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Reflections on Faculty Participation in University Decision Making

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Reflections on Faculty Participation in University Decision Making

Part of the journal section "Forum: Shared Governance at UNI"

Daniel J. Power, "Reflections on Faculty Participation in University Decision Making"

In 1983, when I began my career, a University was a place where professors met students for instruction and research. A University granted degrees upon the recommendation of the faculty to students who had satisfactorily completed courses and met degree requirements established by faculty. Universities had governing boards that ratified strategic administrative and academic decisions. Faculty, especially tenured faculty, had a meaningful role in decisions related to the selection of administrators, hiring and promoting faculty, budgeting, and determination of educational policies. In general, the governance boards deferred to the expertise of faculty and administrators. Academic administrators and many people performing other duties, such as a Dean of Students or Registrar, had been faculty members.

In many universities the traditional, collegial form of governance has been circumvented and replaced by a corporate form of governance that is more hierarchical and autocratic with a board of regents or governors that is more directly involved in decision making. The traditional decision making model of collaboration and participation by faculty has been overridden by a top down model of decision making which is often driven by the board of regents or administrators. Some administrators still have extensive academic experience, especially in academic departments and colleges. Even in the academic hierarchy more and more "pseudo faculty" members with Ed.D. or Ph.D. or J.D. degrees who have never taught or demonstrated expertise in an academic subject that justifies tenure make decisions that impact curriculum and programs. Sadly administrators and faculty are not always united in a common purpose and do not always respect each other's abilities.

Because of technology, universities are no longer solely physical places where learned professors meet with curious students. Meetings may take place using various information technologies in artificial classrooms. Some courses are becoming increasingly programmed. Education is becoming an undifferentiated commodity with value only from receiving a degree that helps in finding a job. Most degrees have the same value, so cost and difficulty of obtaining a degree rather than the anticipated quality of instruction dominate decisions made by students. Students are recruited and promised many tangible and intangible rewards, including friendship, good jobs, higher salaries, and success. A faculty member's reputation as a teacher or scholar matters less and less to students when courses and degrees are viewed instrumentally. Faculty reputations only matter when receiving grants and contracts. Universities that commoditize their degrees become indistinguishable from each other and faculty matter very little in delivering instruction or in governance. This path of mediocrity means we need fewer "real" faculty members to teach in the "few" remaining "real" universities where a quality

education is provided students who want to learn and become educated, knowledgeable people. Quality higher education becomes exclusive and more expensive and devalued by many.

In 2013, faculty at the University of Northern Iowa must decide whether or not we want to work for a "real" university that respects faculty who have expertise they can share in a collaborative, collegial academic setting. We can fight for shared governance and quality education; we can leave UNI for another university where faculty make a difference and are respected; or we can give up and let political appointees and their designees determine the future of the university.

Today, faculty can start to create positive change or we can abrogate that traditional responsibility. The 1966 AAUP Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities is the primary policy document relating to the importance of shared governance. It should guide our actions.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica [Chisholm, 1911], the Latin term *universitas* (university) began to be used in the latter part of the 14th century to refer to a self-governing community of teachers and scholars offering instruction. In 2043, will we still have any "real" universities with shared governance?

Chisholm, H. (editor), *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Volume 27), Encyclopaedia Britannica Company, 1911, Google eBook retrieved 12-28-2012.

Universities. The medieval Latin term *universitas* (from which the English word "university" is derived) was originally used to denote any community or corporation regarded under its collective aspect. When used in its modern sense, as denoting a body devoted to learning and education, it required the addition of other words in order to complete the definition -- the most frequent form of expression being "*universitas magistrorum et scholarium*" (or "*discipulorum*"). In the course of time, probably towards the latter part of the 14th century, the term began to be used by itself, with the exclusive meaning of a community of teachers and scholars whose corporate existence had been recognized and sanctioned by civil or ecclesiastical authority or both. But the more ancient and customary designation of such communities in medieval times (regarded as places of instruction) was "*studium*" (and subsequently "*studium generale*"), a term implying a centre of instruction for all. The expressions "*universitas studii*" and "*universitas collegium*" are occasionally to be met with in official documents.

It is necessary, however, to bear in mind, on the one hand, that a university often had a vigorous virtual existence long before it obtained that legal recognition which entitled it technically, to take rank as a "*studium generale*," and, on the other hand, that hostels, halls and colleges, together with complete courses in all the recognized branches of learning, were by no means necessarily involved in the earliest conception of a university.



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