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Roger Fortin

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SHARING GOVERNANCE AT XAVIER

By Roger Fortin

There is a tendency in American higher education to invest increasingly more authority in the administration. To unsympathetic observers of shared governance, which mainly consists of faculty and administrators making decisions concerning the operation of the institution, effective governance usually means minimizing the involvement of the faculty in decision making because faculty participation may either slow down the process or make governance too unwieldy.

However, speed in making decisions is not always an asset in academia. My experience as a faculty member at Xavier University, and currently its academic vice president and provost, argues that faculty involvement in decision making often assures more thorough discussion, prudent management, and sharper focus on the mission, operation, and direction of the institution. Moreover, there are many examples of costly administrative unilateral decisions.

As a matter of fact, in our recent history, disputes over a unilateral tenure decision, a speech by Louis Farrakhan, and a presentation of *The Vagina Monologues* helped bring governance issues into focus.

Indeed, shared governance is not only wise but a necessary investment in the future success of the institution. It is essential for three reasons: (1) To help maintain the moral legitimacy and core values of the institution as a Catholic and Jesuit university; (2) to help sustain and nurture the university's academic culture; and (3) to promote greater effectiveness in the management of the institution. In my judgment, without full-fledged shared governance the university in the long run will be putting its identity as a Catholic and Jesuit university at risk.

A prudent investment that Xavier should make at this time in its history — and it will be celebrating its 175th birthday in 2006 — is to continue to develop the mechanisms and communication necessary for ensuring broad participation in

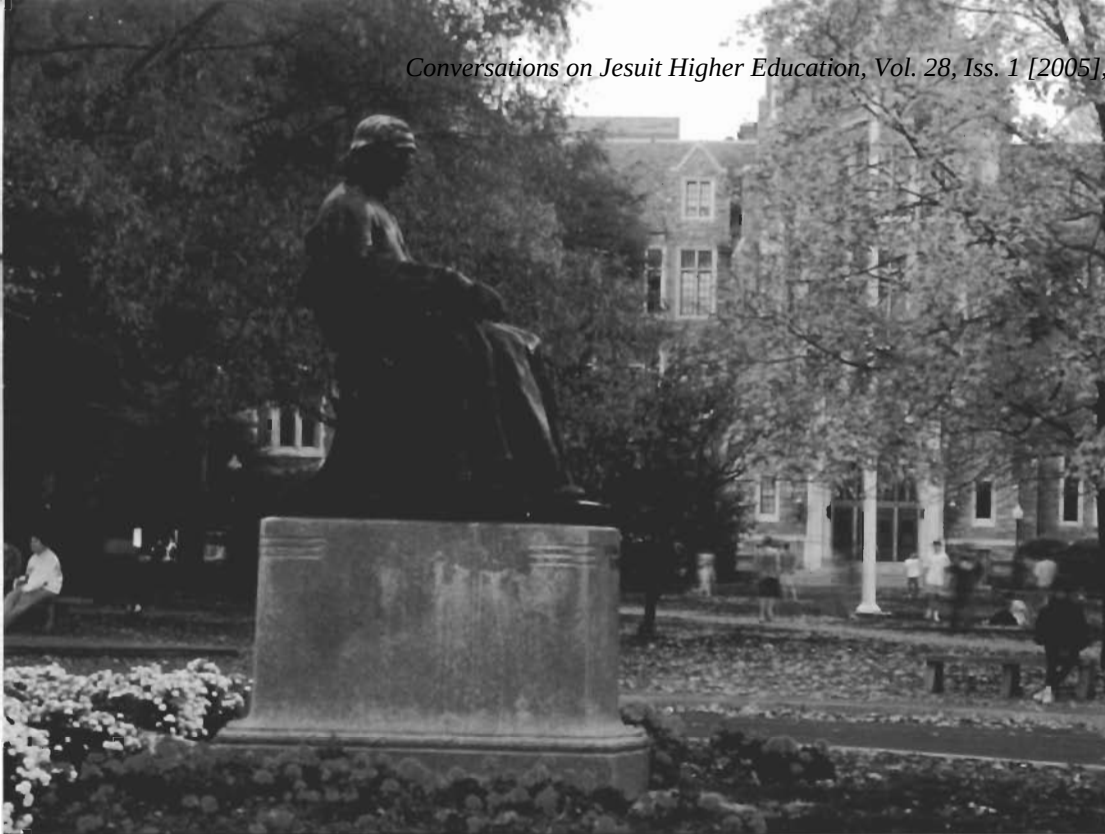
all aspects of decision making, not just academics. I would also suggest that other Jesuit institutions may benefit by fostering a similar course of action.

