

## Faculty Senate Meeting Addendum:

Group: Gaynell, Wendy and Christopher (?)

- How do we define shared governance?
  - *Inclusion and being seen as a valued contributor*
  - *accountability is very important and it's a delicate balance*
  - *finding the balance between effort and ease of governance balance*
  - *faculty have not been engaged in some of the decisions made at VCU*
  - *faculty would oversee curriculum*
  - *Status of faculty – tenure and non-tenure and the culture of trust and safety in speaking up*
  - *contribute in substantive way*
  - *Changes in the university patterns – we need to adapt to help stay afloat*
- How do we know when we have it?
  - *When we are not surprised by the decisions – we know what was behind the decisions*
  - *High level of awareness about the decision-making processes*
  - *The faculty morale will be higher*
  - *We know when we are included.*
  - *When our feedback is seen as a valuable input – and not unilaterally dismissed*
- What are we looking for in shared governance practice?
  - *Equity, Efficiency, Responsibility*
  - *Bring back the thoughts and input from the units*
  - *We would respect the AAUP principles*

Group : Jon Becker, Nora Alder, Liz Canfield, Wenli Yan (?)

- How do we define shared governance?
  - ~ *From study results: faculty believe it's top-down, not happening enough. But there is hope.*
  - ~ *Limitation of the study: difficult to get faculty to participate. Provost's office refused to provide faculty email lists so people who participated are probably people who are already doing shared governance. At some point maybe should reach out to people who aren't involved to find out why.*
  - ~ *How do we get more people involved?*
    - *Make it more appreciated.*
    - *One idea: consideration during P&T for service-heavy loads.*
    - *Recruit early career faculty/ junior faculty early on (how to address fear about speaking out)*
- How do we know when we have it?
  - ~ *We know when we don't*
    - *Committees packed w/ admin & only a few faculty (= faculty can't affect any votes)*
    - *Admin come to committees w/ pre-written agendas & not much opportunity to change them*
  - ~ *So inverse:*
    - *Faculty drive/ set agendas (quality of involvement)*
    - o *Maybe there needs to be part of faculty senate meetings in which admin not allowed*
    - *Enough faculty on committees to have voice (quantity of involvement)*
- What are we looking for in shared governance practice?
  - ~ *Needs to be trust – faculty have to be able to trust admin to act justly and fairly*
  - *Maybe faculty could collect their own data (e.g., level of trust faculty have in admin)*

I'm sharing some feedback from my colleagues in Focused Inquiry related to the questions of shared governance that Senators discussed in today's break-out rooms. It's not exactly what you asked for, but I sent the same three questions out to University College Faculty earlier today. Within 4 hours, I received 6 impassioned replies. Shared governance is a "hot topic" for a lot of FI / IDS faculty right now. In the case of Focused

Inquiry, the Dean just recently announced the hiring of our next Chair, who was an external candidate. (You may remember that our dept. bylaws specified the election of a Chair by dept. faculty. This was disregarded when the Dean chose to conduct an external search). You'll see the distrust and frustration in the comments from FI faculty at this [link](#).

Group: Emily, Nancy Jallo, Sean Cox, Heather Nunnally, and Chintal Desai.

We struggled to define shared governance by what it is, but said we often feel pushed to explain what it is not or should not be. That is, we know it when we don't see it.

- We felt it should be a voice with meaningful application of feedback, not empty rubber-stamping of policies that are already underway. We understand that there are decisions that have to be made for strategic reasons but would appreciate the courtesy of transparent explanations rather than top-down pronouncements. We also said it should be expertise specific, so it's problematic when administrators legislate things related to teaching or research. To me, that says that we should insist on heavy faculty representation on committees and taskforces, and transparency about how decisions were made.
- We also discussed the necessity of trust, and how, especially for term faculty, it can be challenging to feel truly safe to offer significant pushback, if a place is even made at the table. The question was raised of whether there is truly a middle ground, and where the buck would stop with student pushback.
- And, as I mentioned, reporting out, morale is incredibly low. I think shared governance is essential for faculty to continue to want to teach at VCU, or to feel that they are respected as they do so.

