

Faculty Involvement in Institutional Governance: A Literature Review

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***Abstract:** As debates about college and university management have increased in recent years, so too has the amount of scholarship attempting to understand how and why certain decisions are made by institutions of higher education. One of the areas of institutional governance which has received significant scholarly attention is faculty involvement in shared governance. This literature review synthesizes scholarship on faculty governance in American higher education. The findings of this review indicate that while there has been ample scholarship in areas such as faculty opinions about shared governance, faculty influence on institutional decision making, and the relationship between shared governance and institutional performance, there remain many unanswered questions which should be the focus of future research.*

As institutions of higher education have become increasingly complex organizations, the issue of institutional governance has become a point of major contention on many campuses (Gerber, 2001; Simplicio, 2006). This tension has been exacerbated by the increasing pressures and expectations being placed on higher educational institutions by government, business, and other outside constituencies in recent years. Institutions are being asked to do more with less money while being held increasingly accountable for both organizational and academic decisions (Kezar & Eckel, 2004).

These and other pressures have increased the importance of effective governance systems in higher educational institutions (Amacher & Meiners, 2003). These pressures have also led to an increased interest among higher education scholars in understanding how decisions are made within colleges and universities. One of the areas of institutional governance which has received significant scholarly attention over the

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years is faculty involvement in shared governance (Hollinger, 2001; Keeton, 1971; Miller, 1996; Mortimer & McConnell, 1978). This literature, however, has yet to be synthesized and presented in a way that provides the higher education community with a summary of what is known and unknown about faculty involvement in institutional governance.

The aim of this article is to provide a synthesis of existing scholarship on faculty governance in American higher education. Before beginning this literature review, a brief definition and history of shared governance is presented. This is followed by a review of empirical literature on faculty involvement in shared governance, a summary of the findings, and recommendation for future inquiry.

A Brief Overview of Shared Governance

Shared governance refers to the shared responsibility between administration and faculty for primary decisions about the general means of advancing the general educational policy determined by the school's charter (Flynn, 2005, p. 1).

Shared governance is the set of practices under which college faculty and staff participate in significant decisions concerning the operation of their institutions (American Federation of Teachers, 2006, p. 4).

Each of these definitions provides a foundation with which to conceptualize shared governance. The organizational structure of American colleges and universities typically begins at the top with a board of trustees who appoint a president/chancellor to serve as the chief executive of a college community. While the president/chancellor and his/her administrative cabinet typically serve as the chief decision makers of an institution, the tradition within American higher education has been for other campus constituencies, especially faculty, to have significant involvement in institutional decision making (Minor, 2004). The primary ground for faculty involvement in shared governance, as stated by Keeton (1971), is the idea that "faculty alone have the kinds and degree of qualification essential to the task of the college or university" (p. 11).

This tradition of faculty involvement in institutional governance, however, has not always been the norm within American higher education. The first colonial colleges were run almost exclusively by governing boards and institutional presidents. Presidents were in charge of a wide range of activities and served in most instances as “an authority unto himself” (Lucas, 1994, p. 124). Faculty dissatisfaction with this model, however, began to manifest itself during the 19th century. Perhaps the most notable manifestation of this faculty dissatisfaction occurred at Harvard University in 1826. Following several years of heated debate over faculty involvement and discontent with the administration of college affairs and the traditional curriculum, a new set of statutes for the governance of the college was introduced in 1826. This statute provided faculty with control over the admission of students, student discipline, and the conduct of instruction (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997).

Over the next 150 years, several changes in the structure of higher educational institutions in addition to the changing composition and structure of the faculty would lead to an expansion of the principles of shared governance. The development of the research university in the late 19th century, the increased professionalism of faculty in the early twentieth century, rapid enrollment growth, the changing composition of the student body, and the volatile political climate in the 1950s and 1960s all helped to increase faculty voice in various areas of institutional governance (Birnbaum, 2004; Dill & Helm, 1999; Morphew, 1999).

