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# Understanding Faculty Senates: Moving from Mystery to Models

*James T. Minor*

Undoubtedly faculty play an integral role in the intellectual enterprise of colleges and universities (Barnett, 1994). Their role in governance and decision-making, however, is a point of contention on many campuses (Gerber, 2001). In the tradition of higher education, approximately 90% percent of four-year institutions have a faculty governing body that, for better or worse, participate in campus governance (Gilmour, 1991). Yet research and theoretical knowledge about their involvement in campus decision-making is limited (Kezar & Eckel, forthcoming). For example, functional and structural differences that exist among senates, within or across institutional types, are virtually unknown. As a result, litigious discussion about faculty governance continues in the absence of descriptive or theoretical understanding about how faculty senates participate in decision making.

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Still, faculty participation in decision-making is ardently associated with institutional ineffectiveness (Burgan, 1998). Campus decision making, according to the American Association of University Professors' (1966) statement on governance requires the participation of all institutional components, although faculty, the president, and governing boards are referenced as primary caretakers of the university. Robert Birnbaum (1999) stresses that governance is a shared responsibility, a joint effort involving multiple constituencies with particular emphasis given to the participation of faculty. Faculty participation in governance is accepted as intrinsically desirable and as improving institutional effectiveness (Floyd, 1994). However, during a time when effective governance systems are becoming increasingly important for institutional success, faculty senates are often viewed as dysfunctional, underperforming, or impeding (Jordan, 2001; Trow, 1990).

Many higher education scholars point out the importance of effective governance systems for managing this era of change and innovation in the academy (Amacher & Meiners, 2002; Duderstadt, 2001a). Although government agencies, trustees, and university presidents will affect campus governance, faculty are often deemed the most conspicuous of internal governing bodies. They are structurally and culturally diverse and have varying levels of influence on multiple decisions (Minor, 2003). Additionally, increased institutional autonomy and lack of research limit theoretical understanding about the role senates play in governance. Consequently, many campus leaders struggle to make informed sustainable changes that improve the effectiveness of senates.

Although faculty can participate in decision making through multiple venues, such as academic departments or ad hoc committees, this study focuses on faculty senates as a primary location through which faculty are involved in campus governance. I argue that improving faculty senates depends on understanding the various roles they play in decision making. Various organizational structures, senate structures, and decision-making cultures can muddle assessments of senates and confuse understanding about their role in governance. This study augments the perennial debate on how to enhance faculty senates by advancing a conceptual frame to serve as a base for discussion and research. Doing so provides a construct for understanding senates and their role in governance across various institutional types. I offer four models of faculty senates: *functional*, *influential*, *ceremonial*, and *subverted* and discuss key variables important for comprehending them.

Based on 12 site visits and telephone interviews with 42 senate presidents, I provide these models of faculty senates in order to establish a taxonomy by which senates can be better understood and studied. To begin, I review the handful of studies on faculty governance. I then describe the study and introduce the models. Lastly, I discuss the parameters of these models and their use for understanding other aspects of faculty governance.

### RESEARCH ON FACULTY GOVERNANCE

Faculty involvement in governance receives a good deal of scholarly attention (Collie & Chronister, 2001; Hollinger, 2001; Miller, 1996). Yet scholars tend to pay less attention to the function of faculty senates as the predominant organization whereby faculty participate in institutional governance. Most literature on faculty governance discusses the involvement of faculty broadly and from a variety of perspectives (Baldrige & Kemerer, 1976; Kolodny, 2000; Morphew, 1999; Schuster, Smith, Corak, & Yamada, 1994). For example, numerous articles discuss the importance of shared governance (Hardy, 1990), examine the impact of institutional change in relation to current governance structures (Benjamin & Carroll, 1999), or generally discuss the importance of faculty participation in governance (Miller, 1999). While these approaches to the challenges of governance are each helpful, they do not distinctly analyze the role of faculty senates. As a point of departure, I use the existing literature to understand the concept of faculty participation in governance and perceptions about the role of senates in decision making.

#### *Democratic Participation*

Much of the literature on faculty governance is based on the assumption that faculty participation is crucial to effective institutional decision-making (Birnbaum, 1988). This assertion is based on the view that increased employee participation in decision-making is associated with improved employee satisfaction and performance (Floyd, 1985). Several scholars call for more faculty involvement as a way to improve institutional effectiveness, noting that faculty serve as moral guides for institutions that would otherwise respond solely to market demands (Gerber et al., 1997; Richardson, 1999). In contrast, others claim that faculty's over-involvement in governance inhibits the institution's ability to make the fast-paced decisions necessary given the current environment (Association of Governing Boards, 1996; Duderstadt, 2001b). Even institutions that are able to move beyond the issue of democracy, or *how much* faculty should participate, still struggle with *how to* effectively involve them in governance.

