

What the President Should Have Said (and Could Have Said) about Shared Governance

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First, the issue being addressed here is, *to what extent should decisions include faculty?* There are other stakeholders and other issues regarding students, staff, community members, and student parents. Those are not addressed here.

The decisions we make in governing a university are highly varied. Faculty should play different roles depending on what kinds of decisions are at issue. Decisions about which courses should qualify to meet General Education or other degree requirements are and should be (as much as possible within constraints of affordability) faculty decisions. Decisions about qualifying vendors for office supplies or contractors for construction neither are nor should be. The variety of decisions is too large for me to cover them all, but I'll mention several areas where live issues face us, I will say how faculty should be involved, and then will suggest how to approach those families of problems not addressed here.

Curriculum is the purview of faculty. Faculty teach the courses, give the grades, express preferences among the courses they hope to teach and negotiate with each other to decide who gets to teach which courses, develop new courses and with their departments make changes or drop courses from the catalog. In lean times, implementing new courses may require that other courses be cut. Saying whether that is presently true is an administrative function, but deciding which courses will be added and which cut is not. Decisions about how many courses will make up a major are made by the department faculty. Instituting new minors, options, programs, majors, or degrees will all raise resource issues, but administrators may insist on no more than cost neutrality in the decisions to implement those curricular changes. If particular courses not required for a major do not enroll enough students to pay their own way, administrators may insist they be displaced by courses with higher enrollments. "Paying their own way," though there are varying determining factors, needs to be transparently explained. Administrators may, as for instance is the case after the WASC visit report, request the faculty to simplify or to revise for clarity and completeness the processes of curricular supervision, but it is up to the faculty to decide how to do that. Administrators may request that a department offer more or fewer courses within some category (GE, DCG, etc.), but it is the faculty who consent or not. Please note too that Appendix B of the Faculty Handbook is clear that the existence of resource issues does not automatically give the decision-making power to the administration, and there is not, as some have suggested, a separation between

the curriculum and the methods of instruction.

Personnel processes for Retention, Tenure, and Promotion, including fair treatment for lecturers, are part of the Faculty Handbook, a document shaped and amendable by the faculty, and are also part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, arrived at by negotiation between the CFA and the CSU. This area, then, is easier to sketch. With the exception of Memoranda of Understanding arrived at through thorough consultation, administrative input in those processes is limited to application of criteria in individual cases. Larger issues are governed by contract and regulations. For instance, Appendix J on Personnel procedures and policies was recently changed in substantial ways, emphasizing research while broadening the categories of what counts as research, and merging two service categories into one. Administrators did play some part in the proposal and discussion of those changes, but discussion was primarily faculty discussion and the decision was made by faculty ballot.

Sharing a vision of our University is a more difficult matter. What is the role of faculty on articulating a vision we can all share? This issue, though it has been around for over a decade, is given new prominence by the WASC visiting team's report. After speaking of HSU's formidable strengths to shape a strong future, they comment that "A critical ingredient to this future will be the degree to which HSU can come together, [and] unite around its emerging vision, . . ." The Keeling report takes the problem of achieving a shared vision as one of our most important tasks. The question of lack of trust among faculty and administration is thought of as in part a lack of consensus regarding institutional vision.

It is a live issue whether in fact HSU does share a vision; in fact, the problem is not as bad as some apparently think. We do, in fact, share a vision. The vision is complex and includes different emphases and diverse roles for different people, so it is easy to exaggerate disagreement about it. But it is not difficult to say what it is.

Humboldt State University will insist fanatically on excellent teaching. We will offer a wide variety of strong programs, including several which are nationally rated. We will educate students for activism and for critical engagement with a diverse globe facing grim environmental and social issues, and will provide students with a strong general education in the liberal arts. All relevant decisions will be made with the goal of serving students as well as we possibly can.

How hard was that? And sharing such a vision, even while arguing about e.g. how much emphasis to give to activism or about what activism means, prepares us to articulate a cleaner, more focused, more usable strategic plan. Strategic planning processes may be facilitated by administrators, but they belong to faculty. All substantive goals and measures of success will require faculty to articulate them and to decide among competing versions. If

faculty disagree with such a vision, they have the opportunity to enter into debate as part of taking ownership for the vision. If administrators find themselves working for such a vision against their own convictions, and if they cannot convince the faculty through reasoned arguments, then they are working at the wrong institution. (The same goes for faculty.)

