Shared University Governance: Faculty Perceptions on Involvement and Leadership

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Abstract

This article examines motivations for faculty involvement in shared governance. Faculty members at a mid-sized, Midwestern university were surveyed to assess reasons for serving and leading in the shared governance process. Five predominant themes were identified as affecting faculty participation in university governance. The five predominant themes were: (a) within group generic tension, (b) committee member role clarification, (c) the significance of leadership, (d) challenges of the independent professional, and (e) meaningful change and organizational success.

Keywords: shared university governance, faculty motivation, committee roles, organizational success, higher education leadership, tenured and non-tenured faculty, university service

The term *governance* broadly refers to formal policies and procedures within institutions for making policy decisions. *Faculty governance* includes all the mechanisms delegated to faculty for rendering recommendations and/or providing direct decision-making through university-, college-, and department-level committee structures. Faculty governance bodies, typically referred to as academic or faculty 'senates' or 'councils,' generally function on a model of representative democracy, although their structures and practices vary greatly (Miller, Smith, & Nadler, 2016). Faculty governance also includes other representative bodies overseeing university practice, particularly around curriculum, students, and learning (Kezar & Cecile, 2014).

There are complex systems and processes that fuel the operation of US higher education institutions. Of these, there has been perhaps most focused attention on the contributions that faculty make through involvement in university governance (Miller, Smith, & Nadler, 2016). Research on contemporary issues in faculty governance has been increasingly focused upon determining the impact of shared authority and examining whether such collaboration makes for better decisions or a more effective university campus (Brown, 2001; Waugh, 2003; Cordes, Dunbar, & Gingerich, 2013). Other than the structure of academic shared governance bodies and some illustrations of best practices, there is very little research or information available on faculty engagement in university governance; however, there are components that are consistent across academic governing systems.

As part of university governance, there is a shared goal of ensuring that all parties affected by the decisions, plans, and policies are well represented. Committees and senates are comprised of faculty, staff, and students collectively participating in decision- making, planning, and administration accountability. Faculty members are elected by colleagues in their department, college, or by all members of the university's faculty. University governing boards consist of faculty, staff, and student members in addition to members appointed by the governor of the state (Emerine, 2015).

Shared governance is integral to the academy's culture, as it serves as both a means to an end and an end to be maintained and valued. Shared governance is a collaborative process as well as an outcome of collegiality (Crellin, 2010). Recent research identifies faculty governance as playing an important role in creating changes at the college and university levels. The purpose of this article is to identify the specific motivations for faculty participation in shared governance at a mid-sized university. For the purposes of this article, the terms *tenure track faculty* and *junior faculty* will be used interchangeably.

CHALLENGES OF SHARED GOVERNANCE

As a governance model, shared governance has many challenging characteristics. One challenging characteristic involves the governance model's goals, as its goals may be unclear, may compete with other goals, or may appear inconsistent. Faculty from different departments may have dissimilar notions of anticipated outcomes of the process based on goals tied to their unit's priorities. Across the university, it can be challenging to provide consistent expectations of what shared governance can deliver. In practice, participation in the process is fluid: faculty generally flow in and out of decision-making opportunities as their schedules allow, and while balancing various committee-related and departmental responsibilities, they may not attend meetings regularly which inhibits the progress of the committee's work (Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

Attendance at Faculty Senate meetings can be sporadic. Some faculty give detailed reports in departmental meetings while others do not, or there may be a timing issue where voting takes place quickly, not allowing faculty members to solicit input from colleagues. Encouraging faculty members that serve on these committees/subcommittees to share information and providing them the time to do so is essential. For these shared governance structures to work optimally, communication must be open, transparent, and frequent.

In many postsecondary institutions these governance opportunities are limited to faculty seeking tenure (i.e., junior faculty), and exclude faculty not seeking tenure (i.e., tenured faculty and/or non-tenure track faculty). Though non-tenure track faculty have historically been excluded from governance, this situation is changing. Yet these exclusionary practices still prove challenging for many faculty to overcome, particularly for those serving in part-time teaching positions. Baldwin and Chronister (2001) reported that full-time, non-tenure track faculty have become more actively involved in governance. In the institutions they studied approximately 50% allowed non-tenure track faculty members to participate in faculty senate and other forms of formal governance, and 75% were allowed to participate in departmental affairs (Kezar & Sam, 2014).