More than a decade ago, David Dill and Karen Helm (1988) claimed that faculty participation in governance had gone through three different periods which they term faculty control, democratic participation, and strategic policy making. Whether most institutions have moved to strategic planning is questionable. Democratic participation appears to be a more accurate description of faculty involvement, as much of the literature still views governance as a democratic process into which faculty should be incorporated (Hardy, 1990; Mortimer & McConnell, 1978). In that vein, many scholars examine the effects of faculty involvement (or its lack) in specific institutional decisions such as fund raising, budget cuts, program discon-

tinuance, strategic planning, and athletics (Dill & Helm, 1988; Dimond, 1991; Kissler, 1997; Newman & Bartee, 1999). The focus on democratic participation (for the sake of democracy) unfortunately overshadows discussions about how to effectively involve faculty in governance and to what extent more or less involvement improves the quality of decision-making.

### *Perceptions of Faculty Senates*

Incessant concerns about governance and the effectiveness of faculty senates are difficult to address in the absence of models that explain senate involvement in governance. Concerning faculty senates, the majority of institutions operate without benchmarks or comparative perspectives to assess their own behavior. A recent survey (Tierney & Minor, 2003) found that the majority of campus constituents believe that shared governance is important but have little confidence in the senate's ability to influence important decisions. While these findings reveal cultural perceptions of the senate, the issue of effectiveness is more difficult to discern. Perceptions about the behavior of the senate need to be situated within a frame that explains senate involvement in governance. In other words, to simply say that a particular senate is "ineffective" or "successful" means little without benchmarks against which to evaluate behavior.

Although only a handful of studies directly addresses the role of faculty senates in governance (Baldrige & Kemerer, 1976; Birnbaum, 1991; Gilmour, 1991; Lee, 1991; Moore, 1975), even fewer provide a theoretical frame for understanding them. Birnbaum's (1989) study is probably the most widely accepted theoretical work on senates. In an attempt to explain "why senates do not work but will not go away," he offered a symbolic perspective claiming that senates, although ineffective organizationally, still perform symbolic or cultural functions that are purposive.

While Birnbaum's study is helpful, there is also a need to understand alternative senate types. For example, what are attributes of senates that are perceived as "working"? My study provides models of faculty senates across institutional types and across varying levels of involvement in decision making.

Three points help summarize the literature on faculty governance and senates. First, faculty involvement in governance remains a cornerstone of higher education and an institutional value for many campuses. Still, disagreement exists over the areas in which faculty should have decision-making authority and the extent of their involvement in campus governance. Second, little is known about the structural, cultural, or functional qualities of faculty senates. Different senate types or variations in different institutional sectors have not been delineated. Third, the development of theory explaining the role faculty senates' play in governance is primitive. The limited theoretical understanding of senates impairs the ability of those in higher

education to develop policies that more effectively involve faculty in governance. The lack of empirical and conceptual work specifically on senates leaves a distinct gap in the literature. This study, to the extent possible, intends to narrow that gap. Providing a contemporary conceptual frame to view senates is one way of doing so.

### CREATING MODELS OF FACULTY SENATES

In general, theoretical models are intended as tentative descriptions that account for the known properties of a particular subject matter or object. My purpose in creating faculty senate models was to capture the essence of how senates operate in relation to campus governance but not to suggest that one is better than another or that one model is most appropriate for a particular institutional type. As prelude to such analysis, these models simply provide a way to comprehend faculty senates and their role in governance.

#### *Methods*

I developed these models of faculty senates based on data collected from 12 site visits and telephone interviews with 42 senate presidents. Based on the Carnegie Classification of Higher Education Institutions (2000), six of the sites were doctoral universities, two master's institutions, and four baccalaureate colleges. Nine were public and six private. I sampled seven of the institutions purposively and accepted recommendations about the remaining five from an advisory board composed of higher education association leaders, based on the institutions' emblematic and distinctive governance characteristics. The sample represents institutions across various sectors of higher education and campuses that employ varied methods of governance. These campuses also represent a cross-section of institutions where governance systems are perceived by internal and external constituents as more or less effective. In other words, some campuses have received national attention due to controversy over governance while others maintain a relatively satisfied constituency.

