Educational Leadership Graduate Class Lecture Notes

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• Definition of shared governance:

Shared governance systems allot decision-making responsibilities to both the faculty and a non-faculty or “lay” governing board. While the latter is responsible for business-related issues, the former has primary authority over all academic matters.

Shared governance at colleges and universities is unique to the United States. The founders of Harvard — the oldest higher education institution in the nation — tried to emulate the governance systems of British institutions such as Cambridge and Oxford, where faculty have complete control. But in 1636 there were not enough scholars in Massachusetts Bay Colony to establish a system of faculty governance, and a lay governing board was created.

Over the next 200 years, higher education faculty in the United States largely followed the directives of their governing boards. But as the boards began to include more businessmen and fewer legislators and ministers in the late 19th century, and as professors placed new emphasis on scholarship instead of simply teaching, disputes led faculty to take a stand to protect themselves from their boards. The American Association of University Professors was formed in 1915 with the purpose of upholding the faculty’s role in governance, and released a statement that year on academic freedom and tenure,

- Judith Areen, a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center and an expert on shared governance in higher education.
Pros--Faculty bring relevant expertise to decisions about curricula and instructional personnel

Cons--Such systems do not necessarily outline a clear-cut division of responsibilities, but instead rely on “consultation and mutual respect” between faculty, administrators and governing boards.

-Can be a conflict of interest, esp. when a collective bargaining unit is involved.

-Tough to make decisions like budget size via majority vote

–Faculty once moved in and out of administration on a temporary basis. Today, administrators tend to be professionals in a specific administrative field.

-Often a disconnect between what the faculty think of as shared governance and what the administration thinks of as shared governance.

-More of a culture than a defined system. What passes for shared governance varies by university.