

UNIVERSITY SENATES CONFERENCE
WHITE PAPER ON SHARED GOVERNANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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As we enter a time of transition that will accompany major changes in administrative leadership and the development of a new strategic vision encompassing the entire University of Illinois, the University Senates Conference affirms its commitment to the principles and practices of shared governance and in this White Paper conceptualizes the role of shared governance in the function of the University.

The Conference is the agency whose responsibility is representing the faculty of the entire University of Illinois to the President and the Board of Trustees. Conference members are elected by their respective campus senates. While Conference members represent the perspectives of their home campuses, each member is also committed to working for the common good of the entire University. This dedication to the good of the entire University and to each of its three campuses is a unique characteristic that sets the Conference apart from other elected faculty governance groups, and is an essential aspect of its mission. (See “University Senates Conference Statement on Excellence at the University of Illinois” and “University Senates Conference Resolution on Avoiding Cross-Campus Conflicts,” appended.)

The foundation of shared governance requires the active participation of faculty at all levels in decisions and decision processes. When faculty are actively involved in decision making and setting priorities, they will better understand the evidence the reasons behind reforms, and be better able to provide ideas for proposed solutions. When they are directly engaged in the planning process, they have a say in plans developed and hence a more robust stake in seeing reforms succeed. When deliberations entail hard choices and sacrifice, and elected faculty representatives have helped determine these decisions, then other faculty are more willing to accept the outcomes because they trust that their interests were considered and represented in the deliberations. When administrators engage faculty via shared governance in the decision processes, the administrators have greater success, both in the particulars of advancing new initiatives and in their leadership roles more broadly. Shared governance provides a necessary vehicle and an effective platform for dialogue between faculty and administrators.

Ultimately, effective shared governance requires three essential interacting principles: (1) clear statutory rules and organizational structures that instantiate a set of consistent procedures; (2) a tradition of productive relationships formed and sustained over time between faculty and administrators, through the established structures of shared governance (i.e. senates, Senates Conference, and their subcommittees), involving open channels of communication, respect, and trust; (3) a general ethos across the University of shared responsibility for governance, in which administrators at all levels and the faculty as a whole understand the reciprocal (and often overlapping) spheres of responsibilities that administrators and faculty each manage.

In fulfilling its responsibilities the Conference has monthly discussions with the President, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, other administrative leaders of the University and members of the Board of Trustees. The *Statutes* and *General Rules* specify certain occasions when the Conference's advice *must* be sought, such as the appointment or re-appointment of University Officers or proposals to amend the University's governing documents. The Conference's conversations with the President and the President's cabinet are designed to provide for the free flow of information and perspectives on any number of issues affecting the University, from ever-present budgetary concerns to matters such as strategic planning or protecting academic freedom, as well as anticipating areas of concern and interest. To facilitate these interactions, the Conference Chair and the President schedule frequent meetings to maintain open lines of communication.

In recent years, the Conference has reached out to representatives of the Board to share faculty views and to keep the Board informed about issues the Conference is discussing. Similarly, the Board has consulted with the Conference. Members of the Board now meet regularly with the Conference to build and enhance mutual understanding, to learn about faculty concerns, and to seek the Conference's input on issues the Board is considering. The Conference is now organized to have four subcommittees that parallel the charges of the Board's committees. In addition to interacting with the subcommittees of the Board, Conference members make presentations at Board meetings.

Institutional questions that remain paramount for all sectors of the University and require discussion include: What are our core values and missions; How do we define the interrelated missions of teaching/scholarship/economic development/diversity/service/community engagement in the context of our specific campus identities; How do we balance the tensions between campus autonomy and centralized authority; What are the special responsibilities of a flagship University, particularly in the context of the land grant mission for the University of Illinois; and What are its special responsibilities to the state, the nation, and the world?

The University Senates Conference is committed to the principles of shared governance. Our goal is to promote and enhance trust, understanding and productive interactions among the Board of Trustees, the University Administration and the faculty of the University of Illinois.