

State of Shared Governance at UC Davis

By: Professor Robert Powell

January 2, 2009

As the chair of the Davis Division of the Academic Senate, I wish to communicate an assessment of the state of shared governance at UC Davis. Such an assessment is important at any point, but particularly so at this moment in the history of our campus. The search for a new Chancellor, the orientation of the third Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor in less than five years, steady erosion of state funding to our institution over the past two decades, and the budget crisis which is expected to become much worse in the next two years all compel us to take a critical look at where we are and to determine we should be going. Knowing what works well and what does not is vital to maintaining excellence while shaping the future of the UC Davis campus during this period of significant change.

1995: UC Shared Governance

I start with my colleague Professor Daniel L. Simmons' 1995 writings¹ concerning the implementation of shared governance at UC:

“Shared governance with the Academic Senate is one of the distinctive features of the University of California. The system of shared governance gives University faculty, operating through the Academic Senate, a voice in the operation of the University. In addition, it imposes on faculty a measure of responsibility for the manner in which the University operates. Faculty participation in governance of the University through the agency of the Academic Senate is a guiding force that unifies the nine [now ten] campuses of the University into a single system under a uniform standard of excellence.

AN ASSESSMENT OF SHARED GOVERNANCE

Critics of shared governance in the University of California generally raise two concerns; the faculty has too much power, and the processes by which faculty oversight delay the implementation of needed change.

The faculty members of the University of California do indeed exercise great influence on the affairs of the University. Without the faculty there would be no prestigious research accomplishments. Without the faculty there will be no educational program. No central governing authority can direct an individual faculty member to the next great research breakthrough. Nor can a central governing authority direct individual faculty to inspire a classroom of undergraduates with the joy of the discovery of new knowledge. The governors and administrators of a university system must work to provide a supportive atmosphere that encourages creative people to perform at their highest level in a collective research and education enterprise. The faculty, through the Academic Senate, seek to advise the Board of Regents and the administration on the development of policies and procedures that will enhance the research and education enterprise while maintaining appropriate standards of conduct with necessary and reasonable oversight.

Shared governance provides the faculty with a mechanism to participate in the development of policy to guide the University in its continuing quest for excellence in all of its missions. The faculty's sense of participation in the collective endeavor creates a collective responsibility of ownership among the faculty for the academic programs of the University. With that

¹ Shared Governance in the University of California by Daniel L. Simmons, 1995

responsibility comes a culture that seeks to nourish the values of excellence and academic freedom which are the hallmarks of a successful institution of higher education. Removing the faculty from meaningful participation in governance would deprive the University of one of the principal forces driving its constant progress towards higher quality results in its teaching, research and service.

Clearly the consultation inherent in shared governance is a difficult and time consuming process for all participants. The time devoted to consultation undoubtedly delays implementation of what proponents always believe is a good idea. However, the University of California is too complex of an institution to be managed by a central authority. The filter of other minds, and the tests of experience broader than that of a few people more often than not adds value to the formulation of a proposal. In many cases, consultation has thwarted unwise ideas. Examples may also be found of bad decisions that may have been prevented with broader consultation with affected groups. Overall, we enhance our collective skills by reaching out to broad constituencies for participation in governance.”

2004: UC Davis Shared Governance

The Davis Division issued a report in 2004 describing in detail the roles of the administration and Academic Senate in shared governance, areas in which shared governance was working well, as well as areas of governance that could be improved by both sides. Some of the issues raised therein remain current today:

“A healthy effectively functioning Academic Senate organization is important to the overall health and intellectual growth of the campus. Under the shared management structure created by the Standing Orders of the Regents, concurrence by the Academic Senate is required for most major initiatives. Even where concurrence not required, a history of disregard of the views of the Academic Senate creates an atmosphere of distrust and bad faith among administrators and faculty that hinders progress in what must, by its nature, be a cooperative enterprise.”²

“The individual faculty members who bear the greatest burden of the work of the Academic Senate must be provided with an appropriate level of compensation for time lost from their academic pursuits and for the demands that are placed upon them.”³

“The Academic Senate requires adequate staff support for its work.”⁴

2009: State of Shared Governance at UC Davis

UC Davis Governance

The effective functioning of UC Davis requires the faculty, administration and staff to work together within an atmosphere that fosters trust and respect. Transparency is a necessary condition for this to exist. This extends to all facets of university activities including academic and institutional planning, budget, hiring and performance assessment. The Academic Senate firmly believes that effective academic leadership derives from having transparent processes in place so that policies and decisions that result from them are open for comment and discussion, and can be broadly supported. Faculty are reluctant partners if their participation is seen as *pro forma*, disregarded or if decisions are ultimately made without any apparent or defensible rationale.

Institutional success cannot be achieved without enthusiastic faculty participation. It is the faculty, engaged in cutting edge research and new educational initiatives, that give shape to new academic

² Mending the Wall, Executive Summary, page i

³ Mending the Wall, Executive Summary, page ii

⁴ Mending the Wall, Executive Summary, page ii

programs and new initiatives. In recent years, there is a strongly held sentiment that this was not adequately recognized [by the administration]. As a result, some initiatives failed, but more importantly, valuable time was wasted because of the lack of faculty-centered approaches at the outset.

