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Enhancing Engagement in Faculty Governance: 
Issues, Ideas, and Illusions in Engineering and Technology

Abstract

While faculty members and administrators generally agree that governance is an important part of institutional life, longevity, and vitality, many individuals feel less-than engaged in the actual practice of faculty governance. The faculty work portfolio in most engineering and technology contexts includes a three-pronged emphasis on teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and service and civic engagement. Faculty tend to do what is rewarded, thus creating, in practice, considerable tensions between the scope of faculty work expectations and outcomes. Pressures to “publish or perish,” to assess, document, and improve the outcomes of student learning, and to work collaboratively with industry and institutional counterparts, among other things, may all conspire to place faculty governance activities on the back burner, thus potentially undermining the intent and effectiveness of this unique, time honored tradition in the academy.

This paper defines faculty governance, describes its importance, traces its evolution in engineering and technology, explains its historic, current, and emerging purpose, and discusses its relationship to the broader scope of faculty work and institutional effectiveness, all against the backdrop of heightened expectations for productivity, stewardship, and accountability. Findings from studies on faculty governance, engagement, and perceptions of faculty work will be presented, along with the work-in-progress report from a case study of one institution’s approach to governance in the context of realignment within engineering and technology. Successful strategies, lessons learned, and pitfalls-to-avoid in engaging faculty more deeply and meaningfully in faculty governance will be shared, along with implications and recommendations for faculty and administrators in engineering and technology.

Evolution of Faculty Governance: Historic, Current, and Emerging Purpose

America has a tradition of shared governance in higher education. Even though philosophically most of us agree that in higher education faculty participation in governance is important, how we define this participation may vary drastically. Faculty participation in governance is fundamental to the democratic process so valued in this country. This participation forces the administration to be accountable to the faculty and vice versa. It empowers faculty to be involved in decision-making that affects their professions and, thus, their lives.

James T. Richardson, J.D., Ph.D., president of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), a national organization whose purpose is to advance academic freedom and shared governance, summarizes our thoughts well:

“I also stress the importance of faculty involvement in governance of higher education institutions. Certainly AAUP supports firm and efficient leadership of higher education institutions, but only if that efficiency promotes as a major goal development and dissemination of knowledge essential to a democratic society.
We believe in educating the citizenry to the highest level possible, a goal requiring that those with the disciplinary knowledge that is being disseminated should be involved in determining how that knowledge should be shared!

We need faculty members involved in the governing of institutions of higher learning. We need strong faculty senates and other faculty organizations, whose opinions are attended to by those in authority. And we need meaningful faculty representation on all bodies making decisions about higher education.¹

Faculty governance is a hallmark of American higher education. This unique structure and tradition – in which faculty members deliberate, debate, control, advise, and advance their own and their institution’s priorities – requires ongoing commitment by both faculty and administrators. Historically, faculty “owned” the curriculum and “managed” the institution. As colleges and universities have grown and become more complex, and as outside pressures for accountability, performance, and stewardship of resources have become a reality, faculty yielded some of the strategic and daily operation of campus matters to professional administrators. Administrators, who may ultimately serve an elected or appointed board, typically must also curry favor with, and be responsive to, the needs of faculty, who, in essence, represent the intellectual capital of the institution².

Decision-making on the part of faculty typically takes place in venues known as faculty senates. Four models of faculty senate tend to exist: functional, influential, ceremonial, and subverted³. **Functional** senates primarily operate to represent and protect the interest of faculty in university decision making. **Influential** senates serve as a legitimate governing authority within the institution, and they maintain a traditional structure that is electoral and representative of the faculty. Faculty senates that are **ceremonial** are relatively inactive and inoperable, with low-level organization; they seldom meet regularly, and faculty express little interest in governance. Finally, the **subverted** senate’s role in governance is undermined by alternative venues of faculty participation, usually by informal decision-making processes that occur in place of, or in addition to, the senate’s formal operations. Perhaps because of this latter approach, many faculty senates are often viewed as dysfunctional, underperforming, or impeding the work, health, and life of the institution. Alternatively, senates that are influential almost always have a trusting, collaborative relationship among senate colleagues and with administrators³.

