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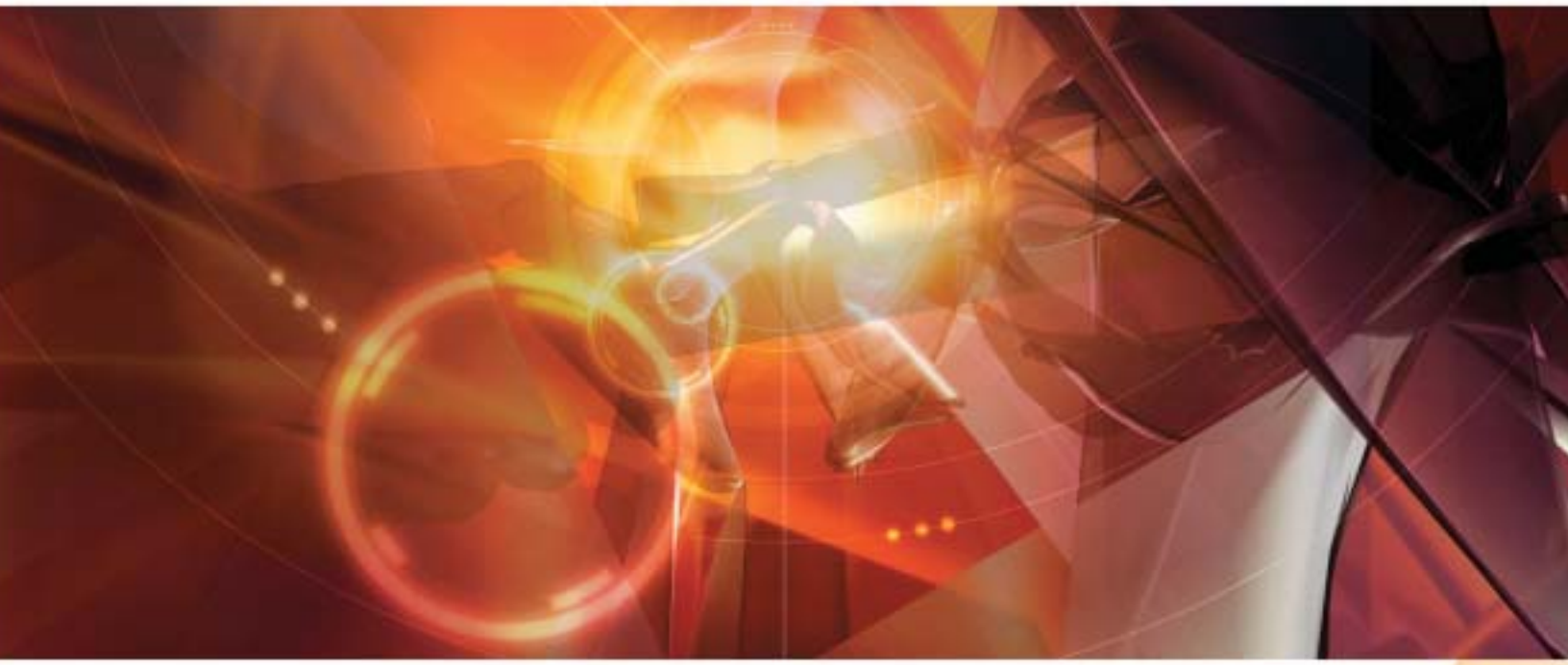
Challenges for Governance: a National Report



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Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis

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CHEPA

University of Southern California

Rossier School of Education

Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, WPH 701

Los Angeles, CA 90089-0031

Tel: (213) 740-7218/Fax: (213) 740-3889

chepa@usc.edu

Challenges for Governance: a National Report

A publication of the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis

Rossier School of Education

University of Southern California

Table of Contents

Foreword

Many colleges and universities across the country are dealing with fiscal crises and other pressures by renewing their commitment to strategic planning, clarifying their institutional missions, and reexamining their governance structures. This report is designed to help policymakers, administrators, faculty, and researchers address the challenges of institutional governance by providing empirical data on the current role of faculty in institutional governance. In this monograph we describe the results of a survey of more than 2,000 faculty and provosts across the country that addressed the ways faculty participate in governance, the degree and effectiveness of that participation, and faculty attitudes toward it.

