

SHARED GOVERNANCE AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

The purpose of this document is to begin a conversation about the state of university wide shared governance at Northwestern University. The impetus for this discussion has been the lack of a faculty quorum at University Senate meetings for at several years, the difficulty of filling faculty positions on the General Faculty Committee, and the low level of GFC subcommittee activity. It is entirely possible that this general lack of faculty engagement in university wide shared governance indicates that the faculty is satisfied with the way the university is being governed. There are it seems currently no important governance issues that have motivated faculty to be involved and when there have been issues in the recent past, the issues were resolved in a satisfactory manner. However, if important and controversial university wide issues do arise, are the current university wide faculty governance structures capable of insuring an inclusive deliberative decision making process? Will the new senior administration be better or worse than the current administration at sharing governance with the faculty?

Given the current state of faculty engagement in university wide shared governance, the absence of any important and controversial governance issues, and the up coming senior leadership transition, now is a good time to examine university wide shared governance at Northwestern University. Two questions should drive this examination:

1. What are the topics and issues that require university wide faculty governance? Or put more bluntly, if there are really no important decisions to be made by the faculty at the university wide level, why spend precious personal and university resources to do so?
2. Given that there are important university wide issues for the faculty to make decisions about, what are the best shared governance structures to insure an inclusive deliberative decision making process?

Before giving some preliminary answers to these two questions, we briefly need to acknowledge that the most important faculty governance issues and structures reside at the departmental and school/college levels. It is primarily at these levels that (1) the hiring, promotion, and tenuring of fellow faculty members occur, (2) the faculty proscribes and teaches their respective curriculums, and (3) the faculty selects and trains graduate students in their respective disciplines. It is only when these faculty rights are impinged upon that these rights become a university wide issue.

What are the topics and issues that require university wide faculty governance?

According to the University Statutes, the University Senate has the following powers:

- a. To consider matters of general University interest.
- b. To make recommendations on matters of educational policy.
- c. To approve or disapprove every action of a faculty involving the interest of another College or School.

- d. To recommend candidates for Honorary Degrees to be transmitted through the President of the Board of Trustees.
- e. To provide election of special and standing committees of faculty members to consider matters within the powers of the Senate.

In 1939 the University Senate exercised its fifth power by establishing the General Faculty Committee. The powers of the GFC were as broad as the powers of the Senate:

“... this committee shall be empowered to consider any matters of general University policy on its own initiative or matters referred to it by the faculty of any of the separate schools, by individual members of the University faculty, by the President, the Dean of Faculties, or by the deans of the schools. It is hoped further, that this committee will be consulted for expressions of faculty opinion by the Board of Trustees. This Committee shall, however, have no powers to commit the Senate or any of the separate faculties.”

In proposing the GFC to the Senate, the elected Special Committee reported its belief

“That ... this committee (GFC) should take up the problem of the revised statutes and the problem of the most effective organization of the University Faculty.”

Based on University Statutes and Senate Resolutions, the general answer to our first question is that almost any university wide topic or issue is appropriate for faculty governance. The only reoccurring responsibility of the Senate is recommending candidates for Honorary Degrees. The only reoccurring responsibility of the GFC is to create a Committee on Cause if the need arises (see the University Faculty Handbook). This means that the GFC either initiates its own topics and issues or responds to issues generated by other faculty members and/or the administration.

Another way to answer this first question is to list specific topics that occasionally reoccur in the GFC and in some instances are reported out to the University Senate.

1. Faculty Benefits (The most active standing subcommittee of the GFC).
2. Childcare options for Faculty (and staff).
3. Faculty oversight of intercollegiate athletics.
4. Ombudsperson functions for faculty.
5. IRB regulations for faculty research.
6. Faculty participation on presidential and provost search committees.
7. Faculty review of administrators.
8. Composition of the faculty (diversity issues and ratio of tenure track faculty to non-tenure track faculty).
9. Faculty property rights and compensation.
10. Academic freedom, integrity, and governance issues.
11. Political and/or ethical statements by the faculty.
12. University wide budget allocation topics.

It is interesting to note that several of the topics listed have university wide standing committees with faculty participation. Yet none of them report back to the GFC or the University Senate. They report to the appropriate university administrator. Perhaps shared governance means that the GFC and/or the University Senate should have some oversight responsibilities for certain university wide committees that have faculty participation.

In summary there are three general answers to the first question. (1) There have been in the past and are currently important university wide issues for the faculty that require a functioning shared governance structure. (2) There must be a functioning shared governance structure to respond to important, controversial, and potential divisive issues that are initiated by faculty members and the administration. (3) A functioning shared governance structure is vital to protecting and sustaining academic integrity, freedom, and faculty governance itself.