To enhance those influential relationships among colleagues and with administrators, faculty senates should adopt the following guidelines to assist in their functioning: (1) the various institutional constituencies should have an opportunity to provide reasonable input into major college decisions; (2) there should be a predisposition toward mutual respect and trust among all parties, even when they seriously disagree; (3) the community should support successful compromise as the highest end and be willing to negotiate differences; (4) discussions should reflect a health respect for reasoned argument and for the importance of maintaining a questioning mind; and (5) generally accepted and codified rules for settling disagreements among constituencies should exist⁴.
In spite of well-intentioned approaches to enhance the collegiality of the faculty senates, faculty participation in campus governance is declining nationwide. As higher education shifts toward market models of organization, boards and administrators increasingly apply bureaucratic modes of decision making to areas that used to be the domain of faculty members. All too often, administrators seem to sidestep faculty senates in favor of "more efficient" and "accountable" decision making that does not reflect faculty opinion or expertise. Thus, there exists a need to more fully relate and enhance governance to faculty work and institutional effectiveness.

**Relationship of Governance to Faculty Work and Institutional Effectiveness**

While most faculty espouse a philosophical commitment to the concept of shared governance, most would prefer to avoid “sinking in commitments that would distract from teaching and research” (p. 30). Such an attitude suggest that faculty members perceive service work – including participation in faculty senate as part of university citizenship – as less important, less valued, and less desirous as compared to the teaching and research aspects of the faculty work portfolio.

Evidence from a study of faculty governance backs up the conflicting views and realities faculty members have toward governance. At one institution, a recent survey found that most professors believe that faculty engagement in institutional governance is important: more than 90 percent of faculty respondents said they view participation in shared governance as a worthwhile faculty responsibility. In terms of their satisfaction with the current level of faculty involvement in governance, the results were mixed.

In this same study, faculty members reported being satisfied with their role in decision making at the departmental and school levels, agreeing that faculty committees represent their interests well and accomplish objectives such as developing educational policy; reviewing curricula; setting standards and procedures for evaluation of teaching and scholarly production and for retention, promotion, and tenure; and granting of tenure and promotion of faculty. Respondents were also positive about the effectiveness of faculty committees in governing themselves and communicating with university constituents. Most agreed that faculty have a say in setting the agendas, choosing representatives and leadership, and establishing procedures for the committees that oversee areas in which the faculty should have primacy. In essence, everyone has to be engaged in the work of the institution, its “cultural maintenance” (p. 31).

**One Institution's Approach to Faculty Governance in Engineering and Technology**

*Importance of Faculty Governance*

The importance of faculty governance is supported by our dean and by our constitution and bylaws. The dean is an avid supporter of shared governance. He/she invites participation at all levels of the school and actively participates in the Faculty Senate and the Staff Advisory organization. Our Constitution and Bylaws of the Faculty articulates the importance of faculty in the governance of the school:
In accordance with the laws of the State of Indiana, and subject to the authority of the Boards of Trustees of Indiana University duly delegated to the Faculty, this constitution confirms and establishes in the Faculty the general power and responsibility to adopt policies and regulations, and to determine procedures for their implementation in order to achieve the educational objectives of the School and the general welfare of those involved in its educational objectives. Nothing in this constitution shall be interpreted as abrogating the agreement for the management of IUPUI executed by the Board, unless or until such time as that agreement is modified or terminated (*Constitution and Bylaws of the Faculty*, last approved in December 2005).

**Background on Faculty Senate**

Faculty Senate for the Purdue School of Engineering and Technology at IUPUI is comprised of faculty (senators) from each department or program. Each department or program has representation and is allowed a certain number of senators, based on the size of the department/program.

