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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the concept of stress in the community college faculty governance unit. While research has found that most faculty experience stress as a result of workload, publishing pressures, and insufficient salaries, this study asserts that some faculty experience an additional dimension of stress as a result of necessary participation in college governance. Data for this study were derived from the National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance (NDBFIG), an ongoing five-year study of faculty involvement in governance sponsored by the University of Alabama. A total of 83 community college faculty governance unit leaders (FGUs) and 76 research and doctoral university FGUs responded to a survey in 1998 constructed around the theme of faculty governance and stress. In general, both groups of faculty rated the level of stress factors similarly. However, analysis revealed that community college faculty rated obtaining program and financial approval as the greatest stressor, while research university faculty rated making decisions that affect others as the highest stressor. Overall, faculty governance leaders were identified as individuals whose perceptions and beliefs varied in regard to their roles in leadership and the factors that cause stress in the position of leadership. Contains 3 tables and 13 references. (SKF)

Stressors Related to Managing Faculty Governance in Community Colleges

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Abstract

Faculty are involved in many aspects of collegiate governance, and often rely on their own abilities and skills to learn their roles while "on the job." One of the primary methods of obtaining faculty participation in college management is through a faculty senate or council. These bodies are increasingly important in community colleges as they serve as a fulcrum of faculty involvement in broad based, inclusive decision making. The current study reports the results of a survey of community college faculty governance unit leaders, the tasks they face, and the stressors to their performance as governance unit leaders, in a sense, as the first among equals.

Faculty involvement in governance has become a basic tenet of college management. The concept holds that faculty should have a say in how a college is operated, and that this "say" can be more than agreement; it can be consensus, co-ownership, and responsibility. Evans (in press) has noted a wide variety of benefits to shared governance, including greater acceptance of decisions, stronger enthusiasm for policy, a wider diversity of thinking about complex systems and problems, and improved morale.

The faculty governance unit leader, often a chair, president, chancellor, director, or head, by design, represents the interests of the broader faculty group to administrators, and uses this important position to structure the work of the unit. These units, typically a forum, council, or senate, rely on the faculty governance unit leader to provide the direction and identify tasks to be completed for the welfare of the group. In a sense, the faculty leader is a first among equals, caught between faculty interests and administrative pressures. Similar to the department chair, the faculty governance unit leader is responsive to both the faculty and administrators (Seagren, et al, 1994), with the primary difference being that the faculty leader must be the leading advocate for faculty interests. Seagren described the chair position as similar to the Roman god Janus, the gatekeeper, an analogy also appropriate for the elected or appointed position of faculty governance unit leader.

Faculty governance unit leaders play an important role in how broad based inclusive decision-making is interpreted on an individual campus. In addition to providing a forum for faculty input into institutional decision-making, these units provide the mechanism for faculty to have input into issues such as quality indicators, campus facilities

planning, and legislative agenda items. The governance unit leader must, by the design of the position, rely on a host of personal response strategies for coping with position challenges. An accepted function of the position, then, is some degree of stress. The current study was designed to explore the concept of stress in the community college faculty governance unit, and in particular, what factors are reported to cause the most stress. Using an adaptation of the Gmelch and Burns (1994) survey, community and junior college faculty governance unit leaders were surveyed, with mean scores reported and used in data analysis.

Stress in Faculty Governance

Faculty stress in higher education has been reported to be similar in many disciplines and in many types of institutions. Arnold (1990) noted that factors such as workload, time constraints, the urge to publish, unrealistic expectations, and dissonance between actual achievements and personal aspirations are instrumental in causing faculty stress. These issues were most prevalent among new, non-tenured faculty. Insufficient salaries, not enough time to keep abreast of current events, and lack of resources were also common stressors among this group of faculty (Gmelch & Wilke, 1988).

Research has indicated that there were differences in faculty stress based on the various personal and professional characteristics of faculty. Arnold and others (1996) found that only academic rank was significant in predicting stress. From a professional perspective, they found that the higher the academic rank, the higher the level of stress. In slight contrast, Dey (1990) found that tenured faculty, whose characteristics were very complex based on variables such as gender, race, and institutional selectivity, perceived

varying levels and dimensions of stress. "Subtle discrimination" seemed to be the largest difference across all the groups in the study which presents another stressor for select groups of faculty. African-American faculty reported higher levels of occupational stress, due to research and service activities, than their white counterparts (Smith & Witt, 1993). In this case, African-Americans tended to be appointed more frequently to extra-academic assignments for various reasons (Brown & Miller, 1998). In all of these, the most common answer seemed to be the development of coping strategies, such as setting priorities (Sorcinelli, 1992), setting long tem goals and strategies for coping (Arnold, 1990), training in time management techniques, and focusing on a problem-solving approach to coping with financial stressors (Gmelch & Wilke, 1988).

