Shared Leadership and Shared Responsibility: Successful Shared Governance
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The concept of shared governance at American institutions of higher education is deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of our lives. In fact, however, shared governance is a relatively new concept in higher education. According to Susan Pierce in Governance Reconsidered: How Boards, Presidents Administrators and Faculty Can Help Their Colleges Thrives (2014), the idea of a faculty voice in institutional matters was not really part of the functioning of colleges and universities until the late 19th century. She argues that it was the 20th century rise in the significance of the AAUP that led to this recognition that faculty opinion should be integral to the functioning and decision-making of institutions of higher education. In 1915, there was the Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure which was reaffirmed in 1940. In 1956, in the face of McCarthyism, the AAUP came out with a very strong statement on academic freedom and in 1966, of course AAUP worked with the Association of Governing Boards and the American Council on Education to craft a remarkable consensus for what has been considered the norm and best practice for the next 50 years.

However, today that consensus is fraying. That fraying is largely due to the fact that higher education in general is under siege in the United States.

What is behind this siege? First is the historical and recently exacerbated anti-intellectualism of the United States. I just finished reading an engaging and disturbing book, Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free. Written in 2009, this book is uncomfortably prescient in our time of "alternate facts" and climate change denial. Charles Pierce's basic premise is that the American healthy tradition of cranks, individuals with crazy but creative ideas, has devolved into an all out war on expertise. Today it seems that too much knowledge is dangerous; intellectuals are not to be trusted. In the popular mind, knowledge and intellectualism flourish most obviously on university campuses. And as a consequence we are not just part of the problem, we are the seat of the problem.

The second reason for this siege against academe is the growing distrust of institutions in general. If we learned nothing from last fall's election, surely we

learned that there is a strong feeling among large swaths of the population (both on the left and on the right) that institutions are broken. The general populace believes that institutions are only interested in self-perpetuation; they no longer are seen as serving a larger good. That skepticism pertains whether the institution is the banking industry or the government or social service agencies or science or health care providers or higher education.   The fact that one of our advocacy planks is that higher education serves not just the individual good but the public good continually falls on deaf ears. Part of the reason for that distrust is the growing instrumentalist notion of higher education (i.e., a degree should lead to not just any job, but a good job); the other part is this distrust of traditional institutions.

The third reason for the siege of higher education is the escalation in the cost of higher education, especially as that escalation is compared to the stagnation or drop in family median income.   This contrast when combined with a growing skepticism about the value of higher education makes for a very dangerous environment for the status of higher education.

Let me give you some statistics.   If you consider the percentage of family income that must be attributed to a year of tuition and fees in 1971 compared to 2015, the change is staggering. In 1971, the median income for an employed male (in adjusted by inflation dollars) was $36,036 (for a female $12,571). In 2015, for a male it was $37,138 (for a female $23,769). So in almost 50 years, the employed male is earning just over $1000 more and the female just over $11,000. In that same period, 4 year public tuition was $2431 in 1971 and in 2015 $9500. So that means in 1971, annual tuition at a public institution represented 7% of a man's median salary and 20% of a woman's. In 2015, tuition represented 25% of a man's median salary and 39% of a woman's. (ProCon.org).

In the face of this growing cost and its growing percentage of family income, more and more attention is being given to the uneven results of higher education—some critics focus on graduation rates and some on job placement and salaries. The results as you know are not impressive. Average 6 year graduation rates for students who entered in 2008 are 60% (National Center for Educational Statistics) and it has been reported that the average 4 year graduation rates for students in public institutions is below 20% (Lewin). Anecdotes of the college unemployed (or underemployed) permeate popular publications, as do analyses of the lack of the value added of a higher education. If you read the critics from Kevin Carey to Richard Arun and Josipa Roksa to Jeff Selingo to Martha Nussbaum, there is no consensus on where the problem lies—some think it's the faculty, some the administrators, some the students, and some the boards. But in fact, we have few

defenders who can break through the public relations juggernaut that is the basic skepticism regarding the value of what we do and our commitment to the greater good.

As academics we can rationalize every one of these data points (e.g., states have been disinvesting in higher education for more than a generation; graduation rates are based on a smaller and smaller percentage of students in college; the baccalaureate degree was never intended only as job preparation). All of these arguments are powerful—but most of this power is in our own echo chamber, not in the public arena.

The final reason for this siege is that there seems to be less and less patience these days with reflection, long term goals and life long projects. In the time of snapchat and twitter, a treatise is meaningless and rational argument is truncated. The attention span of the American public barely stretches from one advertisement to the next on a television sitcom. The 24 hour news cycle and social media give life to the most outrageous and salacious arguments and rarely give credence to thoughtful response. The public in general expects action and correction in nano seconds and we in academe believe that good decision making takes time and reflection. It's as if we were caught in a time warp and yet everyone insists nothing matters more than higher education for preparing people for the knowledge economy.

While we must be responsive to these attacks, we must also be careful to preserve what we believe are the bedrock of our historical success. For instance, we must acknowledge that if results matter, then quality matters, and if quality matters, then higher education is not going to be done on the cheap. It seems that the day of MOOCs has past but there is still a strong appetite for technological mediation of education that saves costs. That does not mean that we should not engage in developments of ways to approach our jobs with an eye towards efficiency and thoughtful use of technology and shared services. The goal should not be to make higher education cheaper. Rather it should be to underline the value for the cost of higher education and to increase access and efficiency.

