Models for Shared Governance

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One of the great benefits of working on the planning of this conference has been the opportunity to engage in discussion and debate with those on the planning committee. I hope that we can create an experience here today that allows you to do the same. In our busy lives we don't often have enough time to think. My friends are always amazed when I say this – since they assume that what I do is think deep thoughts for a living with the occasional foray into a classroom of adoring students. Actually I spend a good portion of my time managing projects and leading a team at the Institute for Families where we do the work for number of state contracts and federal grants. So, I am constantly balancing competing missions and agendas at the micro level.

Eric Gould argued today, and does so at greater depth in his new book, that American universities have a primary mission related to democratic education. American Universities are implementing democratic values and practices *and* responding to the power of the market.

So, I was struck by an analysis of higher education by Rudolf Weingartner who argues that faculty members in particular (but also others he calls "campus dwellers") are more like *citizens of a country* than they are like *employees of a corporation*. This may be an important distinction as we consider University governance.

That said Universities have approached shared governance in diverse ways. Some have argued for a distinction between shared governance models, collective bargaining models and corporate models, but as Eric has noted the current reality is that many institutions must govern in the face of all three of these frameworks. Certainly, here at DU we are constantly seeking to integrate academic governance and corporate governance strategies.

Is there an ideal approach to shared governance for institutions of higher learning? What models are there to choose from? How are different types of decisions handled within competing models? What are the pros and cons of our governance style and decision-making processes?

It is not my goal to answer these questions exhaustively, but rather to lay some simple ideas from the higher education administration literature before you – ideas that may provide context for our collective thought throughout the day.

> What are the competing approaches to governance in academic institutions?

> What are the types of shared decisions we face, and how do they relate to governance?

In proposing to consider these questions in the conference, I had hoped to entice Dean Jim Davis to the podium, especially after spending some time with his new book (Davis, 2003). Being a wily administrator, he succeeded in turning the tables, but has provided invaluable consultation and I would like to acknowledge his support.

Academic Models of Governance

Birnbaum presents five "models of organizational functioning" in institutions of higher education (Birnbaum, 1989).

1.   The Collegial Institution
2.   The Bureaucratic Institution
3.   The Political Institution
4.   The Anarchical Institution
5.   The Cybernetic Institution.

The Collegial Institution places great emphasis on consensus, shared power and effective consultation between faculty, administrators and governors. The academic community is a rich community held together by shared values and by a tradition of civil discourse. Leaders come from the community and are seen as agents for the faculty. Decision-making processes are quite inclusive. Some of us have experience with the small, selective, liberal arts colleges where this model is often found. Some may have entered academia in the hopes of joining such a community

The Bureaucratic Institution relies on a clear, hierarchical organizational structure, chain of command and rule and regulation controls. There is emphasis on effective, efficient, timely management. Decision-making flows from the top of the organization down to the various academic units. Leaders rely on position and charisma for legitimacy. This model has much in common with traditional top-down management models. It could possibly be dubbed the Jean Luc Picard "make it so" model of governance.

The Political Institution assumes that conflict is inevitable and indeed relies on competition for resources as a key governance mechanism. Decision-making is political, diffuse and decentralized. Leadership requires coordination of many diverse and sometimes conflicting missions and priorities.   Leadership is by persuasion, diplomacy and mediation. Processes may appear inclusive and collegial, but much deal making has gone on before the official decision process is enjoined.

The Anarchical Institution is characterized by loose bonds between participants who do pretty much as they wish with little coordination or control. Goals are ambiguous. Decisions are rarely clearly defined, being clouded by extraneous issues thrown into the mix. Leadership is primarily symbolic with little actual ability to influence outcomes. This might be characterized as the "herding cats" governance model.

The Cybernetic Institution has found a reasonable degree of stability in a set of complex procedures that involve multiple decision makers focusing on their specific area and coordinating as needed.

Leadership is of the squeaky-wheel variety, as managers respond to glitches in the system with short-term solutions. Such an approach works pretty well to maintain the existing system, until some external threat creates major upheaval or until there is a need for strategic repositioning of the institution.

I am a social worker, and my profession conceptualizes human behavior in terms of systems (though we prefer ecological models to mechanical ones). Even I have some difficulty envisioning a university simply puttering along in this day and age – still, I can imagine some large public universities might operate in this way.

