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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses three ways of structuring community college governmental bodies and describes the benefits of a combined approach to governance. To remain true to their purpose of serving the community, governing bodies for two-year colleges must consist of representatives from the surrounding community. Although community college governing boards vary from state to state, they follow three patterns, based on the funding source: school districts, county, or state. Representatives from the funding source make up the governing board, and are often elected or nominated by committee. Most institutions rely upon three types of models of governance: bureaucratic, shared authority, and political. In the bureaucratic model, control is delegated downward through the institution. The shared authority model allows for joint participation throughout the organization, and can enhance the governing body by strengthening participant support of the decision-making process. In the political model, the governing body's power emanates from special interest groups so as to benefit the community at-large, but is susceptible to political influences on board members, which could undermine institutional goals. Ultimately, by combining the three models of governance, the boards can actively participate in institutional decision-making while maintaining a leadership role and upholding their responsibilities to the institution and the community. (Contains 12 references.) (CB)

Perspectives on Governance in Community Colleges Using Different Organizational Models

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The Beginnings

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Governance has long been an issue in educational institutions from the European models of the first American colonial institutions to the present day colleges and universities. Governance can be defined as the ability to exercise a directing or restraining influence in the decision process. The directing influences start at the top of the educational hierarchy, which is part of the 'total socio-political economic system' and wind down through the educational system to the individual institution, which itself has its own levels; the hierarchy of governance exists at every stage (Richardson, 1975, Richardson, Blocker, Bender, 1972).

Governance practices changed through the years as various and numerous educational institutions emerged throughout the United States. Early colonial institutions, such as Harvard and Yale, were governed / supported by state offices like the General Court (Harvard), or boards comprised of clergy (Yale), even the governor of New Jersey sat on the board of trustees at Princeton. As new institutions emerged in the late 1700's and early 1800's, a public hostility towards denominational institutions permeated the governance process. There was now indifference as to consequences of religious diversity as well as a growing religious tolerance in the post-revolutionary period. The American standard for governing boards, however, was initiated at Yale, where the practice of a "single absentee body", comprised of the ten organizing clergymen, where the president was the representative of the board with a significant amount of power. On the whole, early governing boards were comprised of sound, wealthy, conservative men typically from the upper class. Their reputation for responsibility and financial soundness enabled them to maintain the standards of the institutions they represented. The College of Philadelphia was the first institution without a representative clergyman (Rudolph, 1990).

As the financial insecurities grew with the educational institutions of the early 1800's, the governing boards' preference moved towards a business and professional image, which allowed for the perpetuating aspect of the board to become a standard. Post Civil War institutions saw an influx of college alumni assert their representation on the governing boards. As educational institutions progressed into the 1900's, other entities such as faculty and students were incorporated into the governing bodies. This mix of representation has become the basis of current governing bodies at our educational institutions (Rudolph, 1990).

Governing Body Members

The increase of public institutions during the 1900's, in both two-year and four-year institutions, created a slight dichotomy in the self-perpetuating aspect for what was considered the standard governing body. Public institutions, funded primarily with state funds, were required to maintain an elected or mandated governing board. Private institutions currently remain the original model, where governing boards are comprised of varied business and professional executives, which may even include clergymen. This type of individual typically represents the institutions' vision and responsibility to the organization as a whole. The individuals are nominated through a committee process, and voted on by the current governing body. Depending on the type of private institution, such as a seminary or a technical institution, members may be required to have a specific background or expertise.

Public, four-year institutions have two types of board members. One type is mandated by the state: these members are normally designated by the state funding sources, or educational commissions. The second type of board member is typically the business or technical professional, such as those found in public institutions, unlike the private ones, must also answer to the institutional funding source, such as the state. The public two-year educational institution commonly referred to as community colleges, represent a further dichotomy of the governing board. Since community colleges were based on the image of offering services to the local community, the governing board must then be representative of that community. Although community college governing boards differ from state to state, they typically follow three patterns, based on the funding source: school districts, county, or state. It should be noted, that even though all public two-year institutions are state supported, they may have additional support from the school districts or counties were they operate, which usually requires some type of governing board representation. Each of these types of governing boards is discussed further.

Two year institutions that are supported through school district funds, may or may not have taxing authority; this varies with each state. Taxing authority enables the institution to set a rate, based on housing assessed values, by which the associated monies are forwarded to the institution; this is what many taxpayers see as their school district tax bills. Institutions that do not have taxing authority piggy-back on the local school district budget for financial support. This financial support from the school districts requires that members of the school district be represented on the community college governing board. When community colleges are supported by numerous school districts (as in areas of Pennsylvania), the governing boards are comprised of members from each school district. The level of member representation is specified in the By-laws of the institution, the governing body members are usually based on the representative student body of the sponsoring school district. Additionally, many school district representatives continue to maintain their position on the community college board, through two to three terms, or until the composition of the school district board changes significantly. (Act of 1949).

County supported two-year institutions (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland), operate under the same auspices as the school districts. The community college requests funds from the county which are included in the county budget. This budget is then used as the basis for the taxing authority of the county. This funding support also requires that members of the county be represented on the college governing board, usually through a county nominating committee, in certain states, they may be elected seats.

