

Comments to:

**American Association of University Professors
Wichita State University**

Reflections on Shared Governance

(Adapted from notes)

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Thank you for that kind introduction Dr. Campbell.

It is a great pleasure to be invited here this afternoon to share some of my thoughts regarding shared governance, a subject of considerable importance in higher education. Indeed, I would suggest that this topic is more important than ever given the intensity of the contemporary critique of higher education, something that I have written about in the recent past.

We have begun to reexamine the issue of shared governance at Wichita State. The refinement of the shared governance approach is one of the performance goals that I negotiate with the President each year. And, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and I have agreed to very intentionally and systematically work on this issue in the coming academic year.

To organize my thinking for these remarks I revisited the AAUP *Statement on Government and Colleges and Universities*. Given the composition of this group, I think it might be useful to begin my comments with a number of observations about that document.

Recall that the document was approved in 1966 and revised in 1990. It was prepared as a guide for governing boards, presidents (and other top administrators), and the faculty. Surprisingly, the document does not actually define “shared governance.” Rather, it is primarily a statement of aspirations followed by a set of observations and suggested joint efforts that should be part of a shared governance system. Many of the assumptions of the document are widely accepted in the academy. Perhaps the most important of these relates to the assertion of the primacy of the faculty with respect to academic programs: *When an educational goal has been established, it becomes the responsibility primarily of the faculty to determine the appropriate curriculum and procedures of student instruction.*¹

¹ <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/policydocs/contents/governancestatement.htm>

The document is remarkably prescient of the dramatic increases in the complexity of the higher education enterprise since the 1960's. It is also appropriately affirming of the great variation among universities and the need for shared governance models to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate that variation. It is relatively easy to glean from this document what AAUP believes are the important precepts of shared governance. Among these are: good communication, the need for a clear university mission, the need to have all constituents involved in long-range planning, space, budget and, hiring of administrators, most especially the president. About all of these, we surely agree.

It is important to point out that, while the document embraces the joint responsibility of administration and faculty in sustaining an effective shared governance system, its faculty perspective seems to unnecessarily calcify a few precepts or approaches that are either logistically or statutorily unrealistic or impossible. For example, the document holds that the faculty should authorize the president to grant degrees. In Kansas and, I would guess, most states, that authority rests with the governing board and is delegated to the President. Likewise, the ultimate responsibility for faculty appointments (hiring, tenure, promotion, etc.) is delegated to the president by the governing board and does not reside with the faculty as suggested it should by the document. Fortunately, most faculty and administrators agree on the need to interpret the AAUP document in light of local law and practice.

The AAUP document, then, is a good foundation for building a shared governance system, although its high-mined tone masks a kind of programmed innocence that I have encountered in other relevant AAUP documents and that I mention again near the end of my comments. .

What I would like to do for the rest of my time with you is to reflect on two broad dimensions of shared governance from the view of administration. In particular, I want to focus first on faculty leadership as the key tool for faculty-centered change and then on the tensions related to the underlying corporate nature of the higher education enterprise.

Faculty Leadership

Let me begin by saying that we can easily get bogged down in the topic of leadership. During my professional career, I have personally been involved in workshops and conferences that suggested that leadership involves: changing thinking (the leader as thought leader); changing frames (the leader as interpreter of the environment); transitions (the change-agent leader), and various other conceptual themes or angles designed to hit the sweet spot of leadership acumen. Good leadership is a complicated mix of personal traits, ambition, environmental factors, and timing (like the famous sentiment of Justice Potter Stewart, we all know good leadership when we see it.²) The views that I express here about faculty leadership are also some mix of these factors and probably others. My intention is not to define another category of leadership or to review the leadership literature but, rather, to reflect on the general concept of leadership as part of faculty participation in shared governance.

² Referring of course to Stewart's famous and generally misquoted comment in the obscenity case *Jacobellis v Ohio* (1964).

Before talking about leadership per se, I need to say a few things about management. Good governance involves good management. Management skills, however, are not traits that are generally expected of faculty (as, for example, part of the criteria for tenure and promotion or merit pay raises) even though successful faculty must possess such skills at least as they relate to the management of their own time, space, and resources. In the context of shared governance, faculty have very little management responsibility. Making sure that the university runs smoothly, meeting state and federal operational guidelines, maintaining fiscal viability, and ensuring accountability to its constituents, all obligations of management, are – and I would argue should be – the responsibility of administration. To be sure, there are quasi administrative roles such as department chair positions or certain directorships where faculty must exercise a management role. And, of course, faculty researchers must manage the budgets of their grants. Certainly faculty play an essential advisory role in most management processes, especially those related to salary and space and this participation is an essential part of an effective shared governance system. But, as I will argue, the management advisory role of faculty is not the most important avenue for change available to faculty. The real power of the faculty to move their institution through participation in shared governance is in the exercise of faculty leadership.

Let me add one more preliminary but very important note before getting, finally, to the topic of faculty leadership. My comments here are directed to those members of the faculty who participate in shared governance for the purpose of affecting constructive change in university policy or approach in a collaborative environment. The governance system can be used for other purposes, such as for expressing disaffection or protesting university policy. I will await another opportunity to comment on these legitimate but, in my view, less constructive functions of shared governance.

