

## SOME THOUGHTS ON SHARED GOVERNANCE

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The Faculty Senate has launched a series of initiatives this year to enhance shared governance, including revision of the FACULTY HANDBOOK and streamlining Senate organization. In addition, a proposal from a Senate subcommittee for revamping the University's general education requirements has been revived. These and other initiatives indicate that the Senate is actively pursuing shared governance.

The administration welcomes this activity, since effective shared governance is an important attribute of institutional effectiveness. As we take steps to enhance relationships among the campus' various governance groups, it may be beneficial to step back a bit and consider the characteristics of a robust system of university governance.

### The Structure of Shared Governance at The University of Tennessee

The September, 1996, edition of the FACULTY HANDBOOK outlines the nature and structure of shared governance at this institution. The governing body is the Board of Trustees, which has full authority over all institutional policies, procedures, and activities (Section 1.2.1). The Board has delegated administrative authority to the President, who has in turn delegated administrative responsibilities and authority to Vice Presidents and Chancellors. In addition, "The Board has delegated to the UTK Faculty Senate authority, subject to the approval of the Chancellor, the President, and the Board itself, to determine general educational objectives and policies at UTK and regulations related to those objectives, such as requirements for admission, retention, readmission, graduation, and honors for all degree and certificate programs." In short, the faculty through the Senate exercises primary responsibility over academic matters.

The chief operating officer of the campus (the Chancellor in the 1996 HANDBOOK) holds delegated administrative authority over budgets, administrative organization, academic programs and policies, student affairs, and the physical plant (Section 1.3). Although the faculty sets the curriculum and recommends new academic programs, the chief operating officer exerts "major influence" on academic programs and planning.

The faculty have a significant institutional voice through the Faculty Senate and the work of their departments, schools, and colleges (Section 1.5). The faculty have particular influence in such matters as the appointment, dismissal, promotion, tenure, and retirement of faculty; in policies regarding selection of administrative officers; priorities for development; changes in physical facilities; and student life, rights and responsibilities. The faculty develop and deliver undergraduate and graduate degree programs and courses under academic policies and rules established by the Faculty Senate. Although the Senate has no management or administrative functions, the

administration values its advice and counsel on “certain administrative matters that are intrinsically related to the health and credibility of the University.” (Section 1.7)

In sum, the FACULTY HANDBOOK sets out a structure in which the faculty and the Faculty Senate have significant influence over academic policies but no formal administrative authority or responsibility. The administration seeks the advice and counsel of the faculty and the Senate on matters that are critical to the effectiveness of the institution.

### Strengthening Shared Governance

In a complex institution such as the University of Tennessee, effective shared governance is difficult to attain. The institution is significantly decentralized and many units are loosely coupled. Shared governance assumes that faculty, staff, and administrators will participate in structures such as the Faculty Senate that encourage joint decision-making and reach decisions collaboratively. It also presumes that faculty will serve responsibly and willingly on the departmental, college and university committees that are not part of the formal Senate structure but that serve as integral elements of the shared governance of academic programs.

Scholars studying shared governance for such organizations as AAUP, NASULGC, and AAC&U, recommend a number of attitudes and actions which may encourage the development of more effectiveness and efficiency. They include the following:

- Administrators must make every effort to involve faculty at critical stages of the decision-making process. Beset by constraints of time and focus, administrators must nonetheless realize that collaboration is critical to success. A “command and control” philosophy is inimical to an effective and efficient research university.
- Faculty government must strive to be efficient, timely, and goal-oriented. Members of the Senate and other governance organizations must do their homework and avoid prolonged individual filibusters on pet issues on which they occupy a minority position.
- Collaborative leadership aims to maximize the collective good, and will not be distracted by those who seek only to maximize gain for their own units.
- It is important to expect the best from all sides of an issue and to refuse to stereotype negatively those who disagree.
- Administrators and faculty alike must live up to the highest academic ideals, particularly the value of diverse opinions and the notion that the best ideas win out because they most effectively withstand the test of critique and analysis.
- It must be clear when actions are recommendations only and when they are binding.
- Academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance are the hallmarks of an effective institution.

- Governance organizations similar to the Faculty Senate should be established for both exempt and non-exempt staff so that their voices can be effectively and efficiently added to the decision-making process.

As we move through this important year, we must commit ourselves to enhancing shared governance, recognizing that it will be difficult to achieve perfect collaboration on all initiatives and matters of institutional concern. We must expect the best of one another and work together to achieve our most important institutional goals. In the free exchange of ideas, disagreements will surely occur, but we are obligated to work those out with the earnest intention of improving the institution.