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BUILDING A CULTURE OF TRUST AT SANTA CLARA

A Conversation with a President, an Administrator, and a Faculty Member

In 1999 Santa Clara received an AAUP award honoring their new model of campus governance. (This is described at <http://www.scu.edu/governance/committees/policy.cfm>.) With that in mind, we sat down to talk about how their system was working and what it might have to teach the rest of us.

We met on January 10 in President **Paul Locatelli's** office at Santa Clara University, along with **Don Dodson**, the vice provost for academic affairs, and **Simone Billings**, a faculty member in the English department who had been president of the faculty senate. Fr. Locatelli had come to Santa Clara in 1974 to teach accounting, left for two years to be Jesuit superior at Loyola Marymount, then returned to Santa Clara and eventually to the presidency. He has been president for 17 years. Professor Dodson, who taught communication at Stanford for six years before coming to Santa Clara in 1977, participated in the development of Santa Clara's current governance structure. Professor Billings came in 1980 after teaching at San Francisco State and the University of San Francisco.

I encouraged them to not fear saying

something controversial and to think in terms of not merely the immediate Santa Clara experience but the culture of all 30 Jesuit institutions, (including two theological schools). Our conversation went on for almost two hours — touching on roles, changing attitudes toward governance, handling crises and controversies, alleged presidential prerogatives, obstacles to sharing power, listening, committee structure, Jesuit lifestyle and identity.

We went beyond the topic of governance strictly defined because issues like the quality of student life, the atmosphere of Jesuit hospitality, and the president's leadership style inevitably affect the whole ethos of the institution, especially the quality of communication, without which governance is impossible.

What follows is necessarily an edited transcript, which the participants have had an opportunity to check. I am especially grateful to Mary Dinardo, secretary to Eugene Cornacchia, provost at Saint Peter's College, for transcribing the tapes.

Raymond A. Schroth, S.J.

Schroth: *Could we start with the first thing, Simone, how do you see your own role as a faculty person in the business of shared governance?*

Billings: Here at Santa Clara the faculty senate president is elected by the faculty. It is not an appointed position from the president, and so I understand that on this campus the highest elected faculty becomes the point person, the spokesperson when media wish to talk to somebody at the university to get the faculty viewpoint or to whom the faculty themselves go if they have an issue. I also in a way enter into a conversation with the administration, both at large and with the president, to know what is happening in all facets of the university.

Then I consult the faculty

who primarily are aware of what is happening academically. I was setting up one meeting a quarter with the president and then monthly meetings with the provost — not to have them dictate to me, not for me to dictate to them, but just to have conversations so that people know on both sides what's going on.

Schroth: *Do the dean and the academic vice president attend the senate meetings and do they vote?*

Billings: The only voting members are the council members and not the deans, the associate deans, those sorts, although meetings are open to anyone to attend.

Schroth: *But they don't participate?*

Billings: Some do, and it depends on who's considered eligible for committees and who isn't. But most of the time the faculty in each department choose their representative, however the department wishes to. In some they have tenured members. In others they change the representative each quarter, making it a junior faculty member, to help that junior faculty member become more familiar with how the university works.

Schroth: *So there might not be that much continuity. You might go a year and you have three or four people represent a department.*

Billings: It doesn't happen that often, but it seems to happen in some departments more regularly than others. I think it depends also on how large the department is. If you have a department of three, classics, then it doesn't matter if you send a different one each time, because they are so small they talk all the time anyway.

The Governing Structure

Dobson: Perhaps it would be useful for the readers if we provided a gen-

eral overview of what the shared governance model is first. Then I think our respective roles in that model could be clearer.

In 1996 we developed our current governance model after a couple of years of discussion between the faculty and the administration, a discussion which staff later joined. This particular model envisions a system in which there are three types of participants: the administration, the constituency groups, and the committee structure.

The constituency groups include a **faculty senate** representing the faculty, who elect departmental representatives to serve on a **faculty senate council**. There is also a **staff assembly council**, which represents the staff, and a **student association** with its own governance structure representing the students.

