

RU Engaged Notes
Shared Governance: The Role of Faculty
11/24/08

Facilitators Jim Newell (Interim Associate Provost for Academic Affairs) and Eric Milou (Professor of Mathematics and University Senate President) welcomed the audience and gave an overview of the RU Engaged Series.

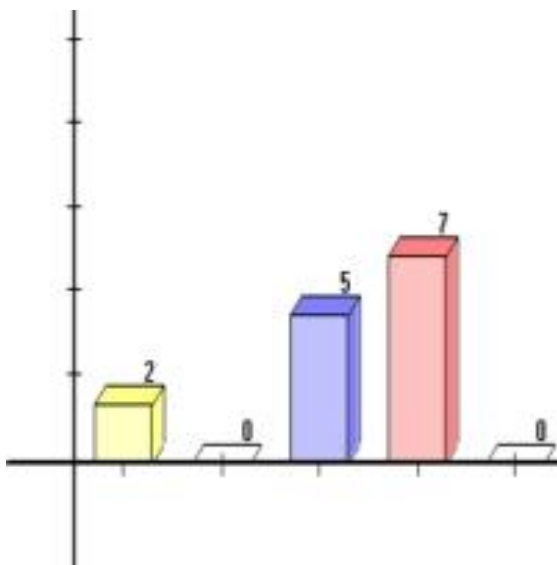
The session began with the following definition of shared governance: “At Rowan, shared governance is defined as a set of practices under which faculty and staff participate in significant decisions affecting the University.” (Source: Board of Trustees Resource Manual, taken from the American Association of University Professors [AAUP])

Eric Milou mentioned that “students” are absent from the current definition and invited those present to reflect on and discuss the definition during the session. It may be time to revisit the definition.

Faculty were then asked to participate in an iclicker survey. The responses are as follows:

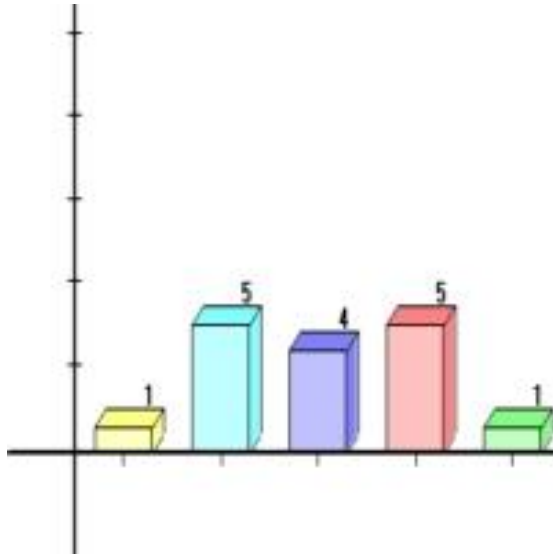
1. To what degree do you feel faculty are involved in shared governance at Rowan University? (Total responses = 14)
 - A. Extremely involved 2
 - B. Very involved 0
 - C. Somewhat involved 5
 - D. Only certain faculty are involved 7
 - E. Not at all 0

Question #1



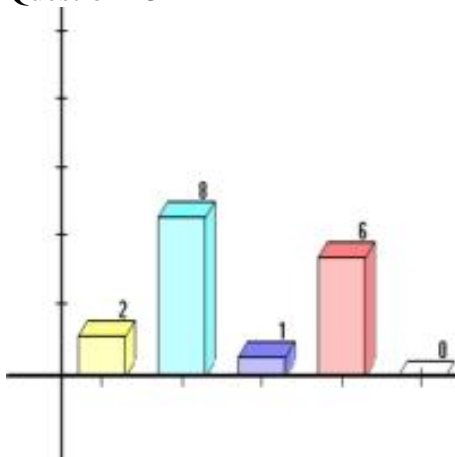
2. At what level would you rate your own participation in shared governance on campus, with 1 being the lowest level and 5 the highest? (Total responses = 16)
- | | |
|------|---|
| A. 1 | 1 |
| B. 2 | 5 |
| C. 3 | 4 |
| D. 4 | 5 |
| E. 5 | 1 |