At each campus, I targeted approximately seven individuals for interviews, for a total of 86 participants during the site visits. To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, participants held diverse perspectives concerning the health of governance and the senate (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). They included presidents, vice presidents for academic affairs (provosts), faculty senate presidents, senior academic officers, and faculty from various disciplines. Advocates, critics, long-time participants, newcomers, and observers were all included. The hour-long interviews focused on the institutional concept of shared governance and the involvement of faculty senates in decision making. Through a series of open-ended questions, I asked participants to provide examples of major institutional decision making.

In addition to the site visits, I conducted telephone interviews with 42 faculty senate presidents at doctoral institutions across the country. On average, these senate presidents had been affiliated with their institutions for 23 years. Thirty-one of the institutions were public and eleven were private. I used a set of 12 semi-structured questions, focusing on structural and cultural aspects of senates and factors that the interviewees perceived to be associated with senate effectiveness. Gaining additional insight from leaders of senates concerning perceptions about the role they play in governance served as the goal for conducting these interviews.

Analyzing the data from both the site visits and telephone interviews involved using a constant comparative method and axial coding techniques to establish models of faculty senate involvement in campus governance (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The constant comparative method allowed for simultaneous coding and analysis to develop general themes. I then used axial coding to reduce the data and refine the categories. Based on the themes, I initially identified six models of senates, which I subsequently reduced to four.

Through this analysis, I identified themes in relation to how faculty senates functioned in the overall context of institutional governance. Based on a review of the literature and these data, I offer the following four models of faculty senates. (By "faculty senate" I mean the formal faculty governing body on a campus, although terms such as "faculty council," "academic senate," and "academic assembly" are alternatively used by some campuses. These models are intended to provide four conceptual frames within which to understand senate involvement in governance.

## MODELS OF FACULTY SENATES

### *Functional Senates*

Functional senates primarily operate to represent and protect the interest of faculty in university decision making. The structure of functional senates is relatively traditional. The senate membership is elected and representative, usually acting through a faculty-led executive committee. These senates can also involve deans or other administrators as members of the senate. Various committees have specific responsibilities and carry out the work of the senate. The senate's decisions or recommendations usually result from formal procedures and voting. Governing documents such as by-laws, a faculty handbook, a constitution, or statutes determine the extent of its authority. One senate president explains: "The involvement of our senate is dictated by state statutes that clearly spell out procedures and the extent of their power."

These senates usually maintain authority in areas that are traditionally the domain of the faculty such as curriculum, promotion, tenure, and academic standards. They usually influence decisions by way of making recommendations upon which the administration may either act or which it may dismiss. Such senates have minimal influence over “nonacademic” areas of university decision making. Often such influence is merely a matter of being consulted when the administration deems it necessary. The faculty senate president at a doctoral university claimed that “[the senate] engages in deliberations about campus decisions but ultimately we decide nothing.”

In essence, these senates are somewhat perfunctory, given their limited authority. Even in academic decision making, these senates sometimes operate in only an advisory capacity because approving a curriculum change or new program rests with higher authorities (governing boards or trustees). A faculty member at a master’s institution reported that “new courses and changes to a particular program although debated and proposed in the senate have to be approved by the board, and requests are sometimes rejected.” One long-time faculty member at a doctoral university warned: “It is not uncommon for the administration to proceed with academic initiatives without the approval of the senate.”

Functional senates are not particularly assertive and usually do not set their own agenda. Instead, they respond to the initiatives and actions of the administration or issues that arise from the environment. A faculty member at the same doctoral university remarked, “I can’t think of anything significant that the senate has initiated. Their actions are often in response to administrative or circumstantial events.” A newcomer at a baccalaureate college stated:

I’ve been amazed at how passive the faculty are. You would think that at the beginning of each academic year [the faculty] would set an agenda for what they might accomplish over the course of the year. There is no such thing. Instead [the senate] deals with the winds as they blow.

These senates do safeguard faculty rights against perceived administrative transgressions. In the event of contentious action by the administration, these senates can become a legitimate force that check and balance administrative authority. In these institutions, presidential and administrative authority is often strong. Overall these senates function as an association that represents faculty interests rather than a lateral partner in campus decision-making. “There are times when faculty feel threatened or there’s something to be gained or lost. It is usually during those times when faculty will occasionally assert a role in decision-making,” explained one assistant provost at a master’s institution. Still, this form of participation is



responsive and usually occurs to block an action rather than support an initiative.

