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Voices Essay on Shared Governance [1]

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The regents of CU grant joint governance of the university to administration and faculty. Following a brief summary of the challenges to a joint governance system, this essay discusses how this approach leads to many positive outcomes for CU stakeholders (e.g., faculty, students, administration and staff).

One challenge for joint governance is that creation and implementation of policy takes more time than would a hierarchical approach confined to administrator input. The process of joint governance takes time away from administrators and time away from faculty. Administrators must seek out and yield to faculty voices before engaging in management procedures and strategies. Often, faculty committees must be formed and representatives must meet, research the issues, and reach a consensus about faculty views. Faculty must take time from teaching and research duties to examine issues from 360o and form a position that represents the perspectives and goals of students and faculty. Management challenges are continuous, and the cycle of faculty input and integration into administration must circle in sync with the ebb and flow of these challenges.

A second challenge revolves around conflict and its resolution. With their focus on the management of the university, their macro-perspectives and oftentimes many years of experience in their roles, administrators may feel that they know best as to how to manage CU and are better equipped to balance the interests of all constituencies. Yet as administrators confront managerial challenges, they impinge on domains that are shared with faculty governance. Viewpoints and perspectives may collide because of different values and goals. Faculty may focus primarily on fair processes, equitable outcomes, and effectiveness of policies for educational outcomes and student success, as well as scholarly productivity, academic freedom, faculty morale and work/reward tradeoffs. Administrators often must consider a host of other issues that sometimes conflict with scholarly effectiveness and faculty considerations. These include overall efficiency, allocation of limited resources, financial viability, legal issues, political considerations, public policy and societal concerns such as tuition, to name a few.

In spite of challenges, joint governance brings benefits to all CU stakeholders.

One significant benefit that faculty bring to governance is direct representation of student interests, both short-term and long-term. First, faculty are experts in pedagogy and understand alternative approaches and the benefits that these bring to students. Second, faculty interact with students continuously and constantly update their understanding of student challenges and issues that facilitate or interfere with academic success. Third, via faculty engagement with their respective academic fields, society and the business community, faculty learn and stay abreast of knowledge and skills that students must obtain

for sustained success over their lifetimes. Teaching is a passion and consequently faculty are advocates for policy that maximizes student learning and lifetime success.

A second benefit of shared governance is that faculty actively participate in the creation and execution of policy. It should go without saying that CU gains extraordinary expertise from faculty input into governance. Together, faculty share their cumulative and diverse life and work experiences and expertise gained from graduate and doctoral scholarship and other academic achievements. Just as this is critical for success in research and teaching, it is also essential for CU to prosper and flourish as an organization. No wonder participants in shared governance want to advance the process.

Perhaps an overlooked benefit of faculty governance is its contribution to university achievements, in all domains, via faculty's social identification with CU. Social identity theory and its close cousin, organization identification theory (e.g., Lane and Scott, 2007; Scott and Lane, 2000), predict broad-based achievements for CU, as a consequence of shared governance with faculty. To socially identify with CU means that a person defines herself by the same characteristics (e.g., beliefs, values, goals) that define CU, that s(he) basks in the admiration CU attracts, that (s)he feels both inclusion with and commitment to CU, and gains esteem from her affiliation and shared accomplishments with CU. Faculty's identification with CU intensifies commitment to CU, ignites motivation to accomplish group goals, fosters compassion and support for students and other stakeholders, fuels work effort, and sparks engagement and collegiality between faculty, students, administrators and other stakeholders. As a consequence, CU and its stakeholders flourish and prosper.

The other side of the theory predicts negative outcomes will result if faculty voices are not included in CU policy and practice. That is, inclusion of faculty in governance is a positive force, but its absence is a negative force. There is not a neutral position. If CU excluded faculty voices (or is perceived to do so), dis-identification can result. In such a case, faculty morale would suffer, they would disconnect their individual identity from CU, they would consider CU as an outgroup, and they would disengage. With dis-identification, collegiality and group efforts would suffer, and faculty would focus their work effort and identity building relative to self-roles and individual accomplishments, without reference to a CU identity.

To summarize, there is much wisdom in regent recognition of joint governance. While implementation can take time and requires conflict resolution, there are substantial benefits, including greater social identification with CU. When faculty consider CU as a vital component of their self concept, their sense of inclusion, belongingness and pride strengthens, and commitment to CU grows. Consequently, CU's achievements proliferate, enriching its reputation and identity.

Lane, V.L. and Scott, S.G. 2007. The neural network model of organizational identification. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 104: 175-192.

Scott, S.G. and Lane, V.L. 2000. A stakeholder approach to organizational identity. Academy of Management Review, 25: 43-62.

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