

This article was downloaded by: [JOHN LOMBARDI]

On: 23 January 2013, At: 09:11

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vchn20>

Leading the University: The Roles of Trustees, Presidents, and Faculty

Richard Legon ^a, John V. Lombardi ^b & Gary Rhoades ^c

^a Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB)

^b Indiana University

^c University of Arizona

To cite this article: Richard Legon, John V. Lombardi & Gary Rhoades (2013): Leading the University: The Roles of Trustees, Presidents, and Faculty, *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 45:1, 24-32

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2013.749144>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

LEADING THE UNIVERSITY

The Roles of Trustees, Presidents, and Faculty

By Richard Legon, John V. Lombardi, and Gary Rhoades

Recent leadership failures at a couple of major public universities suggest that we should revisit the question of how colleges and universities should be governed. Here, Richard Legon, John Lombardi, and Gary Rhoades present their views on the leadership roles of trustees, presidents, and faculty. They describe how those roles can be effectively played and point out some of the ways in which they can go wrong.

Given the challenges now facing higher education and the changes that sometimes threaten to overwhelm it, effective leadership is more important than ever. The authors hope that their comments will initiate a public discussion of how leaders can negotiate the difficult terrain ahead and move their institutions, and the larger enterprise, forward.

—Margaret A. Miller

THE EFFECTIVE BOARD

By Richard Legon

Over the past 30 years, I have traveled to countries in Europe, South America, the Middle East, and Asia recommending best practices in higher education governance. Most recently, I returned from a trip to Asia, where colleges, universities, and education ministries in Thailand and Japan asked me to discuss governance and institutional decision-making with them.

Governance models around the world vary by culture, history, political structure, and institutional traditions. Still, all the board members, institutional administrators, and government leaders with whom I met expressed great interest in governance as practiced in American universities and colleges. Many nations seek to emulate the American model, with citizen volunteerism as one of its key elements.

But our system, while excellent, also requires constant work and attention, and the risk of a breakdown in the delicate balances that make it up is ever present. In the past decade, we have witnessed a number of governance crises across American higher education, most recently at the University of Virginia (UVA) and at Penn State. Each

Richard Legon (rickl@agb.org) has served as the president of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) since 2006. He serves on the governing board of Spelman College and was previously a member of the board of Virginia State University and the University of Charleston (WVA).

institution's governance failures—the abrupt forced resignation of a president at UVA (ultimately rescinded) and a child-molestation scandal that consumed Penn State—are well documented. They are also broadly known: I was taken aback when, following my initial presentation in Thailand, the first question asked concerned the situation at UVA, some 7,000 miles away.

The cause of the governance problems in each of those two institutions is different. At Penn State, they seemed to result from a lack of sufficient board engagement, while UVA suffered from a board that exceeded an appropriate level of engagement by assuming its role to be both strategy and management and that demonstrated limited respect for governance processes.

These crises, along with those at other institutions, have shone a bright spotlight on boards and institutional governance. They have also raised important questions: Is America's model of independent governance as good as it needs to be? Are our boards effectively structured and suitably prepared to resolve the increasingly complex challenges confronting higher education? Is our way of governing colleges and universities in America—essentially the same model that has served us since the late 1600s—up to the demands of the 21st century?

We can ill afford further governance failures, whether due to under- or over-engagement, errors in process or judgment, or high-profile conflicts of interest. Such failures not only attract unwanted attention to specific institutions—they can decrease public trust in our entire higher education system.

NEW CHALLENGES TO THE AMERICAN MODEL

Members of our institutional governing bodies consist largely of people who, whether appointed through a political process or selected by the board itself, come primarily from outside the institution they serve. That model of oversight and accountability represents what is best in this country: Boards consisting of citizen members are a metaphor for the central democratic values of America, and our national development is integrally linked to a spirit of volunteerism.

“
Is our way of governing colleges
and universities in America—
essentially the same model that
has served us since the late
1600s—up to the demands of
the 21st century?”

But while the model has remained constant, board authority and engagement have evolved since the Colonial era. When the nation has faced landmark moments and challenges—the Civil War, the two World Wars, the space-age challenges posed by Sputnik, the Vietnam War, among others—the role and authority of governing bodies have both adjusted appropriately.