These senates' limited role in decision making is often an accepted part of the organization's structure and culture. In other words, the role that functional senates play is important for maintaining the organizational status quo. "Everyone here knows that [the senate] makes decisions on academic matters; but for everything else and even some academic issues, we serve as an advisory body to the president," claimed one faculty member. The provost at a master's institution adds, "Our senate might not be the most powerful or energetic, but I think one advantage is that the relationship between faculty and administration is established." Generally these senates are viewed by the campus as "the place where faculty go to at least feel like they have some control of over the university, when in actuality that control is very limited."

### *Influential Senates*

Influential faculty senates serve as a legitimate governing authority within the institution. They maintain a traditional structure that is electoral and representative of the faculty. However, they usually exist on campuses where the power center shifts between constituencies as the contextual circumstances change. Their authority usually stems from institutional cultural aspects which legitimate their power. Still, power can result from the formal provisions in governing documents. These senates are occupied exclusively by faculty, and the presence of the provost or president is usually *ex officio*. Overall, these senates represent the locus of faculty authority.

Like functional senates, influential senates maintain authority over curriculum, promotion, tenure, and academic standards. These senates also participate in and significantly influence decision making that encompasses a broader spectrum of the institution. Decisions involving athletics, development, budget priorities, and the selection of new senior administrators are a few areas where these senates are meaningfully involved. One faculty member from a baccalaureate institution explained that "most faculty recognize that creating change on this campus is usually done through work in the senate." Another added that "the senate really has been influential in shaping major decisions on this campus. [The senate] is very well organized to get information, analyze it, and provide direction on a wide range of issues."

Influential senates drive issues and promote policy changes that result from having an agenda concerned with the entire university, not just faculty issues. As one faculty senate president explained:

[The senate] has two issues that we're going to take up this year. The first is the issue of prioritizing athletics on this campus. The second is developing a

same-sex benefits policy. I expect that, by the end of the year, we will have made significant progress on both.

While influential senates are responsive to the administration, the administration also responds to them as a result of being a recognizable governing body on the campus. These senates view themselves as responsible for the general welfare of the institution and assume responsibility for improving its overall quality.

The campus community views these senates as influential because they can create change and other decision-making bodies perceive them as a legitimate governing authority on the campus. The president of a baccalaureate college explained: "It is nearly impossible to get things done without the involvement of the senate." A faculty member from the same institution remarked, "I think the faculty are well respected because the senate has proven to be responsible, fair, and not only committed to issues that will improve the conditions of faculty." These senates usually maintain a collaborative, rather than a confrontational, relationship with administration. "The faculty and the administration have been able to maintain a respectful working relationship that allows us to focus on the things that matter," described one doctoral university president. Consequently, these senates can influence major decision making in a variety of areas. The provost at a master's institution claimed that "the faculty senate has a history of being effective at representing the faculty view as well as significantly shaping other important decisions such as institutional priorities, budget cuts, and redefining our student profile."

### *Ceremonial Senates*

Faculty senates that are ceremonial are relatively inactive and inoperable, with low-level organization. In essence, they exist in name only and operate as symbolic artifacts. They seldom meet regularly, and faculty express little interest in governance. The structural power of the president and administration is correspondingly strong. Additionally, only modest communication takes place between faculty and administration concerning decisions under consideration.

On traditional academic issues, ceremonial senates are inactive as organizations. Decision-making authority over academic matters frequently rests with individual schools and colleges. The senate's agenda may consist of routine functions such as electing new officers. One long-time faculty member at a doctoral university described his senate as "a place where faculty go to discuss what they think is going on or talk about decisions after they have been made." One critic from the same campus asserted: "Nobody pays attention to the senate. It is inconsequential to anything that happens on this campus."

However, in line with Birnbaum's theory of faculty senates, these senates may perform latent functions that are not related to university governance. For example, the senate may serve as a scapegoat for the administration, provide status for particular faculty, or act as a screening device for future administrators (Birnbaum, 1989). Because campus constituents view these senates as dormant, organizationally they have no role in decision making.

When I asked one faculty member at a doctoral university what the senate had accomplished in the last two years, he laughed out loud. A dean from the same institution commented: "To be honest, nobody really takes the senate seriously. [The senate] is like a dinosaur. It used to be really powerful but now their impact is nonexistent. They are unimportant to life as we know it today." Others from the campus community explain ceremonial senates a result of faculty apathy or an institutional history of strong presidential authority. "For many years the president ignored the faculty, in some cases for good reason. The result has been that faculty are apathetic and the senate has died," explained a humanities professor of 28 years. A former member of the senate at a master's institution explained: "It didn't take me long to figure out that the senate was like a sad bird with no feathers; who wants to be a part of that?"

