

Shared Governance Spotlight - CU Denver ^[1]

October 21, 2021 by [Faculty Council Communications Committee](#) ^[2]

Joanne Addison

Professor of English, CU Denver

Past Chair, Faculty Council

Representative At Large, Faculty Council

What does shared governance mean to you? Why is it important?

When it's working well, shared governance (Policy 5.A.1) allows for people with a diverse range of knowledge and experience to help shape the university in ways that increase engagement, equity, and accountability. No matter what your interest—student success, social justice, budget priorities, academic freedom, academic policy—there's a place for you on your campus-based Faculty Assembly or system-based Faculty Council. Each School or College (Article 5.A.2) in our system is also required to have a functioning shared governance body that addresses substantial issues in coordination with its administrative leaders. Crucial to effective shared governance is regular, sustained participation that allows us to build the relationships and networks needed to address ongoing challenges as well as new challenges as they arise.

One of our Faculty Council members recently described Faculty Council's Executive Committee as the most important faculty committee in the entire system and therefore one people should be lining up to join. In some ways this is certainly true—through what other mechanism can faculty at any rank have ongoing access to the President's Office and the Board of Regents? But if you don't have the time it takes to be on this committee there are many other ways to make your voice heard through Faculty Assembly and Faculty Council participation.

Tell us about your role(s) on the Faculty Council, how long you have served for, and what your initial motivations were for engaging in this type of service.

I've been involved in shared governance, serving on various committees as well as a Faculty Assembly Chair and Faculty Council Chair, for over 20 years. My initial motivation was rooted in the fight for LGBTQ equality at CU. When I arrived at the University of Colorado in 1995, I really wasn't ready for the level of homophobia I would encounter in Colorado in general and at CU in particular. At that time, sexual orientation was not included in CU's nondiscrimination policy, CU wouldn't provide LGBTQ families with health insurance, neither domestic partnerships nor gay marriage existed, and Colorado had just been dubbed "the hate state" after its passage of Amendment 2. As Justice Kennedy made clear in the Supreme Court's decision, Amendment 2 had as its overriding purpose "to make them [homosexuals] unequal to everyone else."

Shortly after my arrival, I was fortunate to find my way to the system-wide LGBTQ Committee, marking the start of my involvement in shared governance. The committee was led by Professor John Miller, a former Faculty Council Chair deeply involved in the struggle for LGBTQ rights. Because of John's previous position as Faculty Council Chair, he had knowledge of systems and access to people most don't have. And he knew how to organize a system-wide committee in order to effect change. There are many stories I could share about our work together. For example, at one point during our fight for equal rights and benefits at CU it became clear that neither CU's President, nor members of the President's cabinet, nor any of our Chancellors would publicly support our efforts even if they privately expressed solidarity. We were told that in order to gain support we would need to survey the entire faculty across the system to ask whether or not they supported extending health insurance to the families of LGBTQ faculty and staff. Essentially we had to ask our colleagues to vote on whether or not our families were worthy of the same benefits as their families. While the survey results proved generally positive there were many people who took the opportunity to write hateful things on the surveys they returned to us and more than a few told us they would support this extension of health insurance only if it didn't result in their own insurance costs increasing. The only way to make your way through something like this in a system as large as CU is with the help of those who have learned how to access the available avenues as Professor Miller had done.

We worked hard over several years and in 2001 CU added sexual orientation to its nondiscrimination policy and in 2002 CU decided to offer health insurance to domestic partners. While we are still fighting for equal treatment (for example, certain health insurance benefits for our transgendered colleagues are much more recent), being a member of this committee and seeing the changes that are possible taught me about the power of shared governance and the importance of perseverance. It also evidences the fact that our shared governance bodies need to make sure their leadership teams are inclusive so that those who have traditionally been denied the ability to influence higher-level decision-making processes have an opportunity to do so.

What makes this work rewarding? Can you share some of the Council's initiatives or achievements that you are particularly proud to have spearheaded in your role as FC Chair, in particular?

The most rewarding part of participating in shared governance at the system level is having the opportunity to engage with faculty, staff, administrators, and students from across the system and to see actual change as a result of that engagement. The members of our committees achieved quite a bit during the time I served as chair including working to strengthen shared governance through diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, participating in

the review of Regent Laws and Policies, digitizing important shared governance historical documents such as the Jessor Report [3], engaging with ODE about the future of online education at CU, initiating Committee Corner and Faculty Voices in CU Connections, establishing an anti-bullying policy, honoring the will of the vast majority of our faculty and staff in relation to the leadership of CU, and more.

Display Title:

Shared Governance Spotlight - CU Denver

Send email when Published:

No

Source URL:<https://www.cu.edu/blog/faculty-council-newsletter/shared-governance-spotlight-cu-denver>

Links

[1] <https://www.cu.edu/blog/faculty-council-newsletter/shared-governance-spotlight-cu-denver>

[2] <https://www.cu.edu/blog/faculty-council-newsletter/author/27578> [3] <https://www.cu.edu/doc/1970-report-equality-ed-opportunitypdf-10pdf>