In the coming months we will be reporting on case studies we have conducted that have sought to flesh out the findings of the survey. We are also concerned with understanding how for-profit postsecondary institutions govern themselves using case studies, interviews and focus groups. Next year we will turn our attention to board and system level governance and report back our findings.

This research was conducted within the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis at the University of Southern California and has been generously supported by Atlantic Philanthropies. As we continue in this effort, we hope to provide opportunities for meaningful dialogue and discussion. We would welcome hearing from you.

William G. Tierney
Wilbur-Kieffer Professor &
Director

James T. Minor
Research Associate &
Postdoctoral Scholar

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Section I :

Introduction

Shared institutional governance has been a hallmark of American colleges and universities for over a generation. The tradition of shared governance rests on the assumption that faculty should hold a substantive role in decision-making, and the most visible vehicle for faculty involvement is typically a faculty senate or some similar body with a different name. Such senates currently exist on the campuses of more than 90 percent of America's four-year colleges and universities. Over the past decade, however, several trends have placed unexpected pressures on institutions of higher learning. These include extreme fluctuations in state budgets, concerns about the rising costs of higher education, calls for greater accountability from all educational institutions, increasing competition from new postsecondary providers, including for-profit organizations, and the growth in distance learning. These trends have led to greater scrutiny of institutional decision-making and calls for a "restructuring" of academic governance that would improve productivity and control costs.

Such calls have spurred debate about the role of faculty in governance. Critics of existing arrangements often argue that faculty governance in general, and faculty senates in particular, inhibit responsive decision-making. These critics bemoan the lethargic pace of decision-making when faculty are involved and expect to reach consensus. Defenders of the faculty's role in shared governance, on the other hand, contend that faculty involvement in decision-making has positive effects on academic freedom and educational quality. They maintain that the university is not a business; it is one of the world's oldest organizations and has withstood various external pressures, including those of a changing marketplace, by a deliberative and consensual decision-making approach.

Unfortunately, there is little empirical or theoretical work on governance systems and the role of faculty within those systems. Since the 1970s, few national studies of governance have emerged, with Gabriel Kaplan's recent study a notable exception (2003). Our purpose, therefore, was to gather data that would help clarify the state of campus governance today and inform the debate about governance reform. Before addressing the issue of whether faculty involvement in institutional governance is effective or ineffective, one needs to identify the nature of that involvement: the forms it takes, the issues that are most influenced by faculty, and the degree of faculty involvement in various forms of decision-making.

To gather our data, we sent a web-based survey to approximately 3,800 individuals in over 750 institutions of higher education; we received responses from more than half of these individuals. Each respondent was asked 35 questions pertaining to faculty participation in campus governance. In addition to the survey described here, we are currently undertaking site visits to 15 campuses to broaden our scope and further inform our research. Future articles, reports, and conference presentations will be used as venues to delineate and disseminate our findings.

This study focuses on four-year colleges and universities. We do not address important issues concerning the role of faculty in decision-making at two-year colleges. We also do not consider the role of other important constituents in governance. Academic staff, for example, are the fastest growing group in higher education and their roles in campus governance are virtually unexamined. There is also very little research on the role of graduate students in governance. This study is intended to lay the groundwork for further research in these areas.

We begin by describing the survey sample and response rate. We then present survey results on the venues for faculty participation, the areas in which faculty have the strongest influence, the nature of faculty authority, attitudes toward shared governance, and the effectiveness of specific venues for expressing faculty views. Finally, we summarize our main findings and discuss their implications for improving institutional governance.