In the past we used to have a not very clearly defined system in which constituency groups would communicate rather informally with the administration and the administration would appoint committees in various areas that frequently didn't have particularly clear charges, but would make recommendations to the administration. There were various stresses and strains in the system which came to a head in early 1990's. This led to a fairly formal discussion between representatives of the faculty and representatives of the administration.

The current model creates **six policy committees** and an **umbrella committee** called the **University Coordinating Council (UCC)** which is responsible for overseeing the system, for making appointments to the policy committees, for directing issues to the appropriate policy committee, and for resolving any questions that arise about implementation of the governance system.

The role of the policy committee is to be what we call the **final locus of discussion and dialogue on significant policy issues or major changes in the university**.

The six policy committees are the **university planning council, university budget council, faculty affairs committee, academic affairs**

committee, student affairs committee and staff affairs committee.

When we talk about the final locus of the dialogue, this means that these committees are responsible for consulting with appropriate individuals or groups that have a stake in a matter under discussion, and for trying to resolve within the committee to the extent possible any disagreements between the administration and other members of the committee. **The purpose of this consultative and the deliberative process is to come up with recommendations that have a high likelihood of final approval.**

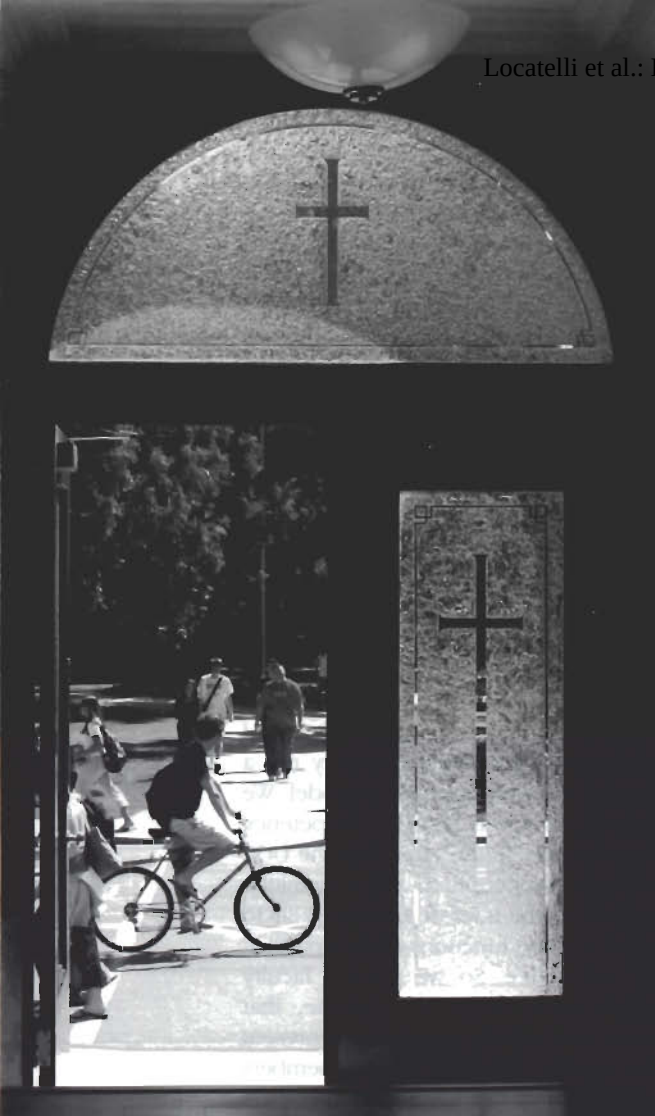
It's a model that places a great deal of emphasis on consultation and discussion and that is explicitly not a constituency representation model. We talked about it as being a competency based model in the sense that the UCC will appoint people to each committee with both the interest and the skills to carry out the functions of that particular committee. So we have a faculty affairs committee, for example, that does not, strictly speaking, represent the faculty, although all the members of that committee are faculty members. Rather it represents their sense of the best interest of the university.

Schroth: *What is the decisive body that would make a major decision about the university that affects everybody?*

Locatelli: If it is a major change to the faculty handbook or major change in the direction of the university, all faculty and trustees would vote. They are the final bodies for any major change in direction.

