



VCU

Faculty Senate

Governance Committee 2022 Report

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This year, the Governance committee reached out to other Virginia institutions to discuss the nature and extent of faculty and shared governance. With the impact of COVID and the arrival of Provost Sotiropoulos, the time arrived to seek out how faculty and shared governance is working and not in our sister institutions. We reached out to several institutions and talked with their Faculty leaders. A few declined our invitations, but most were happy to talk with us. We then compiled the questions and answers. Then we removed identifiers to protect their anonymity. We are reporting their answers below. We also created some takeaways that were also found to be consistent with the extent of faculty and shared governance at VCU. We then created a few recommendations.

Takeaways:

- In many instances, the top-down approach to authority and power within the institution has eroded faculty morale, governance, and shared governance.
- When the decision-making process included and encouraged faculty voice and participation, things progressed into a more collaborative process and found innovative solutions.
- However, two types of faculty involvement are problematic--one is tokenism. Faculty are merely included for form and are generally ignored to the detriment of the university. The other type is the revolving door--what one university referred to as the "Old boys club"--the same people are tapped for special committees, administrative roles, and plum appointments.
- Faculty who take an active role in shared governance are not rewarded by the university and, in some cases, have felt threatened by administrators.
- Faculty Senators sometimes felt intimidated by the continual presence of administrators and the control administrators exercised over the senate's agenda and discussion.
- Faculty expressed frustration around administrators' transparency in their decision-making, especially when faculty have taken the time and effort to develop plans or provide feedback. Yet many times, decisions are made that do not appear to consider the faculty's voice and, in many cases, ignore faculty voices and concerns. Consequently, administrators must share their reasoning for decisions to create and maintain a collective university vision and mission.
- Research shows that diverse voices and experiences improve outcomes. Opening the deliberative process to include more faculty decisions may be more innovative to resolve the issues facing universities as we enter the new world post-Covid.

¹ The chairs wish to acknowledge the members who actively participated in the interviews, the transcriptions, the data analysis, and the final preparation of this report.

Recommendations:

1. Faculty Senate should create an award for faculty members and administrators who demonstrate through their work and commitment to the essential role of faculty to successful shared governance. This award need not be awarded every year but can be a way to show our appreciation for their work.
2. Faculty Senate shall continue to ask administrators to be transparent in their decision making and to include a diverse body of faculty to create solutions to problems.
3. Transparency is a crucial part of governance. We would like the administration to provide a specific faculty-wide meeting where they set out the university's financial situation on an annual basis.
4. Faculty Senate should reconsider the role played by non-senators in meetings and reconsider the “open access” to full meetings given them and explore making attendance by invitation.

Interview Responses:

Institution	What does shared governance look like at your institution?
A	<p>Currently, they have multiple commissions (Faculty, administrators, students, staff). On almost all of those, Faculty have a majority vote. All resolutions come from these commissions. The resolutions go to the University Council, where Faculty is also well represented. However, there was no place for the Faculty to deliberate outside of the other groups, which was a strategic problem. So on paper, there was shared governance but it wasn't the case in practice. Faculty members are sometimes outnumbered since senior faculty leadership also counts.</p> <p>As an example, there is an advisory council on planning but this council is not used for shared decision making, but only for reporting.</p> <p>In addition, it is difficult for Faculty to be engaged since their teaching tasks are so important (this is not Faculty's job).</p> <p>There are also term limits that are a challenge.</p> <p>There is also a concern about the power balance and power differential, where even some tenured professors are concerned and will not speak up, and will concede to the administration (who would for example control the salary raise or budget).</p> <p>Not everything can be put on the docket.</p> <p>There are also some strategies where the administration will push through a decision before Faculty can organize and coordinate their response.</p> <p>Currently, Faculty Senate is not a decision-maker. They have the right to comment on decisions. In the future, they will have veto power.</p> <p>Overall, using the AAUP scale, our institution would be "administrator dominance" or "administrator primacy". The goal is to go to shared governance.</p>
B	<p>The head administrator is set by the bylaws as the faculty senate president is at every meeting and on every email. Faculty has proposed meetings without admin, to no effect.</p> <p>I think we have a problematic culture; top-down, tiered, stratified. There are star faculty and then everybody else. Feudal order. People who are close to the administration, get plum positions. As a result, anything that needs to be done gets done through these insiders.</p> <p>Historically, the Senate hasn't been seen as an action body; just pro forma. Gets lectured to by the administration. Thus, there's an attitude of why bother. That has slowly been changing. For the past 7-8 years, a small group has been challenging this culture.</p>

C	There is an understanding between the administration and the faculty that the faculty will have input on all major decisions. We are included on all major review committees that have topics affecting faculty. The only challenge is to ensure there is faculty representation when appropriate.
D	We've got a faculty Senate, and I think that that is clearly the body that has been positioned to sort of exercise faculty shared governance in the university. I think the Executive Committee of that body includes administrators so the provost and the Vice President of finance often sit in the executive planning meetings of the Senate. I think there's a great effort to try to collaborate and to reach some kind of joint consensus or inform each side as we move forward. But over time, shared governance has certainly eroded on campus and there's quite a lot of top-down. Management decisions and even curricular decisions are often made by the administration and pushed down onto units. If you look at the history of what your government is meant to look like and what faculty are supposed to have control or primary responsibility over, I'd say that we have less and less authority and power over those areas whether it's an academic function and the like. There is a lot of pressure from the administration to normalize, the university with regard to external funding pressures and redefining workloads and things like that really curtail sharing government or just faculty roles.