Due to the necessity of participation in college governance, faculty experience yet another complex aspect of stress. Stress in faculty governance has been observed within a senate or similar unit due to participation (or lack of participation) and trust and mistrust between administrators and faculty (Miller & Seagren, 1993). Gmelch and Gates (1995) found that chairpersons who derived the most satisfaction with their position experienced less stress. An understanding of the role of the department chair, an understanding of the planning process for a productive department, and developing the key leadership skills required for effectiveness were some suggestions for decreasing the stress of becoming a college department chair (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993). Other suggestions for reducing the stress of department chairs included identifying high and low payoff activities, facilitating faculty involvement in conflict resolution, and using creative approaches to interpret regulations (Gmelch & Burns, 1990). All of these are similar stressors experienced by faculty members who are committed to governance.

Research Methods

The current data collection was part of an on-going five-year study of faculty involvement in governance sponsored by The University of Alabama. The National Data Base on Faculty Involvement in Governance (NDBFIG) Project, established in 1994, has provided for the collection and analysis of several data sets concerning the role faculty have, want, and utilize in sharing authority on the college campus. Data for the current study came from a survey developed by the NDBFIG team in the summer of 1998, which was mailed to community college faculty governance leaders in the fall of 1998.

The survey was constructed around the theme of identifying and explaining who faculty governance leaders are in 2-year colleges, and what factors they report to cause them stress in serving in this position. The sample of 100 community college faculty governance leaders was based on institution, meaning that a random sample of institutions was selected from various sources, including AACC directory information, and faculty governance leaders were accordingly selected. Additionally, the survey for this study was mailed to 100 research and doctoral university faculty governance unit leaders, identified in a similar fashion, thus allowing for an opportunity for comparison.

The first section of the survey allowed for demographic data collection, namely gender, rank, academic discipline, and an identification of governance unit tasks. Although the survey contained additional information requests in terms of communication tendencies, the other section of relevance to the current study was the list of 13 stressors. These stressors were identified by Gmelch and Burns (1994) as serious for departmental chairs and faculty. As faculty governance unit leaders, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which their role as a governance unit leader created and impacted their stress

levels. The survey made use of a 1-to-5 Likert-type scale, where 1=Slight Stress, 2=Some Stress, 3-Stress, 4=Serious Stress, and 5=Excessive Stress.

Findings

A total of 159 faculty governance unit leaders (FGUs) responded to the survey, including 83 community college FGUs and 76 research and doctoral university FGU leaders. In the community colleges, and as shown in Table 1, the majority of FGUs were male (77%), held a rank other than the traditional progression of professorship (43%), and taught in the liberal arts (55%). At research and doctoral institutions, the majority of responding FGUs were female (54%), held the rank of associate professor (42%), and either taught in the liberal arts or in an academic discipline not identified (27% each).

Respondents rated their strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (5) with six tasks associated with serving as the lead faculty member in a co-governance body. Both sets of participants agreed most strongly with the same three tasks (develop data bases for governance decision-making, develop networks and linkages, and obtain and allocate resources), although the order of the mean ratings differed somewhat (see Table 2).

As shown in Table 3, respondents from the two types of institutions agreed in the same order with the top two identified stressors associated with serving as the FGU leader. Community college faculty agreed most that the obtaining program and financial approval was the greatest stressor, followed by making decisions that affect others. Research university FGU leaders reversed these two, providing the highest rating to making decisions that affect others. Community college faculty rated only two of the 13 stressors above 3.0 (neutral), and rated one stressor, evaluating faculty performance,

below 2 (disagreement). Research university FGU leaders rated only three of the 13 above 3.0, adding the stressor excessively high self expectations (mean 3.10) to those above 3.0. The lowest rated stressor for research university faculty was completing paperwork on time.

Discussion

Faculty governance activities are generally predicated on the notion that interest and effort in an area connected to a faculty member's value structure will impact the effort exerted. Often, these efforts reflect a combination of personal and professional values, and the extension of these interests to a deeper level suggest an opportunity or at least a partial motivation to assume a leadership position among faculty members in some form of governance organization. This leadership role, by design, is open to any number of stressors; stressors related to faculty interests as well as administrative designs for governance unit activities.

In terms of demographic findings, the predominance of the community college faculty rank of "other" was probably indicative of the use of alternative titles in these colleges for instructional faculty. These titles often include "instructor," "lecturer," or simply, "teacher." Somewhat interesting, however, was the near 20% of the faculty leaders who were full professors, over twice the rate of their counter parts at research universities. This alludes to a possible perspective that in community colleges an understanding of institutional history and culture may be more important to participation in the decision-making process as compared to the emphasis on providing some form of service in the research university.

Women outnumbered men in the faculty leadership roles in research universities, although the opposite was true in the participating community colleges. As with vocational, trade, and industrial education disciplines, some of the three-to-one male-to-female faculty leader ratio in community colleges may be due to long term, historically rooted traditions of male dominance. If this is the case, as with vocational programs, community colleges may be facing fairly rapid changes in the decade in the area of women assuming more leadership roles among faculty ranks.