Section II :

Survey Description

Institutions Surveyed

This report derives from a national survey of four-year baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral institutions, as defined by the 2000 Carnegie Classification of Higher Education Institutions. We randomly selected a total of 763 institutions from these three institutional sectors, sampling approximately 50 percent of all schools in each sector. (For example, of the 611 existing master's schools in the United States, 302 were sampled, a rate of 49 percent.)

Table 1 below presents the total number of schools in our sample by type of institution and indicates how many of these were public and how many were private. The ratio of private to public institutions shown in the table closely resembles the existing ratio in the total population of each institutional sector.

Table 1 : Invited Institutions

Institutional Type	Baccalaureate	Master's	Doctoral	Total
Number Invited	311	302	150	763
Public	68	140	79	287
Private	243	162	71	476

Individuals Surveyed

To gain an understanding of cross-campus views at the selected schools, we sought information from diverse campus constituents knowledgeable about governance and decision-making processes at their institution. We sent electronic letters of invitation to the Academic Vice President (AVP) or Provost, a designated faculty leader (such as the President or Chair of the Senate), and three faculty who serve as department chairs. To the extent possible, we selected one individual from the humanities and social sciences, one from the natural sciences, and one from a professional school. We invited responses from 763 AVPs and 763 Senate leaders, and 2,289 faculty. Of 3,815 potential respondents, a small number declined to participate. In total, 3,761 persons received the survey. This is the denominator we used in calculating response rates.

Figure 1 illustrates the members of each group who completed and submitted surveys. Note that whenever we refer to "faculty" in our results, we mean department chairs. The term "senate leaders" refers to faculty members who have a campus-wide leadership role, and Academic VP (AVP) refers to the academic vice president or comparable role on campus, such as provost.

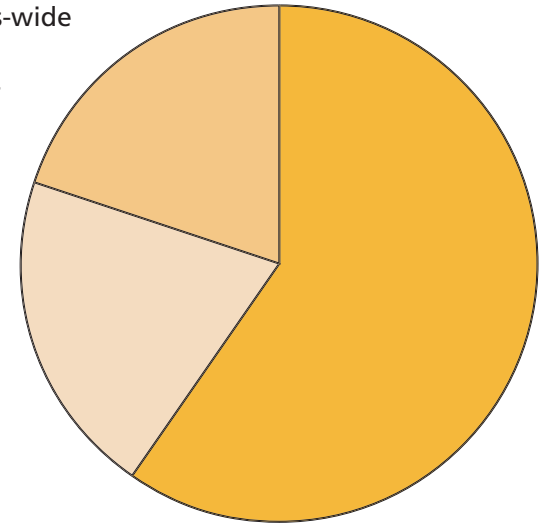


Figure 1 : Number of Respondants

Faculty - 1,199

Academic VP - 411

Senate Leader - 400

TOTAL : 2,010

Response Rates

Of the 3,761 individuals receiving the survey, 2,010 provided responses—an overall response rate of 53 percent. As a group, the faculty Senate leaders showed a response rate of 53 percent; the faculty responded at the rate of 53 percent, and academic vice presidents provided responses at 54 percent.

We also calculated an institutional response rate. Institutions that provided two or more respondents from different positions (e.g., a Provost and a senate leader) were included in the institutional response rate. If responses collected from an institution represented only one constituency group (e.g., two faculty members), the data were collected and analyzed but not included as an "institutional response." The number of institutions with multiple respondents was high: the total institutional response rate was 77 percent. However, the data in the following sections of this document are based on the individual response rate (meaning all individuals who responded, not only those from the institutions included in the institutional response rate).

Section III : Survey Result

Venues for Faculty Participation Go Well Beyond Faculty Senates

Studies of academic decision-making frequently describe faculty governance in "either/or" terms: *either* an institution has an effective faculty senate *or* faculty governance is a sham. The actual picture, however, is much more complex. As one might expect, in a postsecondary universe made up of 4,000 institutions, governance structures vary by culture, size, history, and type.

