Yeshiva, Thirty Years Later: Tension Remains

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The *Yeshiva* decision, in significant measure, was premised on a notion of shared governance traceable to the earliest days of European universities. Arguably, none of these earlier models of faculty governance holds sway today. Universities, as many have recognized, now resemble businesses in many aspects. What has happened to change the situation and our understanding of it? Is there a way to re-establish the earlier model or at least move in the direction of genuinely shared governance? Or, as Dr. Prusak has framed the issue, what does and what should "collegiality" mean today? Based on forty years at two universities (twelve as a faculty member, eight as a department chair, five as a dean, and fifteen as Academic Vice President), I offer the following.

At least five interrelated factors produce today's tensions between faculty and administration: expectations, perspectives, size and complexity, time pressures, and faculty professionalism. Unless these are addressed, there is little likelihood for advancing our common goals.

1) Expectations differ, sometimes dramatically, reflecting the old adage that "where you stand depends on where you sit." Faculty members, whose focus is on academic matters (students, teaching, research, scholarship), rightly expect administrators to support these efforts. Although at times the extent and particulars of those expectations can seem overwhelming, in the vast majority of cases they are perfectly reasonable. Faculty members want support for their activities: good salaries, quality classrooms, adequate technology, a good library, funding for research and academic travel, summer support or access to summer teaching, assistance in securing grants, top-notch equipment and instrumentation, recreational and cultural amenities (the students have taught us a lesson here!), and so on. They tend to want these things when they are needed – which often means "now." Administrators genuinely want to provide these, and they work hard to do so within existing constraints.

There are three problems relating to expectations. Most often, the faculty can have most of what it wants – but not all of it, and certainly not all at once, because the cost of providing these goods and services exceeds the university's abilities to provide them. Thus there arises the need to prioritize and choose. Priorities are not self-evident except to the individuals in need. Even assuming the administrators agree to focus solely on academic issues (which they cannot actually do), it is not clear whether the marginal dollars should go to the engineers, physicists, philosophers, accountants, nurses, or sociologists, or whether they should go to hiring new faculty members, increasing salaries and services for current ones, purchasing new equipment and instrumentation, recruiting better students, supporting graduate students more, enhancing

technology, or remodeling labs and classrooms. These are not decisions that can be easily left to a committee, let alone an entire university's faculty. Trying to do so invites tension and turf warfare – or at least lowest-common-denominator decisions – and it would greatly delay decisions. Administrators readily step into the breach and "make the call," hopefully based upon a strategic vision. In my experience, these decisions are made with good will and with as much faculty input as possible, even though that input is often ambiguous or inconsistent, and even though some administrators, at least, do not understand or sympathize with the faculty's needs and wants.

Second, academic expectations held by the faculty rub up against a host of other needs and expectations that flood administrators' email inboxes. Like it or not, academic matters are not the only item on administrators' "to do" lists. More on this issue below.

Third, some members of the faculty expect to have a major voice in decision-making in non-academic matters. Defining the scope of that voice, however, is messy at best and full of conflict at worst. Although in academic matters (curriculum, tenure, promotions, instructional approaches) the faculty certainly should have the dominant voice, there are times – for example, when faculty members' desires and goals conflict with institutional mission and values (something particularly sensitive at religiously-based institutions), or when faculty interests are inconsistent with externally-mandated requirements such as accountability or outcomes assessment – when such expectations cause real tensions. Usually these academic issues can be managed. However, the rub comes when faculty members want to make, or be involved in making, decisions outside the academic area – decisions for which they usually have neither any particular competence, nor the knowledge base, nor the warrant needed. These general governance issues – facilities, macro budgets, athletics, student life and housing issues, for example – not only reflect different expectations but also fundamentally different perspectives and responsibilities. Administrators appreciate the wisdom held by the collective faculty, and they understand the need to frame and orient many of these matters in terms of the academic mission, but tapping into that collective wisdom is much easier said than done. Moreover, even in those areas where faculty voices should dominate or at least play a role, disagreement, slowness, operational conservatism, and often turf protection combine to frustrate the administration (look at curricular reform, for example).

