

2007-08 YEAR-END REPORT OF THE GENERAL FACULTY COMMITTEE

It is no secret that this has been a frustrating year for the GFC. In part, this resulted from differences between the GFC and the Administration over the faculty's proper role in university governance, but, in equal measure, it is attributable to weaknesses in the constitutional structure of faculty governance at Northwestern. Cognizant of these weaknesses, the GFC established a subcommittee in 2006 to explore alternative forms of faculty governance. Concluding that Northwestern's model of a Senate composed of the entire tenure-track faculty and certain administrators is unique among peer universities as well as uniquely unsuited for effectively voicing faculty views, the GFC proposed at the last University Senate meeting a plan for reforming the structure of faculty governance at Northwestern. The principal component of this plan is a University Senate composed of approximately 40 elected faculty members as well as lecturers and administrators.¹ An overwhelming majority of the 50 or so faculty members at the Senate meeting voted to support such a plan. Under the leadership of immediate past GFC chair Paul Arnston, the GFC is now developing by-laws for a reconstituted Senate that it hopes to present to the Senate and Board of Trustees during the forthcoming school year.

From the following brief summary of the GFC's travails this year, I hope faculty members will make their own judgments as to whether such structural change is needed, and, if they find not, whether there might be other ways to make the GFC a more effective voice for the Faculty in the future. In either case, the GFC's struggles this year should leave no doubt that there is a great need for more faculty to participate more actively in faculty governance at all levels of the University.

I. Challenges during the last year to the effectiveness of faculty governance at Northwestern.

1. Difficulties in recruiting GFC members.

Until its January meeting, the GFC lacked four of the six members who were required to be elected by the Weinberg School. It is unclear why the Weinberg School administration had such difficulty this year in recruiting faculty members willing to run for the GFC. As a result of that difficulty, I e-mailed the entire tenure-track faculty listing reasons why members should consider standing for election.² Although the Administration voiced its displeasure with some of the statements in that letter, it seemed to have achieved its goal of recruiting enough faculty to complete the GFC's membership. Even so, there were too few such volunteers to require an actual faculty vote to choose among the Weinberg candidates.

The lack of a full complement of GFC members at the beginning of the school year impeded the GFC's effectiveness in organizing its usual set of subcommittees since, even with all of its 22 members, fully staffing those committees has been a challenge in

¹ See Attachment 1. The footnoted documents are attachments on the GFC website at <http://www.northwestern.edu/gfc/>.

² See Attachment 2.

past years.³ This year the Benefits Committee under the chairmanship of Donna Jurdy was the only subcommittee that regularly conducted its business. In the forthcoming year, the GFC hopes to avoid a repeat of its problems in membership formation by actively soliciting faculty members to run for the GFC before the beginning of the school year.

2. Minimization of the GFC's role in the selection of Faculty representatives on the Presidential Search Committee.

When the Board of Trustees announced on March 5, 2008, that it would be taking nominations from the public as to the four faculty representatives to be allowed on the Presidential Search Committee, the GFC immediately asked the Administration to follow previous presidential search practices in either accepting the GFC's nominees to the search committee or allowing the faculty to elect the faculty search committee members.⁴ The Administration would not commit to either practice, but said it would consider the GFC's nominees. GFC members then individually went back to their respective Schools and through elections or some other consultative method came up with a list of faculty candidates for the GFC's consideration as its nominees to the Search Committee. At a meeting specially called for the purpose, the GFC, after thorough discussion of the nominees, proposed to the Trustees on March 24 a list of 13 candidates from which to choose as well as a recommendation to increase the number of faculty on the search committee to at least eight.⁵ The Trustees increased the number of faculty on the search committee to six and rejected all but one of the GFC's 13 nominees.

The GFC then expressed its wish to have input in the development of the criteria for selecting the President. However, we were told that these criteria would be determined at the Search Committee's first meeting on May 9.