According to our survey, governance bodies that we call "faculty senates" (also known as faculty councils or academic senates) exist in most of the surveyed institutions. A total 93 percent of doctoral institutions, 90 percent of master's institutions, and 82 percent of baccalaureate institutions have such senates, while only 13 percent of surveyed schools do not. However, as *Table 2* indicates, not all respondents believe that their Senate provides a significant means of faculty participation. At doctoral schools, for example, only 43 percent reported this to be the case. Three other venues were considered more important than Senates (or similar campus-wide bodies with different names) for shared decision-making: academic departments, standing committees and ad-hoc committees. Note that this is true across types of institutions, with all three reporting substantial opportunities for decision-making through academic departments, standing committees, and ad-hoc committees. Although we do not separate this data in *Table 2*, the results apply across positions, with administrators and faculty responding in almost identical ways.

Table 2 : Faculty Venues for Participation

Percentage reporting substantial means of participation

Venue	Baccalaureate	Master's	Doctoral
Academic Department	87	87	85
Standing Faculty Committee	88	83	85
Ad-Hoc Committees	72	62	60
Faculty Senate	60	54	43
School/College Governance	55	49	48
Standing Administration-Faculty Committees	52	42	43
System-Wide Senate	21	20	14
Collective Bargaining/Labor Union	6	16	12

Faculty Senates Differ in Many Ways

Discussions about faculty senates are complicated by the fact that not all senates are alike. Table 3 shows a number of other survey results that demonstrate how senates differ.

Table 3 : Characteristics of Faculty Senates

- An elected faculty member chairs **63%** of senates in doctoral and master's institutions; **85%** of senates in doctoral and master's institutions are chaired by elected faculty.
- **39%** of baccalaureate senates reported receiving no institutional support *(e.g., secretarial assistance, office space, or incentives for participation)*. **21%** of master's senates reported receiving no institutional support. **15%** of doctoral institution senates reported receiving no institutional support.
- **86%** of all senates meet six or more times per year. **10%** of all senates reported meeting less than five times per year.
- **21%** of baccalaureate senates are representational by school, college or department. **52%** of master's and **71%** of doctoral senates are structured similarly.
- In **60%** of baccalaureate colleges, all faculty serve as members of the senate; only **36%** of master's senates and **18%** of doctoral senates include all faculty.
- **43%** of baccalaureate institutions reported not having an executive committee, whereas only **25%** of master's and **13%** of doctoral senates reported no executive committee.
- Of these existing executive committees, **25%** of the senates reported that current senate members choose the members of their executive committee. *(**11%** of baccalaureate, **25%** of master's, and **38%** of doctoral)*.
- **53%** of all senate leaders meet at least once per month with the president or academic vice president. **33%** of all senate leaders never meet with governing boards.

There is Widespread Dissatisfaction with Faculty Senates

At those institutions that had faculty Senates, 22 percent of respondents reported that the Senate was not an important governing body, 53 percent indicated a low level of interest in Senate activities, 43 percent stated that involvement in the Senate was not highly valued, and 31 percent felt the goals of the Senate were not clearly defined, even though there appeared to be clarity about the domains of faculty influence--that is, there was clarity about areas of decision-making where faculty have authority.

This dissatisfaction was particularly strong at doctoral universities, where only 19 percent of respondents agreed that faculty had high levels of interest in Senate activities. By contrast, 54 percent of respondents from baccalaureate institutions and 39 percent of respondents from master's institutions reported high levels of interest in Senate activities.

Challenges to successful faculty participation were cultural and structural. In an open-ended response, participants noted that faculty workload and bureaucratic obstacles such as committee work or untimely processes dissuade faculty from participating in governance. Respondents also reported cultural obstacles to participation, including faculty apathy and cynicism about the process.

