representatives from all parts of the faculty.
- Faculty members need to have confidence that the assessment will be used to make real improvements in the system and will not just be put on a shelf.
- Transparency throughout the process is crucial.
Our evaluation process itself was an experiment in shared governance. Understanding how the recommendations are being implemented and how they might need to be modified are the next steps in the process. As the implementation of recommendations continues, Cabrini will begin to plan for the next evaluation cycle in the 2014-15 academic year. The goal is to be responsive to new developments in the life of the campus over the next three years while we assess and troubleshoot the campus's ongoing experiment. In the longer view, these cyclical assessments will coincide with an intense effort throughout the campus to prepare for the college's strategic plan, which is currently being developed.

Sidebar

Does the current governance structure foster an equal distribution of faculty involvement and move decision making along in a reasonable fashion? Does it create a balance of power within the college? Is it structured in a way that is understandable to all faculty members?

Author Affiliation

JOHN W. CORDES is assistant professor in the communication department at Cabrini College. He was a committee member in all phases of the governance study. His e-mail address is jcordes@cabrini.edu. DAVID DUNBAR, the current chair of the Faculty Advancement and Assessment Committee, is associate professor in the science department. His e-mail address is ddunbar@cabrini.edu. JEFF GINGERICH is the vice provost and dean for academic affairs. Prior to holding this position, he was associate professor of sociology. His e-mail address is jpg722@cabrini.edu.

Word count: 2741

Copyright American Association of University Professors May/Jun 2013