

APPENDIX 5

Academic Governance in the State University of New York: Precepts for Campus Presidents and Faculty

D. Bruce Johnstone
Chancellor
1991

Presidents, provosts, academic vice-presidents, deans, and other academic officers are charged by the Trustees and the Chancellor, either directly or by delegation, with ultimate authority and responsibility for the academic well-being of their campuses. However, SUNY Trustee policy and the traditions of American academic governance call for a sharing of this responsibility with the faculty. The faculty role, either collectively or departmentally, should be particularly substantial in, e.g.:

- * The establishment of general and departmental academic requirements and of standards for admission and for the awarding of degrees;
- * The establishment of general criteria for appointment to, and promotion within, the instructional faculty;
- * The evaluation and recommendation of individuals for initial appointment, renewal of term, promotion, and continuing appointment;
- * The establishment and deactivation of new degrees, specialties, or scholarly orientations; and
- * The articulation of the overall mission of the campuses and any substantive changes pertaining thereto.

Faculty involvement in governance may, and desirably should, occur in a variety of forms and at a variety of organizational levels. The principal formal mode in SUNY is an elected faculty senate (or similar body, often including professional staff and possibly students, but always dominated by the teaching faculty) consistent with Article X of the Policies of the Board of Trustees. Departmental and school (as in "school" of law or medicine) governance, faculty membership on college- or university-wide ad hoc committees or task forces, or faculty serving in part-time advisory or quasi-administrative capacities all constitute important forms of faculty participation in the formulation of policy. The inclusion of administratively appointed faculty on various policy-advisory or policy-making bodies is legitimate and useful, but should not be thought of as substituting for the governance role that can be played by faculty elected or designated by themselves.

Academic governance can be positive or less-than-positive, strong or weak. But "strong" or "positive," while implying substantial influence to the faculty, does not imply a commensurately weak administration or a lessened need for presidential leadership. Strong academic governance, rather, requires strong and effective leadership from both faculty and administration. Strong academic governance is a mark of strong -- meaning effective and well-regarded -- colleges and universities. Strong academic governance is marked by:

- * Extensive deliberation on critical issues and policy formation, maximizing the wisdom and the perspectives that lie behind the critical decisions that must be made on all of our campuses;
- * A wider ownership of decisions and programs, with faculty and staff more likely both to generate and to better accept new ways of doing the work of our colleges and universities.
- * More effective communication and a greater level of trust and cooperation, not only between faculty and administration, but among schools, departments, offices, and other divisions of the institutions; and
- * Better morale...and thus more effective teaching, research, and service.

The following precepts for campus presidents and for faculty are suggestions of ways to strengthen academic governments toward the goal of more effective campuses. The seven precepts for faculty participation were first shared with campus governance heads and the University Faculty Senate Executive Committee at a Faculty Governance Seminar held in Saratoga Springs in September 1991. Although I am grateful to those whose advice to me has, I believe, strengthened the advice that I would pass on to my colleague presidents and faculty, the "precepts" at this time remain my own and do not purport to carry the authority of the SUNY trustees, of University policy, or the formal concurrence of either my faculty or presidential deliberative and advisory bodies.

Seven Precepts for Campus Presidents

1. Respect your elected faculty senate and seek to involve and strengthen it. View it positively, as a partner and indispensable helper, rather than as a natural adversary or as a body whose enhanced strength or effectiveness need to diminish yours.
2. Be comfortable with the principle and essence of collegial governance; a faculty role that is advisory and therefore limited, yet that can be real and beneficial and powerful. Do not let honest differences of viewpoint between you and your faculty governance body become tests of will or strength or credibility, either of you or your faculty governing

body. Be willing to give and to "lose" at times; be willing, at other times, to hear the faculty and, in the end, to disagree and exercise your necessary authority. Be assured that faculty governance bodies understand that overwhelmingly advisory role and know that presidential decisions from time to time will be made that will not please them. But recognize the faculty's legitimate and strongly felt sense of entitlement to be included in the deliberations that affect the mission and academic character of the campus.

3. Be generous and slow to anger. Know that men and women of lively intelligence will differ, perhaps profoundly, even in adherence to similar goals and standards. Do not allow personal agendas onto the governance table and keep the process of governing on the highest road.
4. While democratic principles are laudable, and while students, professional staff, and others can contribute much to the formulation of policies and have voices that need to be listened to, the historic tradition of University governance accords a special role to the teaching faculty.
5. Have high expectations of your faculty governing bodies and convey this to them. Recognize that faculty governance, for a variety of reasons, may not be strong at a particular campus at a particular time, and that an uninspiring quality of faculty leadership or a poor quality of reports and official faculty actions may reflect a widespread lack of faculty interest in the concept of shared governance or in their own governance body -- which may, in turn, reflect the faculty's perception of your or your administrative colleagues' lack of interest in, or esteem for, their advice and counsel. Do not gratuitously ignore shoddy or mean-spirited actions if you should observe them in your faculty senate, but demand better -- and know that the best way to strengthen weak faculty governance may be to take it more seriously.
6. Faculty governance and collective bargaining can co-exist and flourish, even with overlapping membership, but the differences must be carefully respected. The union must be the sole representative of the faculty in matters that properly belong on the bargaining table. By the same token, the faculty, through its governance bodies, both can, and has an academic responsibility to, engage in deliberations and the provision of advice on a wide range of policy matters, both academic and financial.
7. Insist on a respect for the principles of collegial governance from all of your management team.

Seven Precepts for Faculty

1. Begin with a sense of purpose that is positive, not negative; that strives to make things happen, rather than to prevent them; that makes the institution a better and stronger place, rather than merely controls or watches over the administration.
2. Be concerned for the institution as a whole, in its full breadth and depth, rather than for a single part, particularly a single part that you as a faculty representative may most narrowly represent. Be concerned for the institution in the long run, not just for the moment.
3. Be comfortable with the principle and the essence of collegial governance; a faculty role is advisory and therefore limited, yet it can be real and beneficial and powerful. Remember that it is the exchange of views and the lively interaction that conveys the most information and therefore which influences most greatly, not simply a final tally of votes on a particular resolution. Be confident of your influence and tolerate some ambiguity in the matter of final authority.
4. Be generous and slow to anger. Know that men and women of lively intelligence will differ, perhaps profoundly, even in adherence to similar goals and standards. Do not allow personal agendas onto the governance table and keep the process of governing on the highest road.
5. Be courageous. Be willing to take difficult stands and to make tough discriminations.
6. Work hard at the tasks of governance. These are part of your job. Take pride in the product of your work, whether in the form of written or oral augmentation. Demand the same or higher standards of integrity and of academic quality in governance that you would demand of colleagues in articles you might review for a juried publication, or the academic work of your students for which you are expected to give academic credit.
7. Keep governance in perspective. Do not let it crowd out your teaching or your scholarship. Know when to let go. Be able to turn over the reins of governance when the time has come, not just to friends or to those necessarily like-minded, but to others, to new blood.