Finally, in a May 20 letter to Mr. Osborn, the Trustee Chair of the Search Committee, Provost Linzer and Vice-President McCoy, the GFC expressed its objections to the Committee's selection processes and noted the following:

(R)espect for the Faculty's deliberations in nominating faculty members for the search committee is essential to the Faculty's confidence in the search process, to the airing of an adequate range of faculty perspectives on the academic qualifications of the presidential candidates and to the Faculty's ready acceptance of the new President's academic leadership. . . .(W)e have no objections to the five eminent faculty members on the search committee who were not recommended by the GFC. . . Nevertheless, there will be an inevitable appearance that faculty representatives chosen by the Administration and Board, instead of by

³ A description of the usual GFC subcommittees can be found at:

<http://www.northwestern.edu/gfc/subcom.html>

⁴ The reference to "The Administration" here refers to both the Board of Trustees and the University's full-time administrators. Because our direct communications on search committee issues were only with Vice President for Administration and Planning McCoy, we do not know who actually formulated the decisions to minimize the GFC's involvement in the presidential search process.

⁵ See Attachments 3

the Faculty, will not feel totally free to oppose or criticize the views of the people who are responsible for their being on the committee.⁶

The letter also expressed the GFC's "concern that the Board appears to be moving in a direction that would diminish the role of the Faculty in University decision-making" and hoped that the Board would support the GFC's efforts "to strengthen Northwestern's institutions of faculty governance in certain fundamental ways," including "(t)he selection of a President with a demonstrated commitment to shared faculty governance. . . ." Neither the Board of Trustees nor the University Administration has responded to this letter.

The GFC found it troublesome that the operatives in charge of the search process believed they were better suited than the representatives of the faculty to choose the faculty representatives on the search committee. The GFC spent a great deal of time and effort in selecting its nominees to the Presidential Search Committee because we believed it essential that the faculty have confidence that Search Committee members will give adequate consideration not only to the various candidates' qualifications to serve as the University's chief academic officer, but also to their perspectives on the proper role of faculty governance. The Search Committee operatives' failure even to respond to the GFC's expressed concerns over how they had denied an appropriate role for the faculty in the presidential search is not a cause for optimism about the future of faculty governance at Northwestern

3. Inroads on the right of faculty members to vote on their Schools' curricula; i.e., the Medill episode.

i. Chronology of events

During the 2006-07 school year, several Medill faculty members asked the GFC to address what they considered to be a violation of their right under University Statutes to determine the curriculum that would be taught at Medill. At a meeting with a delegation of GFC members in the Spring, Provost Dumas explained the Administration's reasons for authorizing the Medill Dean to impose a new curriculum without seeking a faculty vote of approval. Among the justifications was the fact that on several occasions in the past when the Administration thought it was in a School's and the University's best interests, it had suspended the traditional governance prerogatives of that School's faculty. At its final meeting of the year, the GFC passed unanimously a resolution which emphasized the many adverse consequences of making significant curricular changes without full faculty deliberation and vote.⁷ The Resolution concluded that if the Administration believed it necessary in the future to suspend a faculty's right under University Statute to "prescribe and define the course of study," it should do so only for a limited period and only after the Trustees' approval following consideration of the faculty's views.

When he extended the contract of the Medill Dean in January, 08, the President announced that the Medill Faculty would be allowed to vote on its new curriculum in the Spring or Fall of 2009, which would be either 2 or 2&1/2 years after the new curriculum's

⁶ See Attachment 4.

⁷ See Attachment 5.

imposition. At a meeting with the Provost in March, the GFC leadership requested that the Administration give the Faculty some type of written assurance that its approach toward the Medill curriculum was an aberration that would not be repeated. The Provost's position was that no such assurance would be given or was needed in view of the fact that i. the Medill Faculty would be able to vote on the new curriculum after it had been in effect for enough time for the Faculty to be able to appraise its success and ii. some Medill Faculty members had in fact been consulted in the development of the new curriculum.