The one area of similarity between faculty governance unit leaders at research universities and community colleges was in the high frequency of liberal arts faculty involvement. This trend is consistent with other work in the area of faculty involvement in governance which identifies the liberal arts as a breeding ground of sorts for faculty leaders.

The tasks identified by both sets of respondents were similar, perhaps reflecting a commonality between the faculty governance leaders at the different types of institutions. The task of developing data bases for governance decision-making alludes to the faculty leader's role in setting the stage for the process of decision-making, and contrary to national politics, not advocating a prescriptive agenda. The governance leaders also had similar mean ratings for the least agreed upon task of developing a sense of direction for the governance unit, reinforcing the concept of a procedural or processural governance leader as compared to leaders who carry enthusiasm and duty based on issues. This is somewhat contrary to other research which has based involvement in campus governance on issues and the extent to which issues address personal values.

All of this data provided a framework for identifying the stressors faced by faculty governance unit leaders. Community college faculty had no opinion or agreed with two of the 13 identified stressors, and research university faculty reported neutral feelings toward three of the 13 stressors and agreed with none of them. This suggests that despite the similarity of the department chair and faculty governance unit leader positions, they face fundamentally different challenges and stressors. The faculty governance unit leader stressor probably arises from the confrontational role of leading a group of faculty in opposition, potentially, to administrators. Ironically, the tasks identified seemed to reinforce the notion that governance unit leaders are processural rather than leaders in the traditional sense, and this in turn would point to a greater similarity between department chairs and faculty governance leaders.

Overall, faculty governance leaders were identified to be individuals who varied in their perceptions and beliefs about their roles in leadership. This contention has the potential to dramatically impact how leadership development and institutional effectiveness programs a built, particularly, how experiences are structured to demonstrate value in participation. These findings also provide an interesting impetus for discussion about differentiating between structure and content, and regardless of the structures put in place to demonstrate broad based inclusive decision-making, the value in the process is in the personal value faculty place on the content. Issues such as these must at least be considered a prominent value in discussions of institutional effectiveness, and have the potential to frame the future of faculty co-governance activities.

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Table 1.

Demographic Profile of Faculty Governance Unit Leaders

Characteristic	2-Year FGU N=83	Research Univ. FGU N=76
Gender		
Female	19 (23%)	41 (54%)
Male	64 (77)	35 (46)
Rank		
Full Professor	16 (19)	7 (9)
Associate	15 (18)	32 (42)
Assistant	16 (19)	30 (39)
Other	36 (43)	7 (9)
Teaching Discipline		
Liberal Arts	46 (55)	21 (27)
Business	4 (5)	0
Agriculture	9 (11)	0
Education	0	2 (2)
Engineering	2 (2)	6 (8)
Law	0	4 (5)
Medicine	0	8 (10)
Social Work	6 (7)	0
Communications	6 (7)	14 (18)
Other	16 (19)	21 (27)

Table 2.

Tasks of Faculty Governance Unit Leaders

Tasks	2-Year FGU Mean	(SD)	Rank	Research Univ. FGU Mean	(SD)	Rank
Develop a sense direction for the unit	2.08	(1.53)	6	1.56	(1.06)	6
Develop a sense of pride for the unit	3.26	(1.32)	5	3.26	(1.24)	5
Obtain and allocate resources for the unit	4.06	(1.50)	2	3.55	(1.58)	3
Take care of details of running the unit	3.49	(1.61)	4	3.27	(1.61)	4
Develop networks and linkages for yourself	4.04	(1.53)	3	3.75	(1.57)	2
Develop data bases for governance decision-making	4.39	(1.28)	1	4.51	(1.58)	1

Table 3.

Stressors Reported by Faculty Governance Unit Leaders

Stressor	2-Year FGU Mean	SD	Research Univ. FGU Mean	SD
Having too heavy work load	2.51	(1.09)	2.80	(.93)
Obtaining program/financial approval	4.06	(1.50)	3.55	(1.58)
Keeping current in discipline	2.51	(1.13)	2.78	(.86)
Complying with institutional rules	2.15	(1.16)	2.25	(1.05)
Job interfering with personal time	2.57	(1.09)	2.72	(.88)
Making decisions affecting others	.81	(1.02)	3.98	(.66)
Excessively high self expectations	.67	(1.19)	3.10	(1.02)
Resolving collegial differences	.57	(1.14)	2.90	(.92)
Evaluating faculty performance	1.88	(.60)	2.36	(1.02)
Completing paperwork on time	2.73	(1.30)	2.18	(.94)
Preparing manuscripts/presentations	2.74	(1.04)	2.71	(.86)
Telephone and visitor interruptions	2.44	(1.03)	2.65	(1.02)
Meetings taking too much time	2.57	(1.27)	2.28	(1.03)

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