

THE ROLE AND CRITICISMS FACING THE FACULTY SENATE IN AMERICAN SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The Senate is recognized by the American University system as an advisory and consultative body to the President on all matters that may affect the attainment of the University's educational objectives. The Senates play a vital role in formulating educational policies and the most important exercise of senate influence is in the area of academic policymaking. The paper showed that with the advent of faculty unionization, there are series of clashes between the Senates and Unions and the main issue tackled in this work is why the faculty senates that retain control over academic policy are generally viewed as weak, ineffective and have only a symbolic governance function. The methodology used on this work is survey method using case study and the sources of the work are based on the research works of Steven P. Young (2009), Emil Ricci (2001), and case study is on Penn State University Faculty Senate (2008).

Keywords: Faculty, Senate, Higher Education, University, College, Criticism, Governance, Advisory

Introduction

The University Faculty Senate is the representative body of any given college or university faculty with legislative authority on all matters pertaining to the educational interests of the college or university and all educational matters that concern the faculties of more than one college. Senates were created by faculty in reaction to conditions on campus, such as faculty dissatisfaction with their role in institutional governance, or were created by presidents as a means to proactively modernize the functions of the university. In some cases, the conditions that lead to the creation of a senate were dramatic crises that immediately brought to light the limitations of the campus governance system. A major cause for the creation of senates was the growth of the faculty of the university, which created a need for a representative body to replace meetings of the faculty as a whole. At the time of instituting senates, universities were also making improvements in the quality of the faculty and becoming increasingly focused on research (Anderson,

2007). The Senate is recognized by the University as an advisory and consultative body to the President on all matters that may affect the attainment of the University's educational objectives. The Faculty Senate represents all faculties through the process of shared governance. Each college and campus elects one senator from the faculty (University Senate Faculty, <http://www.senate.psu.edu>). The officers of the academic senate may include the president of the university and the provost of the university. Other officers are academic senate members who are elected to officer posts by the members of the senate. Deans of colleges as well as department chairs may be ex officio members of the academic senate. There are dearth of research literature that examined the roles and functions of faculty senates in American colleges and universities.

Statement of the Problem

In the United States of America the academic senate, also known as the **faculty senate**, is a governing body for a university made up of members of the faculty from various units within the university. Shared governance in higher education is a critical component of academic management. The use of faculty senates is the primary mechanism for engaging faculty, yet these bodies have been increasingly viewed as ineffective.

The main question I want to tackle in this work is why is it that the faculty senates that retain control over academic policy are generally criticized as weak, ineffective and have only a symbolic governance function? Faculty Senate sometimes ends up pitted against each other. As an example, a faculty member from Cal State Fullerton said that as the state's general education and major requirements change, engineering faculty fight to expel the arts and humanities requirements from the engineering major, and so members of those departments end up battling each other (Tilsley, 2012). In approach to this challenge, I will look at the literature reviews on the historical development of faculty senate, membership, structure, role and responsibility, weaknesses and challenges facing the senate body as pointed out by scholars and finally draw my own conclusion.

Methodology

The primary sources of the work are based on the research works of Steven P. Young (2009), Emil Ricci (2001), and case study conducted on Penn State University Faculty Senate (2008). These scholars did a good literature review on faculty senate and Penn State University Senate has recently published works on its faculty senates, also being one of the oldest senates in America founded since

1921 with a well organized structure which stands as a model for most universities. The work is also based on the following sources: Survey conducted by the National Institute for Education from 1971 to 1974, the Preliminary Result From The 2001 Survey On Higher Education Governance sponsored by The American Association of University Professors and The American Conference of Academic Deans and the databases from JSTOR, and Academic Search Premier (EBSCO host).

Literature Review

Most of the reviews of literature on faculty senates which exist tend to treat senates as part of the academic governance structure of each institution (Baldrige et al., 1978; Birnbaum, 1989; Edelstein, 1997; Floyd, 1985; Gilmour, Jr., 1991; flines, 2000; Lee, 1991; Trow, 1990; Wolvin, 1991). Some view Faculty senates as decision-making bodies through which faculties participate in shared governance (Baldrige et al., 1978; Birnbaum, 1989; Floyd, 1985; Gilmour, Jr., 1991; Lee, 1991; Wolvin, 1991). Others are process of sharing authority and management with trustees and senior administrators over the functions and operations of the university (Balderston, 1995). Still, much of the literature suggests that senates are perceived as weak and ineffective bodies (Baldrige et al., 1978; Birnbaum, 1989; Floyd, 1985; Keller, 1983; Weingartner, 1996), regardless of their decision-making powers in the campus governance structure (Baldrige et al., 1978; Floyd, 1985; Gilmour, Jr., 1991; I-Enes, 2000; Lee, 1991; Wolvin, 1991). (Ricci, 2001).

