

# ***Faculty Governance Review Committee Summary Report***

## Faculty Governance Review Committee Members

Christopher Carothers (Comp. Sci.)  
Jacob Fish, *Chair* (MANE, MSEC)  
Wayne D. Gray (Cog. Sci.)  
Iftekhhar Hasan (Lally)  
Robert Messler (Mat. Sci. & Eng.)

Phil Phan (Lally)  
Harry Roy (Biology)  
Don Vitaliano (Economics)  
Mark Shephard (MANE, SCOREC)

## **I. Executive Summary**

The Faculty Governance Review Committee (FGRC) was charged to collect information on faculty governance at peer institutions. This summary report outlines the faculty governance review process and summarizes our findings and observations. A full report disclosing names of the interviewees, some of whom requested to remain anonymous, their institutions and detailed responses has been submitted to President Jackson acting on behalf of the Rensselaer Board.

The FGRC conducted a comprehensive literature survey on faculty governance systems and studied reports from peer institutions, which had already completed their faculty governance review process. A list of 33 private research universities with very high research activity (Carnegie Classification: RU/VH) was compiled, out of which the FGRC chose five that were most relevant to our profile. This sample of five included institutions that are of similar size to Rensselaer in terms of graduate and undergraduate enrollment, number of degrees awarded and research volume. In addition, each can be considered as an aspirant institution with many of the attributes we wish to attain, such as rankings, research volume, graduate programs, and so on.

To ensure consistency in benchmarking, we developed a questionnaire that included questions about faculty governance system, faculty prerogatives, definition of faculty, relationship of the faculty governance body with the administration, and any faculty governance code of conduct. The questionnaire was emailed to our informants prior to our visits or phone interviews. Our informants included representatives from the faculty governance body (senate/council chair/president/dean of faculty), administration (president, chancellor, provost), and senior faculty.

We have seen considerable variety even in faculty governance structures, but also observed considerable evidence of features that work well in general, and others that have more variable success. We observed the following six factors that play a major role in the effectiveness of a faculty governance system:

- Representative Unit: Faculty representatives are elected by and report to departments or divisions.
- Checks and balances: Faculty representatives with a high level of responsibility for interaction with the administration are, at some institutions, subject to some form of vetting by the administration.
- Partnership: Outside of Faculty-specific areas (P&T, Curriculum), members of some key committees include Faculty and Administrators

- Mutually understood domains of responsibility: Faculty retained responsibility on issues of curriculum, student academic standards, faculty hiring, promotion and tenure, peer review, etc. with advice and consent from administration. The administration bears major responsibility on issues of budgets, administrative appointments, etc., with advice from faculty, while final authority on budgets and tenure cases rests with the Board of Trustees, after President's review and approval/consent.
- Responses to problems: Faculty and senior administrators seem most satisfied when the faculty governance structure includes a lean executive core that considers issues, and delegates those deserving or requiring attention to the most appropriate among several standing committees (e.g., P&T, Curriculum, etc.).

## II. Background

There is an increasing number of universities in the private and public sectors that are in various stages of reviewing their faculty governance. There are several factors responsible for this:

- Increasing use of a business model based on market and financial factors to guide university decision making, manifested by the following:
  - Increased competition for students and research dollars resulting in pressure on universities to market themselves;
  - Rising costs of research in the sciences and engineering;
  - Growing media use of competitive rankings in US News & World Report, and other outlets, as indicators of presumed educational quality;
  - Increased costs of operating the university;
  - Expansion and increased cost of nonacademic units which nevertheless impact academic concerns (student affairs, residence halls, etc).
- Supreme Court ruling in the Yeshiva University decision:
  - By defining private university faculty as “managerial employees,” the Court ruled that the faculty role in governance is not independent of the university administration.
- Diverging professional cultures of faculty and administration:
  - The role of administrators is to manage university activities; rewards and recognition of administrators are directly tied to their performance in the institutional sphere. The role of faculty is to excel in teaching and research in a specific discipline. The success of faculty is tied to disciplinary recognition, not institutional success, as measured in part by the scientific community outside the institution, often resulting in competing loyalties.

