
Pleasure and Pain: Faculty and Administrators in a Shared Governance Environment

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California Community Colleges are required by law to pursue a policy of shared governance, sometimes called "collegial consultation" in other states. The California Education Code refers to regulations about shared governance as those related to "minimum standards governing procedures established by governing boards of community college districts to ensure faculty, staff, and students the right to participate effectively in district and college governance, the opportunity to express their opinions at the campus level and to ensure that these opinions are given every reasonable consideration. . . ." For the lay person, this requirement means that when an issue impacts a group—staff, faculty, students or administrators—its members must be consulted. This consultation is frequently accomplished through the use of standing committees where all constituencies are represented. While some areas of college governance are the purview of a particular group (for example, curriculum is the domain of faculty), all parties participate in the discussion that precedes a decision. In some cases, shared governance has created situations in which decisions cannot be made because consulting everyone takes such an enormous amount of time.

I am Dean of my division, which houses English, ESL, speech, mass communication, and learning skills. Shared governance has been part of the division's culture for many years; it is not just a law to our faculty and staff but the way of making decisions. Even when I have the responsibility for a decision, as is the case with managing the budget, the culture requires that I seek the advice of my faculty and staff. But even in such a clearly defined, mandated shared governance setting, such consultation can bring both pain and pleasure for us all.

Problems in the Decision-Making Process

Pain occurred for all of us during the summer of 1997 when our community college faculty contract was implemented with a new provision about which we had not been informed. Suddenly, the number of hours that a part-time, hourly English teacher could teach per week was reduced to either five or six, not the typical eight, depending on the classes assigned. (A teacher who teaches one five-hour basic writing class and one higher level class earns about \$2300 for the former and about \$1600 for the latter, for a total of about \$3900.) The change meant that part-timers who were counting on earning almost \$4,000 for teaching eight hours would see a loss of from \$1600 to \$2300 for the semester, depending

on the classes they taught. Since we hire between forty to sixty English part-timers a semester, I anticipated facing a number of very unhappy people. If I informed them of the change, many of them were likely to quit to take jobs where they could earn more money. If they remained, they were going to be very angry with the college for the loss of pay. Furthermore, I would have to hire about twenty new part-timers to pick up the class which could no longer be covered by some of our most experienced part-timers, and almost all the classes were going to be basic writing—the cornerstone of our program. Adding to the difficulty, since in a California Community College an administrator dare not make a unilateral decision about an issue that so directly impacts curriculum and hiring, I needed to consult with faculty immediately, but only two of the full-timers were teaching summer school. As the end of July approached, I was faced with an immediate crisis.

I had no choice but to implement the new contract; however, how I handled the results for part-time faculty was something upon which I felt required to consult. Therefore, I began to make calls to various faculty leaders in order to explain the issues to them as I saw those issues. First was the problem of what to do to prevent the part-timers from resigning from their positions, with the semester beginning in only three weeks, to teach elsewhere—a real possibility, because most of them could not afford to teach on an hourly basis if their hours were limited in many cases to five instead of eight per week. Then, we needed to decide what to do if I had to hire many new faculty who had very little time to prepare to teach the core courses in basic writing. The basic writing classes would be the ones most heavily impacted by the change, and those classes are the training grounds that insure student success in advanced classes. Finally came the problem of trying to persuade the part-time faculty that the contract change was not something with which English full-timers agreed: it was important to us that they understand we wanted to maintain our collegial relationship with them and were interested in solving the problem.

My solution was to break off one hour from the load of each part-timer who would have been over the allowed hours, thus allowing them to keep most of their income. That one hour I assigned to another part-timer who was under the allowed load. The hour picked up by the underload person was to be earned by that person staffing our writing center at various times to enable the students to complete one of their weekly hours by attending any of a variety of hours in the writing center for any activity including peer tutoring. My solution was based upon a desire to keep experienced part-time faculty teaching our basic writing classes. I wanted to give them as many hours as possible to teach while making sure some of the classes they taught were basic writing. Students who were doing five hours of class for four units of credit would get four hours with an experienced person and one hour of other useful writing help in an alternative activity through the writing center. Since students could choose the activity from among five options, including computer use and peer tutoring, they would benefit. Also, since the center hours could be staffed by the part-time faculty, we would be able to keep it open additional time, including evenings, when it had

been traditionally closed because of no staffing. With evening staffing, we could make student tutors available then, also; many students, not just those in the changed classes, would have the service available.

This solution was fraught with problems, and the difficulties were compounded by the need for shared governance. The faculty coordinator of the writing center did not like the idea of students descending on the center at unscheduled times and envisioned that about 300 students might appear at the same hour when only one or two tutors were there to help them. Then he left town on vacation just when the decision had to be finalized. When he returned, just as classes started, he suggested that some classes be team-taught for that hour, with the one-hour person meeting the class in the regular classroom.

