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Shared Governance: Its History and Its Challenges

Tensions over governance have been part of the fabric of American college and university life since the latter part of the 1800s. Concerns about academic freedom were initially at the heart of these tensions, but over time, especially since the mid-1960s, conflicts about governance have been prompted by disagreements between some members of the faculty and the administration and sometimes the governing board about who should have responsibility for and authority over—or who at least should be consulted about—which decisions.

In 1966, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), in collaboration with the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), defined the notion of shared governance more fully than had been done in the past. As I will discuss more fully later in this chapter, the AAUP argued that even as the governing board had ultimate authority for the institution, the board should delegate the college or university's operations to the president, who in turn would delegate to the faculty primary responsibility for academic matters. This notion was accepted by a great many colleges and universities in concept, despite variations in how it was carried out in practice.

I believe that something even more serious than the historical tensions about governance is now occurring. Specifically, I am convinced that the notion of shared governance as it has been generally understood and at least loosely practiced since 1966 is now being shattered on many campuses and is in jeopardy on other campuses.

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Significant economic and political pressures have, on the one hand, led many boards to call for immediate campus responses to problems. It is no longer acceptable to many trustees that, as the old saw goes, it is easier to move a graveyard than to change the curriculum. Some of them judge the traditions of shared governance to be unnecessarily process-laden and time-consuming. Some believe that the very notion of shared governance is no longer viable.

Many presidents share that same sense of urgency and so are making decisions, including those that affect the academic programs, more quickly than was traditionally the case. Sometimes, presidents do so without full or even any consultation with the faculty. In response, those faculty members who believe that they no longer have a say in academic matters, matters of institutional significance, or both are apt publicly to protest presidential and even board decisions. In what appear to be increasing numbers, members of the faculty are going so far as to vote that they have no confidence in their president.

Such adversarial relationships are occurring at a time when our colleges and universities need not conflict but the shared wisdom and perspectives of all constituents. Failures of collaboration among the faculty, the president, and the board, whatever the cause, are inevitably destructive (as they are in all organizations). At the least, failures of collaboration can lead to an unhealthy paralysis in which decisions are delayed or not made at all. At the worst, such failures can throw an institution into crisis.

In addition, conflicts over governance sometimes lead some of the players—faculty, presidents, and trustees—to say and do things that are not in the best interests of themselves or of their institutions. For example, on a campus filled with tension between the president and the faculty, a longtime trustee known for his candor told concerned faculty members—all of whom had tenure—in a public meeting that if they were unhappy with the president's decisions, they should resign and go find another job. The faculty in attendance concluded that the trustees did not understand or value

their work. Some worried that the comment meant that the trustees wanted to get rid of tenure. There was a good deal of conversation in the hallways of the college about the value of tenure in protecting free speech.

Several faculty members responded unprofessionally. They told the story to their students, thereby eliciting their support. Some of the students then held a rally to call for the president's resignation and to denounce the board. They invited the local press, who covered the rally in a series about what it called a crisis on campus. Rumors spread that some faculty members were encouraging enrolled students to transfer.

Although the trustees understood that only a few members of the faculty members had involved the students, they were critical of the faculty as a whole, arguing that responsible faculty members should have stood up to and opposed those who had involved the students.

The board remained unified in its support of the president. The faculty became increasingly alienated. Admissions and retention did suffer.

The Pressures on Shared Governance

In my judgment, there are a number of particular catalysts for the movement away from shared governance, including the following:

- As noted earlier, the extremely daunting economic pressures facing most institutions have led some presidents and also some chief academic officers to make unilateral decisions about academic programs, decisions that traditionally had relied on at least the advice if not the consent of the faculty.

- The growing concern, on the part of faculty members at institutions of all sizes and types, that a "corporate" approach to decision making has replaced a more

collaborative approach and has led many faculty members vigorously to defend faculty prerogatives because they believe these prerogatives protect them from capricious decisions on the part of administrators and, in some cases, trustees.

- The nature of the professoriate has changed dramatically, in that currently only 25 percent of the faculty at US colleges and universities are tenured or on the tenure-track, with the result that 75 percent of college and university faculty today are contingent faculty, hired on a contract basis, with no role in governance. More than 80 percent of them are part-time. As a result, the vast majority of faculty typically play no role whatsoever in governance.

- The rapid pace of change in the society at large is putting pressure on colleges and universities to institute rapid change as well.

- The growing skepticism among elected officials about the value of higher education has led some governors and some boards of public universities to influence or seek to influence matters that previously had been the province of the administration and sometimes the faculty.

- Some trustees, presidents, and elected officials have embraced the theory advanced by Clayton M. Christensen and Henry J. Eyring in their 2011 Jossey-Bass book, *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out*, that the traditional model of higher education is no longer sustainable. In particular, they have accepted Christensen and Eyring's view that such disruptive technologies as online education, including MOOCs (massive open online courses), will be more cost-effective and efficient than conventional classrooms. They also subscribe to Christensen

and Eyring's view that aspiring colleges and universities need to innovate rather than to imitate—that is, that they need to abandon the habit of emulating the most prestigious institutions like Harvard in order to achieve a higher place in the college rankings and to climb the "Carnegie ladder," the categories developed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

- Faculty members, in contrast, are often skeptical about whether online learning, especially when it is not supplemented by direct interaction with a professor, is pedagogically effective and of a high quality. Faculty members are particularly skeptical about the MOOCs, which are created by for-profit organizations.