Budget is one of the most difficult areas for resolving issues of shared governance. Currently, the University Budget Committee, after recent revisions, is working with a more transparent process than ever before, with a Budget Book containing crucial information in easy-to-follow format, with regular reports which are being revised for completeness and comparability, and with a membership and charge which includes four faculty among its ten voting members. Recently the issue has been raised regarding the fact that three of the faculty are appointed by the Provost after nominations have been put forward by the chairs and the Academic Senate. Recommendation: The method of deciding membership should be revisited and a means be found to give to the faculty the decision of who among the faculty serves on the UBC. This will include reexamination of the question of whether faculty should be a majority on that committee, and reexamination of whether their charge should include an ability to initiate issues regarding budgetary matters.

Program Mix, including Prioritization, Augmentations, Merging, Discontinuation. The processes now under way are going to provide information to be used in planning our future program mix. Budget reductions will drive us to reduce the number of programs we offer, since there is general agreement (almost certainly correct) that we cannot continue to make across-the-board percentage cuts without substantially weakening many of the programs we have. Such weakening has already begun. It might be thought that we need to offer programs which are sustainable as strong programs and stop offering those which are not, but in fact we can make decisions which make programs into sustainable, strong departments, provided we can find the resources. It may be that we will decide to move resources from some programs to others. Who is this we? The answer is all of us, but primarily it is faculty. And of course these issues overlap with issues of vision, curriculum, budget, personnel.

So far, though the Provost was the one who initiated program prioritization, the faculty have developed the criteria, have written the departmental reports, have scored departments based on those reports, and are developing the rankings. The difficult decisions to be made when those rankings are disseminated to the campus will primarily be faculty decisions, though with the Provost and others offering suggested alternatives. Faculty groups have already drafted a post-prioritization process and it has been presented to the Academic Senate for its first reading. I do not know how this will go—it seems likely it will test faculty abilities to work together with complex issues which have some potential for bitter or counterproductive results. If

those are the results, thank God it's the faculty and not the administration making the decisions, even though at that point the faculty will be relinquishing power to the administration which the administration will reluctantly step in to take.

Preparation for the Next WASC Visit in Spring 2010 has already demanded a huge load from faculty and administration alike. This area overlaps with all those above. In this area, administrative facilitation, information-gathering, report writing, and presentations have been absolutely crucial for the University. Without our (administration and faculty) continuing cooperation and sharing of the load, we would run a high risk of endangering our accreditation. While there can be no slackening of effort, it is clear that we are addressing the formidable issues raised by the accreditation team. If we can continue as we are working now then we will have changes in place and in process when they return to assure ourselves of success. This area is one where a list of tasks which are underway speaks well of administration and faculty working together as full partners.

Budgetary processes are undergoing major revision (with the help of our consultant David Maddox) to assure clarity and to better allow us to map priorities onto allocations.

Curriculum oversight structures are being reshaped for efficiency, clarity, and better ability to address big-picture issues.

The Keeling and Hirsch recommendation of using a Cabinet for Institutional Change to smooth out decisionmaking and to develop a shared vision which will guide planning is being implemented. That cabinet will include strong faculty voices. It will also address the need for building trust in our community.

Outcomes assessment is being implemented as a much more pervasive and structurally-integrated part of demonstrating accountability throughout the University. Results of assessments will be used for improving programs before spring of 2010.

Looming Budget Reductions require a separate note from the overall comments about budget above. The first and crucial need here is for widely shared communication of what problems we face now and may face in the future. The administration is relaying information as it becomes available to us through presentations to Council of Chairs, to the President's Council, to the University Budget Committee, to the University Executive Committee, and to the Academic Senate. The University community is being asked to participate in making contingency plans with various scenarios for different levels of cuts. In the absence of legislative courage to address statewide issues, this job is nearly impossible to do well, but we are working on it together. The faculty will be full partners with the administration in making decisions, and full explanations with clear justifications will be offered for all such decisions in

which there is substantial faculty disagreement with the decisions.

This area too has substantial overlap with other areas mentioned above. If we are required to make cuts which threaten the sustainability of programs, then the program prioritization process may be used as part of a justification for merging or discontinuing programs. The new temporary academic planning process which is now before the Senate and which will take the place of the current Program Discontinuation Process (besides broadening program oversight to include, for example, augmentation of programs) involves strong opportunities for faculty input, and of course the steps taken so far have been taken largely by faculty. The faculty will not be overruled in making those kinds of reductions; this means that if the administration finds itself in disagreement with the faculty then it will either persuade the faculty by providing good arguments or will yield to the faculty voice.