For tenure and promotion, ratings are often based more heavily on research and teaching effectiveness, and minimally on service. Due to the emphasis placed on teaching and research, many untenured faculty members are encouraged to wait until after earning tenure before getting too involved in governance. This recommendation is offered because of the associated time commitment that could be expended more efficaciously on areas garnering more impact in their promotion and tenure pursuits. In addition, there could be a perceived risk for junior faculty members serving on faculty governance structures, as those with whom they are serving may also be the tenured decision makers who can impact

the junior faculty members' reappointment, promotion, and tenure. If junior faculty take an opposite position, vote against, or make statements that are contrary to those tenured decision makers, it may have long-term effects on their career. Junior faculty may also lack the experience (i.e., understanding Robert's Rules of Order) or confidence to speak honestly (Emerine, 2015).

Another challenge of the shared governance model is a belief that serving on various committees is an ineffective use of professional time. Serving on committees, boards, and senates is time consuming, and junior faculty may find it difficult to balance their teaching, scholarship, and active service participation time schedules (Emerine, 2015). The amount of time spent on these internal governance boards in meetings and reviewing documents is in most cases very time intensive. Faculty members spend hours reviewing documents, generating new or modifying policies/procedures/initiatives, and forwarding recommendations to administration. But, depending on budgetary constraints, legal issues, or simply that administration and faculty goals do not coincide, this time allocation may be perceived as wasteful by participating faculty.

As an example, faculty senate may make recommendations to an administration and the administrators receiving the input may delay adoption of the recommendations or they may not implement the recommendations at all. Faculty members spend hours reviewing documents, generating new or modifying policies/procedures/ initiatives and forwarding recommendations to the administration, but there is no assurance that the expended effort will be rewarded in action, recognition or compensation (Emerine, 2015). The administration's inaction may be due, however, to a number of reasons that include budgetary constraints, legal issues, or simply that administration and faculty priorities do not align. This misalignment of understandings or of institutional priorities may result in faculty members feeling that they have a say in decisions made at the departmental level, have some voice at the college level, but that their contributions are not as understood or valued at higher levels of university administration.

MOTIVATION TOWARD PARTICIPATION IN SHARED GOVERNANCE

Professionalization theory suggests that the work of professionals is unique as compared to other employment fields, thus they operate in accordance with different principles and standards from many other vocations (Sullivan, 2004). Certain elements epitomize or characterize professionals. These conditions are: extensive training conducted

by peers in the profession; deep socialization processes to work; specialized knowledge; control, flexibility and autonomy of work; decision-making and involvement in setting work conditions; commitment to retraining and maintaining current field knowledge; personal accountability and responsibility; perception of their work as a vocation and more than a job; an addition of hours and working until the job is done (Friedson, 2001). As applied to academia, decision-making structures in higher education contribute in an important way to the leadership development of faculty members. This leadership development process includes an infrastructure of mentorship; examples and modeling; chair, peer, and mentor encouragement and acknowledgement; and the provision of clear outcome expectations that are measured with regularity and evaluated fairly

METHODOLOGY

The goal of the research study was to assess how faculty at a medium-sized, Midwestern university articulate their role in faculty governance. A survey was conducted within a single Education and Human Services College. The purpose of the survey was a) to evaluate the reasons for serving and leading in faculty governance, and b) to identify areas of potential improvement in faculty motivation, role identification, and participation in faculty governance. The following questions were researched: a) why do faculty join college committees; b) why do faculty join university committees; c) when should a faculty member seek a leadership position within the committee structure; and d) how might faculty encourage more active involvement in the governance process?

The researchers chose a mixed methods approach to this investigation. Convenience sampling was used to select participants. A self-report survey was administered via Qualtrics Software and data were securely stored in the Qualtrics database. The survey included quantitative items with space for free-text qualitative responses. Respondents were College of Education and Human Services committee members who served from 2012 to the present. Respondents were first asked demographic information including department and tenure status.

Table 1. *Subject Demographics*

Identified tenure status	n	%	M	sd
Tenured and Tenure Eligible Track (TET)	28	72	1.28	.46
Non-Tenure Eligible (NTE)	11	28		
Total	39	100		

Data were analyzed in two parts: 1) percentages of responses in each question category collected from the surveys and 2) a compilation and thematic categorization of the qualitative responses. The researchers triangulated qualitative data from multiple sources in order to yield accuracy of thematic development (Yin, 2014).

