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*Shared governance between administration and faculty needs to be viewed as a sanctioned vehicle of collaboration, not a rivalry.*

# The Future of Shared Governance

*Matthew A. Crellin*

Higher education has relied on the power of collaborative decision making on college and university campuses through the model of shared governance since the early 1900s (Tierney and Lechuga, 2004). However, the principles of shared governance are now more thoroughly tested than ever before. In response to these simultaneous pressures and challenges, the leadership of education must be at once both agile and purposeful while drawing upon a deeper well of knowledge to inform its decision making. The current model of governance has notable weaknesses, not the least of which is the tension that exists when constituents come together with competing and, at times, antithetical demands and expectations. Although the issues in academe are changing, the structures have remained relatively static, calling into question both the relevancy of shared governance and its feasibility in modern times.

Analyzing shared governance in this context should not seek to radically suggest changes to the system by rewriting the principles that are steeped in tradition. The presented assumption, however, is that the many changes and challenges that are "at academe's doorstep" (Tierney and Lechuga, 2004) require colleges and universities to rethink shared governance.

## Internal and External Stresses on Shared Governance

Since the issuing of the "Joint Statement" from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), higher education governance has become increasingly complex, especially in light of increased organizational stress (Birnbaum, 1988; Kezar, 2001; Kezar, 2004). The challenges on shared governance range in almost every conceivable direction.

Part of the confusion about shared governance has to do with its quality as, what Gary Olson calls, a "floating signifier"—a term so stripped of

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any definitive meaning that it becomes molded around the context a particular person or group decides to give it in the current moment (Olson, 2009). Shared governance has certainly established itself as the preeminent intergroup structure in higher education, yet the definitions of authority remain situational at best and vague at worst. Some faculty members believe, as Olson points out, that shared governance imbues faculty to delegate governance of the university to administrators, keeping academics at the heart of the university while administrators are left to perform the "more distasteful managerial labor" (Olson, 2009). Trustees and administration may view shared governance in the opposite manner, choosing to view faculty as important contributors to the conversation, but nevertheless believing that administrative decisions should be the purview of the administration. Even if shared governance presupposed that all parties have an equal say, are some, in the words of George Orwell, "more equal than others"? Reflecting on leadership within the university, I am reminded of the historical theories of the universe: At one time, scholars argued the models of the geocentric and heliocentric universe—the celestial bodies revolved in space, but around what they revolved remained a debate. Although the Copernican heliocentric model replaced the Ptolemaic model of the early modern age, the authority seat of the academy may prove harder to define—although one in five Americans may still believe that the sun revolves around the earth (Dean, 2005).

The sustainability of shared governance rests on several actionable items: the academy's ability to meet escalating external changes, a re-endowment of the definitions of governance through a shared taxonomy, and an introduction of new principles of intergroup leadership.

## Changing Realities that Re-prioritize Governance

Is shared governance ill-equipped to meet the needs of modern times? Peter Eckel and Adrianna Kezar list four changes with the potential to reshape academic decision making. The first is the relationship that state governments have with public institutions, most notably the increased scrutiny and accountability measures that lawmakers are demanding with regard to student learning and levels of research (Eckel and Kezar, 2006).

Second, the decline in public support means that institutions must look toward other revenue-generating activities to ensure a return on investment (Bok, 2003), including increases in technology, sponsored research, intellectual property claims, market influences, and the adaptation toward business-based decision-making skills (American Federation of Teachers, 2008).

Third, globalization requires a new style of leadership as the addition of international components, global partnerships, delivery of joint programs, and international dimensions not only add more stakeholders to the leadership roundtable, but force universities to interact with new competitors and markets (Eckel and Kezar, 2006).

Fourth, the changing academic workforce has significant implications for governance. The number of full-time faculty continues to decline while the use of adjuncts is on the rise: in the 1970s, 80 percent of faculty were full-time, tenure track professors and in 2000 numbered only 50 percent; in Massachusetts community colleges, for example, up to 80 percent of faculty are part-time (Eckel and Kezar, 2006; Kezar, 2001; McLaughlin, 2009).