In recent years, board members have become aware that the challenges of changing times require greater oversight and engagement. They have recognized that board service is no longer merely honorific and that they have to be accountable for policies and strategies that advance their institutions' missions.

Today, colleges and universities are facing increased government and regulatory oversight, concerns among the public about the value of higher education, and doubts about the viability of their business models. In the face of shrinking institutional resources, they are also confronted with heightened demands to give growing numbers of students a high-quality education at a reasonable price. Boards, in collaboration with institutional and system leaders, are trying to meet the demands of a skeptical public to offer better academic quality while being more efficient and productive and taking an entrepreneurial approach at the institutions they oversee.

GETTING GOVERNANCE RIGHT

Governing boards aren't the sole actors in institutional governance. At its best, governance is a collaborative process that includes the input of an independent board, an administration that leads through delegated authority, and an engaged faculty—the shared-governance model that we at the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) call “integral leadership.”

This collaboration requires mutual respect between boards, senior administrators, and faculty members, as well as an awareness on the part of each of the others' roles. *The Leadership Imperative*, a 2006 report of the AGB task force on the state of the presidency in American higher education, urged those three partners to work together to set and carry out institutional priorities. Among other recommendations, it called on the board to charge the president to build a strong team of faculty and administrators and to lead them in the development and implementation of an effective strategic plan.

The best governance model is one that is collaborative and forward-looking, engaged and aware, open and transparent, inclusive and forceful. It performs like an orchestra in perfect harmony. When it is out of tune, its audiences—students, parents, corporate and policy leaders, the news media, and the public—notice quickly. Their reviews can be harsh.

A TIME FOR CHANGE

So how can we establish the most effective institutional governance practices at our higher education institutions? And what does good governance mean in today's environment?

A governing board that appropriately exercises its fiduciary authority is engaged in meeting the new challenges confronting higher education and overseeing change at the institution it oversees—whether proactively or in response to a crisis. Yet it also is careful not to intrude into management and faculty prerogatives. It operates with openness and transparency, building trust across the institution. Comfortable about its accountability, it is aware to whom and for what it bears ultimate responsibility and knows what to ask and when.

Such a board cultivates a culture of inquiry within the boardroom. It is not satisfied by reports and an agenda that are solely staff driven. It engages in meaningful deliberations on strategy and policy. It emphasizes risk assessment in making decisions and regular attention to board effectiveness.

Specifically, the most effective governing boards and board members, as well as those who select and appoint them commit to the following:

- Recruiting and appointing board members who are familiar with higher education and the institution on whose board they are being asked to serve. For public institution boards, merit prevails over politics.
- Appointing or selecting board members who are committed to their voluntary role and aware of the responsibilities of an independent board.
- Appointing members who include men and women from sufficiently diverse areas of expertise—corporate, professional, and academic. Institution and policy leaders also determine the appropriate number of board members required to meet their policy responsibilities.
- A comprehensive orientation program for new members and continuing education for all. State officials require public board members to participate in an annual education program that includes a review of the state's agenda

A governing board that appropriately exercises its fiduciary authority...is careful not to intrude into management and faculty prerogatives. It operates with openness and transparency, building trust across the institution.

Effective boards will have a lot to do with the success of higher education in the 21st century.

and the role played in it by higher education, the current challenges confronting education, and best practices in board governance.

- Giving its members a clear understanding of the principles of institutional governance—the application of board authority, the necessity of collaborating with top administrators, and a respect for the faculty's responsibility to develop, deliver, and continually improve a high-quality academic program.
- Helping board members understand that their authority rests with the full board and that individual members have limited formal authority.
- Establishing processes that facilitate candor and welcome input while discouraging individual board members who advocate solely for single issues.
- Educating members regarding the issues confronting the institution, as well as higher education more generally.
- Selecting leaders based on their skills in leading groups and building trust and consensus within them. Officers, especially the chair, are experienced board members who understand the challenges confronting the institution and who have developed good relationships with various constituents.
- Not limiting their connections with their institutions to regularly scheduled meetings. To build trust and a solid working relationship, chairs and members engage with their institutions' leaders and participate, as appropriate, in campus events.
- Maintaining their independence from external influences, including governors and state policymakers. They remember that maintaining their independence is fundamental to effective governance.
- Welcoming periodic assessments of their performance (increasingly, regional accrediting agencies are including a review of board governance as part of their institutional review). And they schedule both annual and comprehensive assessments of their institutions' chief executive officers.