Faculty Have Strong Influence in Several Areas

Where faculty have decision-making authority—and where they do not—remains a point of contention on many campuses. *Table 4* summarizes our results on this point. Faculty reported the most substantial influence in the development of undergraduate curriculum. Beyond that, a large majority of respondents felt faculty had a strong voice in determining tenure and promotional standards and standards for evaluating teaching. At graduate institutions, faculty also reported an important role in determining graduate educational policy. About half the respondents from all types of institutions claimed that faculty exercise substantial influence on forming standards for post-tenure review and undergraduate educational policy. The areas where they reported the least influence were evaluation of the President and AVP and the setting of budget priorities.

Table 4 : Level of Influence in Different Areas

Percentage reporting substantial level of influence

Area of Influence	Baccalaureate	Master's	Doctoral
Undergraduate curriculum	92	85	81
General standards of promotion and tenure	74	67	69
Standards for evaluating teaching	74	64	63
Evaluation of the quality of academic programs	64	58	50
Standards for post-tenure review	53	45	47
Undergraduate educational policy	53	46	46
Faculty-related personnel policies	36	31	35
Setting strategic priorities	35	32	29
Selection of the President and AVP	32	26	22
Policies of intellectual property	30	36	37
Graduate educational policy	25	61	75
Evaluation of the President and AVP	19	17	13
Setting budget priorities	16	12	13

Colleges with Collective Bargaining Agreements and Those Without Show Little Difference in Faculty Influence Across Decision Types.

Our survey included results from institutions that have collective bargaining agreements as well as those that do not. Results show that faculty influence over personnel policy is comparatively equal. 36 percent of those in institutions with a collective bargaining agreement reported that faculty have substantial influence over personnel policies compared to 33 percent in institutions without collective bargaining. Those in institutions without collective bargaining reported slightly higher levels of influence over issues such as strategic planning, setting budget priorities, and selection of the President and Provost.

Perceptions of Faculty Influence

All respondents (Academic Vice Presidents, Senate leaders, and faculty) were asked to report the perceived level of faculty influence associated with the various domains of decision-making. *Table 5* presents the results from all institutions by position. The data show that the level of faculty influence in decision-making was perceived as higher by Academic Vice Presidents than Senate leaders and faculty. There is a certain irony that senior academic administrators believe faculty have influence, and faculty think they do not. Such perceptions carried to extremes are recipes for stalled decision-making. The areas of decision-making where perceptions diverged most were undergraduate educational policy, standards for evaluating teaching, setting strategic priorities, and faculty-related personnel policies.

Table 5 : Responses on Perceived Level of Faculty Influence Organized by Position

Percentage reporting substantial level of influence

Venue	AVP	Chair	Faculty
Undergraduate curriculum	96	84	85
Tenure and promotion standards	84	69	66
Standards for evaluating teaching	82	65	64
Evaluation of the quality of academic programs	71	55	56
Undergraduate educational policy	64	47	44
Graduate educational policy	63	52	44
Standards for post-tenure review	53	48	48
Setting strategic priorities	50	30	28
Faculty-related personnel policies	47	27	28
Policies of intellectual property	45	34	30
Selection of the President and AVP	42	28	22
Setting budget priorities	24	10	11
Evaluation of the President and AVP	21	17	15

Faculty Have Informal Authority in Areas Where They Have Little Formal Authority

Respondents were asked to identify those areas where they feel they have formal authority, informal authority, and no authority. Formal authority means having decisive voting membership in a decision-making body. Informal authority, on the other hand, means the ability to make recommendations or provide consultative input that may be considered or ignored by administrators or decision-making bodies. *Table 6* summarizes the key survey results on this topic. It shows the top three areas in which faculty reported considerable formal authority, the top three areas in which they reported significant informal authority, and the top three areas in which respondents reported having no influence whatsoever.