What are the best shared governance structures to insure an inclusive, deliberative decision making process?

To answer this question we must first identify what our current structures are and then what the ideal structures could be at Northwestern University. There are two university wide shared governance structures, the University Senate and the General Faculty Committee. In addition there are approximately 30 university wide committees with some faculty participation.

University Senate. The composition of the Senate includes the following officers of administration: president, provost, deans, chairs, and holders of other administrative offices as may be designated by the president. “All full-time faculty at the ranks of assistant professor and above are members of the University Senate as well as other members of the various faculties, as may be nominated by any faculty and elected by the Senate.” “Fifty members of the Senate, at least forty of whom shall be Officers of Instruction and not Officers of Administration, shall constitute a quorum.” Except for an elected secretary and the president who is the presiding officer, there are no other stated responsibilities or expectations for other members of the University Senate. There are only two standing subcommittees that report to the University Senate: the GFC and the Honorary Degrees Committee.

Over the last few years no more than 12 to 15 faculty members have attended University Senate meetings. There is usually a small cohort of senior faculty who are in attendance. While the Senate usually meets twice a year, meetings have often been cancelled for a lack of an agenda. The agenda for the meetings are proposed by the GFC executive committee to the President.

There is a serious disconnect between the world class status of Northwestern University and the current state of its University Senate. It is not representative of the University’s faculty much less the rest of the University community. The faithful members who come only represent themselves in meetings that do not have a quorum and, therefore, could be

challenged as not being official meetings of the University Senate. It is all too easy to become cynical in this kind governance situation. Even more disheartening to GFC members are the occasions when the GFC works diligently on a resolution, having a unanimous vote, and then presents it to the University Senate. There, 10 or 12 faculty members, who only represent themselves, and a handful of administrators vote on the resolution.

General Faculty Committee. The GFC was established by Senate Resolution in 1939 and then was expanded from 15 members to 21 members in 1975. The GFC members were supposed to be elected from their respective schools, except for three at-large members elected on a university wide ballot. Over the years a number of standing subcommittees were established with many of them going dormant for a while and then being reinvigorated when a particular issue would emerge. One standing committee, the Benefits committee, has been consistently active, meeting regularly with the appropriate administrators. There is supposed to be an executive committee made up of the vice chair, chair, and chairs of GFC standing subcommittees. This executive committee meets twice a year with the President and Provost to set the Senate agenda and talk about the state of the university.

The GFC reality is quite different from the blueprint. For the past four or five years we have had a hard time having a full membership of faculty, much less a full membership of elected faculty. Two years ago, we had 11 returning members if you count one member who never attended a meeting and another member who attended twice. We could not get WCAS to run an election so that the associate dean ended up appointing members. Another member was asked by his dean to serve on the GFC, assuring the faculty member that he would never have to attend. When we asked another dean to elect a member he informed us that it was in the school's faculty handbook that the dean appoints the GFC member. In another school, the GFC member is elected by the faculty members that show up to the school's quarterly faculty meeting. Maybe 30 faculty members would be present.

The GFC cannot represent the faculty to the administration and the Board of Trustees if its members are not elected by the faculty and there are a significant number of vacancies. Last year when meeting with the senior administration, a dean, and the University Senate, it was both explicitly and implicitly communicated to the GFC that the GFC was not deemed to really represent the faculty.

Another difficulty in terms of membership is that there are no bylaws that the GFC can use to dismiss an elected or appointed member who does not show up to meetings. The GFC has had members who could never make or want to make our meetings. In fact there are no bylaws at all in terms of members' rights and responsibilities or how meetings should be run.

In spite of some of these difficulties the GFC has worked well on specific issues that have arisen over the years. Appropriate research has been done by ad hoc taskforces or standing sub committees. The senior administration has collaborated with us and new

policy has been put in place that has pleased for the most part both the administration and the faculty.

Possible Proposals for Improving Shared Governance

Based on this comparison between the stipulated and actually practiced shared governance structures at Northwestern University, what should be done to insure that there is an inclusive, representative, deliberative decision making process of shared governance? This process should be both credible to the administration and the faculty and efficient in terms of faculty time and resources. There are four options to consider.

First, make no changes to the present system as it works well enough when critical issues arise. There are both administrators and faculty members who support this option. Nothing is really broke.

Second, significantly improve the GFC to make it a respected, representative decision making group that has serious issues to consider for the good of the faculty and the university while treating the current University Senate as a University Assembly.