RESULTS
General Responses

A total of 39 faculty responded to the governance survey (n=70), a return rate of 56 percent. All respondents did not complete all items. The majority of respondents were tenured or tenure-eligible faculty (72 percent), while the remainder of respondents (28 percent) were non-tenure-eligible faculty. The overwhelming majority (95 percent) currently serve or have served on a *college-level committee*. The majority of respondents (83 percent) did not characterize their service on *college-level committees* as serving their research interests. The majority (69 percent) of respondents did state that service on *college-level committees* highlighted their skill sets. An overwhelming majority (97 percent) of faculty stated that *college committee* service assures a departmental voice in college governance. The majority (78 percent) also reported that such service fulfills a bylaw requirement.

Seventy-four percent of respondents stated that they are or have served on a university-level committee. The majority of respondents (71 percent) reported that university-level committee service does not address their research interests. Sixty-one percent of reporting faculty stated that university-level committee service highlights their skill sets. An overwhelming majority of respondents (93 percent) stated that university-level committee service assures college representation in university governance. A majority of respondents (68 percent) reported university-level service as fulfilling a departmental bylaw requirement. Sixty-eight percent of respondents stated that leadership on a university-level committee should be undertaken only after university-level committee service, with 39 percent stating that at least two years or more of such service should be required. Seventy-five percent of faculty surveyed believed that prior college-level committee service should be required for faculty seeking a college-level committee leadership role. Forty-two percent of respondents believe that at least two years of service on a college-level committee should be required before leadership is assessed.

Table 2. *Survey Results*
COLLEGE-LEVEL COMMITTEE
Respondents currently serving or have served in the past on a college-level committee.

	n	%	M	sd
Yes	37	95	1.05	.22
No	2	5		
Total	39	100		

Respondents' college-level committee service addresses a research interest.

	n	%	M	sd
Yes	6	17	1.83	.38
No	30	83		
Total	36	100		

Respondents' college-level committee service highlights a skill set.

	n	%	M	sd
Yes	25	69	1.31	.47
No	11	31		
Total	36	100		

Respondents' college-level committee service assures departmental representation.

	n	%	M	sd
Yes	35	97	1.03	.17
No	1	3		
Total	36	100		

Respondents' college-level committee service fulfills a departmental bylaw requirement

	n	%	M	sd
Yes	28	78	1.22	.42
No	8	22		
Total	36	100		

A college college-level committee member should serve in a leadership position.

	n	%	M	sd
After serving at least one year on the committee	12	33	1.92	.77
After serving at least 2+ years on the committee	15	42		
Other reasons	9	25		
Total	36	100		

Table 3. *Survey Results*
UNIVERSITY-LEVEL COMMITTEE
Respondents currently serving or have served in the past on a university-level committee.

	n	%	M	sd
Yes	28	74	1.26	.45
No	10	26		
Total	28	100		

Respondents' university-level committee service addresses a research interest

	n	%	M	sd
Yes	8	29	1.71	.46
No	20	71		
Total	28	100		

Respondents' university-level committee service highlights a skill set.

	n	%	M	sd
Yes	17	61	1.39	.50
No	11	39		
Total	28	100		

Respondents' university-level committee service assures college representation.

	n	%	M	sd
Yes	26	93	1.07	.26
No	2	7		
Total	28	100		

Respondents' university-level committee service fulfills a departmental bylaw requirement.

	n	%	M	sd
Yes	19	68	1.32	.48
No	9	32		
Total	28	100		

A university-level committee member should serve in a leadership position

	n	%	M	sd
After serving at least one year on the committee	8	29	2.04	.79
After serving at least 2+ years on the committee	11	39		
Other reasons	9	32		
Total	28	100		

QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

Five predominant themes emerged from the data. Themes were described as: Within Group Generic Tension, Committee Member Role Clarification, The Significance of Leadership, Challenges of the Independent Professional, and Meaningful Change and Organizational Success.

Theme 1: Within Group Generic Tension

Some participants expressed concern over the inequity of contributions of committee members and the lack of acknowledgment and rewards of contributed service. In the words of one participant,

> "It [committee service] is not rewarded, nor are faculty held accountable for the service they perform."

