

## RESULTS OF SEARCH FOR BEST PRACTICES

While completing an audit of the University's current decision-making and recommending bodies, the task force workgroup also completed an extensive literature review on organization and governance in higher education.

In an effort to cast a wide net in terms of resources that might inform our search for best practices, our readings explored a wide range of topics: organization and governance; planning and budgeting; collective bargaining in higher education; academic governance, broadly defined; effective faculty senate; reviews of organizational governance by other institutions; cultivating a culture for change; use of task forces v. formal structures; curriculum; effective board of trustees; and effective presidential leadership. While we could probably write a book on our findings, we are opting for brevity and thus will summarize below a small number of resources that undergird our conclusions and suggestions. Key articles cited in this report are attached in print form and will be posted on the task force website.

### **Seminal Statements on Institutional Governance**

Perhaps the seminal documents regarding college organization and governance are the *Statement on Institutional Governance* issued in 1998 by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) and the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities* issued in 1966 by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).

The AGB report provides—from a governing board perspective—principles and good practices concerning the participation of internal stakeholders in institutional decision making. It was inspired by a report of a national Commission on the Academic Presidency in 1996 and other evidence of significant changes in higher education that AGB said called for a new statement on governance from a board point of view.

Ultimately, the responsibility for each institution of higher education rests with its governance board. The board must fulfill its fiduciary responsibility for the institution's academic integrity and financial health as well as retain ultimate responsibility for determining its mission and strategic directions. In keeping with tradition and for practical reasons, boards delegate some kinds of authority to appropriate stakeholders. For example, faculty are given significant input/authority in academic matters such as curriculum; retention, promotion and tenure policies; and academic policies affecting students such as admissions and standards. AGB also urged boards to seek the input of and strive for consensus with key stakeholders regarding institutional priorities and resources. According to AGB, the board should conduct its affairs in a manner that exemplifies the behavior it expects of other participants in the institutional governance process and members should be prepared to articulate reasons for their decisions. Boards should not micromanage institutions and consider giving students, staff, and part-time faculty voice in governance, allowing the subject matter in question to determine which group(s) should have predominant or secondary interests. Board members should feel an

obligation to serve the institution as a whole. According to AGB, students and faculty should not have voting privileges on the board as that practice would violate the principle of independence of judgment inherent in a lay board system of governance. The board has the sole responsibility for appointing and assessing the chief executive, who is the board's key window to the institution.

According to the 1998 report, boards should state explicitly who has the authority to make decisions relative to each area of responsibility. The board should establish deadlines for consultative and decision-making processes, and should minimize ambiguous or overlapping areas of responsibility. "Communication," "consultation," and "decision making" should be defined and differentiated in board and institutional policies. When collective bargaining is involved, it should be separate from the internal governance process. Boards may consider establishing formal policies regarding the participation of union leaders in governance bodies.

In October 1966, AAUP called for appropriately shared responsibility and cooperation between all stakeholders at academic institutions through a position paper entitled a "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities." The document was revised in April 1990. The paper presents broad principles that are intended to promote sound structure and procedures. It suggests allowing all institutional stakeholders to initiate ideas and participate in decision making. It also suggests that differential weight of voice should be given, based on the responsibility of the stakeholder for the issue being considered. Issues such as educational goals, the size or composition of the student body, and elements of scholarship and teaching should involve participation of the governing board, administration, faculty, and students prior to the final decision. AAUP believes that strong communication is essential to the success of shared governance.

The AAUP stated that faculty should have primary responsibility for determining appropriate curriculums and procedures for student instruction. This authority included recommending changes in faculty status including appointments, reappointments, decisions not to reappoint, promotions, the granting of tenure, and dismissal. Faculty authority also included aspects of student life that relate to the educational process. In addition, AAUP noted faculty should set the requirements for the degrees offered by the institution, determine when the requirements have been met, and authorize the president and board to grant the degrees thus achieved. Faculty should recommend faculty membership on committees, administrative bodies, and governing boards.

The AAUP stated that the board, administration, and faculty should all seek general agreement regarding buildings and other facilities to be used in the educational work of the institution. Decisions about long-range planning should be a central and continuing concern in the academic community. Budgeting matters should be understood by all, with the allocating of authority determined by the scope of participation in the decision. All stakeholders should have a voice in the establishment of short- and long-range budget priorities. The AAUP recognizes that the board is the legal authority of the institution. The AAUP recommended that the president ensure that faculty views, including

dissenting views, are presented to the board when appropriate to shared governance issues.

### **Collaboration Key to Bridging the Chasm**

In recent years many writers in higher education have sought to shed greater light on why differences frequently occur between faculty and administration and how to bridge the gap in order to improve institutional health and well-being. Robert Birnbaum, a prolific writer in leadership and institutional effectiveness, in 2003 shared a paper entitled, “The End of Shared Governance?” While acknowledging that boards hold ultimate authority for their campuses, he urged them to preserve the role of faculty in shared governance as an essential condition to institutional renewal and well-being. Birnbaum’s insights also reinforced our conclusions that the current governance system of The University of Akron could be improved: “Whenever an institution spends inordinate time and energy on issues of governance, whenever it must rely on hard governance to work, it is almost certainly a sign that an institution is not operating well.”

