

# ***A GIANT LEAP TOWARDS AGILE, INCLUSIVE, AND TRANSPARENT SHARED GOVERNANCE AT PURDUE UNIVERSITY***

## **PROPOSAL**

We have learned from the COVID pandemic that our shared governance structures must continue to evolve. Working closely with leaders from the faculty, staff, and students, we propose a re-examination of the state of shared governance at Purdue University. Jointly, we will explore best practices in shared governance and develop recommendations to innovate Purdue's shared governance structures by identifying ways to enhance the collective voices of our constituencies and further effective collaborations across Purdue campuses.

## **RELEVANT SENATE HISTORY**

The University Senate was established by adoption of Executive Council Document 63-3 (Final Revision, February 17, 1964) via a mail ballot of the University faculty, and approval in principle by the Board of Trustees of Purdue University. Sections A and D of the University Code, Part II, show the delegation of powers to the faculties and the designation of the University Senate as the legislative body of the faculty at the West Lafayette and regional campuses. According to Executive Council Document 63-3, "Subject to the authority of the Board of Trustees and in consultation with the President, the Faculty shall have the general power and responsibility to adopt policies, regulations, and procedures intended to achieve the educational objectives of Purdue University and the general welfare of those involved in these educational processes."

## **RATIONALE**

Shared governance is the process by which various constituents (governing boards, senior administration, faculty, and, as proposed here, staff and students) contribute to decision-making related to policy, procedure, and practice. Strong shared governance improves the quality of leadership across all constituencies and enhances the institution's progress toward achieving its vision and strategic goals. Shared purpose and collective ownership for the present and future success of the institution contributes to a stronger sense of accountability and the creation of a more agile and effective decision-making process.

Effective shared governance is characterized by five aspects: trust, shared sense of purpose, clear understanding of the issues at hand, adaptability, and productivity.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, ratings of Purdue's system of shared governance via the COACHE survey placed Purdue in the bottom 30% of our cohort (i.e., 109 institutions) and below all 5 of our peer institutions. Faculty reported that they wanted to be successful; work in an inclusive, collegial, and supportive environment; and have their voices and opinions be heard and matter. Improving shared governance at Purdue would mean addressing these five aspects via a multi-step process involving 1) examining the diverse constituencies across campus; 2) building consensus for what Purdue's vision of shared governance should be; 3) modeling transparency and respect for these diverse perspectives by communicating openly; and 4) building capacity and investing in active engagement.<sup>2</sup>

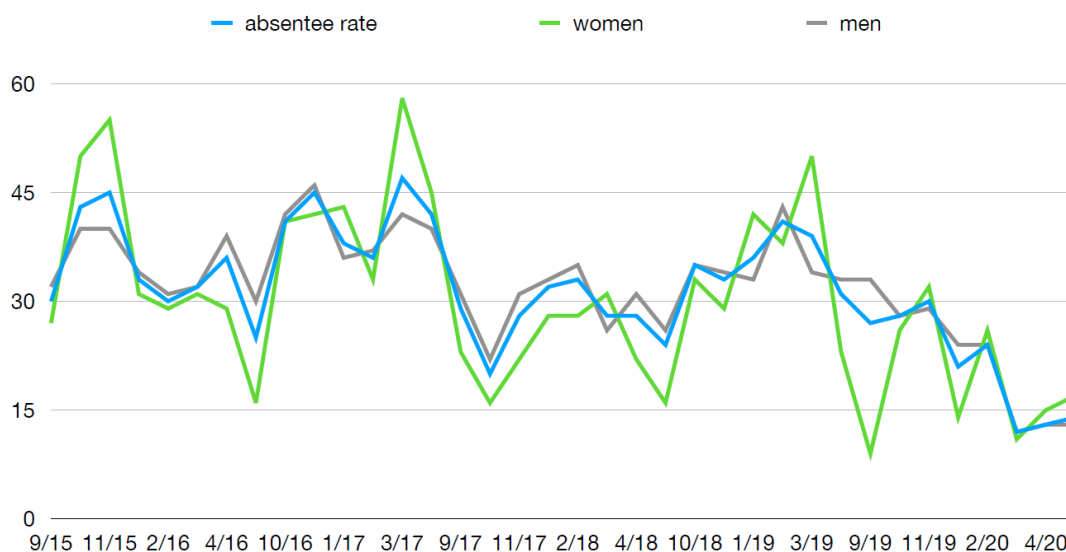
According to a majority of COACHE-surveyed faculty, the Senate, formed in 1964, is cumbersome, ineffective, lacks transparency, and fails to represent the needs and voice of the faculty. It has lost credibility and relevance due to a number of deeply entrenched problems including indifference, factionalism, absenteeism, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ott, M. W. & Mathews, K. R. (2015). *Effective academic governance: Five ingredients for CAOs and faculty*. Cambridge, MA: The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education.

