

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Reflection on the Task Force Process

The task force appreciated this opportunity to take a holistic view of campus internal structures and their functioning, which is a rare event in academe. From our reading of the literature it is clear that most campuses do not take stock in this fashion as often as they should. Clearly, institutions need to periodically examine governance structures and practices so there is not a disconnect between the literal (written system) and reality (how things actually work). Also, it was noted that many campus governance structures and policies across the country today are not well suited for the complex challenges of today's institutions because they were designed for simpler times. The charter sponsors are commended for their attention to this matter. At the same time we urge them to take the necessary next step in using this information, and draw upon the expertise of others, in developing internal systems, structures, and practices that will work effectively and efficiently for this University. Throughout our research we kept returning to a single central point: There is no universal magic formula for effective shared governance. Governance is a combination of structure, culture, and trust that necessarily varies according to institutional history, context, and characteristics. This means that we will not find "best practice" as far as a whole system goes but best practices that together may work for The University of Akron. While all matters of governance are clearly within the purview of the University Board of Trustees we believe that there should be consultation in the development of next steps so the resulting system will have the potential for high effectiveness as well as high legitimacy.

Overarching Issues/Conclusions

Throughout its extensive discussions and data collection, the workgroup identified several issues/concerns that seemed to permeate survey responses, email messages, debate, and actions occurring on campus. This section identifies those issues and the basic dimensions of each.

- ***The University of Akron has a strong tradition of involvement in campus affairs as evidenced by the pattern of participation in a myriad of committees, task forces, commissions, and councils that were identified in this review.***

Overall, we found that members of the campus community generally seemed to be conscientious in attending to service assignments, and there is an expectation of involvement stemming from historical practices. A majority of decision making/recommending entities surveyed rated themselves as effective. While we did not quarrel with these assessments we identified many areas for attention/improvement. Especially in an environment of "doing more with less," deployment of personnel time and talent must be purposeful and efficient and the results of the collective effort must be used rather than placed on the proverbial shelf.

- ***There appears to be an accelerating lack of confidence in current formal structures as evidenced by recent actions of key players; visible divisions within the Faculty Senate; and a proliferation of ad hoc groups.***

This conclusion has been fueled by several developments in the course of our review: an ongoing tug-of-war concerning Board of Trustees' 2003 rule changes affecting faculty participation in issues of planning and budgeting; Faculty Senate resolutions (subsequently defeated or rescinded) calling for external intervention that led to the April 2004 resignations of the senate president and secretary; and a continual stream of appointment of ad hoc groups by both the administration and Faculty Senate with unclear charges, overlapping objectives and deliverables, and a disconnect from each other and "implementers." The University is in the midst of a significant paradigm shift in governance as we have moved into an era of collective bargaining with faculty for the first time. Under the best of circumstances this change would likely have sent many aspects of governance into a "holding pattern" while issues of authority and responsibility were sorted out. We believe, however, the current inertia is deeper than that and its timing amidst significant fiscal challenges is a particular threat to institutional well-being. We believe that the Board, the administration, and the campus community need to move quickly in the new academic year to forge new ways of achieving shared goals.

- ***There appears to be misunderstanding of the respective roles of key players in institutional governance, and these varying perceptions are fueling tensions and mistrust.***

Over the course of our review, it has been apparent that the various players in campus governance may not fully understand its roots and provisions. We suggest reading of the Joint Statement on Academic Governance (1966) and the Association of Governing Boards Statement on Institutional Governance (1998) in order to develop some common understandings about where authority resides and how it should be shared in academic institutions. Further, the University should outline the structural and functional features of governance to the greatest degree possible in order to ensure common understandings.

- ***The effectiveness and efficiency of campus decision-making processes seem to be impacted negatively by two perceived conditions: a lack of expressed, widely understood and consistent priorities and processes for planning and resource allocation; and a dearth of timely, meaningful communication about how, why and when decisions are made.***

Clearly, the lack of a clear institutional plan and accompanying budget priorities appears to be at the heart of ineffectiveness of many groups. As a result several committees with far-reaching formal charges seemed to spend all or most of their time advocating for resources (the Library Committee is a good example of this practice). Further, committees have been preparing their recommendations as seen from a singular lens. For example, the CCTC may consider a technology initiative, of which one would certainly expect it to be pre-disposed to support, without any ability to weigh the priority of any

single initiative in the broader context of organizational investments and choices. Further, there now are many different groups working on various aspects of planning without any clear connection to a larger plan/priorities or to each other. For example, there are several largely independent efforts clustered around strategic planning topics (Balanced Scorecard, Position Review Committee, Operations Advisory Council, and Program Review Committee). It is not clear to us what strategic priorities are driving these efforts and how they are connected in practice as well as function. Later in this report, we will reflect upon results of the 2003 internal communications audit. Respondents pointed out many shortcomings in communication and a lack of trust, conditions which threaten the effectiveness of institutional governance according to our research.