Schroth: *And you find this works?*

Locatelli: It works as well as any other governance system. My role in the governance in terms of policy issues is basically to assess the recommendations that come up from the policy committee, compare them with competing interests, financial implications, impact on the university, and make a decision at that point



A view from St. Joseph's at Santa Clara.

in time, or to take it to the board of trustees for their final decision. If it's a major policy affecting the role of faculty, I would take that to the board of trustees. If it is a recommendation for making a change within, say, student life, I may make the decision myself.

For example, the university policy committee recommended how to improve student life, but part of the recommendation was to either add more funds to fraternities or do something about them. I decided to improve student life by eliminating the fraternities and allocating more resources to improve student life on campus. When the recommendation from the budget committee comes up for approval of the macro budget, which includes the tuition and salary increases, I assess that and 95 percent of the time take the recommendation to the board of trustees.

Frats and Pub

Schroth: Have you eliminated the fraternities?

Locatelli: Yes, we no longer sponsor fraternities. There are some fraternities, but they have no association with the university. The national organization kept four of them going, I believe.

Schroth: What was the reaction? Did alumni who were in the beloved fraternities say never again will I ever give a penny to you?

Locatelli: There was some anger on the part of some alumni who were members of fraternities, there were others who saw how reasonable it was and that it was a good decision; I think that was a vast majority of people.

Schroth: On the fraternity system. What was the clincher in the argument when you sat down and looked at all the material in front of you, what gave you the courage to say we have got to do this?

Locatelli: We looked at a number of things. One was the culture of fraternities and sororities. Both have a culture of exclusivity, rather than inclusivity, and we thought that was an important issue. The second issue was initiation. A few times it included hazing in which some students were hurt physically. There was also a culture of partying. When we looked at all of that, we concluded that rather than put money into that culture it is better to improve student life on campus. So we moved in the direction of residential learning communities in all of our residence halls. We also opened a pub on campus to improve the social life, then hired the student body president to continue after graduation to develop the student life.

Schroth: How is the pub working?

Locatelli: The pub works very well; we follow state laws. It's a place where students can gather on campus.

Schroth: Will faculty use it and go down and have a beer with the students sometimes?

Locatelli: Faculty will go in, and there is a large TV screen in there so when there is a big event, people will gather there. When we were playing for the national championship in women's soccer, there was a large gathering in there.

But now, let me back up on how this current system got started. It started because faculty were unsatisfied with their role in university governance and a couple of decisions I had supported concerning the faculty. One was to eliminate a dean's position without adequate consultation, and the other was to collapse a graduate program into the College of Arts and Sciences. That decision triggered a lot of discussion. So faculty met without the administration to develop a governance plan. Then we had discussions with the faculty in which Don and I, as well as our former academic vice president, joined in. These discussions developed the current governance system, which was put in place in 1995-96. The difference is that this one is based on consultation, trust, and credibility.

Schroth: Now there was a mistake or incident that brought this on that was made by your administration?

Locatelli: Yes.

Billings: We revisit the model every now and then to discuss how well it is working.

Locatelli: We had a meeting roughly a year ago and we had a meeting in February to review how the system is working.

Dodson: The point is not that the new system is without problems, but rather that the rules of the game are clearer to participants, there is a mechanism for addressing them, and there is a set of principles for doing so.

Locatelli: If you look at a governance

structure, it has to be based on consultation, trust, and credibility. Without those no system is going to work.

Who May Speak and What May We See?

Schroth: *What about this question I had mentioned earlier of presidential initiative? For example, there have been several cases where the Vagina Monologues was to be performed and the president intervened or was asked to intervene. Did you have that here?*

Locatelli: Yes, we have had the Vagina Monologues on campus.

Schroth: *In this, or in the case of inviting a controversial speaker; do you think the president ought to have the right to say no, look you guys, I'd rather you not do this?*

Billings: I think he has a right to an opinion; of course, in a sense, that is one of those threads, that middle line of the academic freedom.

Locatelli: I'll give you an example. First I believe the role of the president is to insure institutional autonomy and academic freedom, and at times that can be uncomfortable. We've had a dialogue on pro-life, pro-choice on campus. There were a lot of people who did not want the pro-choice people to come on campus, and in fact some bishops wrote to our bishop to stop it. But our bishop realized as long as we kept it as a dialogue that neither he nor I should interfere.