According to Dr. Larry Gerber, Chair of the AAUP's Committee on College and University Governance (personal e-mail communication, December 4, 2009), this change in faculty may add greater stress to the system:

> The biggest problem here (in shared governance) is in the growth of contingent, non-tenure track faculty. The growth in the number of faculty falling into this category has the effect of undermining shared governance and academic freedom. It is necessary to find appropriate means to involve contingent faculty in governance, but this raises difficult issues, both because these faculty are more subject to pressure from administrators than tenured faculty, and also because tenured faculty are more reluctant to cede some authority to those who may not have a long-term commitment to the institution.

## Criticisms to the Calls for Revision and Examining the Tenability of Shared Governance

Although some criticize shared governance as no longer relevant, others note that many higher education institutions have responded successfully to market and external pressures: integrating new technologies; "establishing joint programs with industry, offering external degrees"; and retooling academic disciplines to better meet the demands of employers (Birnbaum, 2004). In fact, some aspects of shared governance may be beneficial. When I asked AAUP Governance Chair Larry Gerber about the criticisms of shared governance, he cited a need for both faculty senates and administrators to seek improvements on intergroup collaboration (personal communication, December 4, 2009):

> One of the most common criticisms of the shared governance model is that faculty bodies take too long to make decisions. I think that there is some validity to this, but it is also the case that curricula should not be changing every year to keep up with the latest fads. Higher education should not be trying to constantly "market" new products in response to transitory "customer" demands. On the other hand, the functioning of faculty senates can be improved by building in set time frames for decision making. It may also be necessary to devise better means allowing for inter-departmental cooperation, so that departmental and college structures do not become obstacles to needed change.

According to Professor Gerber, the strength of shared governance lies in its ability to act as a guideline for which governance and collaboration can be enhanced: "the AAUP's 1966 statement on government still sets forth sound principles as to the distribution of authority. It offers only very general guidelines, not prescriptions about how exactly governance ought to be structured, but properly argues that faculty should have primary responsibility for academic matters, since they have the greatest expertise." Such a model does not portray the governance of higher education as a hierarchy; rather, the model allows for the two-way flow of decision making to come from the board of trustees or regents through the administration in conjunction with the faculty (AAUP, 2003).

## Examples of Shared Governance in the Global Age: Online Learning at Southern New Hampshire University

In recent years, higher education has expanded into new areas (e.g., for-profit instruction, distance education, new research alliances, and the development of technology and courseware) that Mallon (2005) calls the "suburbs of the university." These expanded areas have the potential to bring about new models of decision making and call into question whether or not shared governance is appropriate to apply across these news arms of the university.

At Southern New Hampshire University, the College of Online and Continuing Education (COCE) is a highly successful and relatively new division responsible for "extending SNHU's offerings to part-time students and/or those not enrolled at the main campus" (P. LeBlanc, personal e-mail communication, November 20, 2009). The online program was recently selected for the second time as a winner in the *New Hampshire Business Review's* "Best of Business" in the Best Online Degree Programs category along with the campus-based School of Business for its "Best M.B.A. Degree," which earned its award for the third time (P. LeBlanc, personal e-mail communication, November 20, 2009). The online program is a revenue-generating entity for the university, accounting for its entire annual surplus and has attracted both accolades and increased enrollment for SNHU (P. LeBlanc, personal e-mail communication, March 8, 2010).

With the COCE came new challenges: the COCE was principally overseen by a management team and chiefly taught by part-time, adjunct faculty members. One goal of the COCE program was to offer the same breadth of courses and topics online as the traditional campus or university college (UC). As the COCE gained institutional traction, faculty from the UC began to raise questions about the content of the online program, the manner in which their course materials were being delivered, and the procedures for managing the program. Dr. Susan Schragle-Law, Professor of Organizational Leadership and President of the Faculty Senate at SNHU (personal communication, December 2, 2009), explained that the online program went through several iterations that eventually took it further away from shared governance, and made it a matter of increasing concern of faculty members:

> The issues surrounding the online college (COCE) are still an ongoing conversation among the faculty. A decade ago, some faculty were resistant to accepting online delivery of their programs: That principled resistance no longer exists. However, the faculty has remained divided on the processes used to port their courses into the online division. In some situations. . .some faculty are accepting while others are not. Some faculty members remain uncomfortable about their say in the online division. The president (SNHU President Paul Leblanc) has made it clear that online is a revenue-generating area that is here to stay. Online went through a few changes years ago, including a new director of the COCE who really became distant from the faculty. [President LeBlanc] said that the COCE pulled out of traditional governance in order to establish programs and grow and develop.