There is a tendency to see examples of all of these models in any institution. Certainly all institutions may be seen as behaving as systems, most espouse the need for collegiality, all are political and sometimes, thankfully, anarchy breaks out. It is argued, however, that academic institutions commonly rely on one primary model. We might consider the question by asking "How do we make the major, over-arching, future-altering, decisions that require major resource allocation?"

With these models in mind, how would you characterize the University of Denver?

Another question may be relevant for us: "Does our Provost Model create a delicate balance between two governance models – with one model characterizing our big, strategic decision-making processes and another characterizing our internal, academic processes? I argue that DU employs a beauracratic framework at the highest levels, while our academic side of the house operates under a political model. I will look forward to debate regarding this conclusion. Still, I do conclude that we seek to maintain a balance, one that presents us with some complex governance situations. The appointment of a President may affect that balance in ways we do not yet understand. It is partially this potential for shifting the balance that makes the Presidency an important governance flashpoint.

Clearly the overall governance approach of an institution influences the way shared governance is conceptualized – both in terms of how we view the present and how we view needed improvements. Also informing our notion of shared governance is our understanding of the nature of collaborative decisions.

Types of Collaborative Decisions

Weingartner argues that most academic decision situations are sufficiently complex to leave room for disagreement - this being a bit of an understatement. He notes that "where the *rightness* of a proposed action lacks confidence-inspiring obviousness, conviction and legitimacy are derived from the *way* in which the decision was reached" (Weingartner, 1996, p. xi).

We may think about three primary types of shared governance decisions.

> **Consultative Decisions** are decisions made by administrators or governors that take place when the faculty and other members of the community have been consulted. Faculty members have little control over the final decision, but do have a clear investment in the quality of the consultation relationship and process that is employed.

> One example of this type of decision is the selection of leadership positions. While the Board of Trustees will select the next Chancellor of the University, the faculty expects an appropriate consultative role. We expect the same of decisions regarding leaders in ancillary administrative roles (Athletic Director, Vice Chancellors, President, etc.) If consultation is sought but never used – then shared governance is not in effect. Sham consultation is a major threat to shared governance.

> **Co-determinative Decisions** are made appropriately when the faculty has given both its advice and its consent. In many academic settings, the selection of academic administrators falls in this category. Other examples might include the selection and implementation of a new Core Curriculum or the decision to go to a required study abroad program. Items that come to the Faculty Senate for consideration and approval are co-determinative decisions, although other structures may also be involved in such decisions.

> **All-but Determinative Decisions** are made by the faculty and are subject to administrative oversight, but are very rarely over-ruled and only for explicit reasons that must be defended. For example, promotion and tenure decisions would rarely be overturned at the Provost, Chancellor or Board level. Similarly, decisions regarding required curriculum content would rarely be mandated by senior administrators (Weingartner, 1996).

In practice decisions are not always so clearly conceptualized. Many governance flashpoints occur when participants hold differing conceptions of the nature of the decision, when decisions are moved from one category to another, or when agreed upon processes are altered.

We would do well to develop our collective abilities to play appropriate roles in these differing types of decisions, and to structure decision processes with greater clarity. Effective leadership skills vary depending on the type of decision and on the broader governance model. All players need proficiency in those skills as well as a commitment to the integrity of the exchange.

> **Making it So**

The dominant governance style of an institution influences views on which decisions fall into the shared governance arena and what type of collaborative decision-making is appropriate. A strong collegial model of governance might well consider the selection of top University leadership to be a co-determinative decision between governors and the campus community. Clearly, a strong bureaucratic model might not consider decisions about leadership to require any shared governance process.

Governance flashpoints occur when competing views of governance are exposed, usually in the context of high stakes decisions. In some cases some participants may be strongly reminded that they wish for a different overarching governance model. In other cases, we may feel that decisions are not being subjected to an appropriate collaborative decision process, or that a process has been unexpectedly altered.

Some might argue that governance flashpoints should be allowed to flash then fizzle. Others would argue that they provide opportunities to improve our collective ability to govern. The conference organizers hope that today's shared thinking leads to continued shared strategizing about how best to influence the decision environment of the University.

You have heard the recommendations from the G-6 group. These recommendations were endorsed by the Faculty Senate last week, and will be considered by the Board of Trustees tomorrow. They are small steps in many ways. It will fall to the DU community to seek and maintain changes in our governance culture here at DU. This implies moving from thinking to action to actively engage in University governance.