It was not until the appearance of the 1966 “Statement on Government in Colleges and Universities”, however, that a unified statement legitimated the role of faculty involvement in institutional governance (Birnbaum, 2004). The 1966 joint statement from the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges was the first document to provide a detailed breakdown of the responsibilities and authority that should be conferred upon faculty and administrators. Two primary principles emerged out of this document. The first states that important areas of action involve, at one time or another, the initiating capacity and decision-making participation of all institutional components. The second states that difference in the weight of each voice, from one point to the next, should be determined by the responsibility of each component for the particular matter at hand (American Association of University Professors, 1966, p. 218). In other

words, as noted by Mortimer and McConnell (1978), the joint statement recommends both the sharing of authority among constituents on endeavors that require joint decisions and a segmenting of authority on endeavors where one constituent has primary responsibility.

It is these principles that have been the foundation for the past 35 years of shared governance in American higher education. Today, despite many obstacles and challenges to the idea of shared governance, it continues to play an important role in institutional decision making. Approximately 90% of 4-year institutions have faculty governing boards that participate in institutional governance (Minor, 2004). Governance also serves as a major part of faculty service to the institution and continues to be strongly supported by organizations such as the American Association of University Professors, the National Education Association, and the American Association of Teachers (Kezar, Lester, & Anderson, 2006).

Literature Review of Faculty Involvement in Institutional Governance

As faculty involvement in college and university governance has come to represent the norm within American higher education, scholars have devoted significant time and resources to empirically studying faculty governance (Hollinger, 2001; Miller, 1996). This research, however, has yet to be thoroughly surveyed and presented in a way that informs the higher education community as to what is known and unknown about faculty governance.

A systematic review of research on faculty governance was the goal of this article. This was done by conducting a literature search via several online research databases including ERIC, Education Abstract FTX, ProQuest, and JSTOR. The key words used in these literature searches included *college/university governance*, *faculty governance*, *shared governance*, and *faculty senates*. Due to the abundance of literature found during the initial literature search, several criteria were introduced for the selection of studies to be included in this review. The first was that the paper be an empirical (qualitative or quantitative) study of faculty involvement in shared governance. The second criteria was that the study fit into one of three broad areas of inquiry; research on faculty opinions about shared governance, research on the areas where faculty

have influence on institutional governance, and research on the relationship between faculty participation in governance and institutional performance. These areas were chosen because they encompass a large portion of the research literature on faculty governance in American higher education.

Research on Faculty Opinions about Shared Governance

Scholars engaged in research on faculty opinions about shared governance have primarily focused on two areas; faculty beliefs about the importance of shared governance and faculty opinions about their level of involvement in governance. In regard to the former, there is considerable evidence of widespread national support for faculty governance. In their national study of over 3800 individuals from over 750 colleges and universities, Tierney and Minor (2003) found that most individuals within the university strongly support shared governance. Specifically, over 80% percent of faculty at doctoral, masters, and baccalaureate institutions believe shared governance is an important part their institution's values and identity (Tierney & Minor, 2003). In their sample of over 100 faculty members at the University of Washington, Williams, Gore, Broches, and Lostoski (1987), found that most faculty believed governance was an important part of their jobs. Miller (2002), using a sample of over 2,000 faculty from various institutional types in the state of Alabama, found strong faculty support for the faculty's role in institutional governance. McKnight, McIntire, and Stude (2007) examined faculty at evangelical institutions and found strong support for faculty governance. Minor (2003) in his study of over 2,000 faculty, faculty senate chairs, and academic vice presidents found that 77% of faculty believed shared governance was an important part of their institution's identity.

Minor (2005), however, found evidence that faculty in one segment of the higher education community were not as likely to view shared governance as an important part of institutional identity. In his study of faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), over 75% of faculty did not see faculty governance as an important part of their institution's value and identity. These findings, which run contrary to the beliefs of faculty at other institutions and administrators at HBCUs, are somewhat a byproduct of faculty attitudes regarding their time and commitment to students. In this same study, Minor found that faculty members believed that the deep commitment to teaching and

students which are a hallmark of faculty at Black colleges may negatively affect the ability and desire of HBCU faculty to participate effectively in governance. While it is important not to interpret these results from the cultural perspective of predominantly White colleges, these findings do raise some important questions about why attitudes of faculty at Black colleges are so different than faculty at other higher education institutions.