Faculty Senate meets eight times per Academic Year (September – December and February – May). A faculty member is the President of Faculty Senate for one year, and another faculty serves as the Vice President of Faculty Senate and will be the Senate President the next year. A staff member is present to take the minutes of the meeting. The meetings last on average 1 ½ hours. There is also a Faculty Senate Agenda committee that meets 1-2 weeks prior to the meeting to create the agenda. Committee chairs attend the agenda meeting to discuss items and advise if they will have a report during the Faculty Senate meeting. The Faculty Senate Vice President presides over the agenda meetings. Committee chairs can email their report to the Vice President if they are unable to attend the meeting. The agenda for the Faculty Senate meetings are sent to all faculty through email one week prior to the meeting. Reports are also added to the commonly-accessible Faculty Senate folder on the computer where faculty can look over past and present Faculty Senate items.

The Dean and the Associate Dean of the School give an Administrative Report that pertains to school, faculty, staff, and student issues. Other school committees, Budgetary Affairs, Computing Resources, Constitution and Bylaws, Graduate Education, Grievance Board, Faculty Affairs, Nominations, Resource Policy, Student Affairs, and Undergraduate Education also have committee chairs who give monthly reports to Faculty Senate. Each committee has representation from each department/program. The various committees meet monthly and discuss items, and each committee member reports back to their department/program faculty what the committee is discussing or making decisions on. There are also outside school committees that have representation at Faculty Senate, and these include Campus-level Faculty Council, Campus-level Graduate Affairs, and some other, related committees.

Issues discussed at Faculty Senate include the Dean’s report which gives academic, faculty and school event news. The Associate Dean generally reports on enrollment, admission, or graduation type issues. There are many other issues presented and discussed during the Faculty Senate meetings from the other committees. The Budgetary Affairs Committee discusses budget
issues of the school and campus. The Computing Resources Committee discusses computer issues for the school, including staff and faculty computers, and technical staff bring their issues to this committee. The Constitution and Bylaws Committee change and update the Constitution and Bylaws as necessary, and advise Faculty Senate members on voting procedures, etc. The Graduate and Undergraduate Education Committees discuss new and revised courses, and new degrees the school wishes to offer. The Grievance Board will very seldom have a report, since they discuss grievances among faculty. Faculty Affairs discuss various faculty issues as necessary. The Nominations Committee mainly reports when nominations for Faculty Senate and the committees of the school take place, which is every two years. The Resource Policy Committee generally does not have a report, since their main function is distributing a teaching award annually. The Student Affairs Committee will report on student issues that Student Council may be discussing, to keep Faculty Senate informed and aware of any implications. Campus-level Faculty Council is a campus-wide committee, and the school representative will report to Faculty Senate what was discussed during the monthly campus-wide meeting. There may also be new and old business that may not fall into any particular committee area that is discussed.

The process used to disseminate information to faculty is done through a few steps. Committees meet on a monthly or as needed basis with their faculty representative, issues are discussed prior to and after the meeting with fellow faculty and chairs of each department/program, and in turn the items discussed are then brought to Faculty Senate to further advise or vote on if necessary, and after the minutes of the meeting are finalized they are then distributed to all faculty in the school.

Eliciting Engagement for Faculty Governance

The process of eliciting nominations for various committees at our institution is contained within our constitution and bylaws. In short, each academic unit has a representative on the Nominations Committee that is responsible for forwarding the names of individuals within their respective departments that will serve on various departmentally-appointed committees (e.g. Faculty Senate; Computing Resources, Faculty Affairs, Graduate Education, Grievance Board, Nominations, Resources Policy and Undergraduate Education). Additionally, the departmental Nominations Committee representative will electronically nominate individuals within their department that will appear on the school-wide voting ballot. These governance positions include; Faculty Senate President Elect (becomes Senate President the following year), Unit Representative to the IUPUI Campus Faculty Senate, Unit Rep. to the Purdue Intercampus Faculty Council, Unit Rep. to Indiana University Faculty Council, Constitution and Bylaws, Student Affairs, Budgetary Affairs and the Unit Promotion and Tenure Board. Any full-time faculty member is eligible serve on any of these committees except the departmentally-appointed Grievance Board (of which only tenured faculty are eligible) and the Unit Promotion and Tenure (of which only tenured, full professors are eligible).

As for the actual process of nominating and voting for elected committee positions, our school has developed an automated online, database-driven system that has been enthusiastically accepted and utilized by our faculty for the past two years.

