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## Pilgrim's Progress: Lessons in Shared Governance

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In the Spring of 2006, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) initiated a conversation to define a “Teacher-Scholar” Philosophy appropriate for the campus. In an experience similar to John Bunyan’s protagonist, Christian, in the classic 1678 allegory *Pilgrim’s Progress*, the SIUE faculty and administrators set off on a 21<sup>st</sup> century journey of discovery.[2] Our journey, however, was toward shared governance, rather than down the path to salvation. Like Bunyan’s Christian, we traveled metaphorically through the Town of Vanity, the Valley of Humiliation, the Slough of Despond, the Hill of Difficulty, and the Castle of Doubt. Unlike Christian, however, our journey of discovery ended before we crossed the River of Death and entered the Celestial City.

The SIUE “Pilgrim’s Progress” revealed several valuable lessons about the process, scope, and outcomes of shared governance. First, it demonstrated that shared governance, as a valued concept, is more than the sum of its parts. Second, the journey revealed that no single voice within the university community should or could determine specific outcomes of shared governance. Third, the experience showed that the process of shared governance can be unexpectedly contentious and unintentionally boisterous, but that the “messiness” does not mean that shared governance has somehow failed. This article explores SIUE’s “Pilgrim’s Progress” in developing a Teacher-Scholar Philosophy and the lessons we learned about shared governance along the way.

The term “Teacher-Scholar” emerged from Ernest Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990). The idea was expanded and refined in the works of Lee Shulman, George Kuh, and Eugene Rice.[3] As these authors and others elaborated upon the concept of the “Teacher-Scholar” as a useful paradigm for defining the roles and responsibilities of the faculty, it also grew into a model for advancing student learning. The *American Council of Learned Societies*, for example, asserted that collaboration among students and faculty is the key to successful learning and that “the model for such collaboration has long been the teacher-scholar.”[4]

As powerful as the concept of the “Teacher-Scholar” has proven to be, the idea has been applied so broadly and used in so many different ways that its meaning and application to diverse campus environments are often uncertain. For example, when a Research Intensive institution like the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign declares that it emulates a “Teacher-Scholar” model, it probably does not mean the same as when a college recognized for its commitment to undergraduate education, such as The College of New Jersey, uses the same term to describe the roles and responsibilities of its faculty.[5]

Despite the great variety of conditions and circumstances in which the term has been employed, the “teacher-scholar” model continues to be a useful means for articulating the values, vision, roles, and responsibilities of faculty. At SIUE, the Provost thought that defining what the model would mean for the

campus as a regional master's comprehensive university would have significant benefits.

Located in metropolitan East St. Louis, SIUE enrolls over 14,000 students, of which 2,300 are in graduate programs. While the University has been recognized nationally for a number of its programs, including the senior assignment undergraduate capstone experience, and for the scholarly productivity of the faculty, the Provost and the Associate Provost for Research/Graduate Dean believed that articulating a "Teacher-Scholar" philosophy for SIUE would help better define SIUE's distinctive characteristics. By crafting a shared vision of how the commitment to teaching excellence, the culture of service, and scholarship and creative activity were uniquely expressed at SIUE, the Provost and his Senior Staff believed that defining SIUE's own Teacher-Scholar model would help differentiate the University from other strong regional public comprehensive universities. Additionally, the Provost thought it would help move SIUE to the next level of excellence by strengthening the faculty and thereby improving the quality of the educational experience for students.

In the Spring of 2006 and for the next 18 months, the Provost and Associate Provost for Research/Dean of the Graduate School initiated and encouraged discussions with various faculty groups and governing bodies eventually producing a white paper for campus consideration by the end of 2008. Similar to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, this discussion with the faculty proved to be an interesting and instructive journey – a journey which traveled metaphorically through the "Town of Vanity," the "Valley of Humiliation," the "Slough of Despond," the "Hill of Difficulty," and the "Castle of Doubt." While our journey ended before we crossed the "River of Death" and into the "Celestial City," we learned a number of valuable lessons about shared governance.