2) Different perspectives constitute the second challenge to shared governance. Perhaps the beginning of wisdom in this area is to acknowledge that "the faculty" and "the administration" do not exist, even though many faculty members see "the administration" as a whole, sometimes in a conspiratorial manner, and not a few administrators often see "the faculty" as one, sometimes with negative connotations. First, any university has multiple layers and silos of administrators, ranging from the president and his or her cabinet down to unit and division managers and workers, with the latter multiplied by the number of colleges, divisions, and other units. Some administrators are themselves academics or at least are attuned to academic matters; others haven't a clue. Yet, when it comes to important issues, faculty members seem often to assume that administrators are in constant touch – or collusion – with one another when, in fact,

weeks often go by without administrators talking with each other. (Even in my own vice president's office, sometimes I did not talk with my associate VPAA for days at a time, let alone with the other vice presidents, most of whom I saw only at weekly or biweekly cabinet meetings.) Both the faculty and the administration are extremely diverse in terms of interest, expertise, and involvement. A college dean may be no more aligned with the president's views than is a newly minted philosophy professor with a veteran accounting professor. Indeed, the tendency to see "the other side" as unified and quasi-monolithic may be one of the greatest barriers to progress.

At the same time, the diversity within the administration allows – perhaps encourages – some administrators to play off one against the other internally: a dean may blame the provost, or the provost may blame the CFO, and so on, when talking with faculty members. Because some administrators may be more sympathetic than others to faculty requests (even if they have no authority in the area of the requests), it can be very tempting for a faculty member to seize on the words or expressions of one administrator and use them to pressure another. Likewise, one administrator might seek to ingratiate herself or himself with faculty members at the expense of administrative colleagues. One of the big problems occurs when one administrator seems to agree with a faculty member whose request is subsequently denied by the administrator actually responsible for the issue. It is too easy to see this as administrative doublespeak, or even disingenuousness. The faculty is fragmented, with those of one college or department sometimes seeing colleagues in other colleges or departments as the cause of their relative lack of resources – a situation that can frustrate administrators seeking to do right by "the faculty."

Nonetheless, there are some perspective-related attributes that should be appreciated. The faculty, correctly, is first and foremost concerned with educational and scholarly issues. It would be insulting and inaccurate to claim that faculty members do not see and appreciate the other elements of university life, but it is likewise accurate to say that they do not have the consistency, intensity, and immediacy of concern or the depth of detailed knowledge and understanding – not to mention the pressures – that administrators have. Faculty members are intellectuals, trained to analyze, question, discuss, and criticize – and to take time doing so. Consensus, entailing logrolling and least-common-denominator solutions, tends to emerge from faculty deliberations. High level administrators, by contrast, tend to be people of action and decision who do not have, or do not perceive themselves as having, the luxury of time before making decisions and who need to make "the right decision" (taking into account a host of issues and consequences) – not merely one that pleases the greatest number. Although deans may be more in synch with the faculty of their colleges and schools, non-academic administrators often live on another planet from the faculty; and central administration inevitably has a different and broader perspective, focused to a considerable extent on long-term macro issues, strategic matters, government regulations, trustee wishes, and alumni views. Those administrators often must march to different drummers, shaped by the changing nature of the modern university.

3) The third general problem area concerns the size and complexity of the institution. It may have been true at one time – maybe as recently as the pre-World War II era – that universities

were all about, and could focus on, matters academic. That, however, has changed in the past fifty or so years. Triggered first by the flood of veterans after the War, and subsequently by waves of "generations X, Y, Z" and their successors, colleges and universities have either chosen or been forced to expand dramatically, both physically and in terms of new functions: residence halls, dining facilities, career counseling and job placement, extra-curricular activities, intercollegiate and recreational athletics, health and counseling, recreational activities, weekend entertainment – to name but a few. On top of that, the information and technology revolutions have added complexities and huge costs that faculty members, and indeed many administrators in other areas, do not comprehend. And why should they when they have their own concerns to worry about? Student financial aid in its many forms, public and private; concern for mission (and in religiously affiliated schools, ministry); public relations; and above all fund-raising have dramatically altered the face of the academy. Colleges are expected to relate to federal, state, and local governments on a range of matters – grants, compliance, service, and traditional "town and gown" issues – and they often are pushed to be involved with secondary and elementary education, the business sector, and other non-profit institutions (e.g., local libraries, churches, and civic groups). Those held responsible for all these facets of higher education life naturally see the university as a different creature from those whose focus must be on teaching and scholarship. Many of these concerns are 24/7/52 in nature, and all are costly. They drive the perspectives of administrators but may not be at the forefront of faculty awareness.