Larry Gerber, chair of AAUP's Committee on College and University Governance and a history professor at Auburn University, said faculty members have a responsibility as the academic experts on campus to play a role in colleges' academic decisions, like those about the curriculum, graduation requirements or hiring (Tilsley, 2012)

Historical Development of Faculty Senate:

There is no precise date that can be traced as the origin of faculty senate however, in the 1960s the concept of shared governance in the colleges and universities system has both blossomed and became well established, which led to the founding of faculty senate on the principles of western European worker-participation models (Young, 2009). The Faculty Senates arose after a period of explosive growth in higher education because faculties grew so large that it was

no longer practical for the faculty to operate as a committee of the whole (a full faculty meeting). Hence, a need for “representative” faculty bodies was created to help to facilitate the smooth running of colleges and universities. Therefore, Faculty Senate was created to give professors a collective voice in campus decision-making, and is meant to exercise power and influence over a broad range of academic and professional issues (Ricci, 2001). Hines (2000), commented that since the 1960s, faculty senates, sometimes referred to as academic senates, has been key institutions in the governance structure of American colleges and universities.

Looking at the case study of the Penn State University Faculty Senate, the first time it met was October 21, 1921 but prior to that date, the entire faculty met as a general assembly. As the faculty grew in number, a more efficient means of faculty governance became necessary and the "modern" Senate, which dates back to 1966 when the body reorganized itself and adopted a new constitution, was approved by the Board of Trustees later that year (Penn State University, 2009).

The aim and practice of instituting faculty senates at universities and colleges throughout America was intended to alleviate the growing pains of the higher education system brought about by the influx of baby boomers (persons who were born between the years of 1946 and 1964, and who enrolled as traditional college students between the years of 1964 and 1987). The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) first suggested formalized shared governance schemes in the 1966 *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*. As a result, many institutions began to experiment with various shared governance arrangements, primarily in the form of faculty senates (Young, 2009).

According to Lee (1979), the ebb and flow of shared governance has been guided by two driving forces: politics and economics. Collins (1996) contends that during the 1960s and 1970s a unique set of political factors, including the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, converged on American campuses. In response to the unrest and mistrust this politically ripe time instilled in students, faculties began using senates to ensure their influence over decisions that would affect an increasingly large portion of campus life for both students and faculty. A third interpretation, as expressed in Tierney and Rhoads (1993) work on faculty socialization, addresses the effect of culture: the culture of the discipline, of the institution, and of the profession. They argue that the culture of the profession engendered a need for faculty service roles in the institution and that this need created a condition that allowed for the inception of faculty senates.

Conceptual Clarifications

1. Senate Membership

The Senate comprises faculty senators, who are elected from each college and campus in proportion to the total number of faculty in their units; ex officio; and members appointed by the President. Senate committee chairs often invite other members of the University community to participate in the work of the committees as resources (Penn State University, 2008). The Preliminary Result from the 2001 Survey on Higher Education Governance reports that 58.59% of faculty members participate in governance by election into the Senate. The Academic Senate meets periodically with a published agenda. Meetings normally use Robert's Rules of Order. The senate will have a set of committees, both standing committees and ad hoc or working committees, which are assigned particular areas of responsibility for policy formation.

2. Senate Structure

The officers of the Academic Senate may include the President of the university and the Provost of the university. Other officers are Academic Senate members who are elected to officer posts by the members of the senate. Deans of colleges as well as department chairs may be ex officio members of the Academic Senate. The Senate is under the leadership of an elected chair and three other elected officers. It has standing committees, which may include Curricular Affairs, Educational Equity and Campus Environment, Faculty Affairs, Intercollegiate Athletics, Research, Undergraduate Education etc. In addition, the Senate elects or appoints members to and participates in various joint committees, commissions and boards, including the University Promotion and Tenure Review and the Faculty Rights and Responsibilities committees. The work of the Senate is accomplished primarily through its committees and subcommittees. An Executive Secretary is responsible for the operational duties of the Senate and supervises a number of staff assigned. Motions, recommendations, or actions that are generated by the Academic Senate through discussion and which are passed by the body will normally be referred to the president of the University for final approval (Penn State University, 2008).

Role and Responsibility of the Faculty Senate

Faculty Senates have shared responsibilities, ranging from a limited role in program approval and review of tenure and faculty promotion to a more comprehensive role that includes budget review and allocation (which is rarely), senior administrative recruitment (which is still rare), and strategic planning. The composition and strength of senates vary according to institutional type and culture (Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 1978; Blau, 1973; Floyd, 1985; Lee, 1991; Wolvin, 1991). The Senates play a vital role in formulating educational policies and perhaps the most important exercise of senate influence is in the area of academic policymaking (Baldrige et al., 1978; Trow, 1990). Traditionally, college and university faculties, through their senates (Baldrige et al., 1978; Edelstein, 1997; Floyd, 1985; Hines, 2000; Trow, 1990), determine policies governing the curriculum, degree requirements, and academic program quality (Trow, 1990).