Analyses of these issues reveal the classic tension that can exist in shared governance. Administrators felt that the methods to deliver this new content often looked to traditional faculty governance as a source of slowness regarding the push of content through the COCE (P. LeBlanc, personal communication, March 8, 2010). The director and administrators within the COCE imported and emphasized business-like agility in the extended delivery process, which Dr. Schragle-Law said, "seemed to put up roadblocks to restrict any full-time faculty input into the academic quality and content of online courses" (personal e-mail communication, March 12, 2010). Meanwhile, some faculty members argued that the quality of the curriculum was best preserved by faculty oversight.

To solve this issue, President LeBlanc and Vice President for Academic Affairs Patricia Lynott proposed a new approval procedure for the COCE. A program that exists in the UC could move to the COCE for extended delivery after going through seven steps to port the material for distribution to online students, including a thorough review from UC stakeholders and professors, curriculum committee review within the COCE, and a multitiered decision tree allowing for the multidirectional flow of ideas and suggestions to pass through both entities to address their concerns and refine changes to coursework. COCE additionally has the license to develop programs that do not exist in the UC catalog as well (P. LeBlanc, personal e-mail communication, March 8, 2010).

Quality control, a concern of faculty members like Professor Schragle-Law, is now addressed by incorporating faculty to have input in the core items of the course content. Full-time professors are invited to participate as course reviewers to review the completed work of the course authors (adjunct teachers) and provide feedback and suggestions, allowing faculty at the UC to flag critical omissions and review of "content enhanced courses," which are purely developed for online delivery. Lastly, course quality is monitored through course author performance. Mechanisms for quality oversight include performance reviews, pedagogy training, syllabus review, online activity reporting, and an online grievance process that allows complaints to move through a four-stage administrative review process.

## Analysis of the Governance Structure in the College of Online and Continuing Education

President LeBlanc wanted to move the COCE in a new direction. To accomplish this, he needed the COCE to compete with other online education providers. According to LeBlanc, faculty approval proved necessary to ensure the quality and legitimacy of the program. LeBlanc stressed the need to "pull our non-traditional programs further out of the traditional campus governance model," adding that "it took a long time to get faculty buy-in and some still think they are giving up too much control, but we had to keep the non-traditional—especially online—much more agile than traditional governance allowed" (personal communication, November 20, 2009).

Still, other members of the SNHU faculty remain skeptical about how the online model fits into the role of shared governance. Professor Schragle-Law summarized the sentiments of some faculty members regarding the COCE's governance structure (personal communication, March 12, 2010):

> What's happened here is that we've realized as a faculty that online is here to stay and we're trying to support it by and large and to develop a working relationship with them (the COCE). What is still not clear is how *they* will fit into *our* governance structure. We have governance concerning promotion, governance about sabbaticals, and governance over curriculum development, etc. In the proposal for shared governance over COCE, we are theoretically able to review the curriculum, but only to offer commentary or feedback which can be completely dismissed. We can make suggestions, but they may or may not implement them. President LeBlanc would like to see more collaborative decision making and we're trying to meet this challenge. Still, there's tension between faculty and online administration. We have a lot of adjunct faculty that teach in the UC and COCE. In the mind of many faculty, sometimes we seem to revert back to the days of closed doors and following a chain of command which is not collaborative.

## The Culture, Symbolism, and Analysis of Shared Governance in Changing Times

Shared governance is integral to the culture of the academy. It is part tradition, part tactic, and largely symbolic. A recurring theme emerges both in the SNHU example and in the arguments both for and against governance: All parties are increasingly concerned with impact, feelings, and representation both in a real sense but also on levels of trust, meaningful participation, and respect for their expertise.

