

## The Strange Death of Faculty Governance<sup>1</sup>

Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott, *Eastern Michigan University*

In an atmosphere of “crisis”, the American Association of University Professors convened a conference on “Shared Governance vs. Corporate Management”, from September 6–8, 1996 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Faculty from AAUP chapter campuses and individual AAUP members from all over the United States convened to compare notes on the relative health of faculty governance. Mary Burgan, General Secretary of AAUP, Larry Gerber, Chair, Committee on College and University Government, John Hopper, Chair, Assembly of State Conferences and James E. Perley, current President of the Association, each gave diagnosis. To an audience of faculty governance practitioners who didn’t need convincing, the AAUP leadership declared that their patient was in terminal condition. Like a game of Clue where all the players know who did it and with which weapons, it was clear that the legitimacy and impact of faculty governance are everywhere in danger.

The crime scenes were designated by each of the panels at the conference: cooperation between faculty senates and school/college/departmental advisory committees; faculty involvement in central administration decisions; the grievance process; governance participation by all faculty; understanding the budget; working with Boards; and working with legislatures. Each plenary session emphasized the evident breakdown in “trust” and “communication” between faculty, senior administration, and Boards.

The classic strategy, documented by many campuses, is what might be termed a stealth attack on governance launched under cover of summer vacations and faculty inattention. While faculty assume that their departmental, college and university committees are providing meaningful “input” on university policies, in fact senior administrators pursue other avenues of consultation, including hand-picked committees which can

provide a more “authentic” faculty voice. A wide variety of campuses, from private to public, are experiencing the gradual displacement of regular faculty governance in favor of a hierarchical, corporate decision-making structure. In this changed context, faculty governance through traditional, elected councils takes second place to a parallel track of “task forces” and “ad hoc committees” as values are shifted from academic freedom and shared governance to cultivating academic “consumers” and cost savings.

### Who Really Governs?

As a political scientist, faculty member at a large, regional comprehensive institution and a former department Head, the conference helped bring together my own training in the discipline and the “political” dimensions of the academic work environment. While the structure, processes and value of democratic government remain at the core of our shared professional concerns as political scientists, the transition between theory and practice in university governance is still ambiguous, at least judging by the evidence of the conference. The conference also made it apparent that if the faculty governance patient is dying the wounds are partially self-inflicted.

Faculty committees and grievance panels, assuming that they have authentic control over professional norms and standards, have forgotten that their political effectiveness within the institution can never be taken for granted. Credibility and influence, rather than formal roles, are daily at stake on campuses across the United States. The *de jure* status of faculty committees is, in most cases, not being directly attacked, even by the Boards such as those at the Universities of Minnesota and Michigan which were the subject of criticism at the conference. Instead, faculty review of tenure, programs, budgets and adminis-

trative hiring has been slowly and effectively undermined by shifting *de facto* responsibility to other sectors of the university which are accountable to constituencies outside the institution, such as state legislatures, federal funding agencies and foundations, and influential local alumni.

Numerous causes of the progressive anemia besetting faculty governance were discussed at the AAUP meeting. But solving the *de facto* problem, it was clear, would require a shift in faculty consciousness away from their traditional individual or departmental interests to a “big picture” campus commitment to shared governance. Sounding themes which might, in a political science context, be termed communitarian, AAUP and faculty leaders called for enhanced “communication” across disciplinary, college and administrative barricades to renew the founding values of shared academic life. The AAUP’s 1994 Policy Document, “On the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom” provided the leitmotif for the entire conference, emphasizing that both of these values are inseparable. Interestingly, neither the 1940 “Statement of Principles” on Academic Freedom and Tenure, which terms faculty members “officers of an educational institution”, nor the 1966 “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities”, which details the institutional role of faculty governance, had connected the two directly. In view of the sea change which academic life is undergoing these days, AAUP’s “Committee T” felt it necessary to specifically address the linkage in 1995 in order to make the point that “allocation of authority to the faculty in the areas of its responsibility is a necessary condition for the protection of academic freedom.”

