

Progress Report: Faculty Senate Committee to Review Faculty Governance, May 2, 2006

The Committee to Review Faculty Governance was created by a resolution of the Faculty Senate in October 2005 to study the state of faculty governance at Cornell and "to make recommendations to the Faculty Senate for changes to broaden and strengthen the influence of the university faculty on administrative decision-making at Cornell." The Faculty Governance Committee (FGC), which consists of seven faculty members from across the university, was instructed by the Faculty Senate to make a progress report to the Faculty Senate by May 2006. In fulfillment of this instruction, the FGC provides this Progress Report. The FGC will continue its work into the Fall semester 2006, with a goal of submitting the first full draft of its final report to the Faculty Senate by the end of the Fall semester.

During the Spring semester 2006, the FGC has engaged in work in three areas: (1) defining issues of faculty governance; (2) research of secondary sources (e.g. articles and studies) on faculty governance models; and (3) conducting interviews with individuals in important university governance roles. These three areas of work are interrelated, as the research and interview processes help to define the key issues of faculty governance and provide information useful for addressing the issues. The FGC also has invited the Faculty Senate, department chairs, and the Cornell faculty to provide suggestions to the FGC of issues and other ideas relevant to the FGC's charge. In addition, the committee has begun work on identifying alternative models of shared governance at selected other peer universities.

The FGC has identified several issues that are important in addressing the FGC charge to make recommendations "for changes to broaden and strengthen the influence of the university faculty on administrative decision-making at Cornell." While this process of issue definition is an evolving one, several key issues have continually surfaced in our interviews and other information gathering.

A first and central issue is the need to improve the timeliness, content, and quality of consultation between the faculty and the Cornell Administration and between the faculty and the Cornell Board of Trustees. The Cornell University Bylaws (Art. II, §1) give the Board of Trustees "supreme control over the University," which is implemented largely through the leadership of the University President as "chief executive and educational officer of the University," and the Provost. (Art. V, §1; Art. VI, §1) (see, http://www.cornell.edu/trustees/cornell_bylaws.pdf). According to the Bylaws (Arts. XII, XIII), as well as tradition, this control by the Trustees and the Administration is shared with the faculty, who have a great deal of autonomy in regard to academic matters in the individual colleges and schools and questions of educational policy that concern more than one college or department. There is a general consensus, moreover, as recognized in the [Organization and Procedures of the University Faculty](#), that University leadership "functions best when it is derived from the consent of the governed and is able to strike the delicate balance between the twin needs for broad consultation and decisive, timely decision-making."

In a number of important areas, however, the lack of consistent and quality consultation with the

faculty has been raised as a key element in creating tension in recent years between the Faculty Senate and the Administration and/or Board of Trustees. In part, this problem may be related to the expansion of offices in the central Administration dealing with "non-academic" matters like finance, student affairs, housing, and legal affairs that affect "academic" areas of concern in which faculty have a large stake. Yet, the structure of the university has not evolved in commensurate fashion, leaving the faculty with an inadequate and inconsistent advisory role in many of these university functions.

Another area where consultation is important concerns major university structural or organizational changes. Several interviews cited consistently the same examples of ineffective consultation between the Administration/Trustees and the faculty over such proposed changes, including: the dissolution of the Division of Biological Sciences, the creation of the Faculty of Computing and Information Science, the closing of the Ward Reactor facility, the creation of eCornell, decisions concerning building construction and parking, the resignation of President Lehman, and the search for new presidents. The FGC will consider means for expanding and formalizing the faculty's consultative and advisory role on the broad range of issues of concern to the faculty.

A second central issue is the effectiveness of the Faculty Senate in representing the interests of the faculty. This issue is related to the issue of consultation, as an effective and representative Faculty Senate is necessary to create a legitimate faculty governance body that can influence administrative decision-making. Departments across campus may differ in their views of the importance and effectiveness of the Faculty Senate. Individual Faculty Senators may differ in the degree to which they report to and consult with their departments. There may well be measures that could be put into effect to improve the education of new Faculty Senators and to improve incentives for faculty to participate actively in the Faculty Senate, thus assuring that it is fully representative of the Cornell faculty as a whole. Communication may also be improved between Faculty Senators and their departments to ensure that department members are receiving information and providing feedback to their representatives in the Senate. There may also be measures taken to enhance communication of information from the University Faculty Committee to the Faculty Senate and thence to the faculty as a whole.

There is a general consensus that many of the Faculty Senate committees function well, with some committee recommendations being given significant weight by the Administration. There is great concern, however, that some Faculty Senate committees do not have a sufficiently strong influence on decisions made by the Administration and/or Board of Trustees. One example is the concern, recently brought to the Faculty Senate by the Faculty Senate Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Status, that the Administration does not give adequate weight to its recommendations concerning faculty grievances. The FGC will consider ways for expanding the tradition and expectation that the Faculty Senate committee recommendations will be given appropriate weight by the Administration and/or Board of Trustees.

Other key issues concern the structure of the Cornell Administration and the Board of Trustees. The large size of the Board of Trustees leads to questions about how faculty can most effectively be given a voice and in turn influence trustee decisions. The important role of the Board of Trustees Executive Committee raises the question of whether faculty should be represented on

the Executive Committee. The predominance of trustees from business corporations also raises the question of whether the trustees apply a corporate style of governance, which may be in tension with a shared governance tradition of the university.

Finally, there is the issue of finding ways to increase the flow of information from the Administration and Board of Trustees to the faculty, which is essential to creating a well informed faculty and to improving the quality of consultation in university governance. One general question which must be considered is whether confidentiality as an information sharing criterion has been overused by Trustees and the Administration, with the result that inadequate information on key university matters is available to the faculty. The FGC will consider recommending means for expanding the flow of information, such as "town meetings" with the Trustees once or twice a year, where faculty could voice their concerns and the trustees could speak to the state of the university and articulate any issues of pressing concern for the entire community. Faculty trustees and the Dean of the Faculty may also create opportunities for increased communication through means such as regularly scheduled fora with faculty focused on particular issues.

These are just a few of the most important and commonly cited issues that have arisen in the Committee's work thus far. They will be among the issues discussed in greater detail in the Committee's draft of its final report forthcoming later this year. To facilitate further communication, the Committee encourages faculty to provide input on governance issues by using the e-mail link to the FGC located on the Cornell University Faculty web site. In the Fall semester 2006, the FGC will solicit further input from the faculty through a series of Faculty Forums organized around particular topics.