# ED433077 1999-08-00 Shared Governance in Community Colleges. ERIC Digest.

ERIC Development Team

**www.eric.ed.gov**

## Table of Contents

If you're viewing this document online, you can click any of the topics below to link directly to that section.

ERIC Digests

# Shared Governance in Community Colleges. ERIC Digest.

THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC

Governance structures for institutions of higher education emerge from an intricate

interweaving of historic and contextual factors. These factors include the constitutional powers of the governor, the strength of the private higher education sector, constitutional status for public institutions, the existence of a well developed, two-year college sector, collective bargaining, and voter initiatives (Bowen, et.al, 1997).

Public community college governance stands quite apart from the governance of systems employed by public universities and public elementary and secondary schools. Governance in America's community colleges is virtually a state-by-state choice with some of the variations being: state vs. local, elected vs. appointed, state appointed vs. locally appointed, taxing authority vs. no taxing authority, voluntary shared governance vs. mandated shared governance, and various combinations thereof.

Governance is a function of structure and of how people act within that structure. Cohen and Brawer (1996) observe that Richardson's (1975) description of bureaucratic, political and collegial governance structures is particularly appropriate for community colleges. The bureaucratic model describes a traditional, rule bound, hierarchical power structure similar to K-12 structures. Authority is delegated from the top down with the faculty, staff and students each occupying respectively lower levels of the pyramid. The political model proposes a perpetual state of conflict between constituencies -- trustees, administrators, faculty, staff and students -- each with competing interests. The collegial model proposes a community of scholars, with consensual decision making processes involving all constituencies affected by the decisions.

The purpose of this digest is to define shared governance, discuss the way shared governance is actually structured in community colleges, and to identify issues suggested by recent community college shared governance experiences.

# WHAT IS SHARED GOVERNANCE?

Shared governance is a social system of self government wherein decision-making responsibility is shared among those affected by the decisions. At the community college level, shared governance means that responsibility for institutional decisions is shared among governing boards, district administrators, and faculty, with joint recognition and respect for the participation of staff and students (Lau, 1996).
An ideal shared governance model is collegial in nature, recognizing the contributions and requirements of all members of the college in a group consensus process. This process fosters a sense of empowerment, equal partnership and a vested interest in successful outcomes of institutional policy and implementation decisions. The purpose of such a system is to direct all available physical and financial resources toward meaningful improvement and progress (Lau, 1996). Ideally, shared governance can create game plans that bridge lines of authority, share resources to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities, and facilitate programs to even out the work load while maximizing system efficiency (Howell 1997; Acebo, 1995). There are many shared governance models available to institutions of higher education; the process and

dynamics have been defined and the advantages and disadvantages articulated (Lau, 1996; Lee, 1997).

# EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND SHARED GOVERNANCE

The California Community College system, a loose confederation of 107 colleges serving more than 1.4 million students, represents the largest system of higher education in the nation. Passage of Assembly Bill 1725 (1988) mandated shared governance in California's community colleges. This and related regulations in California seemed to polarize rather than unite constituencies, creating a governance experience more comparable to a political than collegial model. On the other hand, a recent study of 34 colleges suggested that AB 1725 is generally working as it was intended (Howell, 1997).

While other states may lack similar comprehensive legislative statutes, many have introduced structures of participatory governance intended to improve system quality and efficiency. Maricopa County Community College District in Arizona has structured a "strategic conversations" format to ensure interaction within the college community and continuous quality improvement in the governance process (Rosenthal and Eisner, 1996). A shift toward shared governance and a learning organization model of operation is reported at Austin Community College in Texas (Quereau, 1995). Burlington County College in New Jersey has adopted a governance structure providing "a forum for thoughtful, collegial consideration by faculty, support staff, administrators and students, of administration issues crucial to the teaching/learning process and environment" (Messina, 1994, p.1). The collective bargaining process seems to have intensified the division between faculty and administration, affecting the climate of shared governance at Union County College in New Jersey (Signorelli, 1997). Both Delaware County Community College in Pennsylvania and Fox Valley Technical College in Wisconsin have instituted various total quality management measures to increase participation in decision making (Wolverton, 1993).

# CHALLENGES

Cohen and Brawer (1996) note that the collegial model reflects more rhetoric than reality and that actual procedures maintained in community colleges tend toward bureaucratic and political protection of the staff's rights, satisfaction, and welfare. Kezar (1998) indicates that the participatory model is as likely to exclude people from involvement in decision making as the traditional hierarchical model. The staff in various community colleges have wrestled with issues related to the implementation of shared governance, including resistance to changing historical patterns of bureaucratic and/or political governance, overly prescriptive legislation, and a lack of strong system and local roles enabling the respective boards to actually govern (Nussbaum, 1998). Implementation of shared governance can: (1) promote divisiveness and turf wars

between faculty, staff, students, and management groups each pursuing their own organizational agendas; (2) produce fragmented budgets based on bilateral agreements between the district and each of the warring groups; (3) promote distrust and resistance to change; (4) be unsound in terms of legal accountability; and (5) be too slow (Healy, 1997; Nussbaum, 1998).