<sup>2</sup> Ott & Mathews (2015)

endorsement of harassment and bullying. Figure 1 highlights such absenteeism, although, notably, during the pandemic, attendance has improved, likely due to the pivot to electronic meetings. Absenteeism rates between 2015 and 2020 averaged 31% with women (30.0%) less likely to be absent when compared with men (32%). Chair leadership style also appears linked to absentee rates. Specifically, rates for chairs engaging in more adversarial interactions with colleagues and administration averaged 34%, compared with 27% for chairs who engaged in more consensus-building interactions. Effective organizations are characterized by fairness and good faith, where underlying “motives outweigh objections of form” or process.<sup>3</sup> As outlined by the *American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* (AIP), the Senate’s governing parliamentary code, “the effectiveness and, in fact, often the existence of an organization are destroyed if its officers or members condone unfairness or lack of good faith” (p. 10).<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 1. Absentee Rate (%) Overall and by Gender**

Beyond the Senate’s general ineffectiveness, the climate within the Senate is toxic and antagonistic, contributing to a marked lack of trust and commitment to the ideals embodied by a Senate whose purpose is to serve the best interests of the university community. Optimally, the Senate as a whole should be willing to focus on results, be flexible and adaptable to changing environments, and cultivate a shared sense of purpose that is inclusive of diverse perspectives. While Senators hold differing perspectives, a number of Senators have expressed in private that the cost of speaking out is far greater than they are willing to pay for an organization that they see as ineffective and irrelevant. When Senate business is disrupted due to irreconcilable differences between the senate body and administration, the inability to comprise ultimately maintains the us versus them divide and serves to further weaken an already relatively ineffectual body. This intransigence, combined with repeated instances of verbal intimidation and unwarranted attacks on members of the Senate body, have poisoned the atmosphere of the Senate; interrupted, impeded, and derailed the work of the Senate; and engendered a state of perpetual discord and polarization. Such behavior invalidates the contributions of Senators who have committed much time and effort to furthering the collective and mutually interdependent goals of the entire Purdue community. This level of dysfunction has irreparably harmed the collective ability of the Senate to engage in shared governance in ways that are collaborative, communicative, and consensus-

<sup>3</sup> Hatsell, 1776 as referenced in the American Institute of Parliamentarians Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure

<sup>4</sup> AIP Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure (2012)

focused. Like a virus, the pervasive conflicts invade every aspect of the Senate, weaken its ability to function, and serve to codify behavior in direct violation of parliamentary law. Recall that research indicates that effective shared governance arises from trust, shared sense of purpose, clear understanding of the issues at hand, adaptability, and productivity. Across each of these metrics, the University Senate is failing.

There is also a lack of equitable representation by all members of Purdue's campus community. Currently, 92 of the 102 voting members are faculty (and 23% of those faculty are women) while just one voting member is an undergraduate student and another voting member is a graduate student. Staff who lead the two staff organizations (i.e., CSSAC and MaPSAC) are appointed as advisors to the Senate and, therefore, have no voting privileges. One consequence of the pandemic was an opportunity to engage in a different kind of shared governance. In June 2020, with leaders from CSSAC, MaPSAC, PSG, and PGSG, in conjunction with the Provost's office, we formed the Protect Purdue Leadership group. This leadership group met weekly through February 2021 and now meet about every other week to discuss questions and share concerns raised by each of their constituencies. This group became an integral part of the pandemic response and was invaluable to better understanding everyone's concerns across the campus community, underscoring that *all* voices on campus should be represented, able, and encouraged to participate in discussions about procedures, policies, and practices that affect them. And, equally important, for other constituents to understand and respect the challenges that fellow colleagues face in the various roles and responsibilities they assume as Boilermakers. A university senate heavily dominated by faculty neglects the unique needs facing other groups on campus.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

As Purdue University moves forward into a world that looks much different from just a year ago, the importance of effective and sustained shared governance must become a central driver of institutional change and success rather than an impediment to innovation. Purdue is known for its commitment to "growth, discovery, and innovation."<sup>5</sup> This proposal is an opportunity to make a giant leap forward for shared governance by making it agile, nimble, and better positioned to build capacity and collaboration through active and meaningful engagement with multiple campus constituencies (i.e., faculty, administrators, staff, students, and the Board of Trustees). The pandemic has exposed the need for shared governance bodies to act quickly and efficiently. Making good decisions in times of high risk and uncertainty involves critically evaluating problems, identifying and evaluating appropriate solutions, and explaining choices made in a time-sensitive manner. Empowering leaders across campus and constituencies will streamline decision-making processes especially when situations call for quick and decisive action. The Senate's current organizational structure is too inflexible, too insular, and too unwieldy to allow for such action (e.g., academic calendars for Fall 2020/Spring 2021; teaching evaluation reform).