Institution	How would you describe the relationship between faculty and administration?
A	With their previous Provost, there was a trust issue. Now, the new Provost works well with the Senate. During the Pandemic, the Faculty Senate Cabinet was meeting every week with the Provost. This last year, they would meet once a month. The Provost came twice to the Senate, and the President came once. They also provided written answers to the Senate, which was very appreciated. There are multiple opportunities to have interactions, but the quality of those interactions will vary with leadership. Faculty have had seats on the Board of Visitors, which allowed them to have internal discussions and interactions with board members (although the Senate representative didn't have a right to vote). This allowed Faculty Senate representatives to be heard and to influence major decisions, such as budget
B	A little cozier than I would expect for the inner circle. Senators kind of come and go because that's not where the action is. Senate is engulfed in this top-down, feudalistic culture. Recently, our provost got a new job. There was no search committee and a dean was appointed as provost. AAUP was rebooted recently. But after a crisis was averted, everything went back to the status quo. There was hostility to AAUP in its early years. This is changing a little bit because a small group of AAUP members has managed to make some changes to the bylaws of the Faculty Senate. For example, it used to be that the executive council appointed the next leader. They kept nominating alternative candidates outside of the nominations committee process. "Old boys club." Once the Faculty Senate chair serves, they become cozy with the administration. Trying to make the Senate more representative, more democratic, and less elitist.
C	To date the relationship has been straightforward with dialogue at all levels. This is due to the approach that the president has taken to ensure faculty voices are heard across campus. The senate has monthly meetings with the president and provost so that we can air any concerns and get their feedback.

D	<p>There's a nod to the fact of the senate's role in regards to deliberation. However, if the university wants to do something, and if the board of visitors wants to do something, there's certainly tension. I would like to see faculty way more involved, and sitting on committees of influence and having voting majorities and things like that on many, many things. We do not have that for sure. There's also faculty who move up into administration oftentimes continue to think of themselves as faculty so, then they operate as if they're a part of the faculty of the unit and then, in many ways that sort of money things because then they are sort of seen as friendly to the Faculty. But yet making they're making decisions as administrators and I find that to be very difficult to work around because they're popular or they're well liked or people don't want to ruffle feathers because of their colleagues. And yet they're really overstepping and I sort of see that as this strange position of shared governance erosion.</p>
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Institution	To what extent are decisions at your university made based on a common understanding of shared governance among university stakeholders?
A	<p>There were a number of past initiatives where they were not heard, such as new ed pathways. There was some survey that was done, but there were no consequences and the feedback didn't seem to have been taken into account.</p> <p>In contrast, in the revisions to the shared governance, they now have the impression that their feedback is heard and to voice their opinions. Faculty feel they have some voice in it.</p> <p>The Senate understands the other forces (students, alumni, etc.).</p> <p>But there are some instances where governance was not shared, mostly when the Senate had the impression that the University was run like a company. They also removed a section of the Handbook without any Faculty feedback.</p>
B	<p>Varies by unit. In one school, our shared governance faculty counsel is captured by the administration. In a different school, they have an elected committee for finance and a more democratic governance structure. I have participated in this for years and fought against power in the hands of the Dean. Our bylaws give the Dean too much power, and there is a culture of fear.</p>
C	<p>All decisions on how the campus would implement the COVID-19 protocols was made together. However, the new pass/fail policy was implemented without faculty input.</p>
D	<p>Power is executed and enforced by third parties, by agents, so whether it's street level or bureaucrats as agents, or whatever. And so, in many ways, I often see that the power is pushed down, The decision making authority is pushed down. There are quite a few faculty, such as administrators, deans, chairs, etc, who switch back and forth between faculty and administrative roles. They enforce and met out and carry out the rules that are set on high. So the power is difficult to disrupt because of the ways in which people are agents of the powerful and just kind of shrug and say well you know nothing I can do. I have just been told, I have to do this. I'm often like you actually have agency, should you choose to take it. I've often seen the Faculty Senate align with the administration because many faculty senators, in my opinion, it's [Faculty Senate] like a proving ground for future administrative work. And so it's almost like an audition. Administration and we [Faculty Senate] formed a chapter to really drive the agenda. The Faculty Senate does not challenge some of those positions.</p>

