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Building A Culture Healthy Shared G

The term "shared governance" often means different things to different campus constituencies. Although the term is used frequently in academic settings, it is subject to misunderstandings that arise from diverse perspectives. One perspective sees faculty as having the primary role of governing the university and shared governance as a means by which faculty delegate the more mundane task of managing the day-to-day operation of the institution to administrators so that faculty can devote their efforts to the core academic mission of teaching and research. Another prevalent view, especially among some administrators, is that shared governance creates inertia in the advancement of the university's mission and therefore impedes innovation and progress. These perceptions reveal a lack of understanding as to what is 'shared' with whom, and what the responsibilities of each group are.

Our own understandings about shared governance have expanded and evolved over the years through our participation in university governance as faculty members, faculty senate presidents and administrators. We have come to appreciate the value of collaboration, dialogue and inclusive decision-making in advancing the mission of our institution and have seen how shared governance both facilitates and drives these endeavors. As we discuss in this article, we have learned from our work that shared governance is more than just an organizational structure or process. Instead, fundamental to effective shared governance is a culture of trust based on mutual respect, broad sharing of knowledge and information, and harnessing the intellectual capacity of the entire campus. We will begin with a definition of shared governance and consider ways in which campus leaders can foster an environment that creates effective shared governance.

It is instructive to review the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, an often-cited document jointly issued in the mid-60s by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB)—organizations concerned chiefly with matters related to faculty, administration and governing boards, respectively. This document affirms the importance of collaborative governance by these three groups and clarifies their roles in the process. Two fundamental principles characterize the *Statement:* (1) joint planning and effort, and (2) participation that depends on the degree of responsibility.

The *Statement* explains that joint planning and effort by the board, administration and faculty are necessary because they lead to "increased capacity to solve educational problems." Each group has different expertise and contributes complementary knowledge to joint decisions, such as long-range planning for the institution, use of physical resources, budgeting, and choice of a new president, deans and other chief academic officers.

A common misunderstanding concerning shared governance centers upon the concept that every group is equally involved in making decisions on everything. This is incorrect for two reasons. First, while shared governance requires joint planning and effort, participation in decision-making depends on the degree of responsibility and expertise that each group possesses relevant to the specific matter at hand. Second, centering shared governance on decision-making greatly underestimates the power of shared governance to create ideas, reveal important information, and therefore drive innovation to advance the university's mission.

Typically, the president and the administration have the responsibility to plan, organize, direct and represent the institution, and steward resources. However, areas directly related to advancement and oversight of teaching and research are primarily the responsibility of the faculty. This follows from the principle that the assignment of responsibility and roles in decision-making is made to those campus groups that have