Third, transform the GFC into the Faculty Senate. The new Faculty Senate would have the President and Provost as ex officio members along with other key senior administrators. The Faculty Senate would also include 6 non-tenure track faculty members. There would be an Executive Committee consisting of the immediate past chair, current chair, and chair-elect plus key subcommittee chairs. The University Senate would be replaced with a Northwestern University Forum or Assembly that would meet twice a year, once when the President gives the State of the University Address, and the other meeting to discuss university wide issues, and respond to Faculty Senate reports and resolutions. This option would require that the Board of Trustees be involved in changing the statutes of the university.

Fourth, change the University Senate to a representative body with elected faculty, plus elected student, staff, and non-tenured faculty members, as well as senior administrators as ex officio members. This option would require a careful delineation of the rights and responsibilities between the University Senate and the General Faculty Committee. There is currently no deliberative body that encompasses all of the university's constituencies. This is another way of helping to create "One Northwestern." Again, this option would require that the Board of Trustees be involved in changing the statutes of the university as well as lengthy discussions with the other constituencies mentioned.

Implementation Strategies

This document proposes that we implement the third option over the next academic year. This means establishing a Faculty Senate, a University Assembly, and the relationship between the University Assembly and the Faculty Senate.

Establishing a Faculty Senate. We need to develop a set of bylaws that (1) addresses how members are selected, (2) identifies members rights and responsibilities, (3) establishes a realistic set of standing sub committees with recurring responsibilities and connections to appropriate administrators and other university wide standing committees, and (4) describes an efficient, inclusive, and deliberative decision making process that both the Faculty Senate members and the university community can trust. The Faculty Senate would retain the rights and responsibilities of the former GFC and acquire the responsibility of approving honorary degrees.

First, the Faculty Senate needs to supervise the elections for its membership. We need a set of procedures that are transparently effective in electing a third of the membership each year. There would be 30 elected tenure track faculty members proportionally representing the various schools and the college, 6 at large tenure track faculty members and 9 non-tenure track full time faculty members. How the Faculty Senate collaborates with the various schools and the college must be worked out.

Second, the bylaws need to stipulate the rights and responsibilities of the Faculty Senate members. These would include an attendance policy, required membership on standing committees, and attendance at the all University Forum meetings when they occur.

Third, the bylaws need to establish some reoccurring topics of importance to the faculty that are connected to standing subcommittees, university wide committees, and appropriate university administrators. This is the most important section of the bylaws. A suggested reoccurring set of topics might include:

1. The executive committee meeting quarterly with the president and provost to discuss faculty governance issues.
2. A new budget committee that meets with the provost and other senior administrators to discuss budget priorities for faculty development, etc.
3. The exclusive right of the Faculty Senate to help elect or propose faculty members on presidential and provost search committees.
4. An education subcommittee that would at least meet once a year with the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education to discuss university wide educational issues and to insure that the faculty's right to prescribe and teach the curriculum is honored.
5. That once a year there would be a meeting with the faculty chair of the Program Review Council to discuss the university's responses to the PRC's recommendations for both academic and administrative units within the university.
6. That another subcommittee would meet once a year with the chair of the University Diversity Committee to discuss findings and issues, and also with the Vice President in charge of diversity issues.
7. That a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate meets once a year with the chair of the Athletics and Recreation Committee and perhaps with the Athletic Director if needed.

8. That the Faculty Senate is consulted and/or informed about what faculty members are asked to be on certain key university wide standing committees.
9. A benefits subcommittee that continues to monitor carefully faculty benefits.

Fourth, based on a modified version of Roberts Rules of Order, an inclusive, efficient, and fair process is established for the Faculty Senate decision making activities. This would stipulate when the executive committee could use email to help make decisions and when the executive committee has the right to make decisions in the absence of members' inputs.

Establishing a University Assembly. The University Assembly could retain all the rights and responsibilities of the current University Senate with the exception of approving honorary degrees. The membership of the Assembly would be the same as that of the current University Senate with the addition of all full time non tenure track faculty. The Assembly would meet twice a year. The Presidential State of the University address would be delivered at one of the University Assembly meetings. The meetings would serve as a forum to discuss university wide issues. Other meetings could be called by the President of the University, the Faculty Senate, or by a petition of at least 100 members of the Assembly.

There would be no required quorum for the Assembly to meet. But any resolutions passed by the Assembly would be only advisory to the Faculty Senate unless 20% of the membership of the Assembly is present. Then, the University Assembly resolutions would supersede resolutions passed by the Faculty Senate. All resolutions and actions taken by the Faculty Senate must be reported to the membership of the University Assembly quarterly. The Faculty Senate must also respond to any advisory resolution passed by the University Assembly.

In the coming transitional year, the faculty has the opportunity to start strengthening shared governance at Northwestern University. The faculty can be better prepared to share governance with the new administration as it evolves.