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Integrating Academic and Corporate Values:

Challenges for University Governance

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The key challenges for university governance often spring from what Cathy Potter has called "flashpoints" of conflict. These flashpoints are produced by people—trustees, administrators, faculty—who bring to the table different sets of cultural values (what we've termed "corporate" and "academic") and different ideas about how decisions are best made. As Cathy notes, these flashpoints provide an opportunity to test the effectiveness of university governance, and to consider ways of improving it.

In this talk I'll describe some of the more common governance flashpoints in the modern university, and identify a few flashpoints here at DU that are of a piece with national trends. Some of the common flashpoints have been woven into the scenarios that we'll consider in this morning's second session. I'll also review some of the more useful suggestions that have been made about how to secure the future of shared university governance in a rapidly changing higher education environment.

Governance Flashpoints in the Modern University

Just about any issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* will address one or another flashpoint of conflict created by the clash of corporate and academic values.

Numerous examples exist of both blitz and stealth tactics by Governing Boards to appoint chief executives, consolidate power for chief executives, and accomplish other goals by suspending time-honored courtesies of faculty consultation. These power plays range from the University of California Regents voting to abolish affirmative action in university admissions, hiring, and contracting, to efforts by Howard University trustees to unilaterally redefine tenure in that institution's faculty handbook. Such moves are often justified as a way to maximize institutional flexibility and response time in an increasingly competitive environment. However, they leave in their wake an angry, disenfranchised, and demoralized faculty, which can't possibly be good for student learning.

A second flashpoint is around donor gifts. There are numerous examples of universities taking money from corrupt corporate entities and individuals with unsavory reputations. My favorite quote from a university president justifying the acceptance of such money basically says that "Carnegie shot unionists and Rhodes stole from black people, but it was all done in a historical context and people make mistakes, so why sweat it?" Of course there are excellent moral and ethical reasons for sweating it, and that's why it's unsettling to read that many believe the fight for greater accountability in university giving and receiving is destined to be an uphill battle.

A third flashpoint is around the corporate model's view—nicely described by Eric Gould—of students as consumers to be satisfied, and knowledge as a commodity to be bought and sold. This re-conceptualization started as an arguably well-intentioned move to meet public demands for greater accountability in university teaching and learning. This view is accompanied by an emphasis on quantifiable short-term goals, more efficient modes of instruction, and measurable outcomes. This view collides with faculty views of students as largely undeveloped intellects still lacking the wherewithal that enables informed consumption, and a view of knowledge as a process rather than product. The corporate model also stands to breed in students a sense of entitlement to the commodity that they're paying for (often expressed, in my experience, as an expectation of high grades in required general education courses), and potentially lowers academic standards.

Knowledge conceptualized as product rather than process invites a fourth flashpoint that stems from a corporate view of faculty as a resource to be defined, directed, and deployed according to consumerist demands. What some have termed "adjunctification"—the increasing use of contingent, part-time, and non-tenure track faculty—is the central bone of contention. Justified by governing boards as a cost-effective way to run the shop and maintain adaptive flexibility, adjunctification is akin to the kind of "scientific management" of work that characterizes many modern industries. And, as with those industries, the risk is devaluation of large areas of academic and curricular life (especially in the humanities), and the "deskilling" of faculty as they fill specialized and interchangeable roles on the educational assembly line. For faculty, adjunctification compromises both the teaching and research mission of the university, the expressed ideal (especially here at DU) of integrating teaching and research, and the overall climate of learning. It establishes unsavory "class divisions" among faculty, and trades loyalty and commitment for quick payoffs—something that is not in the best long-term interests of university.

The fifth flashpoint is, of course, a logical outgrowth of adjunctification—the assault on tenure codes. As part of an effort to maintain an institution's flexibility to respond to market forces, Governing Boards have shown an interest in exploring alternatives to tenure and/or expanding the criteria for eliminating tenured positions. Some of these criteria reach beyond financial exigency and program termination to fuzzier criteria of institutional "need" that can invite capricious application. Sometimes this change is justified so as to make academic employment more like other kinds of employment, a point I'll return to below. Faculty, of course, see tenure as the best guarantor of academic freedom and a learning environment that truly values experimentation, thinking outside the box, envelope-pushing, and diversity of thought and action. We faculty also cherish it because tenure's effects can radiate outward so as to help protect students and staff. In short, tenure is indispensable for creating the kind of "affirmative authority" for faculty that allows shared governance to work.