While faculty in general appear to view faculty governance as important, research shows that they are generally less satisfied with their level of involvement in governance. Tierney and Minor (2003) found that 43% of faculty did not believe that faculty senates were highly valued in their institutions. Tierney and Minor also found that faculty influence in institutional governance was perceived as higher among academic administrators than among faculty. A 2004-2005 national study out of UCLA found that less than 50% of full-time faculty at four-year public universities agree that faculty members are sufficiently involved in campus decision making (Leach, 2008).

For any type of effective shared governance between administration and faculty, there must be sufficiently high levels of trust and communication. Several scholars have attempted to examine faculty attitudes regarding trust and communication between faculty and administration with regard to faculty governance. Tierney and Minor (2003) found that over 75 percent of faculty at baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral institutions believed there were sufficient levels of trust between faculty and administrators. Tierney and Minor also found that over 70 percent of faculty believed there were sufficient levels of communication between faculty and administrators. Miller (2002) also found that faculty generally agreed that communication is good between administration and faculty governing bodies. Minor (2003) found that 67 percent of faculty believed there was a significant level of trust between the faculty and the president and 66 percent of faculty believe that communication between campus constituents is good or sufficient enough to make progress while engaged in the decision making process.

Faculty rewards and incentives have also been a subject of some descriptive analysis by scholars. Williams et al. (1987) found that most faculty do not believe there are sufficient incentives or rewards for faculty who participate in faculty governance. Miller (2002) also found

that faculty generally agreed that an ideal shared governance arrangement would sufficiently reward faculty participation in the governance process.

A final set of studies which fall under the umbrella of faculty attitudes about shared governance looked to catalogue faculty involvement in governance. Williams et al. (1987) in their research at the University of Washington used cluster analysis of faculty interviews to identify groups of statements where faculty showed consistent patterns of response regarding his or her involvement in faculty governance. Evidence was found that faculty members could effectively be grouped into six categories based on their belief and involvement in governance. Collegials, which they found made up about 10 percent of their sample, preferred shared governance, were against collective bargaining, and generally made time to participate in faculty governance. Activist, who made up about 18 percent of their sample, were active in faculty governance and strongly advocated the increasing of faculty influence in faculty governance. Accepters, who were 23 percent of faculty, participated in faculty governance (though less than collegials and activists) and often were more accepting of the faculty role in governance than faculty in other categories.

The final three categories faculty fell into were hierarchical, copers, and disengaged. Hierarchicals, who were 15 percent of the faculty, preferred a strong administrative role and generally responded negatively to strong faculty governance. Copers, who composed a quarter of faculty, are generally new faculty members who chose not to actively participate in faculty governance due to the time they devote to research and the acquisition of tenure. While they are not actively involved in governance, they do not completely reject the idea of shared governance. Finally, the disengaged, who made up the final 9 percent of the sample, were faculty who did not participate in faculty governance and who tended to disparage the role of faculty in governance. By grouping faculty in this way, the authors believe that their conceptual framework can serve as the foundation for future research on the faculty with a particular interest in how and or what causes certain faculty members to become members of one group or another.

A second classification scheme was proposed by Minor (2004) in his study of academic senates. After collecting data from 12 site visits and

telephone interviews with 42 faculty senate presidents, Minor identified four categories by which faculty senates can be grouped based on the senate's perception of campus governance and relationship with the central administration. Functional senates are characterized by their cooperative relationship with administrators and their goal of protecting the rights of the faculty. Influential senates work in collaboration with the central administration and typically have the power to initiate significant change on campus. They are viewed as partners in institutional governance. Ceremonial senates are cooperative but often very passive with regard to their relationship with the central administration. Ceremonial senates are typically not an important part of campus governance and faculty are often disengaged from the governance process. The final category, subverted academic senates, lack the confidence and influence of other senates and typically are uninvolved with many parts of the governance process. Their relationship with the central faculty is often one of skepticism and confrontation.