- *While we were not charged with making recommendations about the formal governance structure, we believe the effectiveness of decision making could be improved by several courses of action.*

Based on the literature, institutional governance consists of both formal organization and structure and functional avenues such as informal groups, networks, and individuals. Our research suggests that we should not pay too much attention to structure without attending to the institutional prevailing conditions. We believe that implementing any major revisions to governance should proceed only after an inclusive review has been developed that identifies the institutional culture, goals/principles driving any reorganization of governance structures, and consideration of whether structure and processes are adequate to meet both problems and opportunities. The workgroup's research leads it to conclude that any reorganization, made in isolation without significant university community participation may not have legitimacy and could actually exacerbate issues.

Workgroup Suggestions for Moving Forward

While we were not charged with making specific recommendations about the University's formal governance structure, we have identified several suggestions for moving forward based upon our research. These findings seem to fall into three general areas for improvement: (1) building confidence, (2) building better understanding, and (3) building capacity for effective and efficient decision making.

Building Confidence

- As a first step toward moving forward and establishing credibility, the Board and the administration need to affirm their commitment to shared leadership as necessary for the University's optimal performance and advancement. This should include a clear statement of objectives and responsibilities and an expressed commitment to involving the campus community in any reorganization of formal structures if any should be proposed.

- Develop and implement mechanisms for providing timely feedback regarding administrative action on recommendations in order to provide better connection between decision making/recommending entities and implementers. This finding has been echoed in recent years by the Faculty Senate, accreditation-related self studies, and the communication audit report.
- Recognize that the implementation of collective bargaining for faculty has spurred some fears among other constituency groups regarding division and potential loss of a sense of community. Efforts should be made to alleviate these fears and build community.

Building Understanding

- Educate participants in governance by developing a common reading list of key research to build common language and awareness. Key readings are found in the second volume of this report and include *AGB Statement on Institutional Governance* (1998), *AAUP Statement on Governance* (1966), *End of Shared Governance?* (Birnbaum), and *Divided We Govern* (Gumport).
- Achieve greater clarity and effectiveness in formal structures and make efforts to define workable guiding principles that are understood by all parties. We believe that a matrix such as that developed by Central Michigan University (see appendix) that identifies types of decision-making actions, roles, and responsibilities would be helpful in ensuring that all parties clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Consider creating channels of communication that would facilitate greater campus understanding of how and why board decisions are made. For example, some campus groups indicated a lack of knowledge about if and how the Board of Trustees receives timely and proactive input/recommendations. Rightly or wrongly, this lack of understanding is often interpreted as meaning there is a lack of process. Examples of positive actions might include increasing visibility of trustee attendance at campus events, informational reports from deans and others at board meetings, and college visits by trustees. We are not suggesting direct lines of communication between the board and members of the university community, just linkages illustrating that trustees are fully aware of campus accomplishments as well as problems.
- Create a well-maintained web site with a matrix of organizations, contact information, FAQs on how to get things done, and an effective search engine. The workgroup plans to post this report and appendices online as a starting point toward this objective.
- Employ use of an intranet for faculty and staff instead of expecting the university web site to fully serve both internal and external needs. This tool could make

more effective use of the web for internal communications in regard to decision making and is consistent with 2003 communication audit recommendations.

- All groups with campus-wide reach should keep regular minutes of meetings and post minutes and/or agendas on the web in order to improve communications. For campus-wide groups with significant areas of responsibility, staff support should be provided to ensure minutes are kept. Minutes should provide attachments electronically.
- It is the responsibility of the administrator to whom a decision-making/recommending body reports (per organizational chart) to maintain current contact information for committee members and to provide overall support to that body.
- Avoid appointing multiple committees to do the same thing or with highly overlapping purposes. Workgroup findings provide a good starting point in identifying such groups now in existence.
- While recognizing administrators' time constraints, it might help bridge the gap between faculty and administrators to reinstitute periodic teaching by university administrators. This is consistent with both the communications audit recommendation of "management by walking around" as well as literature review finding that administrators need to understand the faculty's responsibilities and challenges.