Question #2



3. I most often participate in shared governance by (Total responses = 17)
- | | |
|--|---|
| A. Contacting the University Senate | 2 |
| B. Serving on University Senate committees | 8 |
| C. Contacting the AFT | 1 |
| D. Contacting the decision-makers directly | 6 |
| E. Other | 0 |

Question #3

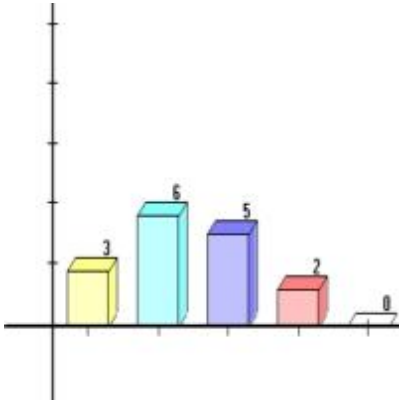


4. To what level do you think the administration considers the opinions of faculty in shared governance, with 1 being the lowest level and 5 the highest?

(Total responses = 17)

A. 1	3
B. 2	6
C. 3	5
D. 4	2
E. 5	0

Question #4

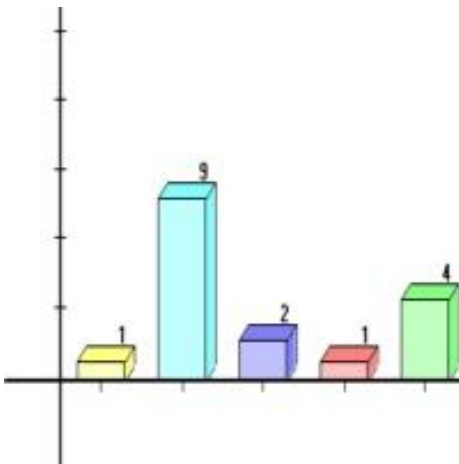


Question #5

5. Based on observations that some faculty choose not to participate in shared governance, which of the following do you think is a primary contributing factor?

(Total responses = 17)

A. Faculty are content with the way things are	1
B. Faculty lack time	9
C. Faculty lack information in how to participate	2
D. Faculty do not care	1
E. Faculty believe that no one listens anyway	4



Faculty and other individuals present were then invited to participate in small-group discussions, choosing one of the questions from the iclicker survey, a topic of their choice relating to shared governance, or one of the suggested optional discussion questions:

What would it take to get faculty more engaged at Rowan?

If you perceive barriers to shared governance, how can we work around them?

Are you aware of any institutions that could serve as a model for shared governance at Rowan?

At the conclusion of the small-group participation segment, the discussion opened up to the larger group, with several individuals offering comments.

Comment #1:

We decided that service is not a priority issue in any department's T & R process. Teaching is first, research is second, and service is often a very small percentage of any T & R process, so when is it that new faculty will get a sense that service has much value? Eric Milou's comment: This seems to corroborate the results for question #5.

Comment #2:

It is not necessarily that faculty lack time, but it's how they choose to use their time, and that depends on the messages coming down to them about what is important for them and for their career goals.

Comment #3:

I think if people felt that their time was well-used in service in shared governance, they would find time for it.

Comment #4:

I would echo both of those comments, and I think (Commenter #1) is right in terms of the message we send to all of the faculty about how important each of these things are. We also have to think about the ways that we are engaged, whether it is a committee or within a College or within a department, because a lot of people might not think of that as being part of shared governance.

Comment #5:

I feel that the department is a central place where information is shared, and I think that's a good place to start in terms of increasing shared governance. I think we have to do it more than once a month for an hour, but the department is a central operation of that idea, and so I would like to suggest that as a way to move forward.

Comment #6:

Do we focus on shared governance only when there is some sense of a failed decision, or is it a failure of shared governance? There may be a decision that people are not happy about, but that doesn't mean there wasn't a representative process that was part of the decision. There may be cases where significant numbers of people are not happy about it—one of the things we might want to identify here is: Do we only become concerned

about shared governance when participation doesn't get the result we wanted? This is a campus that has a lot of shared governance compared to many other campuses. There is almost no aspect of the campus where there is no input requested, but we may believe that "they didn't listen to my opinion."