Some college presidents say that the extensive consultation required by shared governance interferes with their ability to do their jobs; they are besieged by pressure groups, including employee unions wanting more money and power, and state officials who want quick improvements (Healy, 1997). Trustees are beginning to avoid the term "shared governance" because they say it implies a level of collaboration that may not exist (Leatherman, 1998).

# CONCLUSION

Shared governance in higher education is not the daring experiment it was a few years ago, nor it is a panacea for funding and enrollment pressures. Successful shared governance in higher education requires commitment, time and focused effort from all levels of state, system, and campus participants. It is important to note that while other constituencies may feel able to represent their interests through various means, such as collective bargaining, students may feel that shared governance is a particularly valuable procedure - perhaps the only workable avenue for their input.
It is possible that a state adopting incentives encouraging, rather than regulations mandating, cooperation might "pull" its governance structure in the direction of being more collegial, rather than "pushing" it toward being more political.

There is general agreement among interested parties that changes in community college governance are needed (Healy, 1997 ; Leatherman, 1998) and there are wide ranging proposals about what these changes should be (Healy 1997; Nussbaum, 1998). A consensus emerges from the literature: neither top-down nor bottom-up governance approaches work well unless there is a clear mission and a commitment to the goals of the institution.

# REFERENCES

Acebo, S., et. al., (1995). "The Academic Team: A Case Study of Shared Governance." Team Building for Quality: Transitions in the American Community College. Edited by George A. Baker III & Associates, Washington, D.C.: Community College Press. ED 381 196.
Bowen, F.M., Bracco, K.R., Callan, Finney, J.E., Richardson, R.C. Jr., Trombley, W. (1997). "State Structures for the Governance of Higher Education: A Comparative Study." ED 412 866.

Cohen, A.M. and Brawer, F.B. (1996). The American Community College, Jossey-Bass

Inc., ED 389 384.

Healy, P. (1997). "Leaders of California Community Colleges Say Governance Structure Is as a Breaking Point." Chronicle of Higher Education. 19 Dec 1997: A33-34.

Howell, C.D. (1997). "An Assessment of the Implementation of Shared Governance Provisions of AB 1725 (1988) at Selected California Community Colleges." Community College Journal of Research and Practice; 21(7) p 637-49. EJ 554 304

Kezar, A. J. (1998). "Exploring New Avenues for Leading Community Colleges: The Paradox of Participatory Models." ERIC Review. Community College Review; v25 n4 p75-87 Spr 1998. EJ 564 356.

Lau, R. (1996). "Shared Governance and Compton Community College District." EDIM 710 Organizational Management & Governance, Pepperdine University Plaza. ED 396 806

Leatherman, C. (1998). "Shared Governance Under Siege: Is It Time to Revive It or Get Rid of It?" The Chronicle of Higher Education. 30 Jan 1998: A8-A9. EJ 558 425.

Lee, L. (1997). "Sources and Information: Community College Leadership." New Directions for Community Colleges. v25 n2 87-94. EJ 549 475.

Messina, R.C., Cearfoss, C., Trueblood, N., Young, S. (1994). "Opening up the Decision-Making Process Through Shared Governance." JC 940 519

Nussbaum, T. (1998). "Reforming the Governance of California Community Colleges." 20th Annual Earl V. Pullias Lecture in Higher Education. 14 Mar 1998. http://www.cccco.edu/cccco/gen/pullias.htm.

Richardson, R. C. Jr., Ed. "Reforming College Governance." New Directions for Community Colleges, v3 n2 Sum 1975. ED 105 940.

White, K. B. (1998). "Shared Governance in California." New Directions for Community Colleges, v 26, n102, edited by John Stewart Levin, published in Summer 1998.

Wolverton, M. (1993). "Total Quality Management in Higher Education: Latest Fad or Lasting Legacy?" ED 355 900. The ERIC Clearinghouse is administered by the National Library of Education (NLE) and operates under OERI Contract No. ED-99-CO-0010. The opinions expressed in this digest do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of NLE/OERI and no official endorsement by NLE/OERI should be inferred.

—

**Title:** Shared Governance in Community Colleges. ERIC Digest.
**Document Type:** Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs)

(071); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);
**Available From:** ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges, University of California at Los Angeles, 3051 Moore Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521; Tel: 310-825-3931.
**Descriptors:** College Administration, College Faculty, Community Colleges, Educational Change, Governance, Governing Boards, Government School Relationship, Partnerships in Education, Policy Formation, Student School Relationship, Two Year Colleges
**Identifiers:** ERIC Digests
###

—

▲

[Return to ERIC Digest Search Page]