

**RU Engaged Notes**  
**Shared Governance: The Role of Professional Staff**  
 2/2/09

Facilitators Carol Eigenbrot (CAP Center, secretary of University Senate) and Karen Siefring (Assistant to the Dean for student advising in the College of Business; president of AFT Local 2373) 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]) Professional staff were then asked to participate in an iclicker survey. The responses are as follows:

1. To what degree do you feel professional staff are involved in shared governance at Rowan University?
 

a. extremely	2
b. very involved	4
c. somewhat involved	13
d. only certain professional staff are involved	19
e. not at all	0

**Question #1**

To what degree do you feel professional staff are involved in shared governance at Rowan University?

A. Extremely involved

B. Very involved

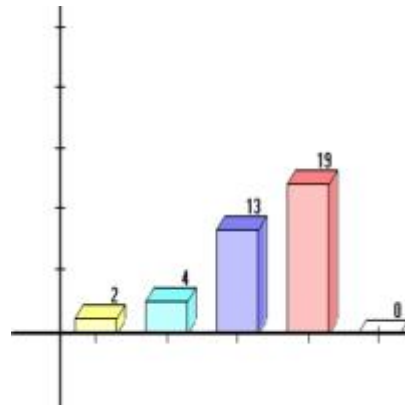
C. Somewhat involved

D. Only certain professional staff are involved

E. Not at all

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2. At what level would you rate your own participation in shared governance on campus, with 1 being the lowest level and 15 the highest?
 

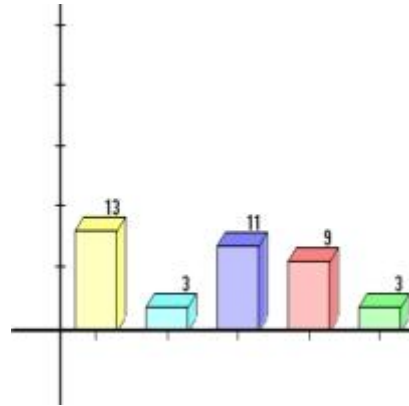
a. 1	13
b. 2	3
c. 3	11
d. 4	9
e. 5	3

### Question #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?

- A. 1 (lowest level)
- B. 2
- C. 3
- D. 4
- E. 5 (highest level)

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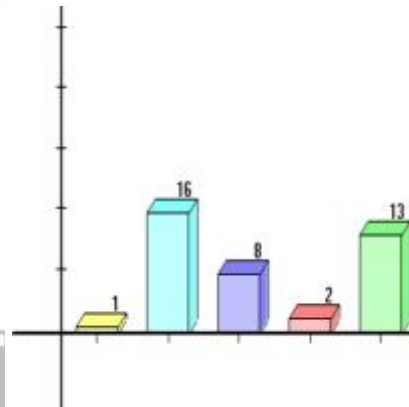
3. I most often participate in shared governance by
- |  |    |
|--|----|
| a. contacting the University Senate        | 1  |
| b. serving on University Senate committees | 16 |
| c. contacting the AFT                      | 8  |
| d. contacting the decision-makers directly | 2  |
| e. other                                   | 13 |

### Question #3

I most often participate in shared governance by

- A. Contacting the University Senate
- B. Serving on University Senate Committees
- C. Contacting the AFT
- D. Contacting the decision-makers directly
- E. Other

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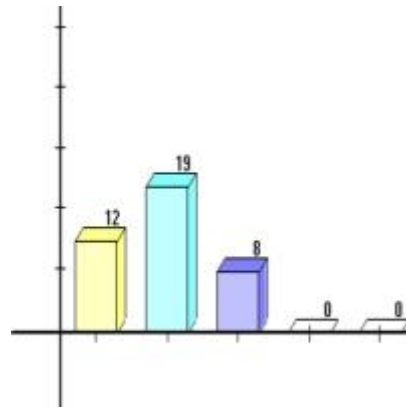


4. To what level do you think the administration considers the opinions of professional staff in shared governance, with 1 being the lowest level and 5 the highest?
- |      |    |
|------|----|
| a. 1 | 12 |
| b. 2 | 19 |
| c. 3 | 8  |
| d. 4 | 0  |
| e. 5 | 0  |

### Question #4

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

- A. 1 (lowest level)
- B. 2
- C. 3
- D. 4
- E. 5 (highest level)

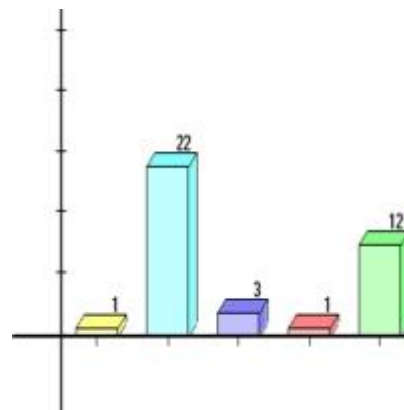


5. Based on observations that some professional staff choose not to participate in shared governance, which of the following do you think is the primary contributing factor?
- a. Professional staff are content with the way things are. 1
  - b. Professional staff lack time. 22
  - c. Professional staff lack information in how to participate. 3
  - d. Professional staff do not care. 1
  - e. Professional staff believe that no one listens anyway. 12

### Question #5

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

- A. Professional staff are content with the way things are
- B. Professional staff lack time
- C. Professional staff lack information in how to participate
- D. Professional staff do not care
- E. Professional staff believe that no one listens anyway



### General Comments:

#### Comment #1:

I think professional staff often feel like second-class citizens here. It's a barrier for people who want it to be a barrier.