Local Governance Flashpoints

Like every institution, DU is experiencing tensions in some of the common flashpoint areas just described. Members of our community will identify and prioritize flashpoints differently. The important ones for me emerge from my experience as a department chair for eight years, a member of the Faculty Senate for longer than that, a faculty representative on FEAC, SPARC, UPAC, and both the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils, and a member of way too many Core Curriculum committees for my own good. Since I've given more than my share of blood to the university in terms of service, I'm going to speak freely about the local flashpoints that strike me as most controversial and compelling.

Obviously, last spring's surprise appointment of a University President created a singularly dramatic and important flashpoint, one that has a lot to do with what has brought us together today. I don't mind mentioning it because I'm working with our new President on "Bridges to the Future" programming for this year and finding it to be a positive experience. Bridges planning has benefited from the intellectual synergy that springs from people of good faith bringing to the table different perspectives on how the world works. Thus, I share with our Trustees the confidence that the President position as currently—albeit poorly—defined will accomplish some good things for the university. But serious and legitimate worries remain about the precedent-setting nature of the appointment, the absence of a detailed job description, and the kinds of programs (existing and imagined) that the new President will be asked to fund. The funding concern is doubly worrying because I sense a gathering "feeding frenzy" for the President's favors that is partly borne of the competitive relations between units that Eric Gould described, something that may not be in the best long-term interests of the university as a whole. Alternatively, it might be better to coordinate these lobbying efforts through an appropriately re-configured University Planning Advisory Council (UPAC), something I advocated in a recent issue of the *Faculty Forum*.

Several years ago we were close to a flashpoint around the assessment of student learning, a movement which many see as part of the corporate interest in quality control and consumer satisfaction. I recall merit raises being used as a stick to whip foot-dragging departments into shape. I freely admit that on my watch as chair the Anthropology Department was an assessment foot-dragger, for what I believe were legitimate practical and philosophical reasons. Certainly, several years of exit interviews with graduating seniors suggest that our majors haven't internalized the lessons of the discipline as fully as we would like, and hence regular program review is a good idea. But I also think that cultivating internalized knowledge—especially in the liberal arts, and given an understanding of knowledge as process—is a messy, unpredictable, and inherently inefficient enterprise. It

depends upon, and is complexly overdetermined by, the particular dynamic between teacher, class, and context. It is best facilitated by opportunities to work with knowledge in particular circumstances, many of which can't be simulated at the university but are only encountered in "real life," and sometimes far down the road. I'm radically uncertain about what I'm achieving in the classroom, but I think that's a good thing because it breeds experimentation, risk-taking, and humility. I'm a believer in the argument that inefficiency is good for universities, and that we best ensure it with small classes, lots of writing, loads of constructive criticism, warrants to experiment without worrying about assessment, and smaller rather than larger teaching loads. DU is committed to some of these things as line items; it remains to be seen how committed we are to the total package.

The evaluation of faculty work is brewing as third local flashpoint, especially in light of last year's FEAC discussions around faculty sabbaticals. In those meetings we entertained the notion that faculty sabbatical is the academy's equivalent of "employee development"—which in the corporate world means a short-term focus, establishment of specific concrete goals, and easily measurable outcomes. I'm not so sure this is a good analogue. It's important to view sabbaticals as opportunities to do things, but I also think it's important to view them as an opportunity to renew, recharge, recoup, and recover from what for many of us has been six years (or longer) of 60 hour (or more) work weeks. Using sabbatical to sit and think would be just fine with me, and using it just to sit sounds even better. To me the sabbatical is another walk of academic life in which we should emphasize process as much or more than product, and in which we should accept that a large amount of inefficiency best serves the institution.

I'm well aware of the argument that sabbaticals are a "luxury" unavailable to workers in other industries. As part of my research I work with unemployed and/or impoverished former coal miners in southern Colorado, so I've felt, perhaps more directly than most academics, the sting of working class hostility and resentment about my privileged status (something aided and abetted here in Colorado by the uninformed public pronouncements of governors and other political functionaries). In my view the typical "real world" employment relationship that some would have us emulate is an unhappy, historically-contingent outcome of the insidious application of scientific management to the world of work. Instead of robbing professors of an opportunity for significant rest and renewal in their line of work, we ought to provide comparable opportunities for those in others.

