What Is Academic Governance

In another Foundational Topic we discussed Shared Governance. Academic Governance is that part of Shared Governance which sets forth the authorities, responsibilities and control of matters related to faculty, the curriculum/academic programs and degrees, and students. In order to assure that matters of academic governance are handled appropriately and in a timely manner, two governance structures work in parallel – the first is a series of membership/deliberative bodies to help develop and set forth academic policy and procedure, and the second is a set of administrative units – academic administration - to assure adherence to and appropriate implementation of academic policy and procedure.

The former is typically expressed in the form of an overarching group of which all faculty – tenured, tenure-track, non-tenure track, research faculty, emeriti faculty and clinical faculty – are considered as members. This group may also be known by various designations such as the academic council (Stanford University), the academic senate, the academic assembly (Fresno State University, The Constitution for the Academic Assembly-Article 1, Section 4 Membership) or the faculty senate. This group may also simply be known as the general faculty or “The Faculty” (Notre Dame University – Article III, Section 1/Membership).

Within the overarching group will be various deliberative and decisionmaking bodies – such as an executive group (an executive committee) - again known by other designations such as the academic senate (Queens College), faculty senate (Chaffee College), academic council (Duke University), or general faculty council - which acts on behalf of and represents the faculty in discussions with a governing board as well as the academic administration.

Here is the definition of the Faculty (Academic) Senate from Penn State University:

“The University Faculty Senate is the representative body of Penn State’s faculty with legislative authority on all matters pertaining to the educational interests of the University and all educational matters that concern the faculties of more than one college. In addition, the Senate is recognized by the University as an advisory and consultative body to the President on all matters that may affect the attainment of the University’s educational objectives.”

A similar definition (General Faculty Council) from the University of Virginia:

“The University of Virginia General Faculty Council (GFC) represents full and part-time Non-Tenure-Track Faculty and the Senior Professional Research Staff. The Council exists to represent the interests of these constituents to the University, to advise the University on matters pertaining to these constituents, and to provide service to the University.”

Committees in Academic Governance: “To support the various areas of academic concern and interest, there is also typically a series of committees authorized by and reporting to the executive committee that have been delegated specific responsibilities.” (Trinity Washington University)
Here is a list of such committees (University of Colorado – scroll down):

a. Budget Committee. The Budget Committee considers matters concerning the allocation of university resources, including:
   • reviewing the budget requests with representatives of the system administration prior to their submission to the Board of Regents and reporting the committee's concurrence or nonconcurrence with the budget request to Faculty Council;
   • evaluating the management of the university's resources, which shall be included in the committee's annual report to Faculty Council;
   • acting as the advisory body to Faculty Council on matters of the budget.

b. Committee on Women. The Committee on Women considers concerns of women faculty, including:
   • assessing the cultural climate of the university as it pertains to opportunities of women faculty for academic advancement, productivity and appropriate compensation;
   • making recommendations for creating an academic environment that fosters the academic success of women faculty;
   • working to assure fairness in the recruitment and retention of women faculty;
   • developing support networks and recommending policy to address the needs of women faculty;
   • administering the Elizabeth Gee Memorial Lectureship Award.

c. Educational Policy and University Standards Committee. The Educational Policy and University Standards (EPUS) Committee considers and recommends policies on education and academic and procedural standards, including:
   • university academic standards, including the Uniform Grading Policy;
   • procedural standards affecting academic affairs common to all academic units of the university;
   • honorary degrees and recognition medals;
   • evaluation and improvement of learning and teaching at all university levels.

d. Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee. The Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee (EMAC) considers concerns of ethnic minority faculty, including:
   • assessing the cultural climate of the university as it pertains to opportunities for ethnic minority faculty for academic advancement, productivity and appropriate compensation;
   • making recommendations for creating an academic environment that fosters the academic success of ethnic minority faculty;
• working to assure fairness in the recruitment and retention of ethnic minority faculty;
• developing support networks and recommending policy to address the needs of ethnic minority faculty.

e. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues Committee. The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues (GLBT) Committee considers concerns of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender faculty, including:
• assessing the cultural climate of the university as it pertains to opportunities of GLBT faculty for academic advancement, productivity and appropriate compensation;
• making recommendations for creating an academic environment that fosters the academic success of GLBT faculty;
• working to assure fairness in the recruitment and retention of GLBT faculty;
• developing support networks and recommending policy to address the needs of GLBT faculty.

f. Learning, Educational Technology, Teaching and Scholarship Committee. The Learning, Educational Technology, Teaching and Scholarship (LETTS) Committee considers and works with multi-campus initiatives to foster educational and research efforts by supporting innovative educational practices, creative use of technology, and interdisciplinary collaboration, including:
• promoting greater interdisciplinary and multi-campus dialogue about educational innovations;
• facilitating the creative use of technology for instruction;
• encouraging student learning through improved curriculum design and instructional methods;
• promoting faculty scholarship in teaching and learning by encouraging evaluation and publication of innovative teaching strategies;
• enhancing life-long learning through intercampus and interdisciplinary outreach education.

g. Personnel Committee. Budget Committee. The Budget Committee considers matters concerning the allocation of university resources, including:
• reviewing the budget requests with representatives of the system administration prior to their submission to the Board of Regents and reporting the committee's concurrence or nonconcurrence with the budget request to Faculty Council;
• evaluating the management of the university’s resources, which shall be included in the committee's annual report to Faculty Council;
• acting as the advisory body to Faculty Council on matters of the budget.
For further information on Academic Governance, see The AAUP Statement - Academic Governance Standards Require Faculty Involvement.