Group: Patricia Brown, Lisa Townsend, Yen (I apologize, her full name was harder to recall, and this is what she told me to call her,) I am an alternate, and this was my first meeting of Faculty Senate.

1.) Re: Defining shared governance: Transparency about and involvement in decision-making, utilizing more organized methods to include voices around the university. Maybe there would be certain areas that are more clearly defined to include governance/decision-making from faculty and staff in areas where it is respected and regularly requested or consulted.

2.) Re: How we know when we have it:

We would not be as surprised by many significant decisions, there would be measures of input and notification of legitimate stakeholders. Surveys would be commonplace for opinions across the university, and/or for certain subsets of the stakeholders.

3.) Re: What are we looking for in shared governance:

Less top-down approach, a feeling of empowerment, involvement, and participation rather than lip-service to more involvement in decision-making; more of a voice and more innovative solutions being offered up and considered to solve problems in the university.

Here are our notes on shared governance:

- The shared governance was not what they expected before coming to the first meeting. The provost gives a report and has already made all the decision. It feels very top-down.
- The provost doesn't read the slides anymore, but the report is still top-down.

- The perception of shared governance would be compromised. However, we don't see any compromises. They have to show they value our feedback that would shape governance. We do not participate in the decisions before they are made, we are only there to amplify and disseminate the decisions.
- Administrators should not attend the rest of the meeting. We are giving the playbook to the opponent. And it is intimidating to have them listen, especially as retaliation can take many shapes and can be subtle. Therefore, we are cautious to voice our opinions. We need more faculty discussions and faculty solidarity, to discuss what is important to us instead of disseminating their positions. We need more meet-up time before we can make suggestions or provide feedback. Zoom makes it also more difficult.

## **Room 6: Maria Rivera, Allison Johnson, Troy Martin**

### **What is shared governance?**

- not only being part of the conversation but also knowing what decisions are being made
- definition shifts with unit-level leadership shifts

### **How do we know when we have it?**

- trust

### **What are we looking for in shared governance?**

- consistency
- communication
- decision and voice in student success metrics??

Comments from FI faculty:

Dean chose external search, with support of provost. External hire as new chair for FI, against department bylaws

"False feedback opportunities"- There were many opportunities to provide input but it felt like it was all a show. Administrators were listening and present but with no intention to collaborate or take faculty input seriously.

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Here are the notes for my breakout group: myself, Nancy Jallo, Sean Cox, Heather Nunnally, and Chintal Desai.

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FI Responses:

- more than listening to faculty; more than giving faculty a mechanism for input – by compromising, decision-making
- domains with clear faculty decision / control (textbooks? Curriculum? Dept. bylaws – leadership)
- action informed by, created by, executed by
- not for listening to reports as an act of communication sharing / dissemination of admin. Decisions
- determine best practices for our own dept., (chair election; qualifications of faculty;)

FI Associate Prof.

I would hope that shared governance provides a mechanism for administration. to not only actively listen to faculty input and demands but also **to meaningfully ACT on faculty demands. Listening does not equal shared governance; compromise** is more aligned with my view in shared governance. What controls are left to those outside of administrative positions? Very few. Other than votes of no confidence in senior leadership, we seem to have very little governmental action left to our faculty body.

**Without action informed by, created by faculty, and executed by faculty there is no shared governance in the policies and procedures of this university.**

FI Professor

at a minimum, it would seem to me that "shared governance" demands that the faculty (and staff) **have a say** (alongside administration) **in decision-making**, and that **SOMETIMES what the faculty want to have happen actually happens**. I have the feeling that the administration thinks shared governance means the faculty are always **allowed to voice their concerns but are systematically ignored when it comes time to make decisions that affect them**.