As we continue to work our way through the recent recession—one that has influenced all sectors of our economy, including higher education—our country's ability to compete in the world economy will rely on a vibrant and renewed higher education system. As my colleagues in Thailand and other nations are realizing, effective boards will have a lot to do with the success of higher education in the 21st century. Refreshing and strengthening governance must be a priority for our colleges and universities.

THE CAREER PRESIDENT

By John V. Lombardi

Over the years, the title of university president (or chancellor) has usually carried with it great leadership responsibilities, high prestige, and significant expectations. And indeed, presidential leadership is vital to a university's well-being. Effective presidents guide trustees in translating their often fragmentary information into sound policy; develop budgets driven by performance data; and make hard decisions based on good information and deliberative consultation, thereby winning the trust of their institutions' faculty, administrative staff, and students.

So the arrival of new university chief executive always generates enthusiastic statements by trustees, faculty, students, and alumni about the superb qualifications of the candidates selected and the institution's exceptional good fortune in luring them. Sometimes these comments are borne out by the president's subsequent actions. There are many college and university presidents in this country whose successful leadership contributes to the ongoing prosperity not just of their institutions but of our system of higher education.

But all too often, these highly optimistic beginnings are part of a cycle of selection, arrival, launch, activity, eventual disillusionment, and departure that repeats on a five- to ten-year cycle. Especially in public universities, suffering as they do from the vagaries of state politics and periodic budget declines, the cyclical nature of the presidential job tends to encourage behaviors that may protect the individual from harm but often do not advance the institutional agenda.

Presidents know that the rhetoric of support and enthusiasm from various constituencies does not necessarily reflect long-term commitment, especially if controversial or difficult measures are required. They also know that every

decision from the first to the last day will create opposition of some kind in some quarter. They are aware that over a relatively short period, those who are unhappy about one thing or another may well outnumber those who are pleased. And presidents recognize that the support of faculty, students, administrative colleagues, alumni, and trustees depends not only on what happens inside the university but also on what external actors—in public universities, primarily politicians—want from the university.

So given the fragility of the constituencies that support them, many university leaders operate on a career- rather than an institution-optimizing plan. If presidencies last from five to ten years (and ten is long for public universities), the career president needs to begin preparing a strategy for acquiring the next presidency immediately on taking the current one. Not all do this, but it is clearly a strategy that many adopt.

The next presidency will come if the current one produces a highly visible public record of initiatives proposed, organizations revitalized, planning activities initiated, friends cultivated, faculty engaged, and networks expanded and maintained. A popular but by no means the only vehicle for this record has been the strategic plan, a process that engages faculty, students, trustees, alumni, donors, and other stakeholders in a review of the institution's accomplishments and needs. It results in a careful and elegantly presented design for the university of the future, with a plan for reaching this future that involves the development of new programs and the enhancement of existing ones.

The process takes a long time, usually at least a year and a half, and engages every constituency in designing a future that the current president appears ready to implement. Everyone wants to participate to ensure that their interests are protected and advanced in the plan. Much enthusiastic discussion ensues, compromises are reached, people recognize that this president has a consultative and inclusive management style, and optimism remains high.

While this process takes place, the president speaks to many groups about the goals and objectives of the university—but always with reference to the importance of the strategic plan in guiding it to greater success. The president launches some modest initiatives, testifies before legislative

Especially in public universities...

the cyclical nature of the presidential job tends to encourage behaviors that may protect the individual from harm but often do not advance the institutional agenda.

John V. Lombardi (lombardi@jvlone.com) is a professor of history. At Indiana University, he directed the Latin American Studies Program, then served as dean of international programs and of the College of Arts and Sciences. He was provost of Johns Hopkins (1987 to 1990), president of the University of Florida (1990-1999), chancellor of UMass Amherst (2002-2007), and president of the Louisiana State University System (2007-2012).

committees about the importance of higher education and the university, speaks to civic and alumni groups, works on fundraising, and generally projects energy and motion.

If asked about significant actions, the president will indicate some impatience with the slow pace of the process but nonetheless express confidence that the strategic plan will soon be completed and great changes will follow. By the time the plan is done, the president is seen as an energetic promoter of the university's future, a clear voice for innovation, and an effective spokesperson for the institution.