## **The Journey**

The journey to develop a Teacher-Scholar Philosophy began, as it did for Bunyan's Christian, in the "Town of Vanity." In October 2005, in his first speech to the University, Chancellor Vaughn Vandegrift declared that "our faculty will continue in the Teacher-Scholar model, and we will be known as a University with quality teachers who are also adept practitioners in the scholarly pursuit of their disciplines." [6] In the Spring of 2006, following a charge from the Provost, the Associate Provost for Research/Dean of the Graduate School initiated a conversation with the Graduate Council about what the Teacher-Scholar model meant for SIUE. The Graduate Council endorsed the idea of articulating for the campus a Teacher-Scholar philosophy and began discussing how it should proceed. It concluded that the faculty should hold a campus-wide "town hall" meeting. In response to the Graduate Council, nearly 100 members of the faculty, or about 20 percent of the tenure/tenure track faculty, attended a meeting in November 2006 to discuss the utility of defining a Teacher-Scholar philosophy for the University.

In reaction to this positive response, the Provost established a Task Force to develop a White Paper. Chaired by the Associate Provost for Research/Graduate Dean and composed of 10 faculty members representing most academic units and the Faculty Senate, the Task Force began work in earnest to define a Teacher-Scholar philosophy. With great pride, the committee presented a preliminary draft of the document to the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate for its review and comment in the Spring of 2007. At this point, the journey left the "Town of Vanity" and unexpectedly entered the "Valley of Humiliation."

Members of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee reacted strongly against the draft document.

Objections were based on a variety of concerns: some philosophical, some seemingly based on self-interest, and others on political grounds. The philosophical opposition argued that defining a single philosophy was impractical to cover the standards for all disciplines. Further, some of this group believed that the attempt to define a Teacher-Scholar philosophy diminished teaching, while still others opposed the idea on the grounds that the “Teacher-Scholar” draft ignored service. Those individuals motivated by self-interest feared that the Teacher-Scholar philosophy would require them to do more research, or provide a more appropriate level of service, or hold them to a higher standard of teacher effectiveness. The last group who opposed the “Teacher-Scholar” draft document based their objections on the political grounds that the Teacher-Scholar philosophy was a top down administration imposition designed to change promotion and tenure.

Stunned by the unexpected and passionate opposition, the Task Force began revising the document. Meanwhile, the Associate Provost for Research/Graduate Dean met with a variety of faculty groups to gather ideas on how to revise the document and to explain the reasons for creating such a statement for the campus. Additionally, by meeting with faculty groups he hoped to allay fears that the Teacher-Scholar philosophy represented a change to the merit and tenure and promotion policies. At this point in the journey, the Task Force found itself struggling in the “Slough of Despond” as many members of the faculty had formed preconceived notions and negative impressions without having actually read the draft document.

Undaunted, the Task Force climbed the “Hill of Difficulty.” It conducted campus wide symposia, met with department groups, chairs’ councils, Faculty Senators, Faculty Senate Councils, and other faculty groups while it made revisions to the document in response to faculty comments. In the end, the Task Force, armed with university-wide input and the belief that a workable compromise had been reached, felt sufficiently confident to proceed with a final draft of the Teacher-Scholar Philosophy. By 2008, the SIUE Teacher-Scholar Philosophy was presented to the Provost who endorsed the product and the process.

### **The SIUE Teacher-Scholar Philosophy**

The final document that was presented to the Provost stated that “The Teacher-Scholar Philosophy of SIUE reflects a serious continuing commitment to teaching, scholarship and service in the belief that scholarship complements and enriches excellence in teaching and service.” To clarify the meaning of that “serious continuing commitment,” the philosophy stated the characteristics of excellence for teaching, scholarship, and service. It also articulated the values of balance, integration, and engagement of teaching, scholarship, and service and how those values enhanced student learning.[7]