Following this trend and recent events on campus, the Rensselaer Board of Trustees decided to review the faculty governance system at Rensselaer by establishing the Faculty Governance Review Committee (FGRC). Members of the FGRC were selected by the process described below.

- The Deans of the Schools of Engineering, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science, interacted with departments to identify one candidate from each department within their respective schools to serve as nominees. Each department forwarded one nominee to the Dean of the school. Only tenured and tenure-track faculty from each individual department were requested to participate in discussions and vote to identify suitable candidates at the departmental level.

- Deans of the Schools of Architecture and the Lally School of Management and Technology worked with their program groups to identify appropriate candidates.
- Within each school, names of nominees from departments were submitted to the respective Deans for review.
- Deans forwarded a minimum of four candidates from each school to the Provost for consideration.
- The Provost selected two candidates from each school to serve on the Faculty Governance Review Committee, a total of ten.\* (Arch. opted to not participate).
- The Provost selected one additional member of the tenured and tenure-track faculty to Chair the committee.
- The Provost submitted the full composition of the committee to the President for final approval.

This selection process resulted in the following faculty membership of the FGRC:

Chair

Jacob Fish, Professor (appointed by the Provost)

School of Architecture

(no representatives)

H&SS

Don Vitaliano, Professor (Economics)

Wayne Gray, Professor (Cognitive Science)

Lally

Iftekhar Hasan, Professor

Phil Phan, Professor

School of Engineering

Robert Messler, Professor

Mark Shephard, Professor

School of Science

Harry Roy, Professor

Chris Carothers, Associate Professor

After the establishment of the Palazzo/Kagan committee to amend the Faculty Senate Constitution, the Faculty Governance Review Committee was charged as an independent body to review and benchmark best faculty governance practices of selected peer universities. In its work, the Faculty Governance Review Committee was charged to visit and look at university governance strategies among the very best universities. The committee was asked to review publications of higher education associations, including the Association of American Universities, and review the Institute Bylaws, with a goal of producing templates for alternative forms of faculty governance, incorporating key lessons learned from their work.

The FGRC was very capably assisted by Jack Mahoney, Director of Institutional Research and Karen Traite, of the Provost's Office.

As the first step, the FGRC, with the help from Jack Mahoney, conducted a comprehensive literature survey of faculty governance systems, which included a survey of articles<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6</sup> and findings from other universities which have already completed their faculty governance review process<sup>7,8</sup>. The next step was to decide on universities against which to benchmark Rensselaer's governance practices. From a list of 33 private research universities with very high research activity (RU/VH) as determined by the Carnegie Classification System, the FGRC chose five institutions denoted in this report as A, B, C, D and E against which to benchmark Rensselaer's governance practices. The rationale for selecting these universities was as follows:

- Include institutions of similar size in terms of graduate and undergraduate enrollment, number of degrees awarded and research volume
- Include "aspirant" institutions that have many of the attributes we wish to attain, such as rankings, research volume, graduate programs, etc.

Our next task was to compile a Template for Benchmarking, which is summarized in Table 2

**Table 2: Faculty Governance Review Committee Questions for Benchmark Universities**

Faculty Senate or Council, Senate structure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are they elected or appointed?</li> <li>• By general vote (all at-large)? Apportioned by School? By Department?</li> <li>• Separate elections, structures, representation for teaching faculty, research faculty, and T&amp;TT faculty? Representation for retirees?</li> <li>• If there is one faculty governance body, but different classes of faculty, do all faculty representatives vote on all issues? Or are some issues reserved for different classes of faculty?</li> </ul>
Faculty Prerogatives: Academic Freedom type issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty role in issues such as curriculum, student academic standards, faculty hiring, peer review, budgets, administrative appointments affecting core academic functions, etc</li> <li>• Faculty participation in searches for senior-level administrators</li> </ul>
Relationships between individual faculty and the faculty governance body
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mechanisms for attracting broad faculty participation (representation by department? by school? at large? mixture?)</li> <li>• Communication channels between faculty governance body and faculty</li> </ul>
Relationship of the Faculty Governance Body to the Administration