Table 6 : Top Three Areas Cited for Different Types of Authority

Nature of Authority	Area	% Claiming Types of Authority
Formal Authority	Undergraduate curriculum	67
	Tenure and promotion standards	59
	Standards for evaluating teaching	50
Informal Authority	Selection of the President and AVP	52
	Setting strategic priorities	59
	Setting budget priorities	53
No Authority	Evaluation of president	41
	Evaluation of AVP	33
	Setting budget priorities	31

The Concept of Shared Governance is Highly Valued

The notion of shared governance has wide support at all three types of four-year colleges. At baccalaureate institutions, 86 percent confirmed that shared governance is an important part of the institution's values and identity, a view shared by 82 percent of the respondents at master's and 79 percent of respondents at doctoral institutions. While there are some differences by position, overwhelming support for shared governance can be found in all three constituent groups on campus: 96 percent of AVPs, 86 percent of Senate leaders, and 78 percent of faculty indicated their belief that shared governance is important. (There was also little difference between institutions with and without collective bargaining regarding the degree of importance placed on shared governance.)

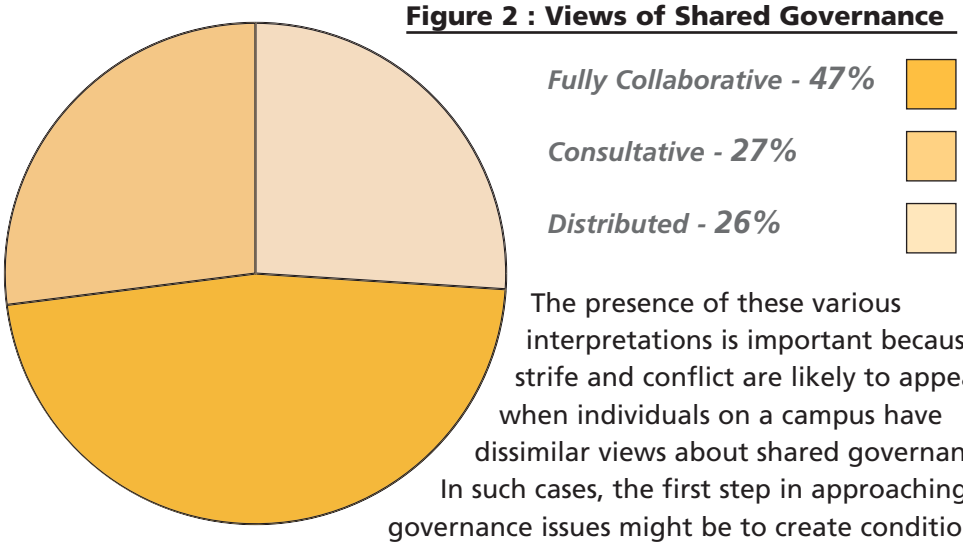
But There is Disagreement About What Shared Governance Means

From open-ended questions, respondents offered definitions of "shared governance." These responses were categorized in three different ways:

- **Fully collaborative decision-making.** This refers to a traditional approach that some might call a "collegial model" of governance. Here, the faculty and administration make decisions jointly and consensus is the goal.
- **Consultative decision-making.** This describes a more communicative model where the faculty's opinion and advice is sought but where authority remains with the senior administration and the board of trustees. Although many individuals and groups are brought into the decision-making process, the model revolves around information sharing and discussion rather than joint decision-making.
- **Distributed decision-making.** In this model, decisions are made by discrete groups responsible for specific issues. The understanding is that faculty have a right to make decisions in certain areas, and the administration and board in others.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents that held these different views of shared governance.

Figure 2 : Views of Shared Governance



The presence of these various interpretations is important because strife and conflict are likely to appear when individuals on a campus have dissimilar views about shared governance. In such cases, the first step in approaching governance issues might be to create conditions where differences about the best approaches to decision-making can be worked out.

Most Respondents Felt There is a Sufficient Level of Trust Between Faculty and Administrators

Despite the challenge of sustaining a culture of trust in fluid governance settings such as colleges and universities, most survey respondents considered levels of campus trust to be sufficient. *Table 7* and *Table 8* show that a great majority of all respondents reported adequate levels of trust concerning action on governance issues. (Again, there was little difference on this issue between institutions with and without collective bargaining.)