4) Administrators, or at least most of them, are both pressured and incredibly busy. Depending on one's position, pressures for top administrators come from trustees (a debatable number of whom know and care little about the particulars of academic life – they of course have general concerns and interests ranging from admissions and graduation standards to faculty quality to wanting the school's *U. S. News* rankings to rise). All administrators must answer to their supervisors, some of whom can be aggressive. (Administrative hierarchy and politics are not matters that faculty members readily relate to.) Other pressures come from accrediting agencies; from government at all levels; from the media, which needs and is needed by universities; from parents (most faculty members seldom hear anything but the "good stuff" from parents, but administrators can be swamped with complaints and requests); and of course from students who seem to have endless needs and questions. More generally, administrators bear the responsibility for promoting and advertising the university, tasks that move their focus to the external rather than the internal. The consequence of all this is that administrators simply are swamped with both big and trivially small issues. Too often, administrators are forced to deal with the urgent at the expense of the important.[1] Faculty members, of course, see this and wonder what is going on. Here, again, is where expectations and perspectives, often linked to the enhanced nature of the modern university, join to create tension. Incredibly busy administrators can fail to exhibit the sort of patience and engage in the sort of dialogue necessary to meet any reasonable standard of collegiality. When that is seen as ignorance, disinterest, or arrogance, the embers of difference are fanned and can grow into flames of real problems.

Most administrators are eager and willing to fight these pressures in order to engage with faculty on matters not only of academic concern but of broader concern – especially when the faculty members have some degree of expertise on a topic and approach it with open minds. Administrators, in my experience, generally enjoy the give-and-take with faculty members, and they do seek out faculty input where they see such input as relevant. However, doing so is not always easy. First, as strange as it may sound, some administrators are simply uncomfortable around faculty members – even to the extent of being intimidated. When this is interpreted as being dismissive or arrogant, we have a problem. The reverse, likewise, is true. I've seen the most outspoken faculty members shrivel into silence in the presence of senior administrators, especially the president, which leads to a sense of distrust when those administrators know how the faculty members speak out in other venues.

Most faculty members likewise are under extreme pressures – to teach, to publish, to participate in governance at least at the departmental and maybe college level, to engage in service, and to live a normal family life at home. Many non-academic administrators simply do not understand the academic life and its pressures.

Second, formal faculty governance bodies that presumably represent the faculty and have an institutional role in governance seldom work as intended and needed. Many are not in fact genuinely representative, even though elected, because many of the university's leading faculty scholars and teachers do not have time, or do not wish, to become involved. Accordingly, they do not seek out positions to be part of "shared governance." Some of those who are involved can be very naïve – sometimes I was amazed at the extent of this – and hold unrealistic expectations despite their best intentions. This can create frustration on both sides.

Note that none of what has been described is to be construed as having anything to do with evil intent, inordinate selfishness, power-grabbing, or any other pejorative attribute. With perhaps the occasional exception, both high and low level administrators and faculty members are decent human beings seeking to promote their universities (and, of course, themselves) and to do what is right. It is the definition of "promotion" and "right" that comes into question, as does the means needed to do so.

5) There is a final consideration worth thinking about, and it concerns the professionalism, status, and stature of the faculty that are essential for any claim to shared governance. Professors Neil W. Hampton and Jerry Gaff have written eloquently on the "social contract" that the academic profession enjoys with society.[2] Among their insights is the recognition that members of the academic profession – the faculty – who would lay claim to the right to be involved in institutional decision making (within but also outside of academic matters) have abandoned or forgotten the obligations that accompany the privileges of their status. Thus, to extrapolate, the faculty's warrant to engage in shared governance depends on living up to the responsibilities of a well-defined profession: ethical considerations, productivity obligations, fiduciary duties, socialization functions (for new members of the professoriate), accountability and oversight obligations (rigorous peer review of non-performing colleagues, for example), and, in general, professionalism. To the extent that the faculty has abandoned or fails actively to take

responsibility in these areas, its status and stature are diminished, most notably in the eyes of administrators and trustees. For example, if there is grade inflation, or if students are violating academic integrity standards, or if some faculty members fail to hold proper office hours, who is responsible to make the needed corrections? Too often, the faculty has turned these obligations – squarely academic obligations – over to deans, provosts, and the like. Is it any wonder that those administrators, and others, question the faculty's claim to shared governance in budgetary, athletic, student life, or physical facilities matters? There is need to establish credibility.

Another aspect of professionalism may be causing problems. Faculty members have become increasingly professionalized in the sense that they have become much more attached to their disciplines and their academic careers, serving as "independent contractors" at their universities and colleges. Only marginally do many of them identify with the institutions that employ them – the sort of identification that once was very strong. Even less so do they willingly take up the mundane tasks that underpin a university's operations. Advising of students, serving on committees, even attending commencement – these are things no longer embraced by today's faculty members as they once were. Collegiality among faculty members – never mind collegiality with administrators – has declined dramatically at many schools. As one's attachment to one's discipline and career grows, the attachment to and involvement in one's home institution often wanes. The effect is to distance faculty members from the administrators whose lives are much more directly connected to and dependent on their employer and who do not have the freedom and perceived mobility that faculty members have. With growing detachment, where is the justification for shared governance?