In view of the Administration's position that its actions in regard to the Medill curriculum did not violate the University Statute's guarantee of a School's faculty's right to decide its curriculum and that it would act in a similar fashion in the future if it felt it necessary, the GFC decided at its May meeting that it would ask the AAUP to investigate the University's actions in regard to the Medill curriculum if a majority of the Medill Faculty were to be in favor of such an investigation. After conducting a confidential e-mail vote by Medill faculty members, the GFC decided that in view of the almost even division among those members on this issue, the GFC would take no action at the present time.

ii. The bearing of the Medill episode on the future of academic freedom at Northwestern

The GFC's protests of the Administration's lengthy imposition of a new Medill curriculum without a faculty vote were both unsuccessful and provocative of intense criticism of the GFC by the Administration and some Medill Faculty. The foregoing chronology of events and the reasons for our actions need to be made of record not only to explain to our faculty constituency why the GFC made its protests, but also, to establish a record of strong faculty opposition that, as explained below, could make the Medill example less useful as precedent for similar administration actions in the future.

The previous Provost's justification for the Administration's imposition of the Medill curriculum relied on several past instances where the usual role of faculty in their School's governance had been overridden. The Administration's Medill actions, however, seemed to take to a new level the Administration's willingness to override faculty statutory rights. This escalating erosion of faculty authority, therefore, made it seem imperative that the GFC protest the Medill actions so that they not become the most powerful precedent yet for similar overrides in the future. The absence of such protest, we feared, would likely be understood by the current and successor Administrations as faculty endorsement of its own disempowerment. Taking a stand on this issue seemed especially important in light of the fact that there had been no organized faculty opposition to a series of actions by the current and past Administrations that have weakened faculty governance roles at Northwestern, including the dissolution during the President Weber years of BRAC, (the GFC's once powerful Budget Resources and Allocation Committee), the change from five year terms for Deans to indefinite decanal appointments at the discretion of the President and the abolition of traditional faculty governing bodies at some of the Schools.

An unfortunate consequence of the GFC's June, 2007 Resolution deploring the suspension of Medill's faculty governance was the media coverage that clearly did not enhance Medill's national reputation. While the GFC did not intend, or act, to have its Resolution disseminated beyond the Medill faculty, we concluded that such risk was outweighed by the potential consequences to the entire Northwestern faculty if we did not take a stand. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the GFC avoided taking a position

on whether the changes to the Medill curriculum were needed and whether the changes that were ultimately imposed were substantively appropriate.

We recognized that there could be instances where a particular School's faculty for whatever reason might not be capable of making curriculum changes that were needed and that the Administration might then be justified in imposing a new curriculum. Our protest, therefore, was explicitly limited to the fact that the Administration had arrogated to itself the decision that the Medill faculty was itself incapable of making any needed changes in its curriculum.

It was and is the GFC's firm conviction that such a decision should never be left to the unilateral discretion of administrators. The reasons for this go to the heart of academic freedom, effective pedagogy and respect for the rule of law.

1. Perhaps most important, a decision to override a Faculty's curricular authority on the ground of its failure to meet academic standards can be legitimate only if it is made by scholars and teachers whose credentials within the relevant academic discipline qualify them to judge whether the Faculty whose competence is in question has or has not departed from the appropriate academic standards. To leave that judgment, as the Northwestern Administration would have it, entirely in the hands of administrators, whether or not they be former academics, violates the norms of academic freedom and turns on their heads the respective competencies of administrators and faculty members.
2. The denial of a Faculty's timely right to vote on its curriculum without first providing that Faculty with a full and fair opportunity to explain both the justification for its actions and its reasons for opposing the curriculum that would be imposed upon it will undermine informed curricular decision-making, will obstruct effective curriculum implementation and innovation and is simply disrespectful of the Faculty itself.
3. It should be self-evident that all faculty members will be more invested in the teaching of courses that are not imposed upon them, but are, instead, arrived at on the basis of collaboration and mutual respect.
4. Finally, regardless of the foregoing policy reasons, denying the Medill Faculty its right to vote on its new curriculum renders meaningless the Faculty's right under University Statute "to prescribe and define the course of study."

In sum, although the GFC failed in its efforts to restore the Medill Faculty's right to vote on its curriculum, we hope that in recognition of the points raised in the GFC Resolution of June, 2007 and in this Year-End Report, the Administration will in the future be less inclined to impose curricula on faculty without the concurrence of independent, well-informed academics who have fully consulted with all concerned parties.