So as long as the function has academic credibility, whether it is a speaker, a play, or whatever, I believe it is a responsibility of the president to preserve the integrity of the institution as a university. What I like about our campus is that when faculty or departments are going to put on something that they think is going to be controversial, they will often let me know ahead of time. We just put on a play called *Pentecost*

and there were concerns about the language and about the play itself being put on. So they let me know before it was even performed what the issues might be.

Schroth: *What is it? I thought I knew all the controversial plays.*

Locatelli: It had some crude language in it, it also had simulated nudity, but not real nudity, and they were concerned about that. I went to the play and didn't find it offensive; and in fact we got no reaction whatsoever.

Schroth: *What about controversial tenure decisions? It is highly possible that tenure committees have made decisions that were either unjust or incompetent. Someone who was really not qualified slipped through or someone who is very qualified, because of personal animosity in the department, has been denied. And the natural step on many campuses is to go to the president. He is seen as the ultimate arbitrator of justice. What should he be free to do?*

Locatelli: Tenure decisions are made by the president.

Schroth: *They are made by the president on the basis of recommendations?*

Locatelli: Based on recommendations from the department, college committee, university committee, dean, provost and outside letters.

Schroth: *So the provost presents you with the dossier; and then you can go either way. What if it's a close call?*

Locatelli: If it's a close call I can go either way, but the only way I make decisions is to read the materials to do an assessment of the recommendations, then meet with the university committee and the provost together and talk about the decision. And we typically come out of that meeting with an agreement on the controversial cases.

Schroth: *Ed Glynn (president of John*

Carroll University) has written an article for this issue in which he lists what he considers the three obstacles to shared governance: one of which is unionization, another is the subculture in the institution, and the other is the local attitude. Do you have any experience with any of those obstacles?

Locatelli: We have no experience with unionization of faculty. We talked about the culture, and in a certain sense I do believe we have developed a culture of trust, and key to that trust, which we need to always do better, is open communication.

Dodson: The two things I would add to what Ed Glynn mentioned as potential obstacles are inadequate communication and time pressure.

To succeed with the kind of model we have and to maintain the kind of trust and credibility that we have talked about previously take a great deal of commitment. It takes time to work through different perspectives on a committee; but absent the time and effort, the results aren't as likely to be as good as they could be, and the frustrations actually are likely to be greater in the end than the temporary frustrations of actually working through disagreements

Billings: For example, if everything is up on a web site, such as the notes of various committees, then it takes time for faculty, staff, and administration to inform themselves, to be constantly checking these things. I'm thinking about the fact that there was before the faculty senate, for example, a proposal on who should recuse him or herself on tenure decisions. It sounds if it should be a slam dunk, to go through rather rapidly. If you are married to someone, or having this kind of relationship with a person, then you recuse yourself from any committee that may be voting on a person's tenure or promotion. But it had to go through probably fifteen drafts.

Schroth: *How long did it take you to draw up this policy?*

Billings: That was forever. We are still working on it.

Locatelli: I believe in local culture. Goodwill is the key to the local culture. Without goodwill among all the different constituencies, no governance system will work. The second piece is a commitment to the overall good of the institution. Acceptance of the distinctive mission of being a Catholic Jesuit university is key to the governance process. The third piece for me is what I see as the aspiration on the part of the university to improve and always to be better. So whenever we get into controversial questions or when we get into any kind of questions, the backdrop of the horizon is: Will this make us a better university, will students get a better education, will the research environment improve?