If the budget is good, the president authorizes new projects and breaks ground for new buildings. If it is bad, the president persuasively articulates the challenges presented by the lack of funds, decries lost opportunities, appoints a number of faculty/student/administration task forces to consider necessary measures, and has the staff find ways to cope with the ensuing recommendations without requiring catastrophic realignments and reorganizations.

By year four, this process will have created a sense of real movement without the actual necessity of making it: The strategic plan will have been considered and approved by the trustees, implementation task forces will have been formed, and discussions of how the plan's goals can be achieved will have begun. However, unless there is significant new money, most of the plan will prove illusory, because the university will not eliminate existing programs to fund the new initiatives, and the task force reports will all call for more investment.

In the fourth year, the president will have quietly contacted various search firms indicating availability for another opportunity. The cycle of presidential turnover is rapid, and new opportunities at as-good or better institutions will almost certainly arise.

With the strong public reputation built over the past four years, mostly composed of public relations and the appearance of forward motion plus consistent network building, the president will become a secret candidate for another position. If offered it, the president will either negotiate with the existing institution for a raise and a new five-year contract or take the new job (with declarations of great reluctance in departing the current university).

In the subsequent public discussion, the now-departing president will express surprise at having been sought out by the new institution and insist that the thought of leaving the current position, given the wonderful future the strategic plan and task force reports promise, would never have occurred absent this totally unsolicited opportunity. Often, the trustees and other constituencies will have determined that the good news from the president's office was mostly news and not action, and they too will publicly exhibit great disappointment at the departure and wish the exiting leader the very best. Then they will look for someone else who might move the university along, and the cycle is likely to repeat.

Although this is perhaps an overly cynical portrayal of the public university presidential cycle, it is not as far from the truth as we would wish.

Among the many things that create this set of circumstances is the difficulty of effecting a real cycle of change at any major public university. Everyone involved higher education—from governors to legislators, from trustees to alumni, from faculty to students—wants to participate in activities that promise major changes at their university. They hope for better students, more classes, higher graduation rates, more research dollars, the expansion and renovation of more facilities, and (of course) winning sports teams.

At the same time, none of these constituencies wants to see reductions in any activity that falls within their field of interest. All can propose the elimination of someone else's program, but few can contemplate the reduction of their own. Instead, they want things done now that will make their own activities more successful, more preeminent, and more significant.

In a less conflict-driven time, perhaps, the president could lead the university into significant change over some reasonable period of time. Today, the impatience of many constituencies, driven in part by election cycles and by all-too-frequent state term limits and difficult financial circumstances, have greatly reduced the time change is expected to take.

Trustees, appointed by highly partisan political processes in many states, know their charge is to produce good news from their universities to enhance the reputation of their governors and to meet the current regime's various ideological or policy objectives. Governors and legislators want something to show within three years (at most) to fuel their next election, and they often look to public universities to deliver at least the appearance of significant change to fulfill the political requirement for visible progress. Trustees who might have been willing to listen to the expert they or their predecessors hired as president often find the political imperative unavoidable and push ahead, even when advised that the proposals for dramatic institutional transformation are neither wise nor likely to be effective.

Complicating this scenario, the drive of legislators and governors, transmitted through trustees, is rarely in sync with the aspirations and goals of faculty, department chairs, or deans. And if the economic climate is poor, with declining revenue and rising tuition and fees, fiscal discontent will further complicate the conversation.

These circumstances can easily produce management characterized by constant conflict and political posturing by all parties. Presidents try to stay on the good side of their trustees but at the same time moderate the less desirable initiatives of the political sector to protect the work of the

This process will have created a sense of real movement without the actual necessity of making it.

**Governors may come and go,
trustee terms start and end,
presidents appear and disappear,
but the faculty are there forever.**

faculty. The faculty and deans, recognizing that the environment is primarily political, work to create their own constituencies among the trustees, legislators, and alumni. The result is almost always operation by influence rather than management by systematic data on performance linked to a clear set of budget incentives.

If the president can maintain control of the university's bureaucracy with the help of strong provosts and other senior administrators, it is possible to create a data-driven universe linked to the university's budget that can help protect it from quick-hit proposals from trustees or legislators. But good data and confidence in them are difficult to create instantly. Additionally, when boards of trustees turn over frequently, and especially when there is no commitment to the politically neutral management of universities, data-driven decision processes often collapse in the face of political expediency.