A word on collegiality is in order. What does it mean? In a recent and successful effort to revise and revitalize the *Faculty Handbook* at Villanova, we sought to make collegiality one of a number of essential faculty functions. What was intended was to establish the norm that people should treat other people in a respectful, considerate, and caring fashion – to avoid the shirking of the mundane duties all faculty members face in their departmental lives. Collegiality in this sense, of course, was to extend to the relationship between faculty and administration. In the end, we substituted "community" for "collegiality" because a number of faculty focused on one definition of collegiality that incorporated shared governance, which they saw as nearly non-existent. (Indeed, a faculty committee's published statement on collegiality became, at least to the eyes of some administrators, a claim for more decision-making authority across the board.) In the end, the claim to a greater role in governance depends on a range of issues – respect, professionalism, competence, commitment, responsibility – that are politically "loaded."

What might the future bring? A focus on the issue of faculty professionalism and the development of a clear strategy for engaging in shared governance are essential. The faculty collectively must take more responsibility for *academic* matters, including those that transcend departments and colleges, rather than pass them off to chairs, deans, provosts, and others; and they must do so in a collegial manner in the name of the academic profession. Doing so establishes a legitimacy to lay claim to a greater voice in other areas that touch academic life. In turn, that legitimacy, coupled with genuine faculty expertise (in, for example, information

technology, investment, areas of psychology and counseling, or architecture), would lead to more invitations to be part of the decision-making process in other non-academic issues, allowing issues to be framed in relation to the core mission of education and scholarship. In short, "the faculty" must give "the administration" an incentive to invite it into higher level decision-making, and it should push for such a role only in those areas where faculty expertise and concern justify such involvement. Naïve wishful thinking, unrealistic requests, claims, and expectations (which actually are quite rare), and self-induced shyness and reticence must be avoided. To earn the respect of administrators, faculty members must seem more like administrators in their appreciation for the complexities of modern day university life and for the need for a division of labor that inevitably will empower administrators. Such empowerment, however, must be linked to sharing of information and transparency. In turn, administrators, especially those in non academic areas, need to be exposed to the faculty experts in those areas, and they surely must understand that the "core business" of the university is the discovery, dissemination, and application of knowledge; all others are support functions.

One simple step would be to establish opportunities to bring faculty and administrators together to chat and discuss issues. Both groups need to understand the others' expectations and perspectives better. This of course runs up against the time pressures that administrators and faculty members face, but my hunch is that most would gladly take the time. Agendas would be needed, lest conversations merely ramble, and they should focus on real university issues and problems requiring resolution. I witnessed one superb example of this when our Chief Information Officer held a "town hall" meeting with faculty on matters of technology.

A second suggestion – one I most regrettably did not implement when I might have – would be to establish a set of faculty administrative internships. Putting faculty members (ideally faculty leaders) into administrative offices for a semester or a year would go a long way toward mutual understanding and enhanced respect. There is nothing better than "walking in another's shoes" to enlighten one's attitudes. It would be costly and might require some alterations in office space, but it surely would help enhance understanding, change perspectives, and, eventually, alter expectations. It would also provide a training- and testing-ground for future administrators. Conversely, it would be useful to bring administrators into the classroom as guest lecturers on occasion to expose them to students and academic perspectives.

Neither of these suggestions is a panacea. Assuming that both faculty members and administrators are of good will, are intelligent, understand the other's concerns and expertise, and realize that they are in this business together, much good can be accomplished. Perhaps the goal of genuinely shared governance in all matters cannot be reached, but surely it can be approached to varying degrees in different areas of university life.

Notes

1. Email traffic – from other administrators, faculty, students, alumni, vendors trying to sell something, accrediting agencies, and a host of others – has become almost unbearable for most

administrators. Spending an entire morning answering emails and trying to solve the problems they raise was, in my experience, a two or three day a week task.

2. Neil W. Hamilton and Jerry G. Gaff, "Proactively Justifying the Academic Profession's Social Contract," University of St. Thomas School of Law Legal Studies Research Paper No. 09–17 (2009). See http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1444587. See also Gaff, "What if the Faculty Really Do Assume Responsibility for the Educational Program?" *Liberal Education* 93.4 (2007): 6–13.