How to Listen

Schroth: *Now to another subject. It's about the act of listening and the failure to listen. Some university presidents — or anyone in a leadership position — it is said, who have been in a long time, take on sort of an air of infallibility about them and they feel competent to make a little judgment on just about everything. What happens is: so many of these problems have come to you before that you've heard them again and again, and therefore you know the answers as soon as somebody starts to talk. As a result, the response might not be as satisfying as the petitioner had hoped, and then they go home and they say that the president doesn't listen. I don't know if you have ever met anyone like this. How do we guard against that?*

Billings: Well, I think that how to become a better listener and to be sure one is listening is an attribute that everyone needs always to check oneself on, whether one is listening in a relationship with a significant other, whether one is teaching students, answering the same questions one

might have heard twenty-five years ago, or if one is teaching sections of the same course just fifteen minutes ago. Many years ago in the mid '70s when I was doing my student teaching and I complained to my master teacher about some comment a student had made, he reminded me that no one goes out of his or her way to appear stupid. No one asks a question thinking: they are going to think I'm an idiot. It's probably a good idea when it comes to being a good listener, even though one has a wider span of knowledge about the issue and knows that the idea won't fly, to still let the person be able to say it out, and then to question a person using the educative tools that we all use. To help the person come to see why it won't fly, because that is the way of bringing them out of ignorance, whether one is faculty, administrator, or whatever...

Locatelli: Listening is a lifelong challenge and a process, so I also believe that Jesuit education is about asking questions; and if you begin with that viewpoint, it requires you to listen. So personally it's important to ask questions, to listen to people making statements and to have people who will challenge you at times. I can recall this past year in the president's cabinet meeting that I did not want to send a note to the campus about the university budget, and one person basically told me I was wrong — that I needed to send the letter — in front of twelve other people. I appreciated that, so I sent him a note thanking him for having the courage to say that, and so it was another lesson for me to continue to listen.

Schroth: *How is your campus newspaper? I've been an advisor at various campus newspapers, and some of them put the feet of the administration to the fire. Does yours?*

Locatelli: I basically told them that I look for three or four things. One is quality of content, then quality of writing, choosing the right topics and having a balanced view of it rather

than taking just one perspective on it, so that they are really writing as journalists, as if they were writing for the *New York Times* or the *San Jose Mercury News*. By and large they have been pretty good, they have raised questions and they do take issues that can be controversial on campus. At times they will raise questions about the administration, but that is what the student newspaper is all about. You know if they didn't do that they wouldn't be learning anything.

Schroth: *Could we talk about campus lifestyle, particularly the social life of the faculty, the practice of hospitality, and the interaction between the general faculty and the Jesuit community? I remember back in the 1960s and early '70s when at some places the last thing some Jesuits wanted to see was a stranger in the dining room. Of course there has been a big turn-around in that.*

Locatelli: I don't know what they say, but more and more we are trying to become a much more open community. In fact a new residence is even going to be structured to have a very open ambience. Nobili Hall does not lend itself very much to this, but on the other hand you can go over to lunch and sometimes you will find only one of the eight tables with only Jesuits; there will be a lot of lay people. The other piece is that we try to have dinners with lay faculty. We begin with the orientation of new faculty, the first day of orientation we have the dinner with the Jesuit community; and then we had, this fall, for the first time, dinner for all faculty who have come within the last three years and their families.

There is a structured program that comes out of the Bannan Center that is headed up by a lay faculty member, where groups of faculty meet for a whole year with only one or two Jesuits in each group to talk about what it means to be a Jesuit university.

Schroth: *How does the group work now?*

Locatelli: They meet once a month for four or five hours, they talk about certain articles and what it means to be a Jesuit university. They will read some of Fr. Kolvenbach's, talks, for example, an article in *Conversations*, and then they will have that discussion. And they also come and meet for dinner in the Jesuit community.

Billings: I know some of the faculty from the first group. They continue to meet. They just love it and it is such a wonderful experience to be able to get together, and they say sometimes that there is another group which meets just for a very simple supper of soup. There are immersion trips, which we have gone on, and the president of the university with students and faculty have made a trip following in the footsteps of Ignatius. These all help with the governance issue, because then you understand what the university is about, what the Jesuit institute is about in a more heartfelt — not only intellectual — way of being able not only to read a mission statement but to begin to see it.

How We Live

Schroth: *Here the president lives in the big Jesuit community. Did you have the option of living someplace else?*

Locatelli: I have the option. If I insisted on it, I'm sure I would get what I wanted. But I believe it is important to be part of the Jesuit community and to be part of the university community, so rather than move to a small community I've decided to live in Nobili Hall. I didn't buy an expensive car; in fact I have a borrowed car, a little VW Jetta, which is the lowest of the low in terms of the VW. So I'm living the life style of what I would consider being a Jesuit.