It is important to note, however, that over 20 percent of all respondents indicated that there is not enough trust among faculty and administrators. Most of those reporting this view are Senate leaders and faculty.

Table 7 : Level of Trust Organized by Institutional Type

Level of Trust	Baccalaureate	Master's	Doctoral
Sufficient	79%	75%	79%
Insufficient	20%	23%	20%

Table 8 : Responses on Level of Trust Organized by Position

Level of Trust	AVP	Chair	Faculty
Sufficient	90%	77%	73%
Insufficient	9%	22%	25%

Most Respondents Felt There is Sufficient Communication Between Faculty and Administrators

Many respondents indicated that besides trust, another important element for effective governance and decision-making is good communication. *Table 9* and *Table 10* show the results of survey questions that asked if the level of communication between governing groups was sufficient or insufficient on their campus. More than 70 percent of respondents at each institutional type reported that communication levels between the governing board members, the President, and the faculty were sufficient. Broken down by campus position, however, responses varied somewhat, with the highest percentage of "sufficient" responses coming from AVPs and the lowest from faculty members.

Again, while the majority of respondents indicated satisfaction with current communication levels, about 26 percent of respondents at each type of institution—and about 30 percent of all Senate leaders and faculty—reported communication levels to be inadequate.

Table 9 : Level of Communication Organized by Institutional Type

Level of Communication	Baccalaureate	Master's	Doctoral
Sufficient	74%	71%	70%
Insufficient	25%	27%	27%

Table 10 : Responses on Level of Communication Organized by Position

Level of Communication	AVP	Chair	Faculty
Sufficient	89%	72%	67%
Insufficient	11%	28%	31%

Section IV :
The Deductions

What might one make of these various findings? Of what use might they be to campus leaders facing the multiple challenges that currently exist? Here we summarize eight findings and delineate the implications.

Faculty governance occurs in multiple venues. Faculty involvement in governance occurs on many levels and in multiple forums.

Confidence in institution-wide governing bodies is low. Faculty have less understanding for, and less appreciation of, faculty senates than for more local governing mechanisms such as academic departments.

Core academic areas are still viewed as primary arenas for formal faculty governance. The respondents – regardless of position or institutional type – still believe that the faculty have authority over the undergraduate curriculum, promotion and tenure guidelines, and standards for evaluating teaching.

Strategic planning benefits from structured, informal faculty input. Although respondents did not report that the faculty had a formal say in the creation of a strategic plan, most believed that faculty had significant informal influence.

Apathy and lack of trust are the most significant barriers to meaningful faculty participation. Individuals related that meaningful involvement is difficult when the faculty voice is not respected and shared governance is not taken seriously.

Respect trumps resources. Although many respondents outlined the need for better staffed committees, senates, and task forces, individuals placed a higher value on genuine respect by the administration for creating effective faculty involvement in governance.

Differential perceptions of shared governance leads to ineffective governance. When constituencies have differing perceptions regarding what role the faculty have in governance, there is likely to be less trust.

Collective bargaining neither inhibits nor enhances shared governance. Institutions with collective bargaining did not report significant differences with regard to the importance placed on shared governance or levels of trust between the faculty and administration.

Section V :
Strategies Improving

We have identified five strategies that those of us who work in academic organizations might consider to enhance governance:

Delineate responsibilities: Challenges associated with governance often stem from conflict about who decides what. Establishment of clear areas of responsibility can decrease confusion and provide opportunities for sustained involvement.

Articulate the meaning of shared governance: As illustrated here, campus constituents often employ multiple definitions of shared governance which create varied expectations about decision-making. Developing an institutional understanding of what shared governance means helps consolidate ideas and expectations.

Utilize multiple decision-making venues: Far too often individuals assume that for meaningful engagement to occur, all decisions must be processed through the same governance unit – such as an Academic Senate. Such a mindset creates the potential for a logjam. Instead, create systematic plans for multiple arenas of meaningful engagement.