Throughout all of this, the stability of the university nonetheless continues, sustained primarily by the faculty and students. These people may well be as self interested as everyone else, but that self interest is in the existence of stable academic structures that support their ambitions (whether personal or professional). Students do not want their degree programs disrupted or their progress through the university unhinged by radical readjustments. Faculty do not want their programs eliminated, their work rules and arrangements changed, or their guild-like academic values undermined.

Governors may come and go, trustee terms start and end, presidents appear and disappear, but the faculty are there forever. Their strength comes not from activism, although it is sometimes useful in crises, but from their continued, permanent, ongoing engagement in the work of the university.

Trustees who understand the fundamental operation of the university, who have good data on its operations and budget, and who know the kinds of change that are possible are rare. Absent this deep understanding, trustees will follow the morning news, react to the latest complaint from an important donor or legislator, or attempt to follow the lead of temporarily powerful politicians. The result will not be good for the university: It will reinforce a cynical approach to university leadership, and it will lose the benefit of systematic performance data linked to a budget that drives university improvement.

In fact, trustees rarely know much about the internal operation of major universities, although they may know a lot about business and some university functions. They

often believe that accounting data offer the clearest perspective on university affairs, when the critical issues actually involve the budget's linkage to investments in academic programs and performance improvement. The education that would normally be part of discussions between trustees and administrators, as well as between trustees and faculty and students, generally fails to happen in the face of time constraints and public meetings and records laws.

Most trustees are unpaid volunteers who find it challenging to provide the time for official meetings. Few care to engage in dialogues with each other or with other university constituencies in open meetings, for when they read the headlines the next day they find themselves represented in ways they had not intended.

Consequently, they often operate on inadequate information, sometimes mediated by gossip, backroom conversations, influential associates, or high-level opinion pieces in national publications. Translating these sources of information into effective policy for the university is difficult without expert guidance and especially without the advantage of data-driven budgets linked to performance criteria for their institution.

Meanwhile, university presidents are often so absorbed with the political and public aspects of their jobs that they find it difficult to support a data-driven performance system for managing the university and for responding to initiatives and ideas from outside. But hard decisions are always made easier and bad decisions more easily avoided by the availability of good, relevant data on performance.

When trustees think they are chief executives and can engage in management, they may hire ineffective presidents in search of the next job. Trustees who do not support the authority of their presidents and who do not engage them in discussions about what can, should, and should not be done will have dysfunctional and ineffective universities. Presidents who do not provide good performance data linked to the institutional budget to their trustees, are unwilling to engage them on important issues, and only tell them what they want to hear should not be surprised that they accomplish little in their short terms.

**Good data and confidence in
them are difficult to create
instantly. Additionally...data-
driven decision processes often
collapse in the face of political
expediency.**

SHARED GOVERNANCE FOR ENDURING CHANGE

By Gary Rhoades

“One iron law of faculty meetings is that those who have the least to say talk the most. Enough was enough: toleration of discussions that lead nowhere has its limits” (Clark, 2000a, p.32). So wrote Bob Clark, a leading scholar on faculty and governance, upon retirement.

Notwithstanding his impatience with faculty meetings, at the core of Clark’s scholarship was his belief in the centrality of faculty’s role in the governance of higher education, whether in liberal arts colleges (Clark, 1970) or in “entrepreneurial universities” (Clark, 1998). Even the latter, he wrote in *Change* (2000b), need “collegial” rather than “managerial” entrepreneurialism, by which he meant the faculty’s central involvement in a process guided by academic values.

From a scholarly and faculty perspective, there is an enduring need for collegial checks and balances in university governance. Three characteristics of professors make it imperative that they be involved, collectively, in organizational decision-making: They have 1) reference groups beyond the employing organization; 2) a respect for skepticism, data, and open debate; and 3) a central role in effecting enduring change, as the academy’s main production workers.

Two recent cases of failed governance at the University of Virginia (UVA) and Penn State make it clear that for all the inefficiencies of collegial deliberation and decision-making, our biggest governance challenge is to foster inclusive and deliberative governance.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

The UVA and Penn State cases reflect two dysfunctional patterns related to image and isolation in governing bodies. They also represent the extremes of board (in)action. The UVA board leaders’ precipitate action represents the growth of feckless and reckless impatience by boards that expect dramatic action and immediate results. That pattern serves the public interest and the organization no better than a reluctance to act, as represented by the Penn State board.