Faculty need to be made aware not only of their rights as professionals within their disciplines, but also of their rights and important obligations in college and campus level

policy-making. However, as audience comments noted, “service” is held in relatively low esteem at most institutions, and therefore faculty who are heavily engaged in campus governance tend to be those most secure in rank and salary, rather than junior faculty who have the most at stake in the outcome. In addition, at some institutions with collective bargaining faculty tend to let periodic contract talks and grievance processes take care of major substantive policy matters. In the meantime, as one faculty member put it, “faculty rights have been leeches away” from deliberative bodies in day-to-day campus life to the very different context of negotiation and litigation. Overall, participants documented faculty inattention and indifference, punctuated by aroused interest in times of crisis. A political scientist would term such a pattern normal in the voting public. However, within universities such a pattern bestows a very tenuous authenticity upon faculty bodies which claim to have a mandate in addressing Presidents and Boards.

### The Midwest Model: Boards, Presidents and Faculty

Yet, even if faculty deliberative bodies are understood to have a major campus voice, *de jure*, questions are being raised about whether or not they are as representative as they claim to be. Invited Regents from the University of Michigan and Indiana University each stated that they do not think that most faculty committees accurately reflect faculty opinion campus-wide or that they conduct their deliberations in a timely and responsible manner. Low faculty voting rates, poor attendance at meetings, and distortions in rank distribution were adduced as proofs. The faculty audience was told that all Boards, whether appointed by Governors or elected at large, tend to “reflect the resentment and distrust of the public toward universities,” and that faculty need to express their collective will “responsibly” in their own defense.

Even “assuming a Board is well-intentioned,” an Indiana University Board member observed, they come from the corporate and political

worlds, and approach their tasks very differently than faculty approach theirs. The discourse and values of traditional academic life can easily slip from the top of their priorities list when Boards face shrinking revenues, angry legislatures and alumni demands. Both the Michigan and Indiana Board panelists made it clear that competition for students and resources drives their policies and results in the need to strike a “balance between incentives, control and the mission of the university.”

Also present for the session on Board policies, which was one of the most widely anticipated and heavily attended, was Craig Swan, a faculty member from the University of Minnesota, who reported on his Board’s recommendations for restructuring tenure and compensation policies. The Minnesota case stalked the three day conference, and seemed to be on everyone’s mind. The Board’s recommendations are available on the Minnesota Website <<http://www.umn.edu>> and contain the memorable line that faculty should be disciplined if they do not display the “proper attitude of industry and cooperation.”

Swan described in detail the obvious breakdown of trust, communication, and every other aspect of campus deliberation, noting even the outgoing President’s public criticism of the process by which the Board developed and announced their recommendations. According to Swan, the Board used the classic stealth techniques of consulting with a faculty body of its choosing, not circulating documents in a timely fashion, setting a deadline for campus input of only a few days after faculty returned for the beginning of Fall term, 1996, and even holding their first public meeting to discuss the recommendations before faculty returned and at a remote campus 200 miles away from Minneapolis. A Washington law firm was retained to draft the final policy. But the Minnesota case, though receiving the most national attention, was not the only example of the clash between the *de jure* and *de facto* realities of faculty governance.

Faculty from the University of Michigan raised several questions

about the manner in which faculty governance at Michigan has been bypassed in the process for selection of a new President. The Board member present said that “faculty need to be clear about their responsibilities,” but also agreed that some faculty on the presidential selection committee were appointed by upper level administrators. There seemed no contradiction between these two statements in her mind, since faculty governance was “not representative or effective.” In defending the Board’s role, however, the Regent noted that although she and the Board had been elected after emerging from a partisan nominating process, they all understood their role to be “autonomous.” The Michigan state legislature and Governor had previously attempted to “interfere” with campus policies, and Board members resented and resisted this encroachment. The Indiana Board member also emphasized his resistance to the politicization of Board policy, and condemned the actions of the Board of Regents of the University of California for giving in to Governor Pete Wilson’s attacks on affirmative action. The trouble, Board members agreed, lies with the faculty who think only in terms of their rights, such as academic freedom and governance, but not in terms of their responsibility for maintaining quality programs at a reasonable level of expenditure.

### Robber Barons on Campus

Finally, exacerbating communication failures on campus, according to Mary Burgan and several panel presenters, is the infusion of corporate language, processes and values into academic decision-making. Intense competitiveness for markets, constant institutional change with the goal of maximizing efficiency and effectiveness, and the hero cult of the “manager” are norms seeping like swamp gas into the hallowed halls of ivy. Burgan referenced a report just issued by the Association of Governing Boards (“Stronger Leadership for Tougher Times”) which presented university Presidents as the Jay Goulds and Cornelius Vanderbilts of their eras, entrepre-

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neers who keep their employees working at maximum output in order to better deliver the goods to the consuming public. Shared governance is not important in this environment, managerial "leadership" is.