A community college that is fully-supported through state funds will operate like its public four-year counterpart, where members of the governing body are nominated to the position. Community college governing boards, like other public institutions, are also responsible to the guidelines or standards imposed by the state such as the department of education or educational commissions. Each institution still has some autonomy in its overall governance, which may distinguish it and lend its purpose to fulfill its ultimate responsibility to the institution's survival and ongoing continuance (Rudolph, 1990). Today's institutions see a need for increased diversity on their governing boards, within the constrains of their by-laws, to allow for faculty, staff and student voices (AGB, 2001)Models of Governance Community colleges, and other institutions, have relied on three types of models: bureaucratic, shared authority, and political. Community colleges as opposed to other educational institutions, because of their diversity and overall mission, have been able to creatively transition between the three models, each of which is detailed below (Richardson, 1975).

Understanding Governance via Organizational Models

The bureaucratic model is seen as a "formal structure having defined patterns of activity related to the functions spelled out in the law and in policy decisions" (Richardson, 1975, page viii). This can be compared to the corporate top-down approach, where everything is delegated downwards through the institution, and each level controls the actions of the lower level. This model is still used quite effectively, even in today's collective bargaining institution and with the increase in student social issues. One of the drawbacks of this model, however, is the dependence on the governing body to limit the representatives from faculty and student committees. Governing boards, may however, be able to 'soften' this model by using committee reports to include other representatives of the institution. This committee representation is used effectively by community colleges because of the need to 'keep in touch' with the community at-large which is a basis for its mission (AGB, 2001, Cain, 1999, Richardson, 1975, Richardson, Blocker, Bender, 1972, McCabe & Skidmore, 1983). These adaptations will however, move the model in the next direction.

The second model, Shared Authority, shows the impact of the joint participation throughout the organization. Richardson (1975) states that "participative governance can be very effective in managing change of a lasting nature because it offers ways of modifying fundamental attitudes and values through group processes" (page ix). This type of governance can enhance the governing body by strengthening the participant (student body, faculty, and administrative) acceptance of decision making processes (AGB, 2001, Bergquist, 1998, Cain, 1999, Richardson, 1975).

The political model was proposed by J. Victor Baldridge in 1971 during his study of New York University. This model represented the institution as a "shifting coalition of power blocs and vested interests" (Richardson, 1975, page ix). The governing body's power emanates not from the institutional boards but rather from the special interest groups operating within a social context. This model more clearly defines a major disadvantage of publicly funded institutions and more specifically, a community college. Since these institutions have governing boards comprised mostly of elected, 'nominated' or mandated members, the impact of a special interest group can become quite evident in the decision making process - some which could potentially undermine the institutional goals (Bergquist, 1998, Cain, 1999, McCabe and Skidmore, 1983).

Ultimately, the nature of governance at the community college level becomes a patchwork of the different models. Community colleges need to determine what works best given the economic and political system within which they must operate (AGB, 2001, Cain, 1999). External Influences on the Institutional Governance Although federal funding plays an important role in educational funding sources for both private and public institutions, the guidelines and standards are more pertinent to student financial aid and grant activity programs. State and local funding is regarded as the primary external influence in public institutions; whereas student tuition is the primary external factor for private institutions. The secondary external influence recognized by the governing boards is the regulatory authority under which they must govern their institutions. These regulations operate on either end of the spectrum, from highly detailed, prescriptive rules and requirements (New York and Florida) to a decentralized system with broad definitions and permissive regulations (Colorado and Massachusetts). The level of regulation determines the authority of the governing boards, and ultimately the type of governing model it may pursue (AGB, 2001, Cain, 1999, Richardson, 1975).

Additionally, external influences can be damaging to governance capabilities and board capacity to debate policy and make institutional decisions. These external influences interfere with policy making authority, as stated before it is more predominant in public institutions, but relevant in both two and four year institutions. Some of the common external pressures include, but are not limited to (AGB, 2001):

Governor appointed board members with a state directive;

Suggestive changes to board composition

Abolishment or restructuring of boards

Collusion among board members to favor economic, political or personal interest; and

Manipulation of the presidential search process.

Board Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the governing boards vary within the type of educational institution; private, public, two-year and four-year, yet one principle remains constant - the governing board is ultimately responsible for the institution, directly and indirectly. The success or failure of the institution will be recognized in their actions, policies and decision-making capabilities (AGB, 2001, Alfred & Carter, 1997, Burke, 2002, Cain, 1999).

Most reference material prior to the mid-1990 will state in one form or another that fiduciary accountability is the primary responsibility (AGB, 2001, Bergquist, 1998, Burke, 2002, Levin, 1998, McCabe, 1983, Richardson, 1975, Richardson, Blocker, Bender, 1972). The new century has created a revised term "institutional performance," which encompasses not only the fiduciary responsibilities but also the academic outcomes and indicators (AGB, 2001, Burke, 2002, Cain 1999).

Collectively, the governing board at each institution may or may not see their responsibilities as including, but not limited to (Ingram, 1997):

Clarify its mission and purpose;

Appoint, support, and monitor the chief executives performance;

Access board performance, through self-study;

Participate in strategic planning;

Review educational and public service programs;

Ensure adequate resources;

Ensure good management;

Preserve institutional independence, within the confines of the system;

Relate campus to community and community to campus; and

Serve as a court of appeal.

By combining the three models of governance, 1) bureaucratic, 2) shared authority, and 3) political, the boards can actively participate in the institutional decision-making while maintaining a leadership role and upholding their responsibilities to the institution and the community. The governing body must depend on the leadership of the institution to uphold the standards represented by the governing boards (AGB, 2001, Burke, 2002, Cain, 1999, Ingram, 1997).

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