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, R. *Recreating the faculty role in University Governance*. Book chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, D. *Leadership and academic culture in the Senate presidency: An interpretive view*. The American Behavioral Scientist; **Mar 2003**; **46**, 7

<sup>3</sup> Del Favero, M. *Faculty-administrator relationships as integral to high-performing governance systems*. The American Behavioral Scientist; **Mar 2003**; **46**, 7

<sup>4</sup> Lieberwitz, R. *Faculty in the Corporate University: Professional Identity, Law, and Collective Action*. **16 Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy**, **263**; **Spring, 2007**;

<sup>5</sup> Minor, J.T. *Assessing the Senate: Critical issues considered*. The American Behavioral Scientist; **Mar. 2003**; **46**, 7

<sup>6</sup> Tierney, W.G. *Introduction*. The American Behavioral Scientist; **Mar 2003**; **46**, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Carnegie Mellon University Faculty Bylaws

<sup>8</sup> Cornell University Faculty Senate Committee to Review Faculty Governance: *Final Report and Recommendations*; **March 7, 2007**.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of president, provost, and other administrators in faculty governance issues</li> <li>• Broad consultation with Provost, President and Board</li> <li>• Regularly held meetings between faculty representatives and board of Trustees</li> </ul>
Definition of faculty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is permitted to vote in faculty governance body votes?</li> <li>• Teaching faculty, research faculty, tenure faculty</li> <li>• Terms of appointment, promotion, procedures for appointment and promotion, contract length, for non-T&amp;TT faculty</li> </ul>
Faculty governance code of conduct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is sensitive confidential information dealt with?</li> </ul>

The faculty and administrators that we interviewed included representatives from the faculty governance body (senate/council chair/president/dean of faculty), administration (president, chancellor, provost) and senior faculty. The questionnaire was emailed to the selected members of the institutions’ communities prior to our visits (and/or phone interviews) to the above benchmark institutions. The visits were conducted and the summary of findings is given below.

### III. Summary of findings

Table 3 provides a snapshot of the governance committee's key findings about practices at the benchmark institutions visited. Some explanation of the categories follows: 'More than P&T & Curriculum' means does the role of faculty extend beyond issues of promotion and tenure or curriculum in a significant way. 'Definition of Faculty' refers to whether or not groups such as librarians or clinical- or research-type faculty are accorded formal status as faculty. 'Who Votes' is whether or not tenured and tenure track faculty are the only group granted voting rights in faculty governance elections. 'Faculty Appointed by Administration' refers to whether or not the central administration has appointive or veto powers over who serves as faculty representatives. 'Representation Unit' is the academic unit at which faculty are elected to serve in governance roles. 'Frequency of Meeting' is how often the elected senate or council is routinely scheduled to meet. 'Faculty Code of Conduct' is whether faculty involved in governance is subject to a separate set of rules for professional conduct, apart from general university human resource regulations. 'Recent Conflicts' is whether or not a major governance dispute between faculty and administration has occurred in the last decade or so. This table is based on the detailed reports submitted by the five visiting committees that are appended to this document.

**Table 3: Benchmark Universities Summary**

Governance Issue	University				
	A	B	C	D	E
Is Faculty Role Only Advisory	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
More than P&T & Curriculum	No	No	No	No	Yes
Definition of Faculty	All	All	All	All	All
Who Votes	T&TT &	T&TT	All	T&TT	T&TT, NT who are teaching at least 3

	retired				courses per ac yr + on 2 sem annual appt
<b>Faculty Appointed by Administration</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Representation Unit for Elections</b>	General	Department	Department	Department	School
<b>Frequency of Senate Meetings</b>	7/year	8/year	8/year	2/year	4/yr
<b>Faculty Governance Code of Conduct.</b>	No	No	No	No	No
<b>Recent Conflicts With Administration</b>	No	Yes	Yes (Campus Art)	Yes (BoT membership)	No
<b>Comments</b>	Widely Admired	Reactive Role; Elected DoF	“Harmonious” Dept. only P&T	Committees Do the Work	Committees Do the Work