In adopting Boyer’s four types of scholarship – discovery, integration, application, and teaching — “The SIUE Teacher Scholar Philosophy” defined a number of key terms in order to clarify some common misconceptions. For example, it distinguished between “scholarly teaching” and the “scholarship of teaching” as well as the differences between “service” and the “scholarship of application.” It defined “scholarly teaching” as having command of one’s discipline and employing appropriate and effective teaching strategies as distinct from the “Scholarship of Teaching,” which the SIUE “Philosophy” recognized as a field of discovery when it produced a product that was developed in a rigorous and systematic manner and was disseminated to a wider audience available for peer review. The “Philosophy” also distinguished “scholarly service” from the “Scholarship of Application.” Like the “scholarship of teaching,” the “scholarship of application” required a product to be

disseminated to a wider audience. "Scholarly service," in contrast, was defined as approaching service with the same sense of professional responsibility and rigor as would be applied to teaching and research.[8]

The SIUE Teacher-Scholar Philosophy stated that it expected all faculty members to be intellectually engaged in their disciplines. It also expected individuals to integrate scholarship, teaching, and service. "Integration," the document declared, "should reach the point that blurs the lines of distinction between teaching, research, and service." Lastly, and importantly, the document recognized the significant role the Teacher-Scholar model plays in active student learning when teaching, scholarship, and service are engaged and integrated.[9]

## **The Journey Unfinished**

After the final "Teacher Scholar Philosophy" document was delivered to the Provost, the full Faculty Senate began a debate of the statement. While opposition was intense, it now seemed less philosophical and less based on disciplinary prejudices, but more concerned with policy implications and the potential for unfair application to promotion and tenure standards and to annual merit evaluations. A certain level of fear, suspicion, and self-interest characterized the debate. It became clear that the opposition was entrenched and the supporters were exhausted. The result was that the Faculty Senate did not accept the proposed document, passing instead what it felt was the core ideas of the proposed Teacher-Scholar Philosophy. This far simpler version attempted to avoid language that it felt might fail to account for differences among disciplines. The Senate action left the majority of participants in the process in the "Castle of Doubt." The administration thought the Senate's statement was too general to be useful in expressing the values of the University and in distinguishing SIUE from other excellent universities while the faculty as a whole was left unclear as to the outcomes of the two year long process.

Despite the lack of a comprehensive, formalized Teacher-Scholar Philosophy as first proposed, the idea remains surprisingly alive in 2011. Many departments incorporated the draft model into their operating papers and practiced the philosophy as envisioned by the Task Force. Most faculty members embrace and readily discuss the concept of the Teacher Scholar. While departmental promotion and tenure documents continue to be revised and improved consistent with the philosophy, the University faculty promotes and celebrates individuals who exemplify the ideal Teacher-Scholar. In the end, however, the absence of a formal philosophy left the project short of the gates to the "Celestial City," though the statement adopted by the Faculty Senate and the ongoing faculty discussions indicated that the journey did not cross the "River of Death" either.

## **Major Lessons Learned About Shared Governance**

Like Christian, the hero of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the University learned a number of important lessons during its journey. In the end, SIUE's "Pilgrim's Progress" resulted in a stronger understanding and commitment to shared governance.

The idea of shared governance in the academic community is difficult to define. Because shared governance is related to many constituencies in the academic community as well as to the many nuances of administrative authority and responsibility, the concept can be problematic in practice.[10] In fact, challenges or tensions to effective shared governance are increasingly evident today. Factors

such as fiscal and budget uncertainties, expanded demand for new delivery formats of academic course offerings, increase in the numbers of adjunct versus full time faculty employed, greater scrutiny and accountability from legislatures and governing boards, and increased student life demands can stretch and cloud the decision-making roles of faculty and administration. [11] Perhaps at no other time in history have more external and internal challenges existed to shared governance in the academic community. Institutions, therefore, are struggling in these unprecedented times to balance the rational procedural issues and the irrational emotional issues inherent in shared governance. Its no wonder, consequently, some faculty would agree with the author of a recent commentary entitled “Shared Governance Is a Myth,” who declared: “It takes years of rank and the bittersweet experience of extensive committee service to realize that faculty influence on the operation of the university is an illusion, and that shared governance is a myth.”[12]