Research on the Areas Where Faculty Have Influence on Institutional Governance

Scholars have also put considerable effort into examining the areas where faculty have the greatest influence in institutional governance. Traditionally, faculty influence has been relegated to primarily academic areas such as curriculum and the establishment of teaching standards (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Lucas, 1994). Recent research has produced strong evidence that this is still the case. Brown (2001) found that at over 85% of institutions surveyed, faculty had primary control over decisions regarding curriculum and academic performance. Tierney and Minor (2003) found that undergraduate curriculum, standards for promotion and tenure, and standards for evaluating teaching are areas faculty have the most influence on campus while setting budget priorities and evaluating presidents and vice presidents were the areas faculty had the least influence. Kissler (1997) found that faculty influence on policy decisions was greater in matters of education policy versus budgeting and resource allocation matters. Kaplan (2005) in his national study of faculty governance at over 900 institutions of higher education found that faculty authority appears to be concentrated in the areas of degree requirements, curriculum, tenure, appointments, and degree offerings. Minor (2005)

found that faculty at HBCUs have fairly significant influence in academic matters but very little in non-academic matters.

Kater and Levin (2004) focused on shared governance in community colleges. Using a methodology that consisted of document analysis of collective bargaining agreements at over 300 community colleges, Kater and Levin found that the most commonly cited areas of faculty participation were grievance (93%), curriculum (56%), faculty evaluation processes (52%), sabbatical recommendations (48%), retrenchment (47%), and the college calendar (42%). The researchers also found that within the 56 percent of the contracts which provided for faculty involvement in academic policy, the language tended to be stronger than in other governance areas in which faculty are involved. The community college was also the focus of the Welsh et al. (2005) piece on shared governance. Their study of two and four year institutions in the state of Kentucky found that faculty at two year schools reported more involvement in strategic planning than faculty at four year schools.

Each of the aforementioned studies in this section provide some evidence that faculty influence in shared governance is concentrated primary in the area of academic policy. Other scholars, however, have attempted to examine faculty influence in non-academic areas of the institution. Two of these studies focus on faculty influence in institutional budgeting. Kissler (1997) used data from UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute to examine faculty influence in institutional budget decisions. His results indicated that faculty had only around 7 percent of the total influence over budgeting and resource decisions. Dimond (1991) also looked at the extent to which faculty are involved in institutional budgeting decisions. His results found a great deal of variety in the depth of faculty involvement in governance among research universities. In the 52 institutions studied, he found that faculty, though limited in their overall control and influence on institutional budgeting, were often involved in consultation in specific areas such as salaries and the merger or discontinuation of programs. Both of these studies suggest that faculty involvement and influence in institutional budgeting are relatively low, especially in comparison to faculty influence in other areas of institutional governance.

Three other studies provide interesting insight into the areas of faculty influence in institutional governance. Though not a published study, the

work of Newman, Miller, and Bartee (2000) on faculty involvement in athletic governance offers an important look at how faculty believe they should be involved in the administration of college athletics. In examining the opinions of a small sample of institutional athletic directors (N=15) and faculty senate presidents (N=15), Newman et al. found strong agreement among both groups that faculty should be actively involved in governance of academic support programs for athletes and the reviewing of NCAA academic regulations.

With regard to the levels of overall influence and faculty power in institutional governance, Chait (2002) found evidence that faculty at schools without tenure (i.e. conservatories and seminaries) have far less power than faculty at similar institutions with a tenure system.

