

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 28

Article 4

10-1-2005

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Recommended Citation

Glynn, S.J., Edward (2005) "From the President's Chair: The Only True Democracy is When We All Share the Guilt," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 28, Article 4.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol28/iss1/4>

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S CHAIR

The Only True Democracy is When We All Share the Guilt

By Edward Glynn, S.J.

As all politics are local, so too all shared governance is local. Shared governance is politics. Consequently shared governance and its possibilities of success vary from institution to institution due to three critical factors: a unionized faculty, a local institutional culture, and the different personalities that faculty members and administrators bring to the process.

Shared governance actively promoted is integral to the successful achievement of institutional mission. The process of promoting and implementing shared governance encourages the shared conversation necessary for successfully achieving a shared institutional self-understanding of what, how and why we do what we do and increases our shared responsibility for institutional actions and their consequences. Individuals shape institutions. We are each responsible for the institution we shape by our action and inaction. We all necessarily live with the successful and unsuccessful institutional consequences.

These convictions I have held since I began my career in higher education as a faculty member at Georgetown University in 1971. They have been confirmed during the intervening decades since then by my experiences of the "local" as chief academic officer in a private and a public institution (Gonzaga University and the University of Massachusetts-Boston), as president of three Jesuit institutions (Saint Peter's College, Gonzaga University, and John Carroll University) and as a trustee of fifteen institutions of higher education.

Essential to an institution's successful achievement of mission is an effective board of trustees. Integral to this effectiveness is the quality of the work of the board's standing committees. That quality greatly depends on how well informed the committees are. Here the basic principle of shared governance is key as it provides more eyes, ears, and wisdom to committees and promotes shared responsibility and shared accountability.

To promote at John Carroll the conversation advancing shared institutional self-understanding and responsibility, a faculty member and a student serve on each of the standing committees of the board. The faculty directly elects the faculty member. The student body president appoints the student. A vice president, appropriate to each committee, also serves. This same practice was followed at Saint Peter's. The board at the University of Scranton implemented this practice in the 1970's. At all three institutions the practice was beneficial to the board, to the faculty, to the administration, to the students and thus to the institutions.

While I was at Saint Peter's College, the faculty and administration agreed to make the following changes in the composition of the College's most important committees. Administrators no longer served on the institutional-wide committees on promotion and tenure. The nine members on each committee were limited to faculty, five directly elected by the faculty and four appointed by the president. The committee elected its chair.

On the college budget committee faculty members elected by the faculty constituted the majority. This committee, which was chaired *ex officio* by the vice president for finance and administration and on which sat the academic vice president *ex officio*, recommended each year to the President budget guidelines. Eleven years of this practice yielded eleven straight years of operating in the black.

Search committees for academic vice presidents at Saint Peter's also implemented shared governance. On these nine-member committees five members were from the faculty, four of whom the faculty elected. The President appointed

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the fifth faculty member as chair and the four other members representing different segments of the university. At John Carroll we now have a university policy regarding search committees for academic vice presidents and deans that calls for a similarly constituted nine member committee.

Efforts to promote shared governance necessarily vary in each institution. I single out here three examples of influencing factors: a unionized faculty, the local institutional culture and the attitudinal stance toward governance that faculty and administrators individually and/or collectively can assume.

During the last four years, during which the university was radically restructured, the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM) offered one of the most successful examples of shared governance. A unionized faculty participated with the administration in an institutional evaluation of every program, college and campus. This resulted in the closing of programs, merging of colleges, and consolidating campuses. The institutional wide conversation, the thoroughness of the evaluations, and the speed with which the planning and implementation took place are bench marks of excellence in shared governance.

A culture of an institution can shape much of what can happen.

The unionization of faculty can have the negative effect of institutionalizing adversarial rather than collegial relations. But, what occurred at UDM is a stunning example of faculty and administration working together to promote the institutional common good, especially when we consider that faculty participation in shared governance is, according to the US Supreme Court's 1980 *Yeshiva* decision, participation in management and thus can be the basis for decertification of unions at private colleges and universities.