Gumport (2001) also made a compelling case for bridging the persistent chasms that divide our academic landscapes and called on institutional leadership to work collaboratively with faculty to be informed, to participate, to consider the dilemmas of the whole enterprise, and to offer potential solutions.

Finally, we note another essay in which the author drew upon social systems theory to bridge the gap between faculty and administrators (Del Favero, 2002). She reported that faculty and administrators largely live in two different cultural worlds with different orientations. These differences make it hard for the groups to communicate and work together to make critical decisions affecting academic programs. She implored both groups to take crucial steps to achieve productive collaborative relationships. Faculty need to become more actively invested in the institutional good and administrators need to invest in learning to understand faculty and their work.

### **Challenges for Governance: Improving Decision Making Structures and Accountability in Higher Education**

In 2002, the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (CHEPA) of the University of Southern California launched a three-year project designed to analyze and recommend ways for improving shared governance in four-year colleges and universities entitled, “Challenges for Governance: Improving Decision Making Structures and Accountability in Higher Education.” The task force workgroup has drawn heavily upon this project’s results including research papers presented in annual forums and a 2003 monograph, *Challenges for Governance: A National Report*. The monograph collected data from 2,000 faculty and provosts concerning ways in which faculty participate in governance, the degree and effectiveness of that participation, and faculty attitudes toward it.

Six findings were shared:

1. Faculty governance occurs in multiple venues.
2. Confidence in institution-wide governance bodies is low.
3. Core academic areas are still viewed as primary arenas for formal faculty governance and all respondents expressed the belief that faculty should have authority over undergraduate curriculum, promotion and tenure guidelines, and standards for evaluating teaching.
4. Strategic planning benefits from structured, informal faculty input.
5. Apathy and the lack of trust are the most significant barriers to meaningful faculty participation in governance.
6. Faculty respondents indicated that genuine respect from administration is seen as more important than resources (e.g., staff, office, load time for participation) devoted to faculty governance groups.

The authors provided five recommendations for improving faculty participation in governance:

1. Delineate responsibilities in order to decrease confusion and provide opportunities for sustained and meaningful involvement.
2. Articulate the meaning of shared governance as different constituencies often have varied definitions and expectations about decision making.
3. Use multiple decision-making venues. Far too often individuals assume that for meaningful involvement to occur all decisions must be processed through a single organization such as a faculty senate. Instead provide systematic plans for multiple arenas.
4. Communicate consistently with faculty, as their engagement may be sporadic in loosely coupled organizations such as a university.
5. Create conditions for trust; trust is accomplished over time as groups and individuals see that what is said is done.

Another product of this research is a series of articles pertaining to models of faculty senates. Four models were identified: Traditional/Check and Balance—senates that represented interests of faculty, had limited legal authority, and largely responded to administration; Legislative/Influential—senates that drove issues and promoted policy changes affecting the entire institution and whose power center shifted based on contextual circumstances; Dormant/Ceremonial—senates that were relatively inactive and lacking of infrastructure; and Cultural/"Kitchen Cabinet"—senates in which a small group of faculty were influential with the administration. The models were intended to provide a conceptual frame by which senates can be viewed and studied.

### **Artifacts from Other Institutional Reviews**

Through extensive online searches and consultation with experts in the field, the workgroup identified several institutions that have undertaken significant revisions to internal governance structures or procedures in recent years. Institutions highlighted include: Central Michigan University, American University, the University of Tennessee

System, Brown University, and the College of New Jersey. Artifacts of these reviews are included in the appendix and posted on the task force website.

These resources reinforce three critical points raised in this literature review:

1. There must be meaningful participation by key stakeholders in the design process in order for the resulting governance structures and/or processes to have credibility and the potential for success.
2. It is extremely helpful if not vital in times of institutional stress that roles and responsibilities of various groups in decision making be clearly identified and widely communicated. A matrix from Central Michigan University found in the appendix provides an excellent example of this concept in action. The document leaves no doubt as to how various decisions are defined (for example, descriptions of what the institution views as “academic” and “administrative” matters) and what role each campus player provides in addressing that issue/decision.
3. The review process typically began with clearly defined and articulated goals and anticipated outcomes. For example, in the case of American University, the reorganization of governance was based on four principles: “(1) the importance of a democratic and inclusive faculty governance system that strengthens the ability of faculty to its responsibility to the institution and our students; (2) faculty time is valuable and the demands of our primary responsibility for teaching and research are substantial; (3) whenever possible decisions should be made at the school, college, and library (academic unit) or departmental level by those most affected by them, and (4) duplication of functions should be avoided.” Guided by these principles, the review committee recommended significant changes in campus internal governance including change from a university council to a faculty senate and a reduction in standing committees to make better use of scarce faculty time for participation. We provide this as an example of form and function; the parameters of our review must be institution based.