A fourth local flashpoint is bound to be adjunctification. DU has been slow, perhaps for a variety of legitimate reasons, to reveal the extent to which we use part-time and non-tenure track faculty. But a report is forthcoming. It will be interesting to see how we compare with national trends, and how we're going to deal with it if

the comparison is favorable. We need to have a meeting of the minds on this one, and come up with creative ways to stem the tide if we want to preserve a faculty that is dedicated to the institutional mission and able to fulfill it.

Doing something about adjunctification may depend on how we handle my fifth and final local flashpoint, one that goes to the tensions that can be created within units as a consequence of decentralized budgeting and the resulting market-driven, inter-unit competition for resources and majors. Eric Gould nicely identifies the consequences of such a situation—we plan curriculum on the principle of competitive majors, embrace few integrative ideals that govern what we are trying to do with the knowledge that we produce, and generally forsake allegiance to anything larger than our discipline.

Many students in my Core classes are still maddeningly unprepared for advanced synthetic work, something that I believe is partly the result of the self-interested advising they receive in their home departments. Involvements in Foundations and Core teaching still seem to be justified first and foremost as a way to recruit majors rather than as a way to achieve some nobler educational ideal. My small department, and I suspect others, agrees to this competition in a way that I believe has negative impacts in other areas; e.g., on the diversity of courses we're able to offer in any one quarter at the graduate level, and on the availability of time for development of interdisciplinary majors and minors that, given a fighting chance, can potentially find a critical audience of undergraduates. Competition of the sort described often increases the need for adjuncts, producing a vicious cycle. I wonder how many other faculty care less about recruiting majors than exporting their particular knowledge to other fields where its desperately needed, or putting it in the service of those burgeoning "borderland" fields between established disciplines where the real action is to be found in contemporary intellectual life. In short, the current systems force us to embrace and protect an archaic system of distinctions and priorities that is conceivably unsatisfying for many faculty, mind-numbing for students, and antithetical to the goals of synthesis and prioritization (and arguably the greater public good) discussed by Eric. Although I was lectured once by an administrator that "restructuring makes people uncomfortable," this seems a poor reason for not spending at least a little time imagining alternative organizational structures that might better accommodate innovations in intellectual life and our own faculty's evolving interests, while at the same time preserving the institution's ability to respond to market realities.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion I'd like to review some of the more relevant and compelling observations that have been made in the pages of national publications about how to reclaim and strengthen shared governance in the current environment of higher education.

Deepening corporatization is exacerbating old tensions and producing new ones. The intensity of these conflicts suggest that universities have some work to do around negotiating, and compromising between, different paradigms and perspectives. Negotiation and compromise is the essence of what it means to practice shared governance, and is also the essence of democracy itself. This year the university is sponsoring public discussions about democracy in the context of "Bridges to the Future" programming. Once again we have a chance to model and practice democratic governance within our own community while we preach about it to the public. I think we looked bad in missing that opportunity last spring, and we can't afford to miss too many more.

We need a strong system of shared governance—however we model it using Cathy's array of alternatives—to protect higher education from unsavory outside interventions and the ignorance that is inevitably associated with partial world views, be they corporate, academic, or political. We need it in order to preserve what distinguishes the university as an educational institution and separates it from the other, more fractured industries that surround it. Shared governance is what positions the university to lead; anything less reduces it to a rather bad imitation of the corporate, hierarchical structures that already exist in more than adequate supply.

Better work must be done by both Trustees and Faculty. Governing Boards and Chief Executives need to understand that faculty aren't simply stakeholders in, or just another constituency of, the modern university. Instead they need to appreciate that faculty—because they produce, synthesize, and disseminate knowledge—essentially are the university. But faculty need to live up to the responsibilities and obligations that come with this status. Faculty Senates often are guilty of the charge that they are slow to react and too reluctant to make difficult decisions to be players in governance. Faculty rank-and-file feed into this paralysis with the superficial engagement that often passes for Senate involvement. There's no excuse for this given what's at stake, and given the communication technologies that are available for transacting faculty business. Faculty need to strike a healthier balance between careful scholarly deliberation and aggressive political action.

More active engagement by the faculty in everyday governance and not just around flashpoints, and mutual respect and trust among all parties is the key. The G-6 Committee has made a good start toward building the kind of mutual respect and trust that is key to making shared governance work.