Schroth: *Depending on temperament, I guess some presidents find it difficult in the community because people would use that time to do business. They would either criticize you to your face, or show hostility, or annoy you. Does that happen a lot?*

Locatelli: I can honestly say we don't have that problem. I made it clear from the very beginning I wasn't going to talk about business in the Jesuit community. I meet with the community quarterly for an hour and just talk generally about the university and have an open discussion about where are we in the campaign. And what are some of the issues that are going on. I made it very clear that it wouldn't do any good for the community or myself to have the campus think that all the decisions are coming out of Nobili Hall. I don't think the Jesuits want that here either.

Schroth: *Let's talk about how different groups commit themselves to the identity of the institution. In this issue of Conversations, a statement from one of the other universities goes like this: "the faculty are the primary guardians of the enterprise, their job is to affirm the ethos of the institution and the greater the responsibility you give to the faculty in governance and direction the greater will be the Jesuit and Catholic identity of the institution."*



Students at Santa Clara University.



Santa Clara University.

But my observation has been that there are several groups within the faculty according to their attitudes toward the direction of the institution. There are Jesuits who favor the school's direction and there are those who do not. Among the lay faculty there are veterans who are as committed to the ideals as any Jesuit, and some more committed than some Jesuits. There are new faculty who hope to stay, and those indifferent to the Jesuit identity and waiting for that letter in the mail box with a better offer. There are the hostiles, bitter about a long-ago offense. Finally there are the former religious, priests and nuns who have married and raised families and who make a special contribution now. Did I leave anyone out?

Locatelli: I think that is pretty accurate sociology on faculty.

Dodson: I think that the quote you had at the beginning of your question is an eloquent aspiration, but I'm not sure that the conclusion follows from the premise. I'm sure most faculty understand what the institution is about. But the way in which they understand in fact is very different from one faculty member to another. Some of our faculty would say that the key aspect of the Jesuit tradition is that it really values teaching and the edu-

cation of the whole student. That is a very partial understanding of the Jesuit mission of the university. Many people have different partial understandings of what it means to be a Jesuit institution, and part of the challenge which we all face as a campus community is to work toward a deeper and richer shared understanding of what that means.

Schroth: You say the understanding is of a primarily teaching institution.

Dodson: That's one partial understanding. There are others. We've also had discussions about what it means to be a Jesuit institution committed to development of "competence, conscience and compassion" and to having "solidarity" in the "real world."

Schroth: Would someone get tenure here who did not publish?

Locatelli: No. We have defined faculty here as teaching scholars, and I'm very impressed with the people coming up for tenure now. They are excellent scholars and have publications in referenced journals or books, depending on your discipline, and they must also be able to teach and teach well. We have taken the harder road I think of balancing. If I were to describe Santa Clara it would be both a college and a university. It's both as

an aspiration to excellence and an aspiration to be very distinctive as a Catholic Jesuit university.

Schroth: Do you think *Ex Corde* is coming up again?

Locatelli: On our campus we have been very clear about being a Catholic and Jesuit institution. Our bishop has recognized that. In fact three or four years ago he gave us the *Pro Ecclesia* pontifical award on the 20th anniversary of the diocese because he felt that we were committed to Catholic education, gospel values and social justice. So we have a good relationship with our bishop based on cooperation and trust and not on the juridical side of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

Schroth: What is his name?

Locatelli: P.J. McGrath.

Schroth: Any advice that you want to add for our readers?

Billings: I think that the advice I would give is to make sure that there is the entering into governance with the idea of what collaboration entails.

Dodson: I think that patience, commitment to the common good and a disposition to entertain others' assumptions about what the common good means are critical. In practical terms all this goes back to the points about trust, credibility, and collaboration that we talked about before.

Schroth: You have a theme developing here.

Locatelli: I believe the governance system has to be based on the aspiration to be better and to have as a horizon the common good that should be based on trust, credibility, and finally always to look for the good in what others are saying. And I think finally is to have the piece of Jesuit education that is based on asking questions. So you have a questioning mind as you look at the issues, but have the courage to make a decision.