Despite facing these tensions to shared governance, the climate at SIUE was able to sustain a complex and at times difficult discussion of the Teacher-Scholar model. One reason why the climate was able to sustain this discussion was because of SIUE’s commitment to shared governance. Overall, the University is consistent with the *AAUP 1966 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, i.e. the process clearly supported faculty judgment in the areas of “(1) curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, and research; (2) matters of faculty status (e.g. hiring, dismissal, retention, tenure, and promotion); and (3) those aspects of student life that relate to the educational process.” [13] Equally important, the campus climate was able to sustain the Teacher-Scholar discussion because of the generally positive relations among the administration and the faculty. Results from the 2007 UCLA-HERI Survey of Faculty Attitudes indicated that SIUE Faculty rated the importance of the role played by the Faculty Senate, the quality of the relationship between faculty and administration, and openness of the administration, to be approximately twofold better than that of national peers.[14]

Despite the strong foundation for these discussions, several unexpected yet important lessons were learned. The first lesson that the administration and Faculty Senate learned from SIUE’s “Pilgrim’s Progress” was that shared governance is more than the sum of its parts. Shared governance is not just the Faculty Senate talking with the administration. Shared governance involves, or should involve, a number of groups, each of which have their own interests and each of which affects the larger group. While the Task Force talked extensively with faculty in various groups – the Graduate Council, various departmental meetings, school/college-wide conferences – those faculty groups were not necessarily communicating with the Faculty Senate. Consequently while the Task Force thought the process of articulating the Teacher-Scholar philosophy was moving ahead with faculty support because of the involvement of the Graduate Council, the response to the “town hall” meeting, and the comments from various departmental meetings, it was, in fact, not. Those groups were not actively communicating with the full Senate, and the Senate in turn failed to consult with those groups. The Senate, consequently, formed the impression that the Teacher-Scholar initiative was a top-down imposition by the administration. It and the administration failed to acknowledge and embrace the most basic principles of shared governance as defined by the *AAUP 1966 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities* that an “inescapable interdependence among governing board, administration, faculty, students, and others... [with] adequate communication among these components, and full opportunity for appropriate joint planning and effort” are essential to effective shared governance.[15]

In retrospect, it appeared that the formal structures of the shared governance, such as the Graduate

Council, the Faculty Senate, departmental units, and school/college committees, and members of the administration operated as *parallel* structures, rather than cooperatively. While the Graduate Council is a council of the Senate and the departments have Senate representation, none seemed to work collaboratively. The administration did not recognize early in the process that the faculty constituencies were not adequately communicating with each other. The administration inadvertently exacerbated the problem by continuing to interact with these groups and not more directly with the Senate leadership. The Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate, on the other hand, failed to acknowledge that there were other legitimate faculty structures that represented shared governance, believing instead that it was the sole voice of the faculty.

Closely related to the lesson about parallel structures, was that second lesson the University learned in its "Pilgrim's Progress." The administration and the Faculty Senate learned that there is no single voice for shared governance. While this lesson is seemingly obvious, it was less so during the process. During the discussions with faculty at departmental meetings, the "town hall" meeting, symposia, and the Graduate Council, the administration formed the impression that a majority of the faculty were more committed and invested in the idea of the Teacher-Scholar than was reflected in the Faculty Senate. Most of the Senate leadership, however, strongly opposed the idea, and in the end, this leadership successfully blocked the passage of the Teacher-Scholar Philosophy as proposed. Additionally, the administration believed it was speaking with a single voice, but in fact the faculty received mixed signals as various deans and members of the Provost staff provided their own interpretations of the "Teacher-Scholar Philosophy," which added to the confusion of voices.

At one level, the issue of the Senate leadership blocking the adoption of the Teacher-Scholar model is a problem inherent in a majoritarian democracy. While the system is designed to let the majority rule, it has checks and balances to protect minority rights from the tyranny of the majority. At the same time, the system of majority rule is structured to prevent minority or special interests from overriding the will of the majority. Those structures, however, are no guarantee that the majority will rule or that minority interests will be protected. In the case of SIUE's experience, a minority in the Faculty Senate thwarted the adoption of the "Teacher-Scholar Philosophy," not accepting that there were other faculty voices in the process that favored the idea. For example, the minority leaders either dismissed or didn't listen to the faculty voices from the symposia, Graduate Council, and numerous faculty groups. They acted as if they were the sole voice authorized to represent the faculty. For its part, the administration failed to realize that the serial dialogs it held with various constituency groups was not the same as speaking directly to the Senate and that the interests of the opposition represented a legitimate minority concern.