Comment #7:

Along that line, there seem to be different levels of shared governance. There's policy, curriculum; then there's shared governance where there's a problem and people say, "What happened?" Shared governance is not going to serve all people in the same way at all times. We have a lot of avenues of shared governance on this campus. I think faculty lack information rather than time. You learn how this campus works after you've been here for a while. How long it takes you to find out how everything works depends on how interested you are in finding that out. If you have no interest in it because you're doing something else, you never find out. And then if something comes up that you don't like, you have to go back and look at your responsibility to participate in shared governance.

Facilitator:

Are there other avenues of shared governance? Senate committees and contacting decision-makers directly – what are the other avenues and how can people create other avenues?

Comment #8:

This is a question, actually – whether we consider shared governance something that goes on down to the local level because it involves making some decisions, and at that level I believe faculty really are involved – but I don't think we should completely ignore that, because it's part of the culture that can feed into shared governance more widely. Do you consider that part of shared governance or not?

Facilitator:

There are 17 faculty here today, but there are 390 faculty who are not here today. Maybe 130 are teaching at the moment. Where are the others? Are they not here because . . . Any suggestions?

Comment #9:

I think this is coming back to a point made earlier—they don't feel as if there being here will make a big difference. They have other things to do.

Comment #10:

I think there are some that think things are going along fine—I think there might be some people who are happy with things as they are.

Comment #11:

I can't help but note the two dominant answers for how people see themselves participating in shared governance. Some issues are intended to be handled by handing issues over to representatives; others are more local decisions. A lot of this comes back

to the definition of shared governance—the word “participate” may be interpreted by some as personal participation, or it may mean to some delegating one’s representation to an elected senator. Does it mean my personal voice on each issue? Until we have a definition, the results will vary. I think one of the first things we should be working on as a campus is to clarify how we define shared governance.

Comment #12:

I think RU Engaged has been seeking to build up a culture of shared governance. I think building a culture of participating and asking for input, using that input in obvious ways, is something we should work towards. Maybe if we could continue this sort of practice and even try some different vehicles, we could see more numbers.

Comment #13:

Increased communication between faculty and administration is important, like when the Provost came to our department meeting. If faculty feel that their opinions are appreciated, then they will want to be engaged.

Comment #14:

I know a little bit about Berkeley, where apparently some faculty consider it a burden of shared governance—almost every decision involves faculty input. We also talked at our table about institutions where there is almost no shared governance, and people have mentioned that—where department chairs are appointed and personnel decisions are made at the College level or even the administrative level. Certainly we are in the middle, but I would like to know if anyone has experience in other institutions where shared governance worked really well.

Facilitator:

The Provost and I met with the Student Parliament recently to talk about the new academic schedule. A student asked a question about shared governance. There will be a task force next year to evaluate the new schedule, and students will be on that task force. The student asked, “Are the opinions of the students going to be listened to?” The answer to that question should be “yes,” but we took some time to elaborate. There will be a whole series of consultations before the Provost makes a decision—he’ll end up with 15 or 20 opinions. He’ll have to distill the best pieces of each and come forward with a plan. So if the student was asking, “Will students help shape the final plan?”, the answer is yes. If the student is asking, “Will the final plan look like what we told you to do?”, the answer would be no—but it will look like an amalgam of various opinions collected.

Comment #15:

I wonder if the kind of thing we’ve discussed here couldn’t be taken down to the department or the College level and get everyone’s ideas. The more people are a part of the process, the more they understand how decisions are made. So I’m not sure how to implement that, but that would be an answer to question #1—that we replicate this at a College or department level.

Comment #16:

We have a University Senate that has representation from all departments—you have an avenue of input into the decision-making process. After every Senate meeting, our senator comes back and gets our feedback. That should be, for a great many of the issues, the way that faculty as a whole is involved in shared governance. We have a representative system that should facilitate faculty being engaged.

Is the system such that we need to have more engagement, or is there a system already in place? That's where faculty should be able to be engaged, to go through their senator.

Are we here because we see that the system is insufficient or because we don't always get an answer that everybody likes? Are institutions with more shared governance actually doing a better job than we are? Faculty want to be able to express their opinions, but that should be left to the system we have.

Conclusion:

Jim Newell closed out the session by thanking the attendees. This year's RU Engaged series will continue in the spring, with dates to be announced. The next session will focus on the role of professional staff in shared governance.