The loosely coupled nature of colleges and universities highlights the tensions of decentralized decision making (Eckel and Kezar, 2006). When decisions are not coordinated across different units, decentralized decision making may place groups at odds. Loosely coupled systems are not without their benefits: They are able to respond to changes with greater flexibility and enable professionals with focused expertise to weigh in on issues and problems without requiring centralized knowledge on all disciplines (Weick, 1979; Eckel & Kezar, 2006). The loosely coupled system, however, may embrace autonomy at the expense of widening the divide among other departments or units within the university.

Competing values, disparate perspectives, and contextual directives often find common ground in educational mission. In the SNHU example, the university was able to push a finished product through the COCE. The faculty involvement and consequent discussion over governance served more of a dialectic purpose than as an exercise in futility. This example does underscore what previous thinkers on shared governance have alluded to: The model values both decisions and the roles of the respective decision-makers. In a symbolic framework, the decisions that may be reached are not as important as what the process of decision making means to the participants involved (Bolman and Deal, 2008).

## Continued Analysis: Intergroup Relationship and Navigating Change

A central method to improving the model of shared governance may be found in promoting understanding and fostering deeper, more systemic cooperation between faculty and administrators. Communication is an essential component of the governance process (Tierney and Minor, 2004).

Todd Pittinsky (2009) illustrates the classic tensions that one could easily find in shared governance:

> Any school administrator can tell you that the student body is not only a collection of individual students but also a collection of groups—cliques, teams, ethnic groups, boys and girls, and sometimes gangs—and that these groups matter. Leadership scholars are often concerned with how leaders can define and sustain a collective, without which there would be nothing to lead. But by and large, these scholars have conceptualized this task as the challenge of bringing together individuals, with little thought given to the various subgroups to which those individuals belong. . .(i)ntergroup leadership is defined as leadership that brings groups together. (p. xix)

Researchers have identified a generic tension between groups of internal cohesion—how much group members feel bound together—and external pressure (Pittinsky, 2009, *forthcoming*). Said differently, the stronger that a group feels its own unique collective identity, the more pronounced difference it sees in everyone else, making it easier to wind up in competition or conflict with "the other group." Pittinsky suggests that intergroup leadership requires leaders to mitigate this tension by simultaneously decreasing the bad feelings between groups while creating positive feelings—two separate tasks. This concept, which he has termed "allophilia," focuses on accentuating the factors that groups have in common with one another. Applying this concept to the tensions found in shared governance, it is not enough to bring everyone together to the same table; rather, leaders should work to honor this difference without trying to eliminate diversity of thought.

Dr. Pittinsky further elaborates on his interpretation of intergroup dynamics as it might apply to shared governance (personal communication, December 2, 2009):

> I do think that some intergroup literature is certainly applicable to this relationship. For example, faculty think of themselves as a group: they say the term "faculty" when they describe themselves, they represent an equivalent position. Administrators also have codified their own sense of "we." Here, they think of themselves as constituents. Of course, if this is a unionized context or not, a state university or private, there are additional, clearly delineated lines. But, when you break down the functions of each group further—campus housing, administrators, a faculty senate—the typology in each starts to become contested with each group. Some things are clearly the domain of one particular group while others are too contested to focus. This is where this idea of a high level of allophilia might come into play—this idea of "positive deviance" where each group is different but ought to be positively engaged with one another.

Pittinsky suggests that institutions ought to look to examples of those in the university who have crossed into a different area of the institution for their anecdotes and reflections. For example, someone who worked in a faculty union and was then sent to management not only would have keen insight on how each group works, but would likely experience a shift of allegiance, values, and group identity. Lastly, Pittinsky emphasizes the role that positive attitudes play in improving the tensions of shared governance: "expectations mask reality and stereotypes often cloud the work that is actually being accomplished. Yet, there are such things as positive stereotypes and should be anchored into a context. Such tensions are less about the world it is and more about what people think it is."