The majority of faculty senates operate under a mission statement. These mission statements give the Senates guidelines and provide them with an outline of their areas of authority. Blendiger, Cornelious, and Mcgrath (1998), list six strengths of academic senates, stating that they provide the means for: (1) determining short-and long-range interests and needs of faculty; (2) articulating expectations of faculty, staff, and students; (3) developing goals and planning strategies; (4) establishing standards and procedures for the review and evaluation of proposed administrative action dealing with curricula offerings, budgetary practices, and faculty recruitment and retention; (5) increasing knowledge and understanding of issues in departments and units; and (6) allocating resources equitably. The debate about the worth and ultimate viability of faculty senates lies in these Senates' missions. The Senate Fact Sheet of Penn State University (2008) summarizes the role and responsibility of faculty senate:

--serves as the sole legislative body representing the University faculty as a whole with primary authority (subject to the approval of the President) over all educational matters, including curriculum, academic policies, admissions, and graduation requirements.

--acts as an advisory and consultative body to the President, both through its corporate whole and any of its constituent parts, on any other matter that may affect the attainment of the educational objectives of the University;

--serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas among the members of the University faculty. One of the ways the Senate facilitates

communication among faculty, students, and administration is through visits by the Senate Officers to all university campuses and colleges every three years.

Criticisms on the Faculty Senate

Studies of Faculty senates have shown their effect on participation and influence of faculty members and as a result, they have met with both praise and criticism. According to Baldrige and Kemerer (1976), the Faculty Senates are often criticized because their powers are largely advisory; senates have nevertheless played a valuable function in symbolizing the academic community's commitment to shared governance. With the advent of faculty unionization, there are series of clashes between the Senates and Unions. There are also serious questions about the relationship between Senates and Unions, and about the impact Unions may have on shared governance. The basic difference between faculty Senates and Unions is that senates operate on delegated authority and depend on institutional appropriations and staffing. Faculty Senates are dependent bodies; their power to affect decision-making is granted by the grace of the governing board and the administration. The Senates have their greatest influence in academic areas such as curriculum and degree requirements while Unions, on the other hand, economic matters are their province. Unions undoubtedly have more power than Senates to gain economic benefits. With Unions legal backing and their legal right to economic information, unions have more power than senates to gain economic benefits particularly faculty salaries, promotions, and working conditions. Where the lines of demarcation are unclear, such as in faculty working conditions and long-range planning, the union and senate converge on degrees of influence to bargain. Historically, elite private liberal arts institutions have encouraged faculty input in decision-making and consequently are more likely to retain the influence of faculty senates. But younger senates may, under the influence of environmental pressures, find their role in shared governance reduced (Baldrige and Kemerer, 1976). According to Baldrige and Kemerer (1976), a spokesman active in senate affairs at Central Michigan University has noted, "We became aware that we enjoyed the benefits of our hard-won battles purely at the pleasure of the Board of Trustees." Senates are therefore susceptible to being labeled "company unions. In addition, since administrators are often included in senate membership, senates are not really representative of the faculty qua faculty. Since the senate functions outside of a legal framework, it lacks the legal backing to challenge the administration unlike the unions.

Why is it that much of the literature suggests that senates are perceived as weak and ineffective bodies regardless of their decision-making powers in the campus governance structure? According Baldrige and Kemerer (1976), many institutions have weak faculty governance and have been unable to safeguard faculty interests from the onslaught of economically related environmental pressures. A study funded by the National Institute for Education, undertook a major research effort to study the impact of faculty collective bargaining on governance and decision-making in higher education in 1971 and 1974, suggest that broad-based senates disperse much of their energy to deal with campus-wide problems and faculty interests cease to be a primary concern. Scholars such as Baldrige et al (1978), suggest that even though faculty senates retain control over academic policy, they are generally weak and have only a symbolic governance function. In Baldrige et al. (1978) analysis of policymaking and academic management, they found that faculty senates "on most campuses are ineffective and weak" (p. 80). Still, their extensive study of senates and academic unions at a variety of institutions report that senates have considerable influence over issues of curriculum and degree requirements (Baldrige et al., 1978). Furthermore, Baldrige et al. (1978) conclude that senates do not perform substantive governance and policymaking functions directly instead, it performs through the academic departments and administrators who control key decisions regarding the curriculum, faculty appointments and dismissals, budgets, and related institutional matters since majority of members are Faculty Senates.