The heart of the faculty governance system is the four components comprising the Nomination and Election (NE) database as shown at the top of Figure 1. The Human Resource (HR) database
at the bottom of Figure 1 contains the faculty listing, tenure status, rank, departmental assignment, administrative role, duration of service and many other descriptors and delineators. The HR database serves as a supporting structure feeding information into the NE database. Figure 1 below illustrates the data pool and information flow of the entire nomination and election system.

Data Pools And Information Flow

![Diagram of data pools and information flow](image)

Figure 1

Each of the Senate committees requiring elected members appear on the online Nomination and Election interface. A field containing all eligible faculty members (as driven by the HR database) for each committee is used by the respective department Nominations Committee members to nominate an individual. As a fail-safe method of assuring nominees are willing to serve, automated email is sent to each nominated individual with the opportunity to decline the nomination. Once the nomination process is complete, the entire faculty uses a voting interface (requiring validation) to elect those who will represent the school the following academic year.

With the improvement of our nomination and elections process, we are left with the perplexing dilemma of how to change faculty attitudes towards their willingness to serve on the various committees comprising our faculty governance system. While somewhat of a joking matter, the truth is that committee service is a necessity and requirement of self-governing academia. While perusing a vast amount of national opinions and policies towards faculty governance, it became evidently clear that we at this institution are not alone in the challenge of recruiting willing
servants. It also became clear that any unwillingness to serve is just as quickly usurped by passionate defense of these committee charges should any form of academic freedom be threatened (either perceived or real). Just-in-time faculty governance? Perhaps.

**Recommendations and Implications of Engaging Faculty in Governance Activities**

What is the key to a faculty senate functioning effectively and to a faculty eager to participate in governance? Or is each higher education institution so unique that this question cannot be answered? We believe that although each is unique certain qualities need to exist for a faculty senate to function effectively.

Primarily, faculty and administrators need to understand the interdependency of all constituents in higher education. Faculty and administrators must believe also wholeheartedly in the importance of communication. The institution must provide an environment that promotes participation from all constituents, one that promotes shared responsibility in decision-making. This environment must be respectful, open, and caring; must invite questions and suggestions; must promote and maintain high standards; and must promote shared governance, shared responsibility, and shared accountability.

To that end, we offer the following recommendations to assist in enhancing engagement in faculty governance, adapted from broader research on the efficacy and effectiveness of an engaged workforce:

- Engagement in the work of the university should not hurt or hold back otherwise productive faculty members in the other aspects of their faculty work portfolio, principally teaching and research
- Rewards, recognition, and appreciation for the time, energy, and effort of self-governance should be a priority of deans, department chairs, and other administrators
- Faculty development on the purposes, processes, and approaches to faculty governance should occur, primarily through orientation, training, and ongoing feedback
- Interventions and accommodations should be made for faculty members who find themselves serving on committees and/or contexts which provide an inordinate amount of extra work (e.g. release time; summer funding; professional development grants; administrative, teaching, and research assistantships)
- Promotion and tenure guidelines and annual faculty evaluation schemes must reflect an accurate and appropriate emphasis on governance as a central component to university citizenship
- Faculty need to recognize the privilege they hold in working in contexts that value inclusion of ideas, participation in decision-making, and mutual accountability for results
• Faculty must necessarily concern themselves with issues beyond their own classroom, research agendas, and disciplinary alliances and to become knowledgeable about priorities, concerns, and policy decisions affecting the broader campus community and higher education landscape.

• Administrators need to set a leadership example of collaboration, respect, and an appreciation for the highly specialized and unique role faculty members play in advancing institutional priorities vis a vis teaching, research, and service.

• Regular review of the approaches, tools/documents, communication patterns, and performance measures (e.g. faculty satisfaction and participation) related to governance must occur, and efforts to refine and enhance governance must exist.

While the above recommendations are not an exhaustive list of interventions, they provide both evidence-based and pragmatic approaches to facilitate an ongoing commitment to the philosophy and strategy of faculty governance.

Bibliography

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