

**Report of the Academic Policy Council to the Faculty Senate  
on the results of the Shared Governance Questionnaire  
April 14, 2009**

**Background**

In early 2009 the Academic Policy Council solicited feedback from faculty in all colleges and units represented in the Senate regarding how well shared governance (SG) is working, particularly in relation to academic matters. This was prompted by the fact that shared governance at UF is a fairly new endeavor, and has been implemented largely in an environment of ongoing budget cuts. While faculty determine academic matters, their ability to do so in light of budget cuts may be severely compromised when SG is not fully operational. Over the past two years, units have established constitutions and to varying degrees have established policies and procedures regarding matters such as fiscal transparency, the role of Faculty Councils, faculty participation in the curriculum, and the like. Therefore, we wished to obtain an updated sense of where we are as a university in the SG process, and how much variation exists across units. We reiterated that the SG report adopted by the Senate and the Board of Trustees places budgetary decisions most directly in the administration's purview, with faculty consultation, and academic decisions most directly in the faculty's purview, with consultation by administration. We sent our survey questions to the faculty councils of each unit or to the Senators of units that did not have a faculty council. Here, we convey to the Faculty Senate our assessment of the results of this survey, and our suggestions for follow-up action.

**Returns**

We received results, (sometimes 2 results), from the following units: CLAS, Education, Engineering, Fine Arts (2), Law, the Libraries (2), PPHP, Pharmacy, and Vet Med. We also received one from the Department of Anatomy and Cell Biology in the College of Medicine. Of those who responded, four (Law, Vet Med, Engineering, and Education) gave us the individual responses and did not attempt to synthesize the results into general statements. The rest gave us summary responses.

Eight colleges did not respond: Business, CALS, DCP, Dentistry, HHP, Journalism, Medicine, and Nursing.

**Survey Questions**

Because establishment of shared governance at UF is fairly recent, and because we are still emerging from a difficult period of budget cuts and face potential cuts in the future, the Academic Policy Council seeks input from the Faculty Councils of the various units on campus as to how well shared governance has operated through these difficult times. All units have now developed constitutions and have established some elements of transparency with regard to personnel decisions, fiscal matters, and the like. We wish to obtain your feedback concerning the status of these efforts by asking you to fill out this brief questionnaire. This is intended to be a follow-up to the Senate's resolution on faculty layoffs and restructuring that was passed May 15, 2008, and will guide the APC and the Senate in the event of future cuts. If shared governance is to work effectively, it must be exercised during tough times as well as good times. We ask that you respond to the questions below in as much detail as you feel comfortable with. The responses

from all units will be combined, reported collectively to the Faculty Senate, and posted on the senate website.

The May 15, 2008, resolution passed by the Faculty Senate had two components:

1. The Faculty Senate requests that those units facing faculty layoffs and significant restructuring ensure that faculty are given a meaningful opportunity to provide input regarding the proposals, and
2. The Faculty Senate supports providing those units with a meaningful opportunity to offer counterproposals to meet budget requirements.

In answering the following questions, please keep in mind the clarity of roles articulated in the shared governance report adopted by the Senate and the Board of Trustees, which places budgetary decisions most directly in the administration's purview, with faculty consultation, and academic decisions most directly in the faculty's purview, with consultation by administration. *Also, please be as specific as possible, giving examples and specific actions that help elucidate your answers.* Please return this questionnaire no later than March 20, 2008

1) How would you describe the overall satisfaction of faculty in your unit to the *governance processes* through which recent budget cuts were handled by central administrators of the university?

2) How would you describe the overall satisfaction of faculty in your unit to the *governance processes* through which recent budget cuts were handled by administrators in your unit?

3) To what extent has academic teaching quality in your unit been affected by your unit's response to these cuts and to what extent have faculty been involved in decisions affecting academic teaching quality?

4) To what extent has academic research quality in your unit been affected by your unit's response to these cuts and to what extent have faculty been involved in decisions affecting academic research quality?

5) How satisfied do you think your unit faculty are with the general process of shared governance as it currently operates within your unit?

6) How satisfied do you think your unit faculty are with the degree of fiscal transparency as it currently operates within your unit?

7) How much uniformity is there across departments in your unit, with regard to implementation of shared governance at the departmental level.