In an extensive study of college and university management, Keller (1983) argues that faculty senates are ineffective, stating that "the old faculty senates are now ragged, poorly attended oratorical bodies in most cases" (p. 127). Keller's (1983) criticisms extend even to faculty participation in the policymaking arena. As such, he notes 'Faculties are becoming more interested in reviewing, criticizing, and modifying policy as in making policy" (Keller, 1983, p. 127). Thus, even though Keller (1983) recognizes the importance of the faculty in academic and other institutional matters, he believes that faculty senates are ineffective.

An additional research was conducted by Floyd (1985), Birnbaum (1989), and Lee (1991), which underscores further the view that senates could be more effective governance bodies. Floyd (1985) analyzed faculty involvement in academic decision-making and comments;

Senate authority on most issues is the functional authority of providing advice to the university administration with the

expectation that reasons will be given when administrative officers take a course of action different from that advised by the senate (p. 19).

Such a view suggests merely an advisory role for faculty senates. But Floyd (1983) in her earlier work contends that "In a few areas, the most notable of which is curriculum, senates have quasi-formal authority" (p. 19). Trow (1990) and Hines (2000) affirm this notion, suggesting that of all policy matters in the governance process; academic senates probably have most influence over educational policy. Floyd (1985) concludes that faculty senates are useful participatory bodies for decisions on curriculum and faculty issues primarily at research institutions and elite liberal arts colleges.

In the present millennium era, more recent studies as shown by the Preliminary Result from the 2001 Survey on Higher Education Governance suggest that faculty senates retain control over academic policy. The survey reports that 35.46% of Faculty Senates have more authority in decision making and resolving of governance issues, while 56.52% believe that there is no change and 8.02% says Faculty Senate has less authority (p.9). The survey reports that 97.98% of councils or committees whose members include faculty representatives in areas such as academic policy, budget matters, promotions, and/or employment policies are considered part of campus governance structure. Furthermore, the survey reports that 16.15% of faculty says faculty senates are advisory body to the administration and /or the board that simply conveys faculty opinion as reference point in decision making. 68.06% says that the faculty senates are policy influencing body which recommends and passes on to the administration and /or board policies they may decline or accept. However, 15.79% says that faculty senates are policy making body which proposes and votes on policies or financial decision that the administration and board almost always adopt as a matter of course. In final analysis, the survey shows that 72.28% agrees that the primary means by which faculty members participate in governance, express their views to the administration, and/or shape policy is through institution-wide bodies of governance which is the faculty senates (p.11)

Conclusion

I agree with Trow (1990), while acknowledging the weakness of academic senates, claims they have a key role in issues involving the curriculum and maintaining academic program quality. Besides influencing academic policy, senates and their committees do defend academic values and academic freedom,

and resist the "managerialism" of an activist president and a partly professional, partly bureaucratic administrative staff' (Trow, 1990, p. 27). Senates are meant to serve in order to limit administrative power. Just as Trow (1990) noted, the faculties and senates hold considerable authority over academic affairs (and that contributes to the notion that faculty senates have an important academic policymaking role. On this point, I agree with Edelstein (1997) and Gilmour Jr. (1991) that faculties are interested in curricular issues and new academic programs. The most recent result from the 2001 Survey on Higher Education Governance shows that faculty senates are policy influencing body which recommends and passes on to the administration and /or board policies which they may decline or accept.

The overall literature review confirms that faculty senates are not strong governance bodies because they can only recommend which is subject to approval or disapproval. Nevertheless, through their senates, college and university faculties hold legitimate and exclusive authority to formulate and adopt educational policies governing the curriculum, academic programs, instructional methods, and standards of student performance. The degree of senate influence over these academic issues may vary according to institutional type just as Lee (1991) observed but faculty senates generally seem to have considerable power in this policy area despite their weaknesses. I believe with all the arguments presented in this work, and the survey conducted by the American Association of University Professors and American Conference of Academic Deans in 2001, which reports that 97.98% believe that Senates are part of campus governance structure, it will be right to conclude that the Faculty Senates are part of campus governance structure but mainly advisory body. Therefore, Senate leaders must come to understand that their role is not to simply get through an experience or to run efficient meetings, but to represent their constituents and bring together an institutional faculty for the best interests of an institution, and as a result, might explore faculty senator orientations and leadership development programs as mechanisms to improve the operations of contemporary senates.

Recommendations

1. First recommendation is to improve communication and education. Faculty senates, need to do better public relations for themselves and need to also educate both administrators and faculty on their role, and on what's at stake. Faculty Senate behaviors should encourage open communication and discourse about issues that face their institutions.

2. Senate leaders also need to follow up on senate work and show faculty the impact of all the committee meetings and reports so that it can be implemented
3. Senate faculty should be transparent in their affairs and it should broadly be seen and encourage within the higher education system.

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