## **WHY IS TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE THE APPROPRIATE CHOICE?**

When thinking about Senate organizational change, there are two pathways: implement changes that work within existing structures to do more or less of something in the hopes of achieving balance, or implement transformational change that enacts new thinking and ways of doing.

The first kind of change is incremental, with a focus on minor improvements and adjustments, but without any fundamental shift in the core of the organization. Multiple attempts at incremental change within the Senate have been attempted: changes to bylaws, changes to onboarding, changes to improve organization and communication, changes to improve relationships with administration, and changes to work collaboratively with

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<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from: <https://takegiantleaps.com/about/>

administration. As outlined above, even when new or incremental procedures are proposed and agreed to, they often are not followed. In fact, an investigatory committee was formed to investigate allegations of election irregularities (i.e., Election Procedures Inquiry Commission, EPIC), finding that:

*“[T]he members of this Commission believe that these irregularities both result from and could contribute to a culture within the University Senate that is characterized by poor attendance, and a lack of individual incentive to serve on Standing Committees of the Senate where most of the work of the Senate is accomplished. To address these threats to the viability of the Senate as a partner in the governance of the University, we provide recommendations for a process to assure that elected members of the Senate become informed of the rules of the Senate before participating in votes taken in the Senate[.]”<sup>6</sup>*

Collectively, the failures of incremental change further highlight the ineffectual nature of the Senate. It should be noted that, in most situations, these failures were not the result of malicious intent; rather, they resulted from leniency in application of the Bylaws that was driven by the general lack of commitment to meaningful civic participation in Senate work. Simply put, filling out committee rosters with any attempts at attention to equity and representation has become an enormous, thankless, and Sisyphean task. When faculty members do agree in good faith to serve as Senators or on committees and then find themselves attacked for having unknowingly violated seldom-enforced technicalities, the result is discouragement and a further decline in morale. Doing more of the same, and perhaps making adjustments along the way, will do little to ensure the Senate is a full participant in true shared governance.

Transformational change, as proposed here, is needed. Its goal would be to reconstitute the Senate into an entity that thinks and acts in a fundamentally different way. Transformational change is necessary when the problems are intractable, when the fixes implemented do not endure, and when there are multiple contributing causes to fundamental problems. ***This proposal is premised on the belief that an effective and productive shared governance structure is only possible when the structural changes implemented create a culture that is significantly and fundamentally different from the status quo.***

To undo years of indifference, inequitable representation, and dysfunction, collaborative leadership among faculty, administration, staff, students, and the Board of Trustees is essential. A collaborative working culture is nurtured through shared governance that ensures inclusion and empowerment of all stakeholders, is efficient and respectful of everyone’s time, is more responsive than the current iteration in addressing both immediate and long-term concerns, and substantially more capable of accommodating, facilitating, and actively pursuing change. Transformational change will make Purdue a leader in this area and, more importantly, make being at Purdue desirable and more equitable for everyone.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SHARED GOVERNANCE**

Effective shared governance requires open communication, shared responsibility, and creating a culture of engagement.<sup>7</sup> Key strategic decisions benefit from input across the range of constituencies at Purdue: administration, faculty, staff, students, and Trustees. Taking time to increase the strength of professional and personal ties to Purdue through shared governance will help to sustain Purdue’s future success and fiscal health.

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<sup>6</sup> Election Procedures Inquiry Commission Report (April 13, 2020), p. 1

<sup>7</sup> Shared Governance at Vanderbilt University (May 2018) Retrieved from: <https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-wp0/wp-content/uploads/sites/305/2019/08/06202610/Shared-Governance-Final-Report.pdf>; Kezar, A. J., & Holcombe, E. M. (2017). *Shared leadership in higher education: Important lessons from research and practice*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Shared governance is challenging and complex; however, if each group of constituents commits to the value and practice of shared governance, we can build mutual trust, especially in challenging times; provide support for innovation; and broaden and deepen commitment to Purdue, creating a culture that welcomes and encourages stakeholder input.