II. Ongoing GFC efforts to improve the role of faculty governance at Northwestern.

1. Proposal to restructure faculty governance at Northwestern

The current plan is to present in the Fall for the GFC's consideration and approval by-laws for an elected faculty Senate. If they are approved, the GFC would then present the proposed by-laws to the Senate in the Spring and, if approved by the Senate, to the Administration and the Board of Trustees.

2. Implementation of an ombudsman program

The GFC approved in the Spring of 2007 a plan to implement an ombudsman program in which three emeriti or senior faculty members would be available to assist other faculty members in answering questions and resolving problems that such faculty would be reluctant to raise directly with administrators. Many of our peer universities have implemented ombudsman programs that are reported to be effective in helping resolve problems before they escalate into intractable adversary conflicts. The Administration has given its approval to such a program pending approval by University Counsel. The GFC hopes to implement this program early in the forthcoming school year.

3. Program for ongoing faculty evaluation of administrators

The GFC subscribes to the principle of management that everyone's job performance should be subject to regular evaluation. Faculty are continually and publicly evaluated in their teaching by their students and in their scholarship by their peers. Deans and other administrators at Northwestern, however, are not evaluated by anyone except higher administrators and this is done confidentially.

Every seven to nine years, programs are subject to the program review process, but that cannot substitute for the regular and direct evaluation of individual administrators for multiple reasons, including, the infrequency of program reviews, the secrecy of such reviews, the apparent lack of follow-up on such reviews and the school-wide focus of such reviews.

The University of Michigan has an on-line system for the yearly faculty evaluation of administrators at all levels, which we are told has been very effective and has come to be supported by the Michigan Administration.⁸ The Northwestern Administration, however, has made it clear to the GFC leadership that it will not support a program for the faculty evaluation of administrators. The GFC would like to explore developing on its own an on-line system for evaluating administrators, but that would have to wait the development of a volunteer group of faculty who could assist in both developing such a system and finding ways to fund the operation of that system.

4. Process for awarding honorary degrees

The controversy over the withdrawal of the honorary degree for Reverend Jeremiah Wright provoked a vigorous discussion among GFC members about both the procedures and the criteria for awarding honorary degrees. There was considerable dissatisfaction with the fact that, although the GFC is asked to approve the recommendations of the Faculty Honorary Degree Committee before the recommendations are presented to the Senate, the GFC knows little about either the process the Honorary Degree Committee uses to nominate candidates or about the justifications for awarding the honorary degrees. Again, this issue developed late in the school year, so that the GFC did not have to study the issue and arrive at specific recommendations for improvement.

5. State of faculty governance within the Schools of the University

Concerns were raised over the state of faculty governance at Schools in addition to Medill. Although we hope to gain more information through a survey of all of Northwestern

⁸ For a description of this system, see: <http://aec.umich.edu/>

Schools and Departments, we now know of only one School that has a set of by-laws on faculty governance. Questions also have been raised about declining faculty participation in decision-making on the School level. For example, in one School, Law, a long-established elected faculty advisory council was abolished by the Dean without prior notice to the Faculty. GFC members from other schools also reported on how the level of faculty participation in governance matters varies with the predilections of different deans. There was GFC consensus that as part of its project to make faculty governance more effective, the GFC survey the status of faculty governance at the individual Schools and then make recommendations as to best practices and a common set of by-laws setting forth minimum faculty governance procedures for all of the Schools.

6. The Program Review Process

GFC members appeared to agree that Program Review was overall a constructive process for the University and should be retained. Nevertheless, several members thought the process could be strengthened in several respects. Perhaps, most notably, was the Central Administration's apparent failure to notify the faculty members of the reviewed programs which, if any, of the report's recommendations would be implemented and the subsequent extent of such implementation. Questions were also raised about the process for selecting the outside reviewers in that when the choice was based upon deans' recommendations, the reviewers tended to support the status quo.

In a meeting on Program Review with Vice-President McCoy, the GFC officers learned that the Program Review process had undergone its own program review and some of the GFC's concerns had surfaced as issues warranting attention. Because there was not enough time remaining in the school year for the GFC to follow-up on these issues, further investigation and recommendations for improvements will depend upon future GFC's priorities.