The culture of an institution shapes much of what happens or can happen. At John Carroll I met monthly with elected officers of the faculty forum. At least once each year I expressed my desire for greater faculty participation in university governance, specifically on the university's budget committee and on a university wide promotion and tenure committee. Presently departmental recommendations regarding both promotion and tenure come from a department through its chair to a committee comprised of the university's three deans (Arts and Sciences, Business and Graduate) which makes final recommendations.

When I began advocating change, I did not know the need to increase faculty participation in governance had been identified in the two previous North Central Association's institutional self-studies and visiting teams' reports, covering the years 1974 to 1984 and 1984 to



The campus at Gonzaga University.

1994. The 1984 self-study identified among areas of ambiguity and conflict "the absence of faculty members on the Budget Council" and "the need of a committee(s) on rank and tenure." The 1984 visiting team report echoed these concerns. In 1994 the self-study and visiting team reports revisited the same unresolved concerns about faculty participation in governance.

Although I had been advocating with the officers of the faculty forum, academic department chairs, and individual faculty members that the committees on promotion and tenure be made up only of faculty members, only during the academic year 2004-05 did a committee of the faculty forum begin to examine the possibility of change.

Conversations with elected faculty leaders and with faculty groups and individuals suggest two reasons why the John Carroll faculty resists having such university committees established. One, the present system is experienced by the faculty as working. Why break it? Or, faculty do not want their finger prints on negative decisions. Some indicated the latter was most probable. A third possibility is that faculty members have more confidence in an administrative than in a faculty committee.

Faculty governance and university governance are not the same thing

Institutional cultures shape what members of both the faculty and the administration consider the reality of shared governance to be. Sometimes such understandings are rooted in a faculty handbook. For example, the John Carroll University Faculty Handbook states: "The Chairperson of the body which represents the Faculty in University governance" is the chair of the faculty forum (the faculty forum is the entire faculty.). Standing committees of the faculty, committees of the faculty forum and the faculty forum itself are according to the Handbook, "responsible to: the faculty."

In higher education shared governance takes place in university committees that are responsible to the entire university community not in committees responsible only to the faculty. Thus John Carroll, in addition to faculty forum committees, has university committees that are responsible to the entire university and, as such, have members from many constituencies. Many faculty members consider the reality of faculty governance to be the same as the reality of university governance. They are not the same. Failed university governance affects the entire institution and requires the attention of the entire institution. Failed faculty governance affects faculty morale and requires

the attention of the faculty. Failed faculty governance most especially and necessarily requires the attention of the faculty when, as at John Carroll, the faculty forum, committees of the faculty forum and standing committees of the faculty are, according to the Faculty Handbook, "responsible: to the faculty" and not to the entire university. Faculty governance accountable to the faculty is not only not university governance but it also is not shared governance. A faculty that confuses faculty governance accountable only to the faculty with university governance itself and even with shared university governance and that acts as if these realities are one and the same is actively creating an institutionalized dysfunctionality and consequently a perennial source of low faculty morale.

The attitude problem

Finally, the attitudinal stance toward governance that faculty members and administrators are individually and/or collectively capable of assuming profoundly shapes the possibilities for shared governance. One hears statements like: "If you establish a university budget committee, what happens if its recommendations are fiscally unsound?" Or, "You can't appoint students to university committees for honorary degree recipients because they will then think they select the recipients." However, if one seeks the best recommendations regarding strategic plans, tenure, promotion, budget guidelines, honorary degrees etc; one should bring to the decision making process as much collective wisdom as is available. Sometimes administrators and boards cannot responsibly accept a recommendation and thus on occasion will say no. Sometimes, though, administrators and trustees are psychologically incapable of trusting the process or are incapable of letting go control of the process and thus discourage and/or do not promote shared governance.

Since all constituencies of a university live with the consequences of institutional decisions, all should be invited into the process. A university by its very mission promotes in the agora of ideas the expression of competing views, concepts, and convictions. Universities are too important to the human community to be allowed to fail their mission. The promotion of competing views, concepts, and convictions in shared governance is a great good assisting universities in successfully fulfilling their noble mission. A paraphrase of a line from Albert Camus' *The Fall* expresses well my conviction that shared governance in higher education institutions is a good to be actively promoted: "The only true democracy is when we all share the guilt."