1. **Effective shared governance is characterized by open and constructive communication.**<sup>8</sup> The multi-directional flow of meaningful and transparent information across all constituents is critical for improved decision-making. When making decisions, having access to relevant, credible, verifiable, and objective information is essential. A lack of communication leads to mistrust and reduced or non-existent commitment to the goals of the institution, whereas transparent and comprehensive communication can improve efficiency, and reduce redundancy. Communication should involve both top-down processes and bottom-up processes.
2. **For shared governance to work, it must be based on a culture of engagement.**<sup>9</sup> Creating a culture of meaningful engagement among all constituents includes providing multiple and varied opportunities for constituent participation when these constituents are interested in doing so. This participation helps them become as informed as possible about the operations, challenges, and strategic priorities of Purdue. Administration must also be willing to share honestly and fully all pieces of information other than those that are necessarily confidential with interested and participating constituents. Fostering this kind of culture will require strong commitments of time and attention from the Board of Trustees, administration, and faculty and staff leadership.
3. **Institutional policies that define shared governance should be reviewed periodically to ensure their currency and applicability.**<sup>10</sup> Determining the effectiveness of shared governance norms and structures requires periodic review with all key constituencies. These reviews will ensure that shared governance is effective and consistent and will codify decision-making responsibilities. Regular and proactive review of shared governance helps to make it an “institutional habit” rather than a reactive response in times of crisis.<sup>11</sup> Further, regular review lends legitimacy to shared governance and signals to faculty, staff, and students that paying attention and becoming involved is worth their time.
4. **Meaningfully incentivize shared governance participation.**<sup>12</sup> Provide university resources (e.g., course release, meaningful inclusion in faculty tenure and promotion criteria and evaluation, stipend, support for professional development opportunities) to those who actively participate in shared governance to ensure that community members are rewarded for well-performed service. Such an incentive program recognizes, values, and normalizes service to the university rather than treating it as a necessary evil to be endured. In fact, evidence suggests that shared governance is most effective when it is comprised of the best faculty, staff, and students at an institution. These are people who opt into these positions rather than the myriad of other activities they could be doing (e.g., for faculty: writing grants, publishing, attracting students; for staff: professional development activities; for students: studying, extracurricular

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<sup>8</sup> Shared Governance at Vanderbilt University (May 2018) Retrieved from: <https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-wp0/wp-content/uploads/sites/305/2019/08/06202610/Shared-Governance-Final-Report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> AGB Board of Directors’ Statement on Shared Governance (2017). Retrieved from: [https://agb.org/sites/default/files/u27335/2017\\_statement\\_sharedgovernance.pdf](https://agb.org/sites/default/files/u27335/2017_statement_sharedgovernance.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Shared Governance at Vanderbilt University (May 2018) Retrieved from: <https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-wp0/wp-content/uploads/sites/305/2019/08/06202610/Shared-Governance-Final-Report.pdf>; Norman, B. (2019) Faculty leadership and institutional resilience: Indicators, Promising Practices, and Key Questions, *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*. 51, 48-54. DOI: 10.1080/00091383.2019.1618145

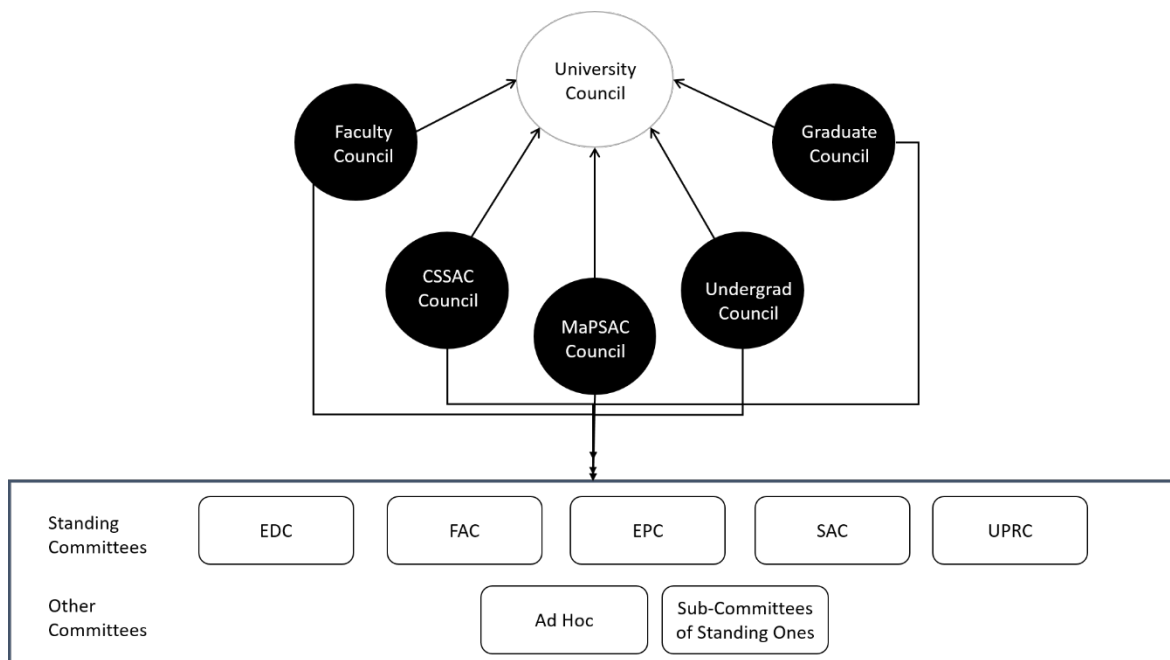
<sup>11</sup> Bahles, 2014; Norman, B. (2019) Faculty leadership and institutional resilience: Indicators, Promising Practices, and Key Questions, *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*. 51, 48-54. DOI: 10.1080/00091383.2019.1618145