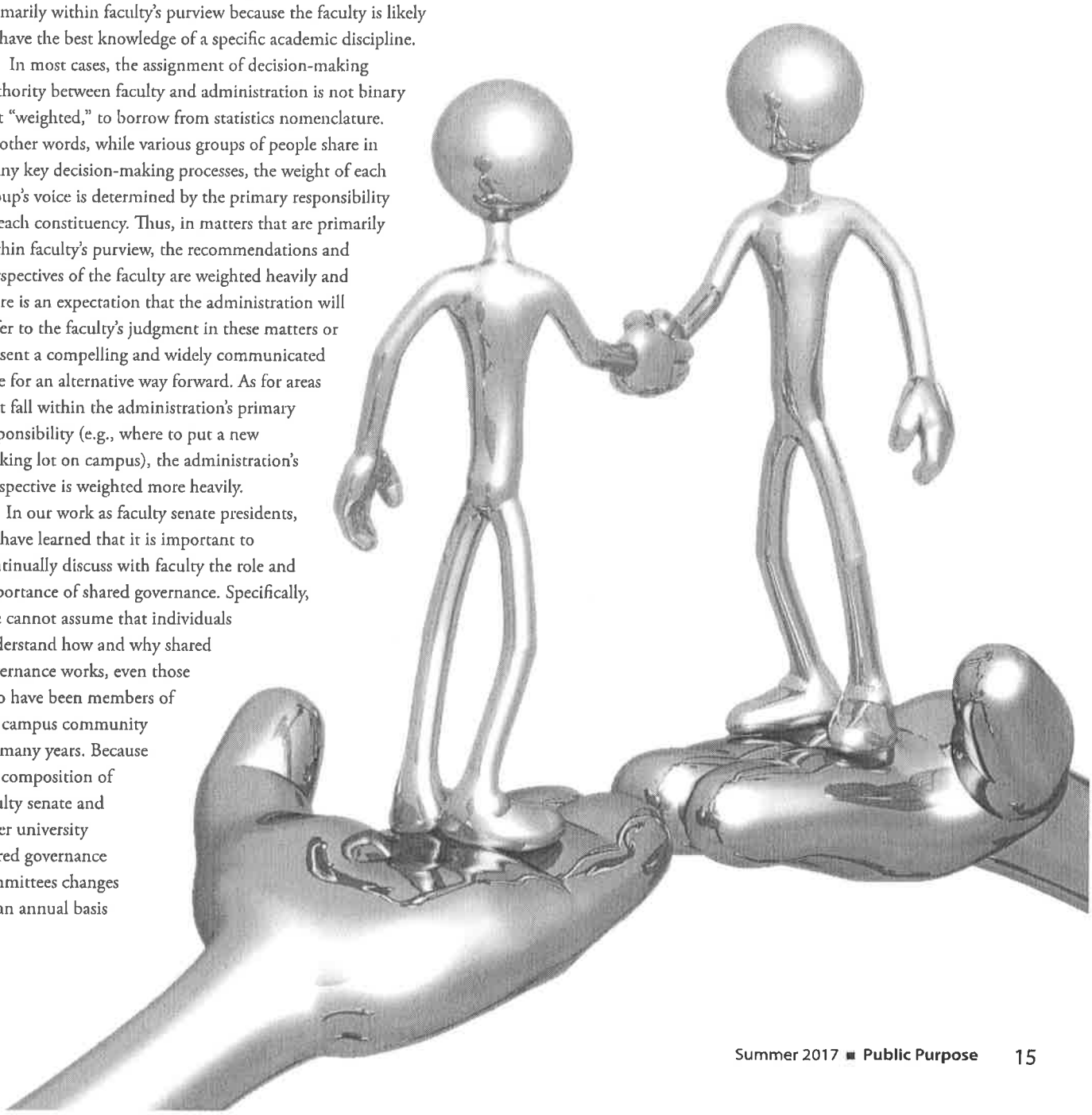
Of Trust Through Governance

By Philip Rous and Sarah Shin

the best knowledge and understanding of the issues at hand. For example, promotion and tenure processes and policies are primarily within faculty's purview because the faculty is likely to have the best knowledge of a specific academic discipline.

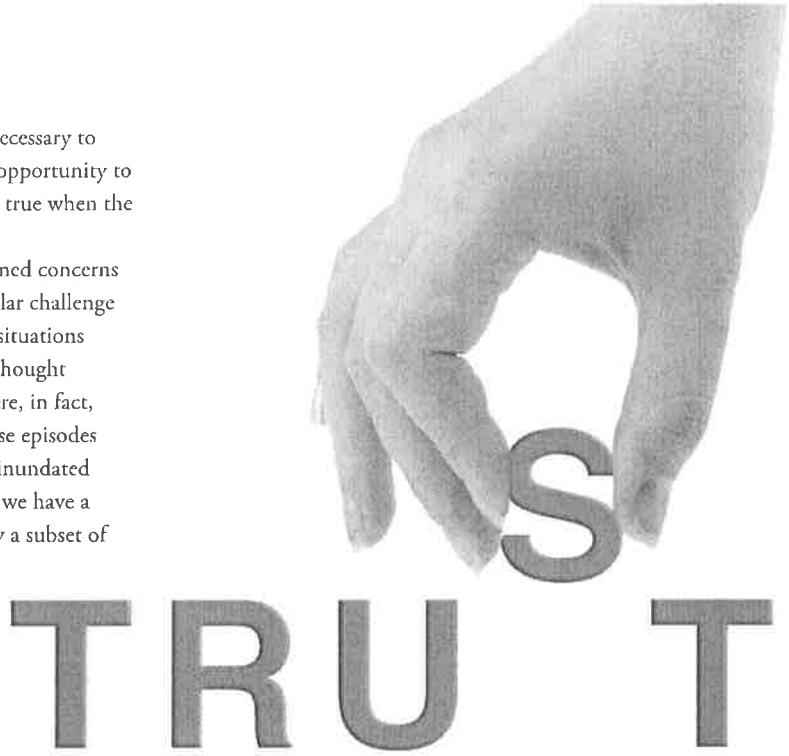
In most cases, the assignment of decision-making authority between faculty and administration is not binary but "weighted," to borrow from statistics nomenclature. In other words, while various groups of people share in many key decision-making processes, the weight of each group's voice is determined by the primary responsibility of each constituency. Thus, in matters that are primarily within faculty's purview, the recommendations and perspectives of the faculty are weighted heavily and there is an expectation that the administration will defer to the faculty's judgment in these matters or present a compelling and widely communicated case for an alternative way forward. As for areas that fall within the administration's primary responsibility (e.g., where to put a new parking lot on campus), the administration's perspective is weighted more heavily.