While the coordinator's solution limited the number of students going to the center, other problems arose. For example, some faculty who shared the hour did not share compatible teaching goals or styles, so they had trouble being a "team." This meant that frequently that hour became "busy time" for students and a bone of contention for faculty. New problems grew out of the solution to assign some students to an hour in the center. For example, I had expected that the usual sign-in procedure would be followed so that a computer record could be shared with the regular classroom teacher of students who used the writing center. Unfortunately, the writing center could not do this because the computer record was for funding, and we could be charged with abusing the funding formula by claiming the same student twice for only one hour of instruction. Without records, faculty who wanted to "track" students' participation found this difficult to do. Along with this, some of those faculty assigned to cover writing center hours did not like the one-on-one tutoring they were asked to do. And some faculty, as well as their students, were upset by a lack of clearly perceived assignments for the hour in the writing center.

Responsibility Versus Consultation

This temporary solution allowed part-timers to continue teaching close to their anticipated load; it also meant that I did not have to hire as many people as I had feared. The greatest problem that resulted from this situation was a faculty perception that they had not been more closely involved in the discussion of the solution, leading, therefore, to their unwillingness to be flexible when we began seeking a long-term solution. That attitude confirmed for me the most basic problem with shared governance: administrators are charged with making decisions, but they must do so by consulting. The faculty, on the other hand, face no requirements except that of being part of the consultation. They are still free to dislike the solution and to blame the administrator for whatever results from the process.

On the other hand, when faculty are involved in the decision and are made part of the solution, they will usually support the final outcome. Two examples of that type of support can be found in the writing center and the basic writing program. When the college moved from quarters to semesters, the faculty took leadership in changing the curriculum. They did this for two

reasons: the department was without a permanent administrator to assume leadership but the conversion could not wait on a permanent hiring, and, more importantly, newly trained faculty who had been recently hired saw an opportunity to implement their ideas. As part of the conversion, the faculty eliminated the writing and reading centers, which were actually classroom-based instruction on a master student model. Instead of deciding what would replace the centers, they used a new grant to begin a new center with computer classroom support but no philosophy or procedures. The philosophy grew gradually as the classes moved into the computer rooms, and from what happened in the first two years came a philosophy of collaboration that resulted from pedagogy driving curriculum decisions. The staff, faculty, and student tutors all "bought into" what was happening, and, as a result, the writing center came to be the focus of much of what makes our current classes work so well at the developmental level.

From this most recent crisis has come the second example of successful shared governance where faculty have become invested in the results of the shared decision-making. Because of the problem over the summer with the threatened loss of part-time hours, the administration looked more closely at the course description and decided that it was incorrectly worded for the amount of credit that was being given to full-timers. In other words, the course outline suggested particular activities which on this campus are given less weight than that given to the full-time English faculty for such work. The full-time faculty were unwilling to consider changing the course outline and decided that they should get what they always had received. The administration, with which I agreed, changed the load value. This infuriated the full-time faculty because it was done without what they considered "appropriate" consultation. In fact, it is the administration's right and responsibility to make such decisions. Nevertheless, the furor that resulted from the "high handed actions" meant that faculty were galvanized into looking more closely at the curriculum and articulating the issues in those terms. With the passage of time and much discussion, including a curriculum retreat, both full- and part-time faculty have agreed to a particular approach to the basic writing courses. The same faculty who assumed leadership in the curriculum conversion stepped in again to articulate the issues on the basis of the curriculum, not as an "us-them" issue. Fortunately, the resolution will allow part-timers to teach the hours they have traditionally taught and maintain the basic writing courses, which enact an approach recommended by current research. But, most importantly, all the faculty feel consulted because the process that was followed was faculty-led and conformed to earlier faculty decisions.

The pain of the last few months was both mine as an administrator and the faculty's. We suffered through the time it took to reach consensus and the controversy that resulted from the discussion. Part-time faculty were pitted against full-time faculty, and administrators, including me, were faced with angry part-time and full-time faculty. The faculty coordinator and the staff who work in the writing center found themselves embroiled in the controversy as they tried to deal with the solution I implemented. In the midst of all the anger

and the questioning of curriculum versus the need to provide part-timers with sufficient instructional hours, none of us found much pleasure. That only came at the end of the process when through the consultation process we came to an agreement about the curriculum.

There are several lessons here. Collaborative structures such as shared governance are not likely to produce clear relations and happy solutions to institutional conflicts. Taking consultation rights seriously is one way to reduce the friction inherent in such systems, for the consultant and decision-maker alike.

Grants Awarded

The WPA Research Grant Committee (David Jolliffe, chair, Christine Garris, and Doug Hesse) awarded the following grants at the 1998 WPA breakfast in Chicago:

Pat McQueeney
University of Kansas
\$2,000

“Writing in Large Classes: Operative Variables”

Alice Gillam
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
\$950

“Investigating Alternative Models of
Writing Program Administration:
A Case Study and Survey”