#### IV. Observations

Cohen and March<sup>9</sup> have famously observed that "efforts to steer an academic institution are as effective as driving a car skidding on ice." While our observations are not that extreme, the complexities stemming from multiplicity of interests and diffuse power in academic institutions are enormous. To the best of our ability to observe at the universities we investigated, committees appointed to carry out specific tasks generally function to the mutual satisfaction of administration and faculty. This is the case with or without a faculty senate-based organization, and is true at every institution we studied. Faculty satisfaction with the governance system was apparent at four (A, C, D, E) out of five universities investigated. The faculty senate system at institution B is evidently beset with problems that will seem familiar to readers at Rensselaer. Why this should be the case at institution B but not at the others appears to reflect either differences in administration, or in faculty expectations, or both. We observed the following factors to play a major role regarding the effectiveness of the faculty governance system:

- Representative Unit: Faculty representatives are elected by and report to departments or divisions.

It is true at institutions B, C, D and E.

- Checks and balances: Faculty representatives with a high level of responsibility for interaction with the administration are, at some institutions, subject to some form of vetting by the administration.

This is true at institutions A, D, and E. At institution C, we could not determine if this was the case. It is partially true at institution B, where the composition of most committees is strictly a faculty decision, but some committees have members vetted or chosen by the administration.

<sup>9</sup> Cohen, M.D. and March, J.G., Leadership and Ambiguity, New York McGraw Hill, 1974.

- Partnership: Outside of Faculty-specific areas (P&T, Curriculum), members of key committees include Faculty and Administrators
  - o Responsible positions for faculty require administrative approval.

This is true at institutions A, D, and E. At institution C, there is some doubt as to whether these committees wield any true power. At institution B some committees are comprised of faculty only, but some others have representatives of Faculty, Administration, and Students.

- Domains of responsibility: Mutually understood by administration and faculty.
  - o faculty responsibility on issues of curriculum, student academic standards, faculty hiring, promotion and tenure, peer review, etc. with advice and consent from administration
  - o the administration bears major responsibility on issues of budgets, administrative appointments, etc., with advice from faculty, while final authority on budgets and tenure cases rests with the Board of Trustees, after President's review and approval/consent.

This is true at all institutions investigated. However, at institution B, there is frequently friction when responsibility for an activity is given to either the administration or faculty and the other group feels they need to be heavily involved with at least some aspects of that activity.

- Responses to problems
  - o faculty and senior administrators seem most satisfied when the faculty governance structure includes a lean executive core that considers issues and delegates those deserving or requiring attention to the most appropriate among several standing committees (e.g., P&T, Curriculum, etc.).
  - o most work is done by standing committees with meetings of the FS being infrequent

This is true at institutions A, C and D. At institution E, the faculty governance system is designed to be fairly formal and there did not seem to be a sense that there was too much work for individual senate members.

- Perceived value of participation in various aspects of governance

The article by James Minor<sup>5</sup> indicated that at small colleges a reasonably large proportion of the faculty felt that their faculty senates were useful. At research institutions, this proportion drops to about 19%. At institutions B and C, there is a feeling that it is onerous to serve on the Faculty Senate. It appears that at all institutions examined, specific committees function well, and it is less difficult to get faculty to agree to serve on specific committees than it was to get them to serve on the faculty senate. One factor that favors willingness to participate is a low frequency of meetings.

- Institutional Satisfaction with Governance System

At institutions A, C, D and E there is a mutual respect that exists between the faculty and administration. At institution B, there is a general feeling that there is a weak linkage between the faculty senate and the administration. Some of the members of the FS are viewed by the administration as disengaged from real faculty work and focused on governance itself, mostly with a bias against the administration.