## **Results**

It is apparent that there is wide divergence across and within units, with regard to understanding what SG is, the policies and procedures it entails, degree of implementation, and level of faculty interest in engagement. Some faculty are disenchanted with the whole SG concept or with its current implementation. These negative feelings often derive from the sense that administrative decisions are made with little or no regard for faculty input. Other faculty seem to feel that our current SG framework is a workable structure, but effectiveness has been overwhelmed by the severity of the budget problems facing us in recent years. Still others feel that SG is working well at their unit level, but that the process is still new and needs continued refinement.

Identified Needs and Issues:

- 1) Improve communication between faculty and administration.
- 2) improve fiscal transparency and faculty knowledge of budgetary matters.
- 3) Improve SG at departmental level; now it is often not as good as SG at the unit level.
- 4) Faculty Councils are generally perceived as useful and effective.

## **Recommendations**

A central goal of SG is to engage in decision-making that coordinates the efforts of faculty and administrators, while adhering to principles of fiscal responsibility and academic freedom. Because SG is relatively new at UF, we are in the midst of a change in our academic culture in this regard. Some faculty are engaged in the SG process, others choose not to be, and still others are focused on other concerns. Therefore, as in our national democracy, it seems wise to utilize our elected representatives (Faculty Councilors and Senators) to facilitate this ongoing cultural change. From the perspective of the Academic Policy Council, the goal is for participation in SG to become an integral part of the normal worklife of every faculty member and administrator.

Success of the educational and research missions and adherence to principles of outstanding scholarship require that non-fiscal considerations weigh heavily in many decisions. However, as stated above, this is the primary responsibility of the faculty rather than the administration. Therefore, to the extent that faculty do not engage in representing these considerations in a clear, pragmatic fashion, fiscal concerns will hold sway above all else. To the extent that administrators fail to communicate the rationale for fiscal decisions, they will appear to some faculty as being more arbitrary than they actually are. Some of the current confusion and disenchantment of faculty may be attributable to the fact that faculty generally have not yet developed a unified, strong voice at the departmental, unit, or university levels. It does appear that faculty satisfaction is greater in those units that report greater engagement in SG.

Implementation of SG needs to occur at the departmental, unit, and university levels. We suggest that Faculty Senators work with their Faculty Councils to engage in

regular discussion with their unit faculty and administration regarding SG principles, policies and procedures. It is important to emphasize the role of SG in the creation of a vibrant academic community; without a perceived benefit there is no incentive for faculty to engage. One place to begin is with a review of the unit's constitution. Faculty councils may wish to focus on specific topics at each college faculty assembly (e.g., fiscal transparency; how the faculty senate works; budget flow at the unit and university levels). We also suggest that Faculty Councils play an active role in monitoring the status of SG in departments of their unit, and communicate their assessments with the unit administration at regular meetings. For example, if several departments have implemented fiscal transparency whereas others have not, the Dean should be made aware of this.

In order to promote a better understanding by faculty of the processes by which budgetary decisions are made, we suggest that administrators provide to faculty an overview of the flow of budget considerations and decisions, so that faculty are made aware of the challenges of making fiscal decisions that have minimal impact on the academic side of the university enterprise. For example, a simple overview of the different funding streams that play into the university's overall budget (e.g., PECO, research overhead, state allocations) would lay the foundation for better faculty understanding of why some streams are available for recurring cuts whereas others are not. The President routinely imparts elements of this information to the Faculty Senate, but what is needed is a simple, complete overview that can be presented by unit administrators at faculty assemblies. This would then provide a basis for similar presentations of unit and departmental budgets, and make clear the parameters within which fiscal decisions must be made. Again, we urge Faculty Councils and Senators to take the lead in promoting these initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

The lack of response from half the colleges is unfortunate – it appears that many glitches were encountered in sending them to the faculty councils. It's not clear whether SG was a problem, or simply lack of adequate communication. Many of the responses we did get indicated growing concern with SG as a collective enterprise. But the APC recognizes that we cannot create a culture of SG overnight. In that vein, we suggest that the Senate and the University Administration focus their attention on the following 4 areas

1. Work to create better synergies between college level faculty councils and unit senators, perhaps by having senators sit on the councils
2. Work to implement better SG procedures at the department and other local levels where faculty feel most engaged
3. Implement the Senate's resolution mandating the creation of unit-level budget councils to facilitate the transmission of budget information and perhaps help translate budget decisions to faculty. These budget councils can serve as important conduits of information in both directions.

4. Review college and department constitutions to improve greater synergies between faculty councils and the University Senate, and to improve faculty participation at the local/department level.