Campus Planning

Dynamic, adaptable, participatory, and well-informed planning and budget processes are critical for the long term success of the campus. The next few years promise to be challenging ones for the campus and the University. This makes it even more important to undertake comprehensive planning that rises above political or short-sighted considerations that fail to recognize and address the larger issues which exist. At the broadest level, the administration, in consultation with the faculty through the Academic Senate, should be able to make important planning decisions that direct campus development in meaningful directions and thereby lead to a stronger faculty and university. Recent successful examples of effective planning are the decisions to target increases in graduate student enrollments and to make major investments in the School of Veterinary Medicine. Both actions, undertaken with Academic Senate input and support, have already enhanced the academic and research missions of the University.

A second example of campus planning has been the initiative process. Although FTE allocations for these new campus initiatives have been undertaken in consultation with the Academic Senate, they typically provide only a fraction of the resources needed for success. There is a concomitant need for start-up funds, space, and support staff, which, if lacking, may ultimately compromise success. The campus must insist that investment of campus resources be made strategically and with Senate input, and that the assessment of success is validated through a rigorous process involving Senate oversight.

Regular consultation with Academic Senate Committee on Planning and Budget (CPB) by a number of administrative officers during the planning processes has been very valuable and instructive. Information provided to CPB on these occasions have helped committee members to educate themselves on the critical issues associated with campus development, and provided an opportunity for representatives of the Office of Resource Management and Planning to address concerns and answer questions from CPB. In the past, such the consultation process was incomplete and sometimes after the fact. Starting in Fall 2008 a system of follow-up meeting(s) has been put in place wherein the representatives of the administration describe campus planning proposals, and then return to hear CPB's response and suggestions to the original planning presentations. This second interaction allows for information provided by the administration to benefit from Senate committee input. This procedure was followed in Fall 2008 and was deemed a success by the Senate and the administration. We also believe that face to face communication during such planning meetings often has advantages over written memos, although sometimes a written response may be preferable.

Campus Budgeting

Transparency in the budgeting process is essential. Not only is it a basic expectation of a publicly funded institution, it is essential internally. It is a means to ensure that the statutory requirement that the Academic Senate advise the administration on budget matters is fulfilled. It is also difficult for different units to have trust in the operations and strategies employed across the campus unless there is openness about the allocation of resources among them and about the way those resources are used.

In order to address the current budget situation, the campus needs to be able to evaluate the budgets associated with activities that relate to the core missions and priorities of the campus. The campus has very few activities and programs that are not worthwhile. In the abstract, practically all we do as a faculty is justifiable with clear potential for beneficial outcomes. However, in the face of reduced resources (in real terms), difficult decisions about allocation of resources must be made and priorities must be established to guide such resource allocations. This will require that the core responsibilities of the university be identified and distinguished from other activities that are less closely related to the University's central missions of education and research. For this to work the whole process must be

transparent to all involved, and above all it must involve meaningful consultation with the Academic Senate.

Campus Leadership and the Pursuit of Academic Excellence

Over the last decade, members of the Academic Senate have expressed increasing concern that campus leadership positions have been filled using hiring processes that have not been transparent. Too often leadership appointments have been made without a formal search or through problematic search processes that result in appointees internal to the UC Davis campus. The latter has been exacerbated by the frequent use of interim or fixed three-year term appointments. This strategy, while expedient, may undermine the oft stated goal of both the administration and the faculty to appoint leaders who can help the University move to the next level of excellence. In this atmosphere, even when the best possible candidate selected from a national search is internal to UC Davis, the decision to hire that person may be unfairly questioned because of other unrelated appointments that were made without an appropriate search. The Senate has memorialized its concern on these matters in a letter to the President of the University of California.

http://academicssenate.ucdavis.edu/pdf/DD_resolution_recruitment_president_after_EC_042108.pdf

The faculty comprising the Academic Senate annually engage in national, competitive searches for outstanding faculty to fill full-time ladder rank positions. These searches are guided by the highest standards of scholarship. The Academic Senate undertakes its role in these processes assuming that these are shared values and that a principal means of ensuring the best possible outcome is to demand confidentiality and transparency. Recently, the Committee on Academic Personnel has identified specific issues that have arisen and have possibly compromised faculty searches. Often these relate to the use of search waivers, searches for which there have been a limited number of applicants, or to searches that may have been biased by the appointment of a search committee that has an inappropriate connection to an applicant. The Senate has raised concerns that under such circumstances, open search processes may be compromised. In the view of the Senate, these echo the issues that have been raised concerning the hiring of some campus leaders.

Summary Comments

The interim and fixed term leadership positions as well as the upcoming hiring of a new Chancellor makes the continuing affirmation of the principles that result in open processes and decision making critical. It is not enough to assert that these are in place. New circumstances and the uncertainty associated with the anticipated multi-year budget crisis make continuing close collaboration between the Senate and Administration imperative. Collaboration is a two way street. Consultation with the Academic Senate must be part of the fabric of the relationship between it and the administration. Even hard decisions made in this spirit are likely to find broad support and a clear sense of shared responsibility. The alternative may be expedient in the short term but is unhealthy for the long term strategic interests of the campus.