

Reflections on shared governance

Governance Happens. But it happens in the trenches, not on the lighted stages of our society. In recent days student protesters have challenged the University system of shared governance, demanding greater representation on the University Senate and administrative committees. These reflections are offered to clarify some history and to encourage all who are interested in improving our governance to volunteer to serve.

The University faculty began a process in 1993 to restructure our system of shared governance in order to make it more viable and effective. The newly reconstituted University Senate, streamlined and apportioned to give faculty and students a broadly based voice, became our legislative body in 1995. The University took the unusual step of affirming that this University wanted a University Senate rather than the more common faculty senate model. It is a fact that the University faculty at present has no exclusive forum to debate its issues comparable to the ASUO and Student Senate. This, alone, proves a commitment by the faculty to the principles of shared governance.

This year the University Senate, having appointed a small ad hoc committee of three faculty, one student and one administrator, is working to restructure our committee system in order to make it, too, "more viable and effective." The committee system has languished about the entire century, suffering from piece-

meal changes, lack of a coordinated overview and archaic legislation. This work is massive, but it is important and will be done. Accusations that our committees are ineffective and a

COMMENTARY

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waste of student and faculty time are sometimes absolutely true. But not always. Good committees with good leadership can be and are often very effective. In 1997 the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns committee brought persuasive arguments to the floor of the University Senate in support of domestic partner benefits.

The senate passed a resolution requesting that the president of the University support and advocate for this important change. It happened. This week the Ad Hoc Committee on a Licensing Code of Conduct brought forward a new University code for regulating all University trademark licensees. The senate voted. The motion passed and will be made university policy.

The charge has been made that University committees lack decision-making authority. But committees inherently lack such authority. They are places where issues and concerns are debated and where consensus is attained. Committees which have accomplished good work make good recommendations and those recommendations are heard and ac-

tivated by good leadership. Anyone who cares about shared governance should volunteer to serve on a committee and work to make that committee effective. Although conscientious efforts have consistently been made to ensure that the student voice is heard on standing and ad hoc committees, it is not unusual for student seats to go unfilled either because no one is appointed or the student(s) appointed do not attend the meetings. Not attending meetings because the committee appears to be a waste of time is the worst action one can take. If the voices of all committee members are not equally heard at the table, fight for the right to be heard. The table is the appropriate place for those arguments. Walking away won't help and certainly undermines later statements that committees are not worth one's time. Efforts are underway to revise the time line for making student committee appointments and to provide better orientation for committee chairs. Both of these changes should aid in improving the student voice on committees.

A public demonstration is an excellent way to highlight an issue. Direct communication with top leadership is another. But real change happens through the sweat of debate and orderly procedure. It's less glamorous perhaps, and certainly takes more time and investment over the long haul, but it's our process. And it works.

Ann Tedards is an associate professor and past-president of the University Senate. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the paper.

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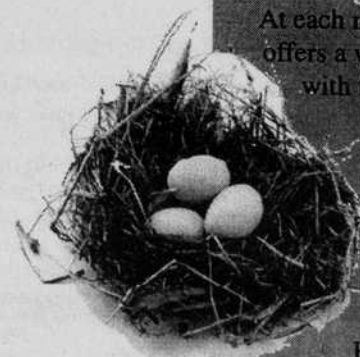
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#33

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LATE SKULY
(EXCUSES, EXCUSES)

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GOT TIED UP.	STUCK AT WORK.	LATE SKULY.	THE LATE SKULY.

#34