Others suggest that the ideals of participating governance do not match reality and that there are no rewards, nor accountability. One participant stated,

> "It is relevant to not only work within one's college but contribute at the university level for the greater good of the organization. The voices of all should be equally heard at the table and university level service ensures even representation for all colleges in university planning and decision-making."

Theme 2: The Significance of Leadership

A majority of respondents expressed concern over the impact of unskilled leaders. They suggested that leaders should have appropriate experience before assuming positions of responsibility. These sentiments were expressed in the following ways:

"The chair-elect should be very familiar with the work responsibilities/tasks of the committee, as well as the politics/dynamics of the committee. Leadership comes with time and experience. Strong leaders know who they are and how to lead by example. They have knowledge and skills to handle problematic issues that may arise. That usually only comes with time and experience."

"I feel that many times the Chair of committees, particularly at the college and university levels, does most/all of the work. I have been in various circumstances in which other members will not do any work that they stated they would complete. Additionally, many times the same faculty members will not show up to committee meetings, yet they put their participation on their CV's"

"It's important to let individuals know it's their responsibility. If someone doesn't serve or help out, it's more of a burden on their colleagues who may be serving on multiple committees."

"If one is a novice faculty member, I don't think it's right to put them in major leadership positions until they have some experience."

"Someone has to [serve on a college committee]. Connection to research is tangential at best and [there are] limited personal benefits outside of being a good team player."

"I served in the past because no one else wanted to do it."

"Stop putting up barriers to serve (unless there is a university reason to do so such as with P&T committee predetermined criteria). The department should decide who they want to serve for their rep (it is their rep) and the college decides in elected positions."

"It is relevant to not only work within one's college but contribute at the university level for the greater good of the organization. The voices of all should be equally heard at the table and university level service ensures even representation for all colleges in university planning and decision-making."

"Truly consider people's ideas. Focus less on compliance and more on people and outcomes for people."

"Discuss the benefits of having your voice heard in decisions. Discuss the benefits of more fully understanding decisions from multiple viewpoints. Discuss the benefits of knowing colleagues from other colleges."

Theme 3: Committee Member Role Clarification

Some participants questioned the value of committee service and the meaningfulness of the intense work. As one participant suggested,

"Clarifying the needs of each committee for membership, do a better job matching individuals' interests and skills to what type of members and leaders are needed on committees, and formal mentoring for service."

Theme 4: The Challenge of the Independent Professional

A number of participants expressed interest in receiving better explanations of the roles and functions of committees. Some participants felt that matching talent with goals and needs of the committee should be part of the committee service process. One participant stated,

"Committees should serve a purpose and actually produce meaningful work. I'm not sure how to get people to want to serve - that is up to the individual in many ways, but it is necessary if we want to ensure faculty governance."

Theme 5: Meaningful Change and Organizational Success

Many participants expressed appreciation for the holistic view they acquire through university service and see these expanded views as strengthening the university operations. Participants responded in the following ways,

"University level committee [work] is important for multiple reasons. First of all one gets very involved in processes that go on 'under the radar' so to speak ... and better understands how to contribute to change or improvements in the processes. Second, working across the colleges provides a better perspective of how different the colleges operate thus allowing one to contribute to improvement within one's own college."

"I have an interest in the responsibilities of the committee. I would like to be able to voice my opinion and/or make a positive contribution about policies and procedures generally handled in this committee."

"I wanted to learn more about how the college works. Each committee has helped me develop a broader sense of what it takes to run the college. A side benefit was that I developed better understandings of the committee work and I became more aware of other faculty members' concerns and interests."

"Explain to new faculty and existing faculty, the inner workings of the committees. Help encourage new faculty to get involved; there should be a better process of rotation on and off committees."

DISCUSSION
Theme 1: Within Group Generic Tension

Researchers have identified a generic tension between groups of internal cohesion—how much group members feel bound together—and external pressure (Pittinsky, 2010). Said differently, the stronger that a group feels its own unique collective identity, the more pronounced difference it sees in everyone else, making it easier to wind up in competition or conflict with other groups. This may account for the disparate results in each category.