Institution	To what extent are faculty allowed to express their opinions without fear of retribution?
A	There are fears of retribution, even for Tenured professors.
B	The feudal culture has varying effects. The star faculty are not afraid to say what they want to say, though most don't really push back. Associate professors live in fear of retribution. The culture seems like more than not people are afraid to take a stand on issues. This is partly about a southern, plantation mentality. Get along to go along. Don't rock the boat. There is no culture of reasonable dissent.
C	All faculty are free to share their opinions. Academic freedom encourages us to be more open.
D	The climate is chilly. I think a lot of people fear retribution if they are seen as asking too many questions if there are too critical. I think that the ethos of keeping your head down to do your job and don't make waves is very powerful here and, obviously, like everywhere as assistant professors on the tenure track. But even full professors really seem to be in many ways disengaged from decision making and that's a bummer because they're not exercising their power. I think, in general, there's just sort of this quiet like go to get along to go along and administrations are savvy. It just chips away these kinds of things until one day you look up and go what. How did we end up here? And the unfortunate part of shared governance is that it takes so much. So much time on the part of the Faculty to play defense or to be reading and monitoring, making sure, things are transparent, so that there is voice. It just takes an inordinate amount of time to do all that and there's no reward for that vigilance and that activity. So it's very difficult for us to I think keep fighting for shared governance because we're not paid truly right and it's not part of our workload really to do this. It's not recognized as such.

Institution	To what extent is there a feedback loop at University such that administrators share their reasons for making decisions?
A	Not much of one
B	At the Senate meeting following the provost appointment, the President did answer questions. He did give a rationale. Administrators are asked and will give answers, but they are not always believable. There is not always a strong rationale.
C	President meets with the senate to provide insight into major decisions and to explain the thought process behind the decisions.
D	It's (feedback loops) only as robust as the Faculty who are committed and monitoring and tracking and holding to account administrators, etc, so. You know, again, that the Faculty Senate certainly is an external volunteer group that is not recognized oftentimes at all, and as a service or even right. So yeah no I think it's just truly those faculty who see this as an imperative a moral, ethical imperative that this is our job. Without academic freedom and our governance, there's no educational system it's a propaganda machine or it's something else. Right, and so I think, but in order to maintain that level of governance and it's a volunteer all-volunteer army no rewards and it's exhausting.

Institution	To what extent are faculty at your university rewarded for engaging in governance activities?
A	<p>There is very little reward. It counts as service (but they don't have a formal service component), but there is no financial benefit nor improved visibility (no mention in newsletters, etc.). There is no real buy-out time. The University doesn't make any deal of this, although this is very time-consuming.</p> <p>"You do it because you care to be involved or learn things. Or it's your term to rotate. I did it to understand more about governance, and issues"</p>
B	<p>Very little. Not seen as something that's seen as high profile or worthy of anyone's time. It counts as service, but we all know how much service "counts." Senate leaders get no remuneration for what they do. No office for Senate. The Senate shares staff with the President!</p>
C	<p>Nothing specific</p>
D	<p>There are no rewards, just more expectations.</p>

Institution	What policies and best practices do you suggest that institutional stakeholders consider that would involve faculty in the decision-making process?
A	<p>The question was not asked</p>
B	<p>The new bylaws make the process less elitist and more democratic. I've been an advocate for a more open nomination process and no nominations committee. It's now less heavy-handed. We have two systems: Faculty Senate and then about 20-25 committees run out of Provost's office. Others never hear about these committees. We should have one unified system of shared governance.</p> <p>We have 4 or 5 positions open on those committees and nobody is volunteering.</p> <p>Have to show faculty that time spent doing it is going to pay off. If leadership ignores faculty, then it's hard to make that case.</p> <p>A university was sued because the donor committee is separate from the university and was therefore not subject to FOIA. Students sued and the SCOTUS of Virginia said the foundation is a private, non-profit organization and not subject to FOIA. But, the president and provost worked with the faculty to change the rules and put faculty members on the non-profit donor committee. So, now the Faculty Senate passed a resolution that the university will appoint 3 faculty senators to the donor committee. Provost rejected the resolution.</p> <p>A single system of shared governance where administrators have to go through the Senate to form committees.</p> <p>The university Covid response team included no faculty. The university finally agreed to add the Faculty Senate chair.</p> <p>A small dedicated group of faculty who do the work on principles and incentives.</p> <p>They now have a representative on the Board of Visitors.</p> <p>It's a constant struggle within the culture of the state and the institution. Things only change when a small, committed group takes things on.</p>

C	We closely monitor ad-hoc committees to ensure there is faculty representation. When this does not occur we engage with the administration to get faculty assigned. We follow our faculty handbook.
D	Not a specific answer was given.