Dr. Roderick Kramer expands on this idea (personal communication, December 8, 2009) concerning the implications of trust, stereotypes, and symbolism in negotiations and group dynamics. Kramer offers suggestions of how trust in negotiations and the promotion of positive stereotypes might serve to ease the tensions that so often typify the behavior found in the shared governance model:

> Trust is interesting because working across boundaries so often builds cognitive difference. Groups have different vocabularies and such little face to

> face contact that stereotypes emerge about what the other is like—often creating suspicion if not paranoia. Leaders should explore the notion of the "contact hypothesis," which has much to do with facilitating cooperation and structuring systems to create equal status. For example, if I wanted to bridge the difference between the education and business schools at Harvard (as loosely coupled systems) I can presuppose that one certainly has stereotypes about what the other is like . . . working together on things such as a joint seminar or colloquium or panel promotes joint interdependence. While one group may have a pool of greater knowledge than the other, a greater norm begins to shift where people begin to meet on the same plane.

In this aspect, Kramer illustrates an interesting point: too often, groups come together to act on problems rather than to seek points of collaboration that might strengthen their interdependence. Furthermore, if leaders within these groups extend themselves to the other group in a true spirit of openness and respect for the other group's work, this model behavior might serve to reinforce positive behaviors.

Heifetz (2009) suggests that the overriding reason for failure to adapt to change is a resistance and fear of loss:

> Losses come in many forms among individuals, organizations, and societies, from direct losses of goods such as wealth, status, authority, influence, security, and health, to indirect losses such as competence and loyal affiliation. In our experience, the common aphorism that people resist change is more wrong than right. People do not resist change per se; they resist loss. People usually embrace change when they anticipate a clear benefit. Rarely does anyone return a winning lottery ticket. People resist change when change involves the possibility of giving up something they hold dear. (p. 131)

Heifetz identifies two common patterns for "adaptive failure:" diversion of attention and displacement of responsibility. "These take a wide variety of forms in organizations and politics, including using decoys and distracting issues, tackling only the aspects of the problem that fit a group's competence, jumping to solutions without adequate diagnosis, misusing consultants, blaming authority, scapegoating, personalizing the issues, launching ad hominem attacks, and externalizing the enemy" (Heifetz, 2009). Shared governance without principled leadership can quickly devolve into a political exclusion exercise, and leaders should therefore be mindful of the strategies of incorporation and inclusion.

Heifetz's challenge to leadership applies to governance in the university—it requires those who govern to assess "who should play a part in the deliberations and in what sequence?" (p. 133). Kramer provides an interesting suggestion to changing the model of shared governance: "Cognitive thinking is all about the framing of the task. Maybe instead of shared governance, it ought to be called *distributive leadership*. It has a nicer sound in that it's about sharing leadership opportunities across the spectrum. It redistributes the leadership challenges in a way where groups may have more of an equality in answering the challenges of governance by assigning the leadership with intent" (R. Kramer, personal communication. December 8, 2009).

However, would "distributive leadership" just become another floating signifier? Professor Kramer is provocative:

> Giving something like shared governance a new working title in distributive leadership gets people thinking differently about the attribute and domains. For example, we have resources but we're trying to come up with the best way to meet the imperatives and demands on those resources. People out in the collective might have great ideas and distributive leadership might imply that voices have more of a distributed and equal weight. The point here is getting people on the same webpage—on content, on curriculum, on budgets—with the intent to move beyond just getting everyone in the same room. (R. Kramer, personal communication. December 8, 2009)

## Re-endowing Shared Governance while Preserving Collegiality

Shared governance is both a means to an end and an end to be maintained and valued; it is a collaborative process while also an outcome of collegiality; it is steeped in tradition yet concerns itself with change and innovation in the academy, and most of all, it seeks to bridge difference and yet curiously exacerbates it. This model is likely not going to be changed radically; there are aspects of this governance structure that work well and promote positive outcomes. There are many ways to proceed, and those in leadership should work to re-endow the term "shared governance" with new meaning and definition to actively prepare higher education to navigate the challenges yet to come.

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*MATTHEW A. CRELLIN is director of Policy and Research at the New England Board of Higher Education.*