Theme 2: The Significance of Leadership

Randall (2012) suggests that an adaptive leadership model, which focuses on the leadership process rather than on individual leaders, can be implemented over the long run and can create enduring change. The importance of developing consultative processes is also confirmed by studies illustrating that governance processes have been brought to a halt when feedback is not followed or when advisory capacity is unclear (Schuster, Smith, Corak, & Yamada, 1994).

Faculty members want leadership that emerges from their ranks, yet they don't encourage (and often actively discourage) peers and charges to develop the skills, knowledge, and desire to lead. If there are no people at this intersection, institutional boards in particular will seek leadership solutions elsewhere (Barden & Curry, 2013).

Pittinsky (2010) suggests that intergroup leadership requires leaders to mitigate internal tension by simultaneously decreasing the bad feelings between groups while creating positive feelings—two separate tasks. This concept, which he has termed "allophilia," focuses on accentuating the factors that groups have in common with one another. Applying this concept to the tensions found in shared governance, it is not enough to bring everyone together to the same table; rather, leaders should work to honor this difference without trying to eliminate diversity of thought (Crellin, 2010).

Theme 3: Committee Member Role Clarification

Several conditions have been identified as critical to effectiveness, including clarification of roles, lateral coordination, redundancy of function, reward structures, consultation and joint formulation, trust and accountability, norms and values, composition of the governance groups, and leadership. In addition, clarifying roles is related to both effectiveness and efficiency (Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

Theme 4: The Challenge of the Independent Professional

Professionals organize and, to a large measure, manage themselves. Professional groups seek autonomy to create their working conditions because they believe that they can best establish the working conditions that will further their complex jobs and fulfill their commitment to the public good (Sullivan, 2004). Shared governance (or input into the decisions of the campus) and faculty-created work conditions are a hallmark of professional status in the academy (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007). Our findings serve to underscore the relevance of this phenomena and its impact on full participation in shared governance.

Theme 5: Meaningful Change and Organizational Success

All parties at the university are increasingly concerned with impact, feelings, and representation both in a real sense but also on levels of trust, meaningful participation, and respect for their expertise (Crellin, 2010). A central method to improving the model of shared governance may be found in the notion that promoting understanding and change in higher education only takes place if faculty are committed to participating in the change initiative. In higher education, the buy-in process of change is long and arduous, and it

takes time for faculty to be persuaded to look at new models. Change requires a re-examination of existing assumptions of how and why members of the faculty participate in leadership and service (Randall, 2012).

Faculty are in the best position to discuss issues surrounding curriculum, program assessment, standards, policies, academic freedom, and the intellectual property as they design. They assess, evaluate, and use these processes and interface with other academic areas daily so are in the best position to make determinations of practice (Emerine, 2015). There is no better way to learn about the positions, interests, history, and written and unwritten norms of an institution than through playing a role in governance. Not only does this type of service provide valuable information to the participating faculty, but it also enables faculty to deepen their investment in the success of the university's mission. While serving on committees, boards, and senates is time consuming; most, if not all faculty would agree that faculty committee service is an important role.

Limitations of Research

The participants were selected as a convenience sample of faculty in one college at a mid-sized university in the Midwest. While the mixed-methodology ascertained useful results for a pilot study, the external validity of the results is limited. Additionally, a somewhat modest response rate demonstrates a need for varied sampling measures and broader methodology.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study suggest that faculty value the voice they now have in university governance. They see involvement in the multi-tiered university committee structure as necessary to ensure their full representation in university decision-making. The themes that emerged from qualitative and quantitative data underscore both the need for refinement of standard practice and the complexities of this challenge. Faculty function independently and have compelling loyalties to their students, their research and their career field. Yet they have a considerable, vested interest in contributing to the success of the university that they serve.

Results of this study also suggest that faculty value experience in service and perceive the assumption of leadership to be the purview of those with past committee experience. Results further suggest that it may be advisable to more fully orient new faculty to the process of university governance and their roles within these governance structures. Developing an appreciation for the importance of involvement in university governance and

an understanding of the roles faculty play in decision-making will strengthen faculty contributions to the university scholarly community and impact both its operations and its success.

Future recommendations include broader sampling measures, varied populations (i.e., private versus public institutions; small versus large institutions; similar study conducted across colleges in same university; increase national scope of sampling), and the use of advance statistical measures to predict outcomes for use by administrative bodies within academic institutions.

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