Now, to some observations about faculty leadership.

I suggest that faculty possess avenues of leadership approach and outcome not available to administrators because they are more intimately involved in the real guts of the operation: discovery and learning. Moreover, because members of the faculty are generally freed from management imperatives, their exercise of leadership tends to be less constrained and more grounded in the basic values of the institution. Thus, faculty leadership is more likely than administrative leadership to be fundamentally extraordinarily innovative. This, I believe, has to do with the nature of the scholarly enterprise. Unlike the ideas or innovations of administrators, faculty innovations are tested against competing ideas rather than utilitarian constraints. This freedom to dream that faculty have is what drives entrepreneurship in higher education.³ But, the freedom to dream or, more especially, the unbounded affection of the innovations that yield from dreams, may place a drag on the effectiveness of faculty to affect real change in a shared governance system.

Too often faculty diminish the power of innovation and creativity simply by not being willing to let an idea live outside the intellectual space in which the idea was born. The fact is, though

³ Many administrators will agree that the central challenge to running a research university is managing the almost limitless faculty innovation. Virtually everything good that universities do is the result of such innovation.

many administrators are loath to admit it, there are very few true innovations for change that can be diminished or discounted by honest administrators if the creators are willing to examine their inventions in novel ways, have the assumptions directly tested and – insert huge gasp – permit the idea to be illuminated by the harsh light of fiscal utility. Most of the best ideas for change die because the creator was unwilling to let the idea be examined in a new environment. (As an aside, such intellectual intransigence can also doom an idea that stays fully *within* its realm of creation. But, that is a topic for another time.) Let me illustrate this point with an example from my own experience.

In my career I have been involved in three major general education reform efforts, only one of which succeeded. In all three of the programs, exceptionally innovative ideas regarding how to approach general education were advanced early in the process. In the two cases that failed, the faculty creators of the key innovations believed so strongly in the disciplinary foundation of their ideas that they assumed that any shaping of the idea to meet legitimate curricular and fiscal constraints would kill it. They took the position that administration should remove all constraints in order to let the idea live in its original form. It turned out that, in fact, the ideas were advanced primarily as a challenge to administration rather than as ideas that would revolutionize learning. In both cases, administration pushed back and the process died of its own weight. Both the innovators and the administrators justified the collapse by their own victimhood. Faculty proclaimed administration unwilling to change even in the face of a brilliant idea and administration sighed that, once again, faculty were too idealistic to work with them to seek a legitimate and practical compromise. Neither group displayed much in the way of leadership.

In the case that succeeded, the faculty innovators were able to internalize administrative skepticism by acknowledging legitimate administrative constraints and by allowing their idea to be examined closely *inside* those constraints. They essentially said, help us figure out a way that this idea – or some essential derivative of it – *will* work. The result was the addition of new faculty lines to support a faculty-generated revolution in general education. The resulting program was not precisely what the faculty innovators envisioned. The program also cost more than administration planned to spend. But, by allowing their idea to be shaped by legitimate administrative concerns, the faculty essentially forced administration to work with them toward a solution.

In order to protect myself, I have to say at this point that there are some very, very good ideas that simply cannot be made to fit into the local environment no matter how deep the will for compromise. The fact is that some things do cost too much, take too much faculty time, require too much reallocation or just plain won't work on our campus.

My observation is that too often faculty confuse leadership with power, decision making and access to management. One of the phrases that I often hear in my conversations with faculty about governance is the desire to " ...be at the table," when decisions are made. Exceptional faculty leaders know that, in the end, innovation and the ability to manage it within the university environment is more powerful than line-item budget authority or a place at the "table." Constructive faculty leaders are people who are able to design and test concepts in their mind within the full dimensions of the environment in which they live. So, for example, their concept

of curricular change is informed not only by the imperatives and traditions of their discipline but by their understanding of the ways in which those imperatives and traditions may be viewed from the full range of alternative perspectives, including other disciplines and administrative imperatives.

One of the reasons that faculty may be reluctant to permit their ideas to be shaped by the fiscal and political realities of the university is their distaste and visceral distrust for what they see as the underlying corporate nature of the enterprise. Let me turn to that set of tensions.

Governance and the Corporate Imperative

There are fundamental tensions between the ideals of the academy and the practice of running a university, and those tensions appear to be growing in the face of public demands on higher education and diminishing public support. Administrators are often urged – indeed, in some instances directed—to run the university like a business with students as customers. It is important to pause to reflect on how antithetical this idea is to the enterprise of learning. More than any other human process, higher learning is essentially a collaborative process. For real learning to occur, students must collaborate actively with their faculty in the learning process. The endeavor is nothing like a simple transaction. Students can no more be “consumers” learning than scholars can be simply “producers” of it. The full rejection of the “student as consumer” model is, in my view, an essential first step in understanding the unique culture and advantage of American higher education.