<sup>12</sup> Election Procedures Inquiry Commission Report (April 13, 2020)

participation). A healthy shared governance structure is one where these faculty, staff, and students are committed to the success and future of the institution.<sup>13</sup>

**PROPOSED MODEL FOR STRUCTURAL REFORM**

**University Council → Constituent-Specific Councils → Standing and Issues-Based (ad hoc) Committees:** A University Council would include leaders of the CSSAC, MaPSAC, PSG, and PGSG groups as well as members from faculty, administration, and potentially others. It is envisioned that this council would be smaller than the existing university Senate, which currently has 102 voting members and additional advisors. Constituent-specific council leaders would represent their councils on the University Council. Councils would include tenured/tenure-track faculty, both existing staff groups, undergraduates, and graduate students. Additional councils comprised of non-tenure track faculty, alumni, and other groups could be formed to increase campus-wide representation. See Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Proposed Model**

**EXAMPLE:** New York University uses a University Senate structure comprised of representatives from 5 constituent-specific councils (tenured/tenure-track faculty council, full-time continuing contract faculty council, student senators council, administrative management council) and 5 senior members of the administration. Each of the 5 councils meets separately to review and consider constituent-specific issues and then brings these forward to the University Senate. More information can be found here: <https://www.nyu.edu/about/leadership-university-administration/university-senate.html>

<sup>13</sup> Norman, B. (2019) Faculty leadership and institutional resilience: Indicators, Promising Practices, and Key Questions, Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning. 51, 48-54. DOI: 10.1080/00091383.2019.1618145

**EXAMPLE:** At the University of Pennsylvania, the primary shared governance structure is the University Council, which has members from all constituencies on it. This council “exists to consider the activities of the University in all of its phases, with particular attention to the educational objectives of the University and those matters that affect the common interests of faculty, staff and students.” There is also a separate independent faculty senate that is designed to serve the needs of full-time teaching faculty, referred to as the Senate Executive Committee. It serves 3 functions: consult with upper administration; review/approve changes in formal policy that fall under senate responsibility; and initiate consideration and exploration of issues that are of concern to the SEC. In the latter capacity, these issues are then expressed to upper administration. The tri-chairs sit on the University Council. More information can be found here: <https://secretary.upenn.edu/univ-council> (University Council) and here: <https://provost.upenn.edu/facultysenate> (Faculty Senate).

**EXAMPLE:** Brown University is frequently listed as an institution with an exemplary shared governance structure. In their mission statement from their founding, they describe Brown as “a partnership of students and teachers in a unified community.” While they have multiple councils and committees, the primary one is the Community Council. It serves as a university-wide representative forum for making advisory recommendations on a wide spectrum of issues and concerns. Membership includes the president and members of their cabinet, a faculty member from each school/college (a total of 10 with 2 being non-tenured), 4 members of the cabinet, one faculty member from each of the schools and colleges, at least 2 non-tenured/tenure-track faculty; 5 undergrad students, 3 grad students with representation from the presidents of UG and grad governments, members from the staff, and alumni. Faculty, staff, and alumni serve staggered 3-year terms; student members serve staggered 2-year terms. More information can be found here: <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/community-council/about> and here: [http://cs.brown.edu/people/jsavage/TaskForce/FacRulesRegs.5\\_2.pdf](http://cs.brown.edu/people/jsavage/TaskForce/FacRulesRegs.5_2.pdf)