### *Subverted Senates*

The fourth model is the subverted senate. Their role in governance is undermined by alternative venues of faculty participation, usually by informal decision-making processes that occur in place of, or in addition to, the senate's formal operations. These senates maintain operable structures that involve formal proceedings. However, the informal processes by which faculty participate in decision making are more effective in determining decision outcomes. For example, well-respected senior faculty may be able to influence decision making on a particular issue more than the formal proceedings of the senate.

Administrators on these campuses may employ "kitchen cabinets," a term referring to small groups of "trusted faculty" or individuals who influence major decisions through informal processes. One new faculty member at a baccalaureate institution claimed that "the president has a special committee that he appoints members to. Whenever he wants faculty perspectives, he consults that committee, not the senate." The disregard of decision-making protocol, weakened structure, or distrustful decision-making cultures can cause these senates to be incapacitated.

These senates maintain authority in areas of curriculum, tenure, promotion, and instruction. Members of the academic community, due to disagreements, occasionally challenge their authority. These senates are often accused of being narrow in focus, confrontational, and, in some cases, marred by a history of irresponsible decision making. Concerning issues of institu-

tional improvement, the administration often views these senates as an obstacle to be avoided. As a provost at a master's institution put it, "Over the years the president has continually taken decisions out of the hands of faculty due to resistance and an inability to get things done."

Subverted senates usually suffer from negative cultural and communicative aspects that affect their role in campus decision making. Institutional history, rumination over past fall-outs, or confrontation between key players in the senate and administration can lead to senate subversion. The combination of personnel, type of decision, and poor communication affect, in varying degrees, the influence of these senates. "The faculty view the administration as oppressive, and administrators see faculty as disengaged," explained one former senate member at a master's institution. "The senate then serves as a battleground for perceived power rather than a playing field to make decisions." Distrust between constituents can lead to "deal-cutting" and other actions that circumvent the senate as an organization. In some cases, failed senates resulted in alternative decision-making processes. A provost from a master's institution emphasized, "I think the president only trusts the senate with issues that he can afford to lose on, which are usually things that he doesn't care much about."

Campus perceptions about these senates indicate a lack of confidence that they can or will make sound decisions as the chief reason for their being subverted. Others point to an inability of faculty and administration to work together. One former senate member at a doctoral university lamented: "For many years there has been a deep-rooted distrust between the faculty and the administration. I get the sense most people can't really point to the source of such animosity, yet holding on to it seems to be a part of the culture which inhibits faculty involvement in governance."

### ANALYZING KEY VARIABLES

As a way to elaborate on these models, I now consider key variables for making better sense of them. Taking into account (a) what issues are under consideration, (b) personnel and culture, and (c) the ability of senates to shift from one model to another is important for understanding and using these models. I believe that these issues influence the role faculty senates play in campus governance.

#### *Importance of Type of Decision*

The roles that faculty senates play in campus decision making are affected, in part, by the type of decisions under consideration. The decisions to discontinue football, launch a new academic program, or set policy for distance education curriculum, for example, can affect how faculty senates operate. In other words, it is possible that a senate can function uncharac-

**TABLE 1**  
**CHARACTERISTICS OF FACULTY SENATES BY MODEL**

<i>Senate Characteristics</i>	<i>Perception of Campus Constituents</i>	<i>Areas of Decision Making</i>	<i>Relationship with Administration</i>
Functional	An association that represents the faculty. Exists to protect and preserve faculty rights.	Curriculum, tenure, promotion, and issues relevant to faculty work conditions.	Cooperative
Influential	A governing body that can initiate change on campus. Viewed as a partner in campus governance.	Curriculum, tenure, promotion, faculty issues, institutional improvement, strategic and budget priorities.	Collaborative/collegial
Ceremonial	Not an important part of campus governance. Faculty are disengaged and senate activity is viewed as a pasttime.	The academic calendar, election of new officers, and other routine/mundane decisions reserved for the senate.	Cooperative/passive
Subverted	Could be more effectively involved in governance; lacks the confidence of other important governing constituencies to do the right thing.	Institutional decisions reserved specifically for the senate; uninvolved in other areas of decision making where it has no formal authority.	Skeptical/confrontational

teristically when involved in a decision that holds extraordinary consequences. Given the unique nature of colleges and universities, it could be said that no decision is ordinary. However, these institutions show that while making high-stakes decisions or resolutions that carry negative consequences for faculty, senates tend to be more engaged. This pattern emerged at five of 12 sites visited and 13 of 42 cases from the telephone interviews. A faculty

member from a campus with a functional senate reported, "Our senate is usually very modest; but every now and then, there is an issue that they feel strongly about. It is during these times when the senate can take on a more assertive character."