Adopting the Principles of Shared Governance

Interest in shared governance at Xavier University began in the mid-1960s. As the university experienced significant enrollment and physical growth, faculty members sought greater participation in the affairs of the institution. In the summer of 1966 the Jesuit administration granted the faculty's request for the faculty committee, elected by the faculty, to appoint faculty to various university committees. Over three decades later, however, the faculty sought an even larger role in the governance of the institution. At a time when American colleges and universities dealt with multi-million dollar budgets and the command and control styles of administration relegated the voice of the faculty and staff to an advisory role rather than that of a partner in the institution's success, the faculty hoped to develop and implement a governance structure that ensured greater participation and collegiality in academic decision making processes.

In 2001, during his first year as president of Xavier University, Michael J. Graham, S.J., endorsed the faculty's request for more interaction in the governance of the institution. Embracing the concept of shared governance, the faculty committee, academic deans, and I — then serving as the interim academic vice president — collaborated to regularize

Roger Fortin is the academic vice president and provost at Xavier University.



A statue of John Carroll, a Jesuit before the Society's suppression, founder of Georgetown University, is featured prominently in the center of campus.

and institutionalize practices that would enhance faculty participation in the life of the University.

In September of that year the president, the interim academic vice president, and members of the faculty committee began communicating and collaborating more fully. In addition to meeting every two weeks with the interim academic vice president, the chair of the faculty committee and two faculty representatives also met with Graham and the interim chief academic officer each month for breakfast. Later that fall the chair of the faculty committee began attending the meetings of the academic affairs committee of the board of trustees. The meetings with top administrators and trustees had "provided," the faculty committee wrote in its annual report, "a valuable opportunity for dialogue, particularly with respect to the evolving academic vision of the University, the tenure and promotion process, and issues in academic governance and the academic culture more generally." That same fall the chair of the faculty committee also began attending the quarterly meetings of the full board of trustees.

Recognizing the need for further study of appropriate governance models, in October 2001 five faculty members and the three academic deans attended a conference on mission and governance jointly sponsored by AAUP and the American Conference of Academic Deans. Upon their return the eight delegates, joined by the interim academic vice president and additional members of the faculty committee, met regularly to discuss areas where the governance of the

university could be improved by fuller collaboration between faculty and administration. Gradually the group developed a set of general principles designed to foster a climate of mutual accountability and integrity and to enable the university to achieve its goal of greater academic excellence. Approved by the faculty in April 2002, the Principles of Shared Governance document reflected the community's commitment to openness, good faith, and collaboration across the entire university. "These principles," the chair of the faculty committee wrote, "are a statement of governance ideals that can guide institutional practice in the future." By the end of the year the board of trustees affirmed "the intent expressed in the Principles of Shared Governance."

In keeping with the University's Articles of Incorporation, the Principles declared "shared governance and academic freedom as essential to the health of the institution. The university administration, president, and the board," the document read, "recognize the primacy of the faculty in academic affairs." While recognizing "the oversight authority of the board, the president, and university administration," the faculty agreed that "communication, collaboration, and negotiations between and among the faculty, university administration, president, and board of trustees are [to be] carried out in good faith." In the spirit of academic freedom "all faculty members," the document further stipulated, "[were] encouraged to participate in leadership roles and are free to express dissenting views without reprisal." During the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 academic years, trustees and members of the faculty committee and other faculty began the practice of meeting for lunch after one of the board's quarterly meetings.

More Vigorous Implementation of Shared Governance.

Indeed, over a short period of time, considerable progress was made in strengthening relations between the faculty and administration. However, notwithstanding the progress made in shared governance, much remains to be done. The adoption of the Principles of Shared Governance, frequent meetings between the president and the academic vice presi-

dent and provost with members of the faculty committee, and fuller participation of the faculty in scores of committees did not alone insure greater shared governance. Over a two-year period faculty protested, with some justification, the process used in awarding tenure to an administrator and in the cancellations of a satellite down-linked speech by Louis Farrakhan, and of Eve Ensler's play *The Vagina Monologues*, though the latter was reinstated a few days later.

In the first instance faculty members charged that provisions for awarding tenure in the Faculty Handbook had been violated. In terms of the two cancellations, they argued that the university, especially in regards to the play, had violated academic freedom. Because of these incidents, the faculty argued for more forceful implementation of the principles of shared governance. "While the establishment of the principles...represents an excellent beginning to a broader, more participatory form of leadership," the faculty committee said, "it is clear that implementation of these principles needs to be improved."

In light of the controversy over the two cancellations, partly due to poor and incomplete information that the office of the president had received, President Graham sought to broaden participation in decision making. In the summer of 2003 he announced a change in the administrative organization of the University. He replaced the university's executive committee, consisting of the president and the vice presidents, with the president's administrative council. "To insure an interchange of important perspectives and points of view from a more broadly based group of individuals," Graham established the new council, consisting of nineteen individuals, among whom were the president, vice presidents, chair of the faculty committee, and other professionals representing different sectors of the university. "This larger and more diverse group of individuals," Graham wrote, "will bring to the table both their own passion for the university as a whole and their own expertise in a particular area necessary for our continued improvement."