The rush and the trend toward dramatic action by boards are heightened by state politics that define compromise

as weakness and that have become polarized to an extent not seen since the 1960s. They also reflect the post-2008, Tea-Party-era tendency in state politics (and on boards) of demonizing professors, presidents, and indeed the academic enterprise as being a central part of states’ problems (fiscal, cultural, and political), not as central parts of the solution.

THE DISTORTING EFFECT OF SHORT-TERM IMAGE

For the UVA and Penn State boards, an overriding corporate-like concern with the university’s image—in the short-term, public-relations sense—played a role in what they did and did not do. That concern could be seen as a deep-seated loyalty that clouded their judgment.

The board leaders at UVA were too focused on trying to keep up with more prestigious institutions and too little aware of the value of imagining a distinctive place for UVA. An unrealistic, perhaps parochial, understanding of UVA’s national standing led them to take drastic action based on a concern that UVA was falling behind Harvard and Stanford. But the university’s official peers do not include those universities, and while it may be tempting to try to imitate universities that dwarf UVA in research expenditures and endowment, such a move fails to live up to the special place, contribution, and creativity of Jefferson’s great experiment.

A concern for image was also evident at Penn State, where the board appears to have been too little focused on asking questions that might undercut the university’s reputation in the short term, thereby harming it, ironically, in the longer term. There, the problem was an unquestioning commitment to organizational and personal loyalty. In both cases, a fixation on short-term image took priority over imagination and integrity.

THE FAILURE TO ENGAGE THE CAMPUS

Neither the UVA nor the Penn State boards meaningfully engaged their campuses’ administrative leadership or faculty. The failure in the one case seemed to have been rooted in blind ambition, in the other in blind faith. What both reveal is that neither too much hubris nor too much deference serves an institution well.

“The UVA and Penn State cases... represent the extremes of board (in)action.”

Gary Rhoades (grhoades@email.arizona.edu) is a professor in and the director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona. From 2009 to 2011, he served as general secretary of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). His research focuses on the restructuring of academic institutions and professions.

“If a board is to play a constructive, strategic role in charting and supporting a university’s future directions, a deep knowledge of the enterprise is essential.”

To effectively map and monitor a strategic direction for a university, a board must respect, learn from, and engage the academic administration and the faculty. It is evident from their comments and actions that the UVA rector and some board members had little understanding of UVA’s distinctive areas of comparative advantage (e.g., its strength in the humanities) or of innovative initiatives that were in process.

If a board is to play a constructive, strategic role in charting and supporting a university’s future directions, a deep knowledge of the enterprise is essential. That involves thoughtful and open exploration of ideas with those who do the work of the university.

Public research universities are complex collections of talents and possibilities. Neither boards nor central administrators are Leonard Bernsteins who can get all members of the production, actors and musicians alike, to follow a single score. Universities are better conceived as configurations of jazz musicians engaged in improvisation. In this context, mindless imitation of quite different universities promises little benefit—as does mindless acceptance of an administration’s assurances that all is well.

Meaningful engagement and fulfilling their fiduciary responsibilities requires that board members listen to the professionals within the institution and, out of a dialogue with academic administrators and faculty, facilitate an emergent course of action. It also involves asking appropriately probing questions and carefully reviewing written reports but not stepping over the line into micromanagement

SPEED KILLS

It is one thing to make dramatic pronouncements about pursuing fundamentally different ways of “doing business.” It is quite another to institutionalize changes that endure beyond the tenure of a particular president or rector.

The role once played by most boards is exemplified by the Penn State board—a booster group that raises support, that loyally and vigorously promotes the institution, but that does not actively consider its work to be safeguarding a broader public interest. That booster role entails a corporate-style deference to the CEO and a corporate-like view that what is good for the university is good for the state. The degree to which that kind of deference and blind defense of the institution can go wrong was made clear in the Penn State case.

More common now, particularly recently, is the role of an unreasonably impatient boss—exemplified by the UVA board leaders, who seemed to have assumed that the university must and can be recreated and its problems solved in short order.