### **Formal versus Informal Structures: Ensuring Effective Use**

An apparent trend evident at The University of Akron in recent months has been a proliferation in the number of ad hoc committees and task forces (we acknowledge our existence also is a product of this practice). Thus, one of our goals in the literature review was to identify any available best practices or research indicating the wisdom and/or effectiveness of using informal versus formal groups. We found evidence that use of informal groups can give the institution much needed flexibility to deal with emerging issues, often with greater speed than is possible in formal organizations. However, there are many traps associated with this practice. Some of these include: a lack of focus; a disconnect between planners and implementers leading to lack of action on recommendations; a tendency to engage the “usual suspects” in multiple arenas; a lack of credibility with the campus community because the ad hoc group is seen—rightly or wrongly—as an administrative ploy to circumvent the established structure; or an inefficient use of faculty and staff time as issues and or questions are revisited in multiple forums and leading to inaction.

While there are few clear prescriptions for success, two resources are noted here: a series of reports published by the American Council on Education that provide research-based approaches to forming cross-institutional teams as a mechanism for change; and publications by another expert in organizational governance, Stanford's William G. Tierney (2001), who studied reform efforts at 15 four-year colleges and universities, concluding that the prospects for success of change efforts are enhanced by the following practices:

1. Foster an atmosphere of agreement by laying the necessary groundwork and giving a clear charge to the committee.
2. Define roles and timeframes.
3. Seek comparative data.
4. Ensure good communications.
5. Encourage an innovation-friendly culture.

In 1999, Tierney recommended changes across the university campus through a process of reengineering. He outlined several procedures of reengineering: (1) Reengineering seeks dramatic change through comprehensive restructuring not by improving what is already in place, (2) Reengineering does not overlook or destroy an organization's culture, (3) Reengineering is not a quick fix: it is a way of seeing and acting in the organizational world.

The book reiterated many of the points we have raised thus far in this review including the use of teams for so-called "soft projects" that arise out of need or opportunity, the wisdom of according power and authority to teams who are closest to the decisions, and the need for identification of a handful of performance indicators that members of the university community can use to gauge their productivity and progress. Organizational units need to be involved in continual analysis about ways to improve what they are doing. A tool that stimulated much discussion by the task force workgroup was the cultural audit that involves reexamining work and how it dovetails with institutional vision; keeps units on the lookout for ways to cement bonds of fellowship within and across units; at the macro level, a continual analysis about ways to improve what we are doing; and at a micro level, an ongoing assessment of the interpersonal dynamic and health of all areas and individuals.

### **Maintaining Effectiveness in an Environment of Declining Resources**

Finally, we are exercising our editorial prerogative in sharing a final resource that we believe may be instructive to campus decision-makers as the University seeks to maintain institutional effectiveness in a time of declining resources. Cameron and Smart (1995) studied more than 300 colleges and universities that were forced to downsize to identify any strategies and/or behaviors were associated with their ability to maintain effectiveness in times of downsizing and economic distress. They found a series of practices and/or behaviors, dubbed the Dirty Dozen that correlated with a decline in institutional effectiveness. Institutions, for example, that avoided these behaviors were

more likely to maintain or even improve effectiveness in an environment of declining resources.

The “Dirty Dozen” are:

1. Centralization—decision making is pulled toward the top of the organization;
2. Short-term crisis mentality—long-term planning is neglected as the focus remains on immediacy;
3. Loss of innovativeness—trial-and-error leaning is curtailed as there is less tolerance of risk and failure;
4. Resistance to change—a “hunkering down” occurs;
5. Declining morale—infighting permeates the organization;
6. Politicized interest groups—the climate becomes increasingly politicized;
7. Non-prioritized cutbacks—across-the-board cuts are made to reduce conflict but priorities are not obvious;
8. Loss of trust—distrust increases;
9. Increasing conflict—fewer resources increases internal competition as units fight for their “piece of the pie;”
10. Restricted communication—only good news is passed upward due to fear and distrust;
11. Lack of teamwork—individualism and disconnectedness grow;
12. Scapegoating leaders—and unclear priorities foster a “siege mentality.”

Six factors were associated with avoidance of the Dirty Dozen: (1) involvement of organization members as well as customers in planning and implementation; (2) visible, accessible, and visionary leaders; (3) over-communication of “nice-to-know” as well as “need-to-know” information; (4) careful analysis of organizational processes, capabilities, and core competencies; (5) formation of cross-functional and cross-level teams as a necessary part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation process; and (6) implementation of congruent appraisal, reward, and development systems that were viewed as congruent with the objectives.

All evidence available to us, including accreditation standards of the Higher Learning Commission, indicate that there must be broad-based participation in institutional planning and implementation. We are not so bold as to suggest what that process should be, but we believe that the process must be participatory and credible if the University of Akron is to continue its positive momentum in the face of a challenging internal and external environment.