Building Capacity

- Develop case studies of effective and ineffective decisions made at the University to see what works in our context. Two examples of effective decision processes that come to mind are the salary equity task force and campus-wide review of RTP policies. An example of an ineffective decision could be the choice to suspend publication of the schedule of classes, which was modified after public outcry.
- Likewise, study those groups on campus that seem to be performing their responsibilities effectively.
- Recognize that academic governance occurs at multiple levels. The role/responsibilities of deans and chairs in formal governance structures must be addressed.
- The University must implement a clear and functional process for planning and budgeting that provides for meaningful campus community input. Once planning and budgeting priorities are identified they need to be communicated widely and used by committees in their work so groups are not working in isolation with no way to assess the cost/benefits of their actions. Our University's goal should be to make decision making more proactive than reactive.

- Consider changes in the formal structure that recognize the complexities of the modern university and provide formal linkages with appropriate administrators and other “frontline” personnel who currently have little or no way of giving input to standing committees. This could take a variety of forms. Examples of different approaches taken by other higher education institutions are provided in the appendices to stimulate discussion.
- Implement a serious review of the University’s curriculum process recognizing that teaching of courses and programs represents the institution’s single largest deployment of resources. Among the reasons why we believe such a review is merited: marked differences between oversight of undergraduate and graduate proposals; review by the General Education Advisory Council after proposals already are formally approved through the curriculum process; and a lack of serious attention to resources required for implementation. The current process, for example, gives the same attention to minor revisions such as name changes as to proposals of new programs, causing both the system and participants in it to be inundated with a high volume of proposals.
- Eliminate or revise committees self-reporting as inactive and/or ineffective and then make necessary rule changes using the highlighted organizational chart in this report as a starting point. All references to deleted or revised committees must be changed throughout University rules, regulations, and documents. Historically this role was charged to the Senate Reference Committee; it may be useful to consider whether a university-wide reference committee might be one way of accomplishing this oversight.
- Require use of a project charter when ad hoc groups with broad university impact are formed. The charter should clearly identify goals, deliverables, timelines, to whom the group reports, and final dispensation regarding recommendations. A consistent format should be adopted and the template posted on a central web site. Progress toward charter deliverables should be monitored by the responsible administrator and/or project sponsors.
- Follow-up, especially with task forces and ad hoc committees, should include a survey of people charged with responsibility regarding whether the assigned work was completed and how that work was used. Data should be used for analysis and decision making.
- Process mapping should be used to improve both understanding and effectiveness of decision making. For example, the task force workgroup attempted and ultimately failed in its efforts to diagram *actual* processes such as planning and budgeting (a matrix such as the Central Michigan example would make roles, responsibilities, and flow of decision making clearer). Mapping also can be useful in determining whether each step in a decision-making process provides added value and what information is considered when processes are adopted.

- Leaders at all levels need to understand that “time is money” as it relates to campus participation in governance. Group activities should be organized to ensure that time is well spent and “busy work” designed to give the appearance of participation be eliminated. Layers of review should be minimized only to those that add value in some way. Some institutions have adopted this principle in action: American University, for example, expressed a desire to ensure that valuable faculty time was deployed most effectively as one of its guiding principles in redesigning the work of its faculty senate.
- Consider implementing the PeopleSoft module for “faculty events” that can be used for monitoring committees across the campus. Although part of the University-owned PeopleSoft system, use of this module has not been deployed due to limited resources.
- Given the importance of advancement activities (alumni, communications, development, and governmental relations) to institutional well-being, consider creation of informal or formal committees with linkage to the Division of Public Affairs and Development. At this time no such bodies exist at the university-wide level.
- Secure process policies and procedures from consultant Michael Dolence as he offered in the May 2004 planning retreat. The workgroup issued a request for these materials but no response was received.
- An ongoing Higher Learning Commission (North Central Association) committee should be engaged in continual reflection and assessment rather than deployed merely to prepare for the next institutional review.
- Cultivate continuity of good leadership in campus governance by implementing mechanisms for training/seasoning of current and future participants. We are encouraged by developments such as implementation of a new leadership training program, recently reviewed by the vice presidents.
- Articulate expectations for leadership service and offer appropriate rewards/recognition for participation in governance to the degree possible within existing resources.
- Limited response from student organizations as well as poor student participation in some campus-wide committees suggests that a study of student involvement in governance might be warranted. It appears there is strong student involvement in college-centered activities/groups but a weaker commitment to university-wide functions. We strongly support student involvement in governance but offer that existing structures might not be the most appropriate for today’s students based on their level of involvement and follow through.