Of course, political scientists who have followed the permutations of "TQM" will have noted that its current manifestations entail, at least in the cutting edge of the corporate world, rather a considerable amount of devolved responsibility from central managers to the shop floor.

From the automobile industry to the computer industry and points in between, giving workers a voice in the production process seems to have a beneficial effect both on worker efficiency and the quality of the resulting product. The Japanese car industry, for example, boasts of its "continuous improvement" and "quality circle" philosophy. Rather than overhauling the production line every year from top to bottom, little changes are continually made on the advice of line managers and workers, the cumulative effect of which is an upgraded product. But university managers, so it appeared from the reports cited at the conference, are a few years out of date in their reading and prefer an earlier model of corporate relations where hierarchy prevails and faculty are urged to confine their governance activities to their own disciplines and departments where their specialized expertise lies.

Even when administrators do attempt to devolve decision-making, as has been attempted at the some campuses with respect to budgetary matters, the result is decidedly mixed. Greg Markus, Political Science Department and the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan reported on the intensely competitive nature of departmental and college behaviors when their share of the budgetary pie is tied directly to formulas which stress enrollment and research dollar produc-

tivity. The result has been to undermine the attractiveness of interdisciplinary and experimental curriculum and of programs and departments whose value is cannot be measured in quantitative terms.

Marc Cogan, Department of Philosophy, Wayne State University, reminded his audience in the panel on understanding the budget that in the case of today's university budgeting "knowledge is not power".

## The AAUP and the Future of Governance

The AAUP and its conferees have sounded an alarm which, they say, is as old as the organization itself. Arthur O. Lovejoy of Johns Hopkins and John Dewey of Columbia University organized a meeting on the Columbia campus in 1915 to discuss what could be done about events such as the firing of the economist Edward Ross at Stanford because Mrs. Leland Stanford, Jr. disagreed with his assessment of the gold standard. The goal of the 1915 meeting of the organization they founded was to ensure academic freedom, and remains so today, in 1996. AAUP is the only professional organization for all faculty, full and part-time, and in all institutions of higher education.

Homer Neal, Interim President, University of Michigan, opened the convention by saying that faculty are "the heart of the university," though he went on to describe the progressively sclerotic relationship between the faculty and administration. AAUP agrees and, at 44,000 members nationally, intends to expand as rapidly as possible by multiplying chapters and individual memberships to give the faculty heart more pumping power. Associate Secretary Jack P. Nightingale is one of AAUP's field representative and is dispatched as needed to offer his expert advice and assistance. About 50% of

AAUP's member campuses are collective bargaining units, but its overall charge is to provide a broad, legitimate faculty voice in determining professional norms and standards, as well as assistance in bargaining compensation and working conditions. But, given the crisis in faculty governance, the leadership of AAUP, like Boards and Presidents, finds salvation in counting. For Mary Burgan, "there is strength in numbers".

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## Notes

1. The subject of faculty governance is generating a growing literature, some interesting nuggets of which were helpfully supplied by the AAUP as background material for the conference. If any *PS* readers are interested in a published exchange in these pages based on the subjects of effective faculty governance, collective bargaining on campus, or the respective roles of faculty, Presidents and Boards in administrative recruitment, tenure, fiscal and program policies, contact me at: [pls\\_scott@emuvax.emich.edu](mailto:pls_scott@emuvax.emich.edu) or Department of Political Science, 601 Pray-Harrold, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197, or at my home Fax: (313)662-9952

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## About the Author

**Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott** is Professor of Political Science, Eastern Michigan University. She arrived at EMU January, 1990 and until May, 1995 served as Department head. Previously, she was at California State University, Long Beach, where in 1984 she won the first Distinguished Teaching Award given by the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences. She was appointed to the APSA Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Responsibilities in January, 1995, after serving as Special Representative for the Committee. Some of her most recent publications include: "Hannah Arendt: Campaign Pundit", *Op-Ed.* (July 27, 1996) *The New York Times*; *Hannah Arendt: Love and Saint Augustine*, (1996 with Judith C. Stark). Edited and with an Interpretive Essay. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

