Improving Collaborative Governance at John Carroll

Concerns about governance at John Carroll are longstanding. In the past thirty years, or more, the following issues have challenged our sense of community and of collaboration. These concerns have been raised through our accreditation self-study, through our survey on great places to work, and through campus conversations. Some of the issues raised are that

- different models of faculty governance have been tried but none have drawn full and active participation from the faculty;
- the senior leadership informs the campus community but does not consult sufficiently;
- for the staff to voice their concerns are inadequate;
- it is unclear how the board of directors' authority is exercised;
- the faculty handbook is regarded by some as outdated, and the faculty handbook committee as inflexible;
- there is insufficient collaboration between faculty committees and senior administrators;

President Niehoff and Provost Colleran want to address the problems—real and perceived – around collaborative governance. We wish to do so in a manner that respects the primacy of the role of the faculty in curricular decision-making, furthers the health and effectiveness of the institution, and adds to a community where positive collaboration will enhance the achievement of our mission.

To this end, we have invited Dr. Thomas Longin, to lead a "conference committee" project on improving collaborative governance. Thomas Longin is the former vice president for programs and research for the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (1997 – 2002). Prior to joining AGB, he served as provost of Ithaca College (NY), vice president for academic affairs at Seattle University and dean of Humanities and Sciences at Ithaca. Before that, he was a faculty member at Ithaca College, Virginia Tech, and Carroll College- Mt. In the past seven years, Tom has facilitated AGB Board Self-Study Workshops at the University of Portland, Loyola University-Chicago, Loyola University New Orleans, Shenandoah University (VA) Fordham University (NY), Sweet Briar College (VA), Loyola University Maryland, Hampshire College (MA), Minneapolis College of Art & Design (MN), Scranton University (PA), Pitzer College (CA), Columbia College Chicago (Ill), Westminster College (UT), Heidelberg College (OH), and Loras College (IA). Tom holds a Ph.D. in American social and intellectual history from the University of Nebraska (Lincoln), a Master of Arts in history from Creighton University (NB), and a Bachelor of Arts in history from Carroll College (MT)

Process, Outcomes, Timeline

The "conference committee" is a tool that Dr. Longin has developed to enable focused discussion among the three university constituencies—the Board of Directors, the Faculty Council, and the Senior Leadership. Its first goal is to clarify the roles and responsibilities of these three constituencies in the decision making process. It begins, in effect, with an institutional governance audit.

Process: The process brings together the provost, on behalf of the senior leadership, a member of the board of directors, and the chair of Faculty Council, on behalf of the entire faculty. Under Dr. Longin's guidance, they will engage in discussions about governance and they will report out on these discussions to their constituencies. (Note: the Faculty Council Chair will need to report out to the entire faculty, not only to the Faculty Council.) The conference committee will begin with three people, but its membership may be broadened. It may be disbanded once the governance audit and role clarification is complete, or it may remain in place as a group that can continue to focus attention on significant challenges.   In the first instance, the conference committee is designed as a process and a tool to improve our governance structures and bring them to a place of regular and satisfactory collaboration.

Outcomes: With an emphasis on transparency and candor, the "conference committee" will work from the premise that as citizens of the same university, we should work together to face the strategic issues and challenges that are before the institution.

Timeline: The conference committee will meet frequently during the initial phase (even weekly); we anticipate that it will finish its work on clarifying roles and responsibilities by the end of this academic year.

Other initiatives to improve collaborative governance

In addition to the clarifying work of the conference committee, Assistant Provost Dr. Nicholas Santilli is leading an audit of university committees. We want to know what committees exist in the university, what their charges are, what work they appear to be doing, whether there is duplication of work, and whether they are effective and consultative.

Provost Jeanne Colleran has requested to meet with the Faculty Council once each semester, and Faculty Council Chair Barbara D'Ambrosia has agreed. At these meetings, the provost will outline progress of university committees and areas for further work.

We will continue, as necessary, to form ad hoc committees with appointed and elected members to address specific questions within specific timelines. The Ad Hoc Committee on Conflict of Interest is an example of one such committee: they will submit their recommendations to the Provost by the end of the fall semester.

Conclusion

The ideal of collaborative governance is not to be a system of checks and balances between distinct constituencies or to level power differentials. The ideal of collaborative governance is to recognize that the major constituent groups need to work together in order ensure fulfillment of mission, institutional effectiveness in academic and administrative practice, and delivery of the best learning experience possible for our students.