Yet the evidence in higher education is that top-down change generally doesn’t stick. Too many innovations are only superficially adopted and fail to touch the institution’s actual work before the next boss arrives (Birnbaum, 2000). What’s hard is not so much to dictate change but rather to inscribe lasting change in the university’s work.

And those responsible for institutionalizing meaningful, enduring change in universities are the faculty. Sadly, in the current political environment, consultation, incrementalism, and compromise have become dirty words for which presidents, professors, and politicians are put on the defensive and occasionally fired.

CAN SHARED GOVERNANCE EFFECT MEANINGFUL CHANGE?

The concept of shared governance, as advanced in the 1960s by the American Association of University Professors (and by the American Council on Education and the Association of Governing Boards) has taken a hammering. The last three decades have seen calls for change in what are said to be anachronistic governance structures. The last three years have witnessed heightened efforts to adapt governance to the rapidly changing fiscal, political, and technological environments. Such calls are premised on the belief that current governance structures are cumbersome, foster inertia, and fail to overcome the resistance to change.

I am somewhat sympathetic to critiques of shared governance, with three caveats. First, most colleges and universities lack or have experienced a decline in genuine shared governance, either formally or in practice. Second, most faculty do not have the opportunity to be involved, because over two-thirds of the academic workforce is off the tenure track. And third, I would say of shared governance what

“What’s hard is not so much to dictate change but rather to inscribe lasting change in the university’s work. And those responsible for institutionalizing meaningful, enduring change in universities are the faculty.”

“What is...worrisome...is the relative absence of meaningful, open deliberation and debate on college campuses about key strategic questions.

Churchill said of democracy: “It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.”

Certainly, faculty meetings can be exasperating. Certainly pointless pontification or wordsmithing of minor sentences while major challenges are overlooked can be infuriating. What is far more worrisome, though, is the relative absence of meaningful, open deliberation and debate on college campuses about key strategic questions.

What is also deeply troubling is what I heard about as I traveled around the country during my two and a half years as General Secretary of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP): the declining presence of an independent faculty voice to weigh in on key issues, the increased fear of exercising that voice, and the heightened willingness of administrators and boards to claim that using that voice to comment on institutional policy is not an aspect of academic freedom.

Why do these trends concern me? Because good governance does not stem from conformist, team-playing, “organization people” who are unwilling to debate, offer different ideas, or dissent. Good governance requires what the professoriate brings to the table collectively—as unionized bargaining units, faculty senates, or other outspoken groups.

Professors have a commitment to the public good that reaches beyond the employing organization, leading them to be more willing than most to be whistle blowers. They ask

“The professoriate is part of the system of collegial checks and balances that is so essential to good university governance.

challenging questions, provide inconvenient facts, and offer uncomfortable analyses of institutional and comparative data. And they are the workers who determine the extent to which formally proposed changes can and will be institutionalized in practice. The professoriate is part of the system of collegial checks and balances that is so essential to good university governance.

In closing, let me invoke Bob Clark’s words, as I did in opening. In responding in *Change* magazine to a critique of his concept for promoting commercialization in higher education, he wrote,

My case studies [of entrepreneurial universities] turned out to be good examples of a basic point: when faculty and administrators get their heads together in responding creatively to uncertainty in an era of extremely rapid societal change, good old-fashioned collegiality can serve both constructive change and stabilize continuity. (Clark, 2000c, p.6)

Governing for effective, enduring change requires that faculty share in the institution’s leadership. If, by contrast, corporate-style thinking and a politicized rush to push dramatic change win the day, what is lost is not just collegiality but smart governance. What will result for both universities and businesses, as often as not, are self-inflicted wounds and sometimes disastrous fallout. ☐

RESOURCES

- Birnbaum, R. (2000). *Management fads in higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Clark, B. R. (1970). *The distinctive college: Antioch, Reed, and Swarthmore*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Press.
- Clark, B. R. (1998). *Creating entrepreneurial universities*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.
- Clark, B. R. (2000a). Developing a career in the study of higher education. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 15). New York, NY: Agathon Press.
- Clark, B. R. (2000b). Collegial entrepreneurialism in proactive universities: Lessons from Europe. *Change*, 32(1), 10–19.
- Clark, B. R. (2000c). Burton Clark replies. *Change*, 32(3), 6.