At the very same time that there are all these pressures from the outside of higher education, we stakeholders from the inside are not necessarily in agreement with one another. The faculty are made uncomfortable with what has been called the "corporatization" of the academy (by the way, Susan Pierce points out that the first time American faculty expressed concerns about corporatization was in 1908). Sometimes I believe that faculty confuse corporatization with accountability.

Frankly, if you look at corporate America, I would not confuse the two. And I submit accountability is not a bad thing. It is the basis for thoughtful accreditation and for public transparency. The administration on the other hand is convinced that the faculty do not appreciate the existential threats to the enterprise. Threats that include not just the elements of the siege mentioned above but also the changes in the delivery of knowledge, the looming high school enrollment drop and changing demographics of high school students that will hit the northeast very hard, the demands for accountability by the public and boards of trustees, and the drip drip drip of anti-intellectualism and xenophobia that seems to have become a world wide problem. Trustees just want us to get things done and in an efficient, effective, and non controversial fashion. We should transform our engagement models, keep the students safe and quiet, and satisfy our surrounding communities (without giving them too many freebies). All of us in this room of course know that that is easy. Right?

For those of us in the public sector, the intrusion from partisan political leaders can be especially disruptive. Often these politicians will respond to a heart broken request from a constituent to address a mental health crisis on a campus by legislation that stems from the best intentions in the world, but results in unexpected and dangerous consequences. The kinds of consequences that would have been identified with more serious review and consideration by those on the campuses with the expertise. And in the public sector sometimes the bright line that should be drawn between partisan politics and Trustee governance is not honored.

These problems are no doubt daunting, but they can, I submit absolutely be addressed and be addressed in a productive and timely fashion. The way they will be addressed is through a full appreciation of shared governance, but an historically contextualized understanding of shared governance. All stakeholders have a part in making decisions, but not all decisions and not with the same authority. All stakeholders are leaders, but not in all matters.

First, I believe that shared governance is not merely faculty governance. It is shared. I also believe that that sharing, in the best of all possible worlds, is not merely the faculty sharing with the administration of an institution, but also with the students, the professional staff, and most importantly the Board of Trustees. I would also emphasize that even as these constituent groups should have a voice, they need to be participating as a member of the community at large.

The Board particularly must be attentive to the notion of a single voice. Good practice requires that the Board have robust and honest discussion on the most difficult of issues but out of that discussion comes a single opinion and decision from the Board of Trustees.

Furthermore, there are certain portions of decision-making that are agreed to be in the purview of a singular stakeholder group. For instance, it has been a shared belief that the curriculum is essentially in the purview of the faculty and the naming of a building or asset is in the purview of the Board. However, there are some changes impinging on this more simplistic division of authority. Consider the following. Is there not a time when it is appropriate for an administrative office to encourage a change in delivery mode, such as a greater use of technology in the curriculum? On the other hand, most protocols make clear that it is the Board's responsibility to name assets. But recently we have seen episodes that engage other voices to inform the Board action—at Yale, at Princeton, and currently at The College of New Jersey.

The second foundation for successful shared governance is that all of the stakeholder groups must listen to and respect the perspective of the other groups. Boards and administrators must believe that dissent is creative. They must recognize that transparency and openness is as important as data. Faculty, staff and students have to understand that the landscape of higher education is not what it was 10 years ago, much less 50 years ago. Change is not something we can resist; rather it is something that we must embrace but not in a passive way, we must use it to serve our mission. In addition, while thoughtful deliberation on important matters undoubtedly results in better decisions, process obstacles that serve only to stymie progress are legitimately seen as stalling tactics by both administration and Boards. Faculty should always be forthright with opinions but the "demonizing of administrators as a class" is as useless (Susan Pierce) as the infantilizing of the faculty as a class by administrators.

And everyone should engage with the leadership of the institution with integrity and trustworthiness. Thus, even students who wish to participate in leading an institution or realizing a change cannot simply default to guerilla tactics and petitions. They must actually engage with the faculty, the staff and the administration.

In their 2015 book Locus of Authority: The Evolution of Faculty Roles in the Governance of Higher Education, William Bowen and Eugene Tobin assert

We start, then, with the twin premises (1) that the governance challenges facing American higher education today—as it copes with pressures to adapt to a new world marked by a lethal combination of high expectations concerning educational outcomes, severe fiscal constraints, and rapid technological change—are of absolutely central importance, and (2) that these challenges have to be addressed on the basis of a deep understanding of faculty roles, and how they have evolved over time. (9)

They emphasize that faculty roles and particularly with regard to governance has continued to evolve. The default position that quality in program always trumps cost simply can no longer be accepted. Finances do matter and there will be trade offs. Because of the changing landscape of education and the different modes of knowledge delivery, structures will need to be re-considered. Bowen and Tobin's view of shared governance in contemporary times is more nuanced than simply identifying which part of decision-making belongs to which stakeholder group. To them it is "embracing a commitment to a genuine sharing of perspectives—to the avoidance of constituency-based thinking." There should be an "eagerness to embrace good ideas generated by others." While administrators will be making the decisions that lead to recommendations to the Board (when Board action is required), administrators must be expected to articulate clearly the rationale for these decisions. (212).

In other words, while shared governance today is not what it was in 1966, neither is higher education. But shared governance has never been more important than it is today. It might look, feel, seem different, but there is a reason why American higher education has survived, why it continues to be the envy of the world, why Americans continue to clamor to gain admission to our institutions of higher education, why some of the greatest research in the world is happening on our campuses. One of those reasons is our very complex, highly consultative decision making processes.

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