Based on the number of campuses that show differences in character during particular types of decision, it is therefore important to consider how decision types influence the senate's role. For example, functional senates showed greater levels of interest in decision making when faculty could potentially lose or gain authority in a particular area. A member of a ceremonial senate claimed, "When the university was considering instituting a post-tenure review policy, the senate was more alive than ever because everyone was worried about what would happen to them." Another added that "the only time the senate is really engaged is when decisions directly affect or threaten the comfort of faculty."

This insight raises questions about faculty participation in governance according to issue. Some scholars suggest that faculty are capable of constructive participation during "hard decisions" that may have negative consequences for their work conditions (Eckel, 2000). However, it is not clear which types of decisions generate more or less participation. Considering participation according to decision-type is also important for the number of new decision areas in higher education. For example, for-profit endeavors in which two institutions join their curricula to offer market-driven programs is one issue that will likely create questions about faculty involvement in decision making (Eckel, 2003; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

It is equally important to note that all senates did not show differences in character while making high-stakes decisions or in dealing with issues that directly affected faculty. Functional senates showed the most significant change during high-stakes decision making. Other senate types (influential, ceremonial, and subverted) were more stable across various decision types. These differences may be attributed to the fact that, culturally and structurally, the role of functional senates is continually negotiated while influential, ceremonial, and subverted senates have more stable roles.

For example, one functional senate at an urban doctoral school would not normally have been involved in budget issues, but when the university was deciding whether to build new dormitories on campus during a time of fiscal constraints, the senate took an unusually active role. Building new dormitories on this largely commuter campus would significantly improve the climate of teaching and learning, a point of particular interest to the faculty. However, the administration framed the proposal to build the dorms as a way of improving enrollment and thus increasing revenue. Because of the potential consequences for teaching and improved intellectual environment, the senate became uncharacteristically involved in a matter that the administration viewed as budgetary, an issue from which functional sen-

ates are normally excluded. One senate member explained, "Never would [the senate] be so involved in budget matters, but this issue of building new housing seems to be one of the few things both the faculty and administration want to do." A senate president from the same campus commented: "Our senates might be more or less involved in decision making depending on what's at stake. If there are no empires to build or money to be had, then we pretty much stay out of the way and mind our own business."

In short, the dynamics of particular decisions can involve faculty senates in ways that stretch the parameters of these models.

### *Personnel and Culture*

Another variable that influences the role of senates is personnel—or the extent to which key governance personnel effectively communicate, cooperate, and collaborate. These persons include senate leaders, the president, the chief academic officer, and others who play key roles in campus decision making. Their interaction can significantly shape the role of faculty senates. The social and cultural aspects of campus governance influence decision making as much as structural characteristics. The majority of studies on governance tend to exaggerate the need to reform governance structures but pay little attention to the influence of communication and cultural aspects (Tierney & Minor, in press). This study provides an indication of how personnel affect the role of the senate. The configuration of personnel appeared to affect subverted senates most significantly and, to a degree, the role of functional senates.

Participants involved in governance can, through their interactions, influence the role of senates by continuing to operate within existing cultural norms or by creating new ones. For example, a faculty senate president from a doctoral institution with a functional senate explained: "Under our old president [the faculty] were never involved in governance. He just didn't believe in it; and as a result, we were shut out." A former faculty senate president from a master's institution with a subverted senate lamented:

Unfortunately, I don't believe anything the administration tells [the faculty]. For a long time they have shown an unwillingness to work with us on hard issues. In their minds it's much easier to bulldoze ahead, and maybe consult us along the way or at the end. The relationship between the old administration and the old senate wasn't that way.

One long-time faculty member at a baccalaureate institution with a functional senate stated:

It's hard for me to think that structural qualities are problematic for senates. We've had the same structure for 30 years and governance never worked. In the last five years we've gotten a new president and provost, and now it works but the structure hasn't changed a bit.