Having said that, it is important to appreciate that, fundamentally, universities do operate in a business model. We want to manage and lead toward a positive bottom line in order to guarantee continued existence. We generate revenue, we have cost structures, we manage real estate, we have investments, and we have business plans. This approach is absolutely essential in order for the CEO to meet her fiduciary responsibilities to the board, to the students who pay tuition, and to those who support the university.

Where we differ from the corporate world is this idea that we would enter into a dynamic and integrated collaboration, a bottom up approach if you will, to shape the mission and goals of the organization. And, it is the contract with the faculty to shape mission, develop university-wide strategy, and agree on power and responsibilities within that strategy that is at the heart of shared governance. This hybrid nature of higher education has a number of important implications that bear on how we organize our shared governance system. Let me mention two of these.

First, we must acknowledge that the corporate foundation of the university responds to real forces for change that we must accommodate if we are to maintain American universities as the world leaders in higher education, particularly in research and graduate education. Our accommodation of these forces has created a much more complex system than was in effect when the AAUP document on shared governance was issued. The origins and implications of the complexity of modern universities is sometimes misunderstood by faculty and certainly not adequately explained by administration.

This brings me back to the “programmed innocence” (perhaps the concept could also be labeled “inertial nostalgia”) that I detected in the AAUP document and sometimes see in other, more recent, publications from the organization. For example, a recent issue of *Academe* (the Bulletin of the AAUP) contains the annual report on the economic status of the profession which includes the following passage:

For most of the history of U. S. higher education, faculty members performed the key administrative functions. The college president, dean of faculty, dean of students, and director of admissions were professors who simultaneously wore faculty and administrative hats. Today, positions that previously would have been held by faculty members ...are held by...professionals.⁴

Further along in the passage, there is a list of these so called “professionals.”

...vice chancellor of student success; study abroad director; associate director for experiential learning; director of financial aid; director of counseling services; assistant director of admissions, communications and special events; chief information officer; assistant vice president for marketing and public relations.....

The clear implication here is that we are bloated and burdened with bureaucrats who are performing superfluous jobs that, in the past, would easily have been handled by faculty. Typically, administrators will respond to this by pointing out that state and federal regulations alone require certain kinds of staffing. But I would argue as well is that every last one of these positions contributes in some important and measurable way to the contemporary educational enterprise and the climate of faculty support. More and more, these new higher education professionals fill the gap between the discipline-based knowledge of faculty and the technology-dependent ways in which modern students (of all ages) learn. The importance of this kind of expertise extends to numerous highly trained, non-faculty, professionals in the academy.

There is, of course, considerable value in to faculty holding administrative positions especially in areas directly related to their expertise. Take, for example, our Chief Information Officer. Looking at my schedule last week the CIO and I talked about: email storage, how to get laptops to faculty, classroom technology, internet speed, security of private records, how to support e-learning, and how to get better technology to the library. What he brought to that discussion is an international reputation in networking and technology, which he also applies directly to his teaching and research in engineering. Such situations are becoming extremely rare in the academy however. CIOs have existed in higher education for only about 20 years and the position has become rapidly professionalized because of the expanding landscape of technology. I expect this to be the trend with professional positions related to technology.

A second manifestation of the underlying corporate nature of the American academy is the phenomenon of time scale discordance in the patterns of work of administration and faculty. It is

⁴ “Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession.” *Academe* 94(2). March-April 2008. <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2008/MA/sal/sal.htm>

quite simply the case that we in administration often have to move very fast (we often refer to this as “business time”) in order to respond to the demands of governing boards, legislators, regulations, or to opportunities and challenges that arise unexpectedly. For example, the yearly budget cycle in the state of Kansas depends on final legislative action followed by staff work in the state agencies. No matter how much tuition and budget planning we do prior to the late spring, we will always find ourselves in a rush to make final salary recommendations and budget adjustments at a time when faculty have dispersed for the summer. Faculty participation in this and many, many other operational activities of the university simply require a different kind of commitment.

This time scale of administrative work pushes against the deliberative pace of faculty governing bodies like the Faculty Senate and their committee structures. The inclusion of a more reflective and deliberative element in the university community conversation is an essential part of good shared governance. But it is important to acknowledge that if faculty participation in governance is focused entirely on the activities of the senate, the faculty voice may be diminished by the rush of the moving train of administrative work. To work effectively together, there must be points of interaction where faculty and administrators work at the same pace. There is no question that such intersections can be found. Our work last year to pull together the HLC accreditation is an excellent example. Our work to understand our global position and to revise our honors programs are other good examples.

Neither the underlying corporate nature of higher education nor the time scale differences between faculty and administrative work are operational components of shared governance. They are facets of university life that affect our interactions with one another and, thus, the effectiveness of the shared governance process.

In closing, I want to emphasize again that these informal remarks are not intended to be a set of recommendations with respect to shared governance at Wichita State University. Indeed, as I have told many of you, I believe that we have much work to do to reach the kind of governance system that we would all like to have and, so, I have much to learn. These comments are really a set of reflections about faculty governance that I put forth to generate dialogue that will support our work together and give me a chance to learn more about the issue from your perspective.

As always, I appreciate the opportunity to spend some time with you this afternoon.