In our work as faculty senate presidents, we have learned that it is important to continually discuss with faculty the role and importance of shared governance. Specifically, one cannot assume that individuals understand how and why shared governance works, even those who have been members of the campus community for many years. Because the composition of faculty senate and other university shared governance committees changes on an annual basis



as people rotate on and off these assignments, it is necessary to review these concepts regularly and give people the opportunity to ask questions about the processes. The same is often true when the administration is subject to rapid turnover.

One of the most important lessons we have learned concerns how information is communicated. This is a particular challenge in shared governance. Both of us have encountered situations where we were surprised to discover that things we thought were common knowledge or communicated well were, in fact, not familiar to people at all. As disappointing as these episodes may be, we need to recognize that all of us are now inundated with information, e-mails and announcements, and we have a natural tendency to pay immediate attention to only a subset of what we see and hear. Given this reality, some amount of redundancy must be built into our communication efforts. When in doubt, we try to err on the side of sharing more rather than less because lack of information leads people to guess the motives behind campus actions and breeds mistrust. If, on the other hand, campus leaders get in the habit of communicating broadly and constantly, members of the community learn to expect this kind of communication over time and transparency becomes part of the institutional culture.



We have also come to recognize that good communication is not just about conveying information but, most importantly, about effective listening and ensuring ample opportunity for the campus community to provide input. Faculty and senate committees require time to perform due diligence in reviewing new program proposals and responding to a wide range of requests, whether they are pro forma or require a more thorough assessment. We have observed that building time into the calendar for careful deliberation sends a strong message to the faculty and administration that their feedback is truly valued. However, when important decisions must be expedited due to unforeseen circumstances, it is critical that the reasons for moving forward quickly be explained clearly and the faculty's assistance is respectfully requested in the spirit of collaboration.

Through our interaction with faculty and administrators at other universities, we have seen that the fitness of an institution's shared governance system is determined to a great extent by the governance model that is in place and the dispositions and skills of those who are involved. It is not enough to simply have a governance system based on collaboration if some groups routinely depart from its principles. Shared governance works well only when all groups are convinced of their interdependence and the usefulness of communication among themselves, and respect the boundaries established by each group's primary responsibilities.

By way of illustration, our university recently adopted a new online student course evaluation system. Our campus began considering this option over a decade ago. While there was consensus that a new approach was needed, each time a proposal for adopting a new system was made, significant concerns were raised that prevented it from being approved. A major step forward was initiated by the formation of special workgroup with full faculty representation that conducted extensive research on the various evaluation systems available and made a final recommendation to the faculty senate. Throughout this three-year process, which ultimately led to the adoption of a new evaluation instrument, the university administration did not intervene in recognition of the fact that course evaluation falls squarely within faculty's purview. Had administration unilaterally implemented a new course evaluation system, the change may have occurred much more quickly. But it would have been unlikely to be the most effective approach and would have been a major blow to the shared governance process.

Examples like this, accumulated over time, contribute to building confidence among faculty that their input will be valued and taken seriously and that they play a critical role in decision-making and advancing the mission of the institution as a whole. Undoubtedly, establishing a culture of trust and mutual respect takes time and effort and requires constant attention and nurturing through continuous communication and vigilance on the part of all groups. But the payoff from well-functioning governance is very large. The institution thrives when all groups are furnished with sufficient information and included in the decision-making process, and when they are encouraged to contribute to advancing the institution's mission as true partners. P

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