7. Conclusion

Faculty are invited to draw from the foregoing their own conclusions as to both the causes of the largely dysfunctional relationship between the GFC and the Administration this year as well as the best approaches toward remedying those dysfunctions. The latter is obviously dependent on the right answer to the former. A litany of causes has been suggested to us by faculty who were and were not GFC members. The primary suggested culprits are the following:

1. Because the GFC is not perceived by the Administration as truly representing the will of the faculty, the Administration does not take the GFC seriously.
2. Because the GFC does not concern itself with issues that really matter to most faculty members, it does not garner the respect of both faculty and the administration.
3. The GFC too easily compromises or abandons its demands so that the Administration believes that it has no need to accommodate to those demands.
4. It is unrealistic to expect the Administration to cede decision-making authority to faculty representatives who are not sufficiently organized to exact a cost for being bypassed.

5. GFC members have not tried hard enough to seek mutually acceptable compromises with the Administration over issues in contention.
6. Because the GFC never directly communicates with Board of Trustee members, it has failed to utilize a potentially critical source of leverage.
7. The GFC has failed sufficiently to publicize its own role and activities to the faculty and, as a result, has failed to galvanize wide faculty support for its positions.
8. GFC members have failed to demonstrate that they have sufficient commitment and expertise to represent the faculty effectively.
9. Northwestern lacks traditions of effective faculty governance that would enable faculty representatives to maintain an effective role in university governance.
10. Trends in faculty attitudes toward participation in university life are moving toward an individual entrepreneurial model in which faculty are becoming less invested in the success of the university as a whole.
11. GFC members lack sufficient commitment and expertise for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to:
 - i.. the lack of extrinsic incentives for service, such as, pay, released time or even words of appreciation from departmental or university administration;
 - ii. lack of a full-time staff member to provide support;
 - iii.. lack of a budget that would allow for meaningful research and investigation of policy issues;
 - iv. significant disincentives to serve on or work for the GFC, such as, time diverted from work that is rewarded by home departments, criticism from the departmental or central administrations, criticisms from fellow faculty for doing too much or too little.
12. Structures of faculty governance assure a weak GFC for several reasons, including members' three year terms, ineffective processes for GFC elections, too few members for the effective operation of critical committees, and, the GFC's lack of rule-based authority for making decisions on matters of significance.

Although some of these hypotheses contradict others, there is probably at least some truth in most, if not all, of them. Nevertheless, as is evident from my introductory paragraph, the last of the above suggestions focuses on the issue that the GFC has identified as the major impediment which stands in the way of more effective faculty governance at Northwestern.

The major criticism of our proposed remedy of creating an elected faculty senate is that there is no good reason to believe that an elected faculty senate would be more effective than the current GFC-University Senate structure since such a change would have no necessary effect on the foregoing plethora of other causes of ineffective faculty governance at Northwestern, *e.g.*, why would faculty members have more desire to serve on an elected faculty senate than they now have to serve on the GFC.

There is undeniable force in this objection both because changing procedural structures may make little impact on an embedded culture of relative indifference to faculty governance and because the transaction costs in switching

to the elected model are likely to be significant. Nevertheless, three considerations provide hope that the elected model may result in substantial improvement. First, that model is prevalent at many of our peer universities which are reported to have effective faculty participation in university governance. Second, the fact that the number of elected faculty senate members would be significantly greater than the current number of elected GFC members would allow for a more robust system of faculty committees, which would be expected to do the bulk of the work of faculty governance. Third and finally, the conjunction of a new structure of faculty governance with a new presidential administration has the potential of entirely reframing what has been recently a governance model that has not been altogether satisfactory from a faculty perspective.

In view of the incoming GFC officers' determination next year to create a more inclusive, more inviting and more pro-active approach toward faculty governance, I believe there is good cause for being optimistic about the progress that will be made in improving such governance in the years ahead. However, without both the willingness to serve and the moral support of an increasing number of faculty members, little is likely to be accomplished in improving faculty governance at Northwestern.

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