The third lesson SIUE learned about shared governance in its "Pilgrim's Progress" was that shared governance can be contentious and boisterous. Shared governance does not guarantee unanimity. The discussions were often chaotic, passionate, and without resolution. Various faculty groups had diametrically opposed viewpoints. The Department of Economics, for example, was generally in favor of the concept while the Sociologists were angrily opposed and the History Department was adamantly indifferent. Regardless of the fact that shared governance can be noisy and messy, it should be understood and accepted as part of the sociology of how a community of scholars finds its values and beliefs. We argue and discuss an issue until we agree upon some common principle or value that most will accept. That sociology can be uneven and take considerable time. It should not, however, deter the process of shared governance or be avoided just because it doesn't assure a positive outcome or neatly fit into the parameters of controlled discussion. By virtue of the fact that the faculty

were all engaged in this messy discussion, the values, tenants, and philosophy of the Teacher-Scholar model became part of SIUE's vocabulary and culture.

## Conclusion

The formal part of the "Pilgrim's Progress" for a "Teacher-Scholar Philosophy" ended with the Faculty Senate action. However, the conversation about the concept continues as a number of departments and schools have revised their promotion and tenure documents incorporating many of the ideas of the "Teacher-Scholar Philosophy."

Perhaps more significant than the outcome of the "Teacher-Scholar Philosophy," the journey led to a strengthening of shared governance and a new appreciation for the ongoing process of building trust between the Faculty Senate, the administration, and other faculty groups. One scholar of higher education observed that there are five factors critical to enhancing Faculty Senate effectiveness.[16] Of these factors, the strengthening of communication was particularly relevant to SIUE's Teacher-Scholar discussion. William Tierney and James Minor assert that Faculty Senates that desire to improve their role and impact must improve their "modes of communication, including written, oral and symbolic forms." [17] As a result of the SIUE's Pilgrim's Progress, communication among faculty groups was strengthened as well as between faculty constituencies and the administration. The Provost, for example, initiated an annual planning retreat with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and his Senior Staff. Additionally, the Senate and the Provost appointed a Task Force to make recommendations on how to better align Faculty Senate Councils with Provost Office Units. Lastly, the Provost and Faculty Senate formed a Task Group to define the meaning, vision, and characteristics of shared governance at SIUE.

In retrospect, it is clear that a number of strategic errors were made in developing and trying to adopt a "Teacher-Scholar Philosophy" for SIUE. The importance of the journey, however, was not about learning more effective political strategies. Instead, the significance of SIUE's "Pilgrim's Progress" was what we all learned about shared governance. In the final analysis, one need not be afraid of shared governance just because it is noisy and contentious. Nor, should shared governance be bypassed just because you encounter resistance. Shared governance is not simply about structures. It is a process that requires robust communication and constant attention.

It is instructive not to lose sight of the lessons learned by Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*. In his journey of spiritual renewal, Christian benefited from the encouragement of "The Interpreter," a wise guide who encouraged Christian to evaluate the signs along the way in order to make right choices. SIUE did not have an "Interpreter" to help evaluate the signs and events. Perhaps had we had such a guide, we would have seen what Gary Olson recently argued that "the key to genuine shared governance is broad and unending communication. When various groups of people are kept in the loop and understand that developments are occurring within the university, and when they are invited to participate as true partners, the institution prospers. That, after all is our common goal." [18] The experience of SIUE's Pilgrim's Progress might be able to serve as "The Interpreter" for other institutions as well as for ourselves as we continue the journey toward improving shared governance.

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Assistant to the Provost for Policy and Communication, and Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, respectively, during the time period covered by this case study.

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The College of New Jersey: [www.tcnj.edu/~academic/TeacherScholarReport.doc](http://www.tcnj.edu/~academic/TeacherScholarReport.doc) For an example of how the language emanating from the Teacher Scholar concept has been conflated, see Marion Allen and Peggy Field, "Scholarly Teaching and Scholarship of Teaching: Noting the Difference," *International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship* (2005) and Lee Shulman, "Teaching Among the Scholarships," *AAHE Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards* (2000).

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