So, I don't think shared governance can mean a seat at the table. It either needs to mean **enough seats at the table to be able to determine outcomes OR partitioning off what the faculty have**

**autonomy** over . . . hmmm, I cannot seem to think of a single example . . . oh, wait, like electing your department chair.

FI Associate Prof.:

We have been deprived of our right to shared governance. It is a breathtaking betrayal of every single person in this department and shows that the admin we deal with don't respect us as people or professionals. What recourse do we have?

FI Assistant Prof.:

I'm afraid my thoughts may be mildly incoherent, but so you have some of them ahead of 4 pm, I'll say that, generally speaking, the AAUP definition resonates with me. Of particular importance to me is that **we should be able to determine best practices (including leadership! but also faculty evaluation, etc.) for our own department, with top-down mandates only interfering in the most exceptional cases--so exceptional that I can't even really think of what that would be.**

FI Assistant Prof.:

We all work in an institution that has its own goals and preferences about the way they would prefer things to be. If the administration makes all the decisions that determine what people's lives look like, then those decisions will naturally skew in favor of the institution at the expense of the individuals who work here. If the people who worked here made all the decisions about the way things happen, then those decisions would naturally favor individuals at the expense of the institution. So shared governance, I think, means first acknowledging those biases (the institution will never actually care whether my life is livable or not as long as I keep producing labor; I will never actually care about the financial well-being of the institution as long as it continues to deliver me a paycheck, these things are inherently sometimes at odds). Then you have to do some marriage counseling between people representing the institution and people representing the workers and set some boundaries: these people have the right to make decisions in this area for these reasons. When there's a disagreement, in functional shared governance, we respect those boundaries and seek more marriage counseling instead of exerting power over each other. Right now, that's obviously not happening; in a disagreement, the institution is clearly exerting power over workers and replacing them with their own people, b/c they believe that ultimately it's their way or the highway and they can enforce that by firing us ("because I'm the man of the house, that's why").

I guess to carry on the dumb marriage metaphor, I think that we'll have shared governance when we have the equivalent of three bank accounts: yours (institutional power and area of decision making control), mine (workers' power and area of decision making control) and ours (areas where decisions need to be mutually agreed-upon b/c matters touch on the rights or areas of both). Right now, I think that we're in a situation where we have the Yours bank account and a Mine bank account, but the institution is a co-signer on the Mine bank account and has access to those funds and can make decisions about how that money is spent, but workers are not co-signers on the Yours bank account, and who even knows if there's an Ours bank account. Which makes this marriage pretty traditionally patriarchal, frankly.

I'm trying to think of an area that falls in the Mine bank account and genuinely isn't touched by administrative control. Our textbook/s? Mostly, but we're under pressure to keep our textbook choices cheap so that we can be in the "cheap classes" listing. Our curriculum? Again, yes, but there's pressure to conform to universal gen-ed learning objectives. Even in our individual classes, how we teach and evaluate students is always in the shadow of the DFW rate, which, we say that doesn't harm people to have a high DFW, but we also know that's not true b/c that's at odds with the institutional demand to keep students enrolled. But I have no mutual ability to change

how my dean or provost do their jobs, or what their measures of success in their work are, etc. As a result of it being super clear that the institution doesn't trust me to do my work, I don't trust them. We know how this ends: marriage counseling and a lot of work done to rebuild trust and boundaries, or divorce.

FI Associate Prof:

sorry friends for such a last minute response, but I would just like to say that part of shared governance is following established bylaws, having an opportunity to weigh in, in a meaningful way, on leadership decisions, especially, not having a chair chosen, against the express wishes of a very significant majority of faculty within the unit, on the basis of a shoddy rationale. We were given lots of opportunities to express feedback, but those opportunities felt very hollow and inauthentic, because it was really clear that the administrator, in our department at least, had no intention of responding meaningfully to that feedback. So I would like to say that "false feedback opportunities" is a sign of failed shared governance. I'm looking for legitimate collaboration, where the feedback I offer seems to shape (even if not determine outright) the outcome of a decision.