Eckel (2000) examined faculty ability to make “hard decisions” as part of their role in institutional governance. One of the criticisms of faculty involvement in governance is the idea that faculty are self interested and incapable of engaging in actions that are beneficial to the university but detrimental to the faculty. Using data obtained via case studies of four research universities, Eckel examined faculty participation in the discontinuation of academic departments. He found faculty were both able and willing to make difficult decisions such as eliminating academic programs for the good of the university. Eckel believed his findings refuted the myth that faculty would not participate constructively in institutional decision making, particularly when a decision may have a negative effect on colleagues.

Research on the Relationship Between Faculty Participation and Institutional Performance

The final area of inquiry examined was research on the relationship between faculty participation in governance and institutional performance. Surprisingly, only a few empirical studies could be found which fit into this category. Minor (2003) used OLS regression to examine the impact of faculty participation in governance on the effectiveness of the faculty senate¹. His findings indicated that faculty

¹ Minor’s faculty senate effectiveness variable was create by combining the following three Likert-scaled survey questions: 1) faculty at my institution are satisfied with the structure and function of the senate; 2) during major college/university decision making, the senate is effective in helping reach

involvement in the senate and faculty interest in senate activity were positively and significantly related to senate effectiveness. The results of this study also indicated that faculty participation in decision making at the departmental level, in standing faculty/administrative committees, and on ad hoc committees each have a positive and statistically significant impact on the effectiveness of a faculty senate.

Three other studies used data from the 1970 AAUP national dataset to examine how faculty governance played a role in various measures of institutional performance. The first of these was published by McCormick and Meiners in 1988. The researchers concluded from their study that, after controlling for other factors, that more autocratically run economic departments were more productive than democratically run economic departments with regard to faculty publications and publications by graduates. This study also found that increased faculty participation, again controlling for other factors, had a negative impact on the overall quality of an institution as measured by the SAT scores of incoming freshmen (McCormick & Meiners, 1988).

Thirteen years later, Brown (2001) reexamined the data analyzed by McCormick and Meiners (1988) in an attempt to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between faculty governance and institutional performance. Brown found that, controlling for other factors, greater faculty participation in decisions regarding appointment and tenure had a positive impact on three measure of college/university performance; the SAT scores of incoming students, an institution's average faculty salary, and an institution's Gourman index (a rating of the institutions overall quality). Brown also found that greater faculty participation in general administrative decisions such as the building of new facilities and the selection of an institution's president/chancellor had a negative impact on all three measures of university performance and that greater faculty participation in curriculum decisions had no impact on performance. Brown concluded that increased faculty participation in governance may be good or bad depending on the areas in which the faculty participated. He suggests that faculty involvement in

resolutions to issues under consideration; and 3) others from the campus community (administrators, governing board, students) view the senate as powerful.

areas where they have better information and more incentive to participate can indeed have a positive impact on an institution.

Finally, Cunningham (2008) attempted to examine the impact of faculty monitoring of college and university administration on the financial performance of an institution by regressing the overall strength of faculty governance (as measured by the 1971 AAUP data set on faculty governance) on an institution's endowment per students. Cunningham found that the strength of faculty governance had a positive relationship on institutional financial performance (Cunningham, 2008).

Discussion

This review examined several empirical studies on faculty involvement in college and university governance. The purpose was to provide a thorough, organized summary of current knowledge on this subject while bringing to the attention of the higher education community areas where increased scholarship is needed. While it is believed that the systematic method in which research studies were collected ensures a comprehensive survey of empirical literature on faculty governance, it remains possible that some research has been overlooked. The major works in this area, however, have been reviewed in this article.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this literature review. The first is that faculty participation in governance appears to be accepted as a desirable and important part of higher education. Only one group of faculty, those teaching at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, (HBCU) were unsupportive of the idea of shared governance. Though Minor (2005) provided some rationale for this, it remains somewhat of a mystery as to why HBCU faculty feel so differently about faculty governance than faculty at other types of institutions. This mystery begs for increased scholarship on the attitudes of HBCU faculty towards shared governance.