Because of the *Vagina Monologues* incident, during the spring semester of 2004 there was also considerable discussion on campus regarding university protocol for outside speakers. In April the university adopted the Protocol for Campus Public Speakers and Events, affirming that the university's "multiple commitments to its mission as both a Catholic, Jesuit institution

and as a university require, on the one hand, a strong commitment to teach and to respect Catholic and Jesuit traditions and, on the other, an equally strong commitment to the principles of academic freedom."

The faculty and administration agreed that the potential for controversy was "never in itself an acceptable reason to deny a speaker or event." If it were known that a speaker would be controversial, the Protocol document now made certain that the entire campus would be made aware in order to welcome the exchange of ideas and views. Consistent with the Principles of Shared Governance, there would be ample discussion and consultation with the faculty and appropriate administrative offices. By building a system of dialogue, the steps outlined in the document would prevent a process where a handful of administrators on their own would determine if a speaker or event were acceptable.

One of the most successful examples of shared governance was the extensive collaboration of the faculty and administration in the development of a salary enhancement package for the faculty. Throughout the fall and early spring semesters of 2004-2005 the faculty compensation committee, consisting of eight faculty members and three administrators, met regularly to discuss ways of enhancing the salary profile of the faculty. Upon the committee's recommendation and approval by the president, the university appropriated, in addition to a 4 percent merit salary increase for all personnel, over \$273,000 for faculty salary structural adjustments for 2005-2006. This was an important first step in Xavier's



Students participate in community service projects at Rockhurst University.

effort to bring faculty salaries in line with the quality profile of the faculty and stature of the university.

Mission and Shared Governance

Because religion, more particularly Catholicism, is important to the university, it recognizes the importance of religion in others. As part of its Jesuit identity, the university also continues to be committed to rigorous academic work that cultivates and challenges the mind, to caring for the whole person, and to attending to service and social justice. Its vision of justice is linked with the Catholic faith that is rooted in the scriptures, Church tradition, and the Ignatian heritage. In my judgment, any diminution in commitment to its Catholic ethos and Jesuit culture would weaken the University's fabric. Not only would Xavier be less in keeping with its mission, it would jeopardize its competitive edge.

The administration and faculty members, who are at the heart of the learning enterprise, play a central role in

affirming the institution's mission and determining its well-being and future. The president, internally and externally, is the main symbol or brand, affirming through his commitment and leadership the mission and vision of the University. Guided by the exemplary role and leadership of the president, other administrators work collaboratively with faculty and other professionals in advancing the goals of the institution. When governance is less shared, especially with the faculty, the institution becomes less academic and the moral legitimacy and core values of the institution are in jeopardy. Faculty members are often in the best position to sustain the tradition and mission of the university. As the primary transmitters of the culture and ethos of the university, they are the mainstay and catalyst of the institution. Moreover, generally there is a much higher turnover rate among trustees and top administrators. In order to nourish its identity as a Catholic and Jesuit University, as well as support quality educations and scholarship, Xavier is well advised to further develop institutional practices that strengthen shared governance.

Principles of Shared Governance at Xavier University

1. The faculty, university administration, president, and board of trustees regard shared governance and academic freedom as essential to the health of the institution. The university administration, president, and the board recognize the primacy of the faculty in academic affairs. The faculty recognizes the oversight authority of the board, the president, and university administration.
 2. Communication, collaboration, and negotiations between and among the faculty, university administration, president, and board of trustees are carried out in good faith.
 3. The university community looks to policy documents and reports of appropriate national professional organizations for guidance in the governance of the university.
 4. In the spirit of academic freedom, the university community values free inquiry, diverse opinions and practices, schools of thought, and perspectives. With respect to shared governance, all faculty members are encouraged to participate in leadership roles and are free to express dissenting views without reprisal.
 5. The faculty, university administration, president, and board of trustees respond expeditiously to one another regarding concerns, suggestions, recommendations, requests for information, and the need for action on institutional issues.
 6. The faculty and academic administration, in keeping with the faculty handbook, exercise primordial responsibility in determining academic policy. They determine educational policy, criteria for program review and development, curriculum design, and policies involving faculty status.
 7. The university faculty—in collaboration with the academic administration—determines standards and criteria for retention, promotion, and tenure. They establish standards and procedures for hiring faculty members and for evaluating teaching, scholarly activity, and service. Academic departments establish formal procedures for faculty members to recommend the appointment, retention, tenure, and promotion of departmental colleagues. The faculty renders recommendations in faculty personnel matters through established procedures.
 8. The faculty sets agendas, chooses representatives and leadership, and establishes procedures for committees that oversee the areas in which the faculty has primacy. It routinely assesses the effectiveness of academic committees, evaluates shared governance and institutional practices, recommends necessary changes, and shares in institutional decisions that affect academic life. Moreover, faculty participate in the establishment of standards and procedures for evaluating academic administrators.
- The faculty periodically reviews and, when appropriate and necessary, proposes changes to the Faculty Handbook, the Constitution of the Faculty Assembly, and similar documents.