Communicate: Colleges and universities exist in "loosely coupled" environments. A mistaken tendency is to try to tighten the loose coupling. Instead, accept that our institutions exist in decentralized organizations and that the faculty's engagement with an issue may be sporadic. A key to effective governance is to communicate consistently with the faculty. Utilize the multiple media outlets that exist and follow the schemas that have been established.

Create the conditions for trust: Trust exists as a reciprocal relationship where both parties accept the importance of one another and have bonds of mutual obligation. Trust is not a "pie in the sky" value that is impossible to articulate. Trust is accomplished over time as a group or individual sees that what was said is done.

Section VI :

Conclusion

We have undertaken two tasks. First, we have reported the results of a survey administered to 763 institutions, hoping that our data will provide information useful to individuals at their own institutions in comparing and contrasting general findings to their specific situations.

We then offered our own broad deductions and strategies that derive from the data. To be sure, how one communicates and the venues for decision-making will vary from institution to institution. The point, of course, is not that this or any survey can provide faculty and administrators with the wherewithal to develop a cookbook for academic decision-making. Academic life is protean, contradictory and time-consuming. However, all too often we have seen campuses where responsibilities are ill-defined, definitions of shared governance are varied and competitive, and groups do not communicate with, or talk past, one another. What we have outlined is not a step-by-step guide to academic governance, but a delineation of what college and university governance looks like in the early 21st century and the scaffolding that might improve it.

This report comes at a time when campuses are increasingly challenged by fiscal crises and questions of strategic mission. For those interested in the study of campus governance, this study is intended to provide more light than heat; for those interested in benchmarks and reference points, the report hopefully presents helpful data. In addition, this report offers a foundation that will enhance and support further research.

Section VII :

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About CHEPA

The Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis is an interdisciplinary research center based at the University of Southern California. Our mission is to improve urban higher education, strengthen school-university relationships, and to focus on international higher education, emphasizing Latin America and the Pacific Rim. Our projects focus exclusively on policy oriented studies pertaining to the improvement of postsecondary education. In addition to the work that has been outlined here, we are currently involved in studies pertaining to college preparation, increasing the diversity of the faculty, and a research-based project that will provide ways to improve the transfer rates of urban community college students to four-year universities. In June 2001, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne in order to enhance our capability in conducting comparative higher education research. Over the last decade, we have received funding from, among others, the Ford Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, Atlantic Philanthropies, the James Irvine Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the J. Paul Getty Trust, and the Haynes Foundation.

William G. Tierney
Director & Wilbur-Kieffer Professor of Higher Education

Linda Serra Hagedorn
Associate Director & Associate Professor
Program Chair
Community College Leadership

CHEPA Staff

Director

William G. Tierney, Ph.D.

Associate Director

Linda Serra Hagedorn, Ph.D.

Faculty

Estela M. Bensimon, Ed.D.
Professor & Director, Center for Urban Education

Guilbert C. Hentschke, Ed.D.
Professor

Michael L. Jackson, Ph.D.
Vice President for Student Affairs

William Maxwell, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

Melora Sundt, Ph.D.
Associate Dean

Postdoctoral Researchers

Susan Auerbach, Ph.D.
James T. Minor, Ph.D.
Hye Sun Moon, Ph.D.

Research Assistants

Chiu-Jung Chen, Dean Campbell,
Andrew Chlebek, Julia Colyar,
Zoë Corwin, Scott Cypers,
Vicente Lechuga, Sion Lee,
Jaime Lester, Gail Makukakane-Lundin,
Kristan Venegas

Administrative Manager

Gina Lincicum

Administrative Assistant

Diane Flores

For information, please contact:

Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (CHEPA)
Rossier School of Education, WPH 701
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0031
Tel: 213-740-7218
Fax: 213-740-3889
E-mail: chepa@usc.edu
www.usc.edu/dept/chepa

USC UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
Rossier School of Education