Research reviewed in this study also indicated that faculty generally were not satisfied with their level of involvement in governance. From Dimond's (1991) study, one could surmise that this is due in part to the fact that faculty would like more involvement and influence in institutional budgeting. Faculty would also like to see increased incentives for faculty participation in governance. Each of these findings

indicate that faculty would welcome a greater role in institutional governance if given the opportunities and the incentives to participate. Among these incentives may be increased recognition of faculty contribution to governance during tenure review. Involvement in institutional governance requires a significant time investment on the part of faculty. If this time is not acknowledged and valued during tenure review, faculty may opt to use this time in other areas.

Contrary to what is generally believed to be the relationship between faculty and administration, research indicates faculty believe there is sufficient levels of trust and communication between faculty and administration with regard to faculty governance. This trust could be an indication that a solid foundation exists for cooperative shared governance arrangements between faculty and administration. Despite this trust, research has indicated that many faculty members are unsatisfied with the shared governance arrangements at their institutions. This apparent disconnect should lead researchers to examine in more detail the sources of dissatisfaction with shared governance among faculty.

As had been the tradition in American higher education, research examined in the study indicates that faculty involvement in shared governance is often relegated to areas of academic policy. Faculty appear to have less influence in areas such as institutional budgeting and other non-academic matters. These findings seem to hold across a wide range of institutional types, including research universities, HBCUs, and community colleges. The question that arises from these findings is whether faculty influence in governance is concentrated in these areas because they are the areas faculty are most comfortable with or because they are the areas in which faculty are allowed influence. While some research indicates that faculty would like to participate in other areas of institutional governance, more evidence is needed to strengthen our understanding in this area.

This relegation of faculty influence is interesting when examined from the context of the 1966 “Statement on Government in Colleges and Universities”. As mentioned earlier, the joint statement recommends both shared and segmented faculty involvement in institutional governance. Evidence suggests, however, that faculty governance is currently much more segmented than shared. Faculty appear to be given great decision-

making authority over the areas in which they presumably have the most expertise. In other areas of institutional governance, however, faculty appear to be much less involved. These findings provided strong evidence that institutions of higher education have strongly adopted the segmented governance aspect of the 1966 joint statement but have not fully incorporated shared governance into their institutional structure. Why this has occurred would be an interesting line of scholarship for future researchers.

Perhaps the most interesting finding of this literature review is the lack of scholarship on the impact of faculty governance on institutional performance. Given the current push for efficiency and accountability around higher education, it was expected that more scholarship would have attempted to address the question of whether faculty governance has a positive or negative impact on an institution's performance. In addition, the three studies which had examined the relationship between institutional performance and faculty governance used the same AAUP dataset from the early 1970s. This dataset, though important, has undoubtedly become dated given the changing composition of the college and university faculty.

Among those few studies which have looked at this relationship, there appears to be mixed findings. In some specifications and in relation to some outcomes, increased faculty involvement has a negative impact on institutional performance. Other model specifications, however, show that increased faculty involvement in some areas has a positive impact on institutional performance. These contradictory findings make it difficult to make any strong conclusions about the relationship between faculty involvement in governance and the performance of a college or university. As scholars increase their research activity on this relationship and create new datasets from which to examine this relationship, a better understanding of the influence of faculty governance on institutional performance will be developed.

Conclusions

Though the subject of faculty involvement in shared governance has received ample empirical attention, more research is needed to complete the higher education community's understanding of this complex and multifaceted area. As this literature review has indicated, there has been

strong research on various aspects of faculty opinions about shared governance, areas where faculty have influence on institutional governance, and the relationship between faculty participation and institutional performance. This research has produced a solid foundation of knowledge about faculty governance.

This foundation must now be built upon. This can be done with increased scholarly attention to, among other things, the influence of institution type and academic disciplines on faculty governance, the impact of faculty governance on institutional performance with special attention being focused on the collection of newer data to address this question, and increased research on the hypothesis presented earlier that faculty with greater dedication to teaching have less time for faculty governance. As these and other studies are initiated, scholarship on the study of faculty governance will increase and provide the higher education community with important information on the attitudes and behaviors of college and university faculty.

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