These quotations illustrate the influence that personnel and institutional culture can have on the role senates play in governance. Issues such as trust, preservation of cultural norms, or aversion among actors are important for developing a more complete picture of governance. Distrust, for example, was shown to interrupt communication on one campus. "We have an issue of screening," said one senate member. "In senate meetings there is the sense that you can't tell everything, and you can't trust that everything is being told." The senate on this campus invites the provost to meetings to establish communication between the administration and faculty, normally a helpful measure, but one that inadvertently resulted in self-censorship because many faculty did not trust the provost. In this case, cultural aspects of governance were more problematic than structural configuration of governing bodies.

Conflicting perceptions about authority also appeared to inhibit governance. Faculty usually had perceptions of authority that were somewhat different from the administrators' perceptions. For instance, faculty usually perceived administrators as more powerful than the administrators viewed themselves. Conversely, administrators viewed faculty as more powerful than faculty viewed themselves. On a campus with a subverted senate, a provost expressed discontent with the faculty: "I would like to see faculty take advantage of the authority they have been given to affect positive change." However, a member of that campus's senate commented, "I think the faculty would be more willing to participate in governance if the administration took us seriously and faculty felt [as if] their input mattered." Conflicting perceptions of governance can result in poor communication or a culture of distrust. More importantly, these dynamics are cultural elements that can significantly impact the role that senates play in governance.

Many efforts to improve governance focus on structural elements, probably because they are more tangible and easier to change. Cultural aspects of governance usually represent a more difficult task that involves the breaking down of established norms, sustained efforts that are focused, and, in some cases, personnel changes. Reform efforts and arguments that consider structural aspects of governance will benefit from cultural analyses that provide a more complete picture of campus decision making.

### *Ability to Shift Models*

Throughout the study it became apparent that some senates had, over time, transitioned from one model to another or were currently in the process of shifting. Personnel and structure significantly impact senates' ability to shift. For example, hiring a new president or provost, or making definite structural changes that grant more or less authority to senates are issues that impact a senate's ability to shift. Cultural shifts that restore trust or improve the campus's perception of senates can also alter their role but



seem to take much longer. Three senates from the sample (one from a master's institution and two doctoral institutions) had recently transformed or were in transition.

A provost from a small baccalaureate institution explained: "Historically I think that our senate has been inactive; however, in recent years, the president and I have really made a push to make the senate more responsible for dealing with issues they deem important." A faculty senate president from a doctoral institution stated:

I think right now [the senate] primarily exists to make recommendations and give advice, but we are moving toward becoming more critically involved in decision making. Recently we have been trying to get a voting seat on the top administrative committee and on the board. So far we have gotten the former, which has really made a difference in how the administration views us and how much power we have.

To better understand these models, the assumption must be that they exist in a fluid environment. Different actors enter and exit from campus communities. Circumstances such as legal mandates can change the arrangement of formal governing bodies. A sudden drop in student enrollment or revenue can call for stronger presidential leadership. My point is that senates can shift from one model to another over the course of their existence. As a result, some senates might fall between models. Type of decisions, personnel and culture, and a senate's ability to shift are important variables in determining how senates participate in institutional governance. The four models of faculty senates (functional, influential, dormant, subverted) represent a protean construct. Taking these variables into account is important for better understanding the senate models. Figure 1 illustrates how decision-type and personnel might affect the role that senates play in governance.

As mentioned earlier, my purpose is not to say which model is more effective than another. Rather it is to offer a frame by which faculty senates can be better understood. These models thus provide a construct that makes a complex collection of senates more comprehensible. I am reminded of the early organizational models explaining institutions of higher education and the impact that they still have on how we think about universities (Kerr, 1963; Masland, 1985; Weick, 1976). Moreover, those models influenced approaches to research.

Those familiar with faculty senates will be able to say, to some degree, that their institution does not neatly fit into one of the models presented here. While this may be true, the usefulness of these models is as a conceptual frame to understand the role faculty senates play in governance across a variety of institutional types. A significant need for more research is evident. The questions that drive research on governance, however, are better