Comment #2 - Question from audience member who is not a professional staff member:

I'm stunned that only one person in the room uses the Senate—why?

Response: I don't think we're educated. We have to take responsibility for ourselves—if you want to get involved, you have to make a decision to be involved.

Comment #3 - Follow-up question: If you had an issue that you wanted to get before the Senate, who represents you in the Senate?

Response: I have no idea—and I'm probably more educated about this than most people.

Comment #4:

Being on the Senate ends up being counterproductive—we're a small group, a significant minority—it's hard for professional staff issues to work their way to the top. But at the same time, it's perceived that that's our venue.

Comment #5:

I've never thought of it as a venue. I think there's a lack of connection in some ways. Is it apathy? Are we burying our heads in the sand? Faculty tend to be more vocal. If you're a professor, you're "higher on the food chain." Do we respect each other as professionals? When I first was hired, I was advised not to speak directly to the President and not to have lunch with the secretaries. Another factor is that as professional staff we're spread out and have different responsibilities.

Comment #6:

Faculty are given the message by departments—this is your institution; be involved. I'm not sure that that message is reinforced for professional staff.

Comments About Question #1 (To what degree do you feel professional staff are involved in shared governance at Rowan University?)

Comment #1:

One of the things that came up at our table was that you can't simply point the finger at administration if you're not involved. We are all adults and you have to make a decision to become involved. It's easy to blame somebody else, but if you're not making an effort, you're to blame.

Comment #2:

Sometimes it depends on how long you've been here and how busy you are in your job.

Comment #3:

We do have people at our table who have been here just a couple of years. The same people are always elected to be on the Senate so that does not give everyone a chance, and some people do not have time for committee meetings.

Comment #4:

There's a universal feeling that time is a limiting factor, especially if you're committed to making a difference. There's also a universal dynamic where in every group some are very involved and others are not, and some are in the middle. I don't know what one could do to overcome that.

We briefly discussed whether we felt that our opinion mattered a great deal and the consensus is that all of us feel our opinion is not as valued as it should be, or as we would like it to be.

Comments About Question #2 (At what level would you rate your own participation in shared governance on campus, with 1 being the lowest level and 15 the highest?):

Comment #1:

I think at our table it ranges within the categories set up depending on the number of years a professional staff member has been here. One professional staff member has been here less than five years and feels they are not able to assume additional responsibilities; they are still learning their specific job responsibilities, as they should. I've been here 28 years and have had the opportunity to be involved in shared governance at great length, serving on committees. It has contributed to my professional development and helped me do my duties in a more enhanced way. The level of experience and the desire of wanting to become involved, and also encouragement from one's supervisor—all of these make a difference.

Comments About Question #3 (I most often participate in shared governance by . . .):

Comment #1:

I would be curious to hear from those who answered "other" to see what they felt "other" meant.

Response #1: Serving on AFT committees.

Response #2: I wanted to pick more than one, so perhaps some chose "other" because of that.

Comment #2:

We had a divergence of views, depending on what level—University level, College, or department? Is there a different perspective of shared governance at different levels of the institution? Our sense is that it does vary. Where does shared governance begin?

Comment #3:

I participated in a meeting about a year ago where there was mention of silos on campus. Breaking down those silos could help—we professional staff are basically where the rubber meets the road in each of our departments. We know how we help the faculty, but that information is not spread from one department to another. If there was an avenue to present an idea, have it evaluated, and then brought back to you—if we were to set up an informational professional staff committee and bring to that committee the abilities we have as professional staff, and that information were disseminated to faculty, that could be helpful to faculty, for example, in writing grants. And especially because we are in our silos, this doesn't happen. We could do a better job of sharing our resources.

Comment #4:

I'm wondering how well we communicate and educate our professional staff first about what shared governance is and second what our opportunities are. Maybe we need to evaluate that process.

Comments About Question #4 (To what level do you think the administration considers the opinions of professional staff in shared governance, with 1 being the lowest level and 5 the highest?):

Comment #1:

There have been a lot of times when we were on a committee and we thought the information would be passed along higher up, but sometimes we heard nothing back about the recommendations we made. That can make you feel that there's no point—no one listens to what we say.

Comment #2:

I think that brings us to something else. If I don't get what I want, it doesn't mean I wasn't heard. It just means that what I wanted was not the right answer.

Comment #3:

Our table had some discussion regarding this and the issue of being reactive vs. proactive. Sometimes professional staff are asked to participate after the decision-making process is completed. We're asked how to implement the decision. It's more of an after-the-fact participation.

