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I. The Basics of Shared Governance

The practice and policies of shared governance in virtually every college and university in the United States are grounded in *Principles of Shared Government of Colleges & Universities*, created in 1966 by the American Association of University Professors (representing faculty) and commended by the American Council on Education (presidents) and the Association of Governing Boards (trustees). That document identifies the respective roles, responsibilities, and authorities of three parties to shared governance:

- Board of Trustees
- President
- Faculty

The primary issues on which the practice of shared governance focuses include:

- Institutional mission and goals
- Educational policy and academic programming
- Strategic direction and planning
- Resource allocation
- Institutional operating policies
- Personnel and appointments
- Physical plant

The specific responsibilities/authorities of the **Board of Trustees** normally include:

- Determine and periodically review the purposes and the mission of the institution.
- Elect the President and remove him or her for just cause.
- Authorize the establishment or discontinuance of colleges, schools, or degree programs of the institution upon recommendation of the appropriate faculty bodies and the President.
- Establish policies regarding appointment, compensation, promotion, tenure, and dismissal of faculty members.
- Review and establish the terms and conditions of employment for all administrators, staff, and other employees of the institution.
- Approve and authorize the awarding of earned degrees to qualified candidates upon recommendation of the faculty.
- Act on all candidates recommended for honorary degrees by the faculty and the President.

- Approve the budgets as recommended by the President (administration) and ensure the ongoing fiscal health of the institution.
- Establish policies for the management of the endowment and investment funds of the University.

In broader terms, as fiduciaries the board is ultimately *accountable* for everything at the institution. That does *not* mean that they are involved in the day-to-day management or in the academic core of the institution—it *does* mean that they are engaged in appropriate oversight of all aspects of the institution's operations to ensure the institution's integrity, health, sustainability, and commitment to mission.

NOTE: The board, while maintaining a general overview, *entrusts the conduct of administration to the administrative officers—the president, provost, deans, etc.—and the conduct of teaching and research to the faculty.*

The specific responsibilities and authorities of **the President** include:

- Oversight and management of the institution's operations.
- Appointment of vice presidents, deans and administrative officers responsible for the operations of the institution and the conduct of academic programs, student life programs, business and financial affairs and institutional advancement programs.
- Responsibility for the development and execution of strategic plans.
- Serving as the institution's chief spokesperson to both internal and external audiences.
- Responsibility for the maintenance of existing resources and the creation of new resources.
- Shared responsibility for a communications system that links the components of the institution's community.
- Ensuring that faculty views, including dissenting views, are presented to the board in those areas and on those issues where responsibilities are shared; similarly, the faculty should be informed of the view of the board and the administration on like issues [NOTE: this language taken from the AAUP *Statement*].

The specific responsibilities and authorities of **the Faculty** include:

- Primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status and those aspects of student life that relate to the educational process ["primary responsibility" recognizes that some faculty decisions require ratification by the administration and the board, e.g., hiring, tenure & promotion].
- Setting the requirements for degrees offered in course, determining when the requirements have been met, and authorizing the president and the board to grant the respective degrees.

- Faculty status and related matters are primarily a faculty responsibility; this area includes recommending (to the administration and ultimately the board) appointments, reappointments, decisions not to reappoint, promotions, the granting of tenure, and dismissal.
- Active participation in determination of policies and procedures governing faculty compensation.

II. Shared Governance in the 21st Century: Some Basic Principles

- Shared governance can no longer be viewed solely as the respective allocation of *authorities*—it must be viewed, and carried out in practice, as a *strategic alliance* among all stakeholders, in which all parties to deliberations agree on goals and on their respective roles in achieving those goals.
- All parties to shared governance and decision-making deliberations must recognize that the opportunity to participate in those deliberations must be accompanied by willingness to be a part of the *collective accountability* for the outcome.
- While staff and students were not included in the 1966 AAUP *Statement* as formal participants in shared governance, staff and students increasingly expect for their voices to be heard in an institution's strategic deliberations, particularly those that will affect them directly.
- The success of stakeholder participation (faculty, students, staff) in shared governance, and in decision-making writ large, is entirely dependent on:
 - The existence and effectiveness of formal representative structures (e.g., Faculty Senate; Student Government; Staff Council) that can provide advice and perspective to the president and the board, and—where appropriate—provide representation to decision-making bodies
 - The willingness on the part of campus stakeholders to invest the time and energy to participate in the shared governance and decision-making processes
 - The willingness on the part of campus stakeholders to invest the time and energy necessary to ensure that they are fully informed on the institution's bylaws, policies, practices, and respective roles and responsibilities
 - The willingness on the part of campus stakeholders to invest the time and energy necessary to ensure that they are fully informed about the issues that are the subject of shared governance and decision-making
- Successful shared governance is heavily dependent on mutual trust and respect among the participants. Opportunities—both formal (representation) and informal (social) for campus stakeholders to interact with the president and members of the board are essential to achieving mutual trust and respect. Without the opportunity for the stakeholders to get to know one another, relationships are often clouded by inaccurate assumptions and presumptions that make the strategic alliance necessary to effective shared governance difficult, if not impossible.

- The success and effectiveness of shared governance is dependent on a robust communications infrastructure and practice that ensures that all parties are sufficiently informed of issues, challenges, opportunities and decisions.
- It is important to recognize and acknowledge that shared governance is *always* a work in progress—that like any system involving complex issues and decisions, and large numbers of stakeholders, it must be periodically assessed for effectiveness and changed when appropriate based on the findings of the assessment. To phrase it in more blunt terms, every high-performing organization should periodically step back and ask the questions, “are we doing the right things in the right way at the highest possible level?”

III. Shared Governance at St. Mary's College of Maryland: Some Thoughts

In formal terms, i.e., bylaws, handbooks, etc., shared governance at St. Mary's College of Maryland is consistent with the fundamental principles and practices of higher education institutions in the 21st century. It is evident that all stakeholders have a firm and sincere commitment to those principles and practices. But it is also evident that a variety of decisions that had to be made in recent years in response to urgent and complex challenges have put a strain on the system and its participants. In addition, our conversations with all stakeholders pointed to concerns regarding communications and transparency. To address those issues, while at the same time recognizing the need to periodically evaluate the state of shared governance, we would suggest the following options:

1. Creation of a Task Force (working group?) comprising board members, administration/staff, faculty, students)
 - a. Charge from the Board:
 - i. Develop a statement of Shared Governance at St. Mary's College of Maryland (to be endorsed by constituencies and approved by the Board).
 - ii. Develop a parallel (or embedded) Statement of Principles for Shared Governance & Decision-Making.
 - iii. Outside facilitator a good idea.
2. Create a decision matrix that identifies and clarifies the specific roles (e.g., decide; consult; inform, etc.) of each constituency in institutional decision-making.
3. Conduct thorough review of campus communications policies, procedures and structures for effectiveness (this could be done with cross-sector task force, and/or with outside consultant).
4. Identify and implement formal and informal opportunities for regular stakeholder interaction.
5. Undertake periodic assessment of the state of shared governance that involves all constituencies.
6. Campus-wide email from president in advance of Board meetings with an overview of the agenda, noting in particular “big issues” that the Board will be addressing.
7. Campus-wide email from president and/or Board chair after Board meetings with an overview of what was discussed, what decisions were made.

8. Review the roles of faculty, student and staff representatives to the board to ensure that their participation has consequence.
9. Review and amend as necessary Faculty Bylaws and College Bylaws to ensure consistency and a clearer statement of faculty governance as a component of shared governance.