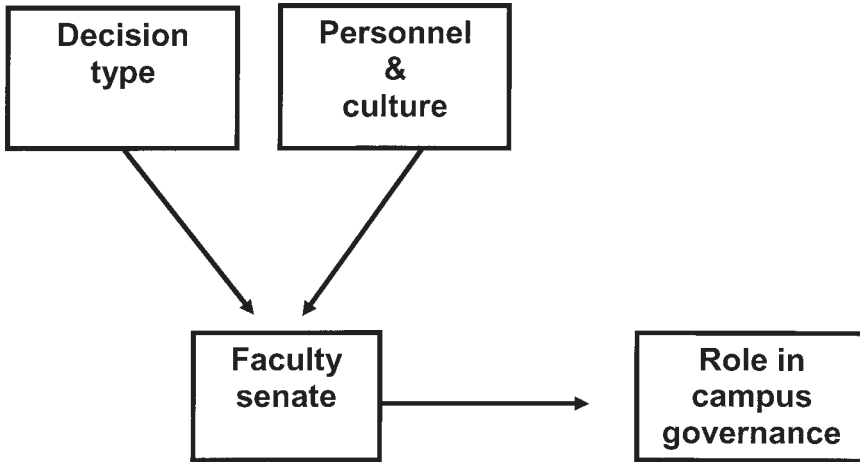


Figure 1. The influence of personnel and type of decision on senates.

focused on how university decision making can position institutions of higher education for success. After laying out these models, I now consider two aspects of faculty senates important for further research: the importance of structure and alternatives for faculty participation.

*The Importance of Structure*

During the conception of this study, I attempted to distinguish structural differences among faculty senates. I studied such structural variables such as the number of senate members, how often they met, committee structure, or who chaired the senate. However, in the course of this inquiry, it became apparent that, on the campuses in this study, structure did not necessarily distinguish the roles that senates played in governance. Senates can have distinctly different structures but serve similar roles with respect to their involvement in governance. Likewise, senates can have similar structures but serve significantly different roles.

Although structure can influence the role senates play, I do not consider it to be the most significant variable for determining models of senates. Senates are more accurately situated according to multiple aspects, including institutional context, decision-type, culture, and leadership. This is not to suggest that structure has no effect. I am, however, suggesting that the effect of structural qualities is not clear in relation to other aspects. The question then becomes: Which structural qualities significantly affect the role of senates in campus governance, and which do not?

As an example, many senate leaders view one-year terms for senate presidents as a structural flaw that inhibits effectiveness. However, on campuses where the culture of faculty participation represents the challenge, the struc-

ture of the senates may not necessarily be the most pressing problem. Cultural aspects such as trust or communication may be more serious. Research on other institutional and cultural dynamics is important in understanding of faculty senates. Also it is important to understand the interactions of cultural and structural variables.

### *Alternatives for Faculty Participation*

Thus far, I have discussed faculty senates under the rubric of faculty involvement in governance. Senates are not, however, the only means by which faculty can significantly participate in campus decision making. Alternatives include ad hoc committees, individual advocacy, academic departments, schools, or possibly collective bargaining unions, to name a few. Such avenues for participation do not negate the importance of senates; instead, they are a simple reminder that other forms of participation exist and, more importantly, should be considered for their impact on the role of senates.

Are only certain types of faculty invited to participate in decision-making committees outside the senate? Do these alternative venues detract from senate effectiveness, or does senate ineffectiveness lead to the creation of alternative venues for faculty participation? For campus leaders attempting to make sense of decision making, understanding alternative venues for faculty participation is also important. Alternative venues can, depending on the context, enhance faculty participation by providing an opportunity for involvement or serve as a contending voice that diminishes the effect of a senate.

## CONCLUSION

Faculty senates remain an integral part of campus governance. The role they play is the cause of much controversy, dissatisfaction, and debate. Yet, the amount of scholarship on senates leaves campus leaders interested in reform with little direction. Instead most literature on faculty governance is colored by arguments for more or less authority by particular constituencies. In my view, conversations that consider how granting more or less authority may influence institutional effectiveness are more useful. The turf wars that characterize the literature are like a tug-of-war in which the rope never moves far from the starting point. More scholarship that delineates good practice and provides better understanding of the dynamics involved with faculty senates is needed.

The models presented here are intended to lessen the mystery surrounding senates and to offer a model by which they can be understood. Secondly, these models will, I hope, encourage additional research on senates. Descriptive research that provides a sense of how senates and other governing bodies, such as governing boards, are organized represents a useful start.

Additionally, an increased focus on effective governance systems opposed to highlighting those that fail will help establish models that move campuses toward improvement. Campus leaders responsible for the development of governance policy should have the benefit of research rather than suspicion. Governance, the structure and processes by which campus decisions are made, has significant consequences for the health of institutions. The faculty senate represents just one important aspect of campus governance. However, the performance of faculty governing bodies can either promote or stymie the success of institutional initiatives.

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