Comment #4:

We talked about the concept of value and participation. If you feel valued, you're more likely to participate. As an earlier speaker commented, sometimes you participate in a committee and are waiting for a response that never comes. Having that feedback is valuable, because when you don't get feedback it makes people feel their opinion doesn't matter or the decision was already made. For me, it would make me feel better to hear that a decision had been made and then have the rationale explained. If you feel valued for anything you do, you're more likely to continue to do it.

Comments About Question #5 (Based on observations that some professional staff choose not to participate in shared governance, which of the following do you think is the primary contributing factor?):

Comment #1:

I think it's important for professional staff to learn about what has happened before. If you take time to ask questions about why we did this at the University, why this decision was made, it will give you better understanding. I think the comment made about the supervisor is important—I had a supervisor who encouraged me to get involved in professional associations because not everyone can be involved in the Senate. Sometimes governance here is your willingness to serve. Most of us at this table felt we didn't make any real impact on decisions, but when you serve on a tenure and recontracting committee, you are making decisions that matter; when you're on search committees, you have an influence. Everyone has their role, and if everyone does what they're supposed to do, this campus works well. You can never be accused of rocking the boat when you're one of the people trying to row the boat and are involved. The fact that we feel respected and honored for the activities we do on this campus makes us feel valued. "I'd rather feel appreciated than make an extra \$5000 a year"—I've heard many people say this.

Comment #2:

I've served on committees for more than 20 years and have been on the Senate for the last six. This is a faculty-driven institution, but it doesn't stop me from participating.

Comment #3:

I'm very happy at Rowan and don't want to work anywhere else. I'm also happy to have the opportunity to serve on committees. My concern is economic—if we compare ourselves to faculty and librarians, we are not well compensated.

Comment #4:

There are many institutions where professional staff cannot serve on the Senate. And for the first time, we have an AFT president who is a professional staff member.

Conversation Based on List of Possible Discussion Questions:

Time allowed for the discussion of only one of these questions: What would it take to get professional staff more engaged at Rowan?

Comment #1:

I believe RU Engaged is a forum for speaking and a stepping stone for change. I think this is a great forum for standing up and saying something—just stand up and say what you have to say.

Comment #2:

I was trying to go back to when I first started here. As I advanced through my career, I became more active. When you have people in the room who are relatively new and who are senior, you do get a range of responses.

Comment #3:

On the recontracting committee for professional staff, one of the things we see is that professional staff are hired to do a job but it's more than that—there's a service component. There's a feeling that we should be continuing to grow and educate ourselves as individuals. Sometimes the professional staff just aren't given the support they need in terms of time to participate in committees.

Comment #4:

I feel very supported in my office to do service across campus. However, two of our table members here (not professional staff) were not able to articulate what a professional staff member is. Members need to be able to articulate how we function in the Senate and in the AFT. There needs to be a process of continually trying to educate new supervisors—actually, all supervisors—about the role of professional staff?

Comment #5:

The area I work in is extremely fast-paced. We feel we don't have the time to even make an AFT meeting, let alone participate. We also encounter a lack of understanding from our supervisor about who we are and what we want to do to benefit ourselves and enhance our professionalism at Rowan.

Comment #6:

Our new professional staff members aren't aware of how to get involved. That's an educational, informational challenge for both sides, supervisors and professional staff.

Comment #7:

I'm hearing a lot of finger-pointing about management. As professional staff, our professional development is really in our hands. We're ultimately accountable for how involved we get. We make time to be as involved as we want to be. We really need to hold ourselves accountable and get involved, not just blame management or say we're too busy.

Comment #8:

I got involved by joining a learning community that developed an orientation for professional staff. We just had an orientation in January. We try to find all the new hires and give them a lot of information, including how they can get involved. I hope you take advantage of this if you're new here.

Facilitator Comment:

There are about 120 professional staff and about 40 people here today, about 1/3 the population.

Facilitator Comment:

If you volunteer to serve on a Senate committee, you almost certainly will, even if you don't get your first pick. People don't always think of serving on a committee as shared governance, but it is.

Conclusion

The facilitators thanked the audience for their participation and reminded them of the last two sessions on shared governance in the RU Engaged series: 11:30 Friday, February 27 – role of support staff in shared governance; 10:30 Wednesday, March 25 – role of administration in shared governance.

Written Comments / Suggestions / Questions

At each session, index cards are provided on the tables so that audience members may write comments. Below are the comments and suggestions provided from this session:

1. Set up a forum to present professional staff ideas; check state website to see if there is some sort of online forum.
2. We need to know who to contact for specific issues; we also need to break down silos.
3. I wonder if the iclicker survey could be done in advance of the meeting so we could spend the time discussing the answers. Perhaps the use of surveymonkey or something similar. An additional advantage would be the chance to provide definitions.

4. The same people are always tapped to serve on committees. How productive are the committees? How are the reports or findings shared? Also, committee membership can be a burden, especially for the chair of the committee.
5. Do we encourage people to participate in professional associations? This could bring prestige to the University.
6. What issues are staff members interested in making decisions about?
7. How long should someone be on campus before they serve on committees?
8. How do we inform professional staff that they have an opportunity to be involved in decision-making? How do we educate our new hires?