- Fewer chief academic officers than in the past are seeking presidencies and so, for that reason as well as others, boards are increasingly turning to so-called "nontraditional candidates" for the presidency—that is, persons from outside the academy.

- The power, reach, and ease of social media, as is true in other sectors and as later chapters will illustrate, have transformed conflicts that previously would have been confined to a campus and perhaps its local community into matters that quickly receive national and even international attention. Such attention in turn often exacerbates the original conflicts. For example, social media campaigns mounted by faculty and students to broadcast their concerns beyond the campus often motivate geographically distant alumni to become involved in conflicts at their alma mater and the local and national press to weigh in on the issues. National attention has also increasingly motivated governors and other public officials to become actors in dramas affecting state-supported institutions.

Differences in How Shared Governance Has Been Practiced

A great many colleges and universities have embraced and continue at least to give lip service to the notion of shared governance in its broadest outlines.

At most colleges and universities, the board has historically delegated authority to the president for finances, facilities, human resources, risk management, informational technology, fundraising, marketing, external relations, student life, admissions, and financial aid, reserving for itself both oversight of the president and responsibility for policy. The board has also had responsibility for determining the institution's mission, although changes to mission happen only rarely if at all and usually are based on a presidential recommendation developed only after extensive discussions with all campus constituencies and sometimes alumni.

The president in turn has typically delegated responsibility to the faculty, except in unusual circumstances, for all academic matters. What this delegation means on any particular campus tends to grow out of campus history, culture, and governing documents. For example, at some institutions, the faculty's role, even in terms of academic matters, has clearly been understood to be only a recommending one. At yet other institutions, however, the faculty's role in shared governance has extended beyond the academic programs and the hiring, tenure, and promotion of faculty into many other areas of the institution, such as policies and practices relating to students, the cocurriculum, athletics, admissions, financial aid, facilities, and investment of the endowment.

But wherever an institution falls on this spectrum, all decisions that involve the allocation of resources require administrative approval. Thus, initiatives developed and approved by the faculty for academic programs and for faculty lines (including their location) are dependent on the concurrence of the administration (often the president or the chief academic officer) and the allocation of pertinent resources.

The History of Shared Governance

Governance was not an issue on US college campuses prior to the Civil War because, as W. P. Metzger notes in his oft-cited 1955 Columbia University book, *Academic Freedom in the Age of the University*, antebellum colleges were "paternalistic and authoritarian" (p. 5). Explaining that colleges were under "denominational control," Metzger characterized them as looking "to antiquity for the tools of thought, to Christianity for the by-laws of living; [they] supplied furniture and discipline for the mind, but constrained intellectual adventure . . ." (p. 4).

In his essay "Professionalism as the Basis for Academic Freedom and Faculty Governance," Larry Gerber (2010) writes that "before the last quarter of the nineteenth century, college teaching was not a very prestigious vocation" and that, prior to the Civil War, faculty were "aspiring young clergymen who saw college teaching as a temporary position until they could find a pulpit" and who played no role in governance. Rather, Gerber writes:

> Presidents and governing boards, which before the mid-nineteenth century drew heavily from the clergy, exercised decision-making authority with little input from faculty. Faculty were responsible for maintaining discipline, building character, and passing on received wisdom to their students, but were not expected to engage in research or the production of new knowledge (p. 5).

The Emergence of Academic Freedom and Research

After the Civil War, many American professors studied in Germany and, as Gerber notes, soon embraced the German notions that students had the freedom to learn without much administrative interference and that faculty members were free to teach and engage in research as they saw fit. Many American professors also emulated German scholars by valuing research intended to discover new knowledge. Some came to believe that it

was important to use that new knowledge to inform public policy debates about economic and social issues. It was no longer thought to be enough for faculty merely to transmit what they knew to their students.

Not unexpectedly, when faculty participated in public policy debates, some found themselves in conflict with corporate donors who on occasion demanded their dismissal. Sometimes these donors were successful. For example, such noted social scientists as Edward A. Bemis, John R. Commons, and Edward A. Ross all lost their academic positions at Chicago, Syracuse, and Stanford, respectively, reportedly because their publicly stated views antagonized donors. Indeed, Mrs. Leland Stanford was the force behind Ross's firing.

The desire for academic freedom and the ability to participate in public policy debates in the public arena was gathering support at the same time that the governance of colleges and universities was also changing in an important way. Increasingly, boards of colleges and universities, whose role was to provide oversight and to hire and if necessary fire the president, included more businessmen and bankers than clergy.

As a result, as Margesson notes, as early as 1908, there were complaints that colleges and universities had become too corporate and that presidents had too much power, something that nearly a century later is very much a refrain on some campuses. A piece about university administrators in the 1908 *Popular Mechanics Monthly* put it this way:

> No single thing has done more harm to higher education in America during the past quarter-century than the steady aggrandizement of the presidential offices and the modeling of university administration upon the methods and ideals of the factory or department store (Margesson, 2008, p. 72).

The AAUP Becomes a Force in Matters of Governance

In 1914, in response to a number of cases during the previous decades in which faculty members believed that academic freedom had been violated, a group of notable scholars came together to form the AAUP.

They founders of the AAUP, including its first president, John Dewey, were particularly influenced by the Ross case and the case of Scott Nearing, whose contract in 1915 had not been renewed at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School despite his having been recommended by the faculty. As an article in the Spring 2007 *Wharton Alumni Magazine*, "A Radical Who Laid the Groundwork for the Tenure System," explains, Nearing had run afoul of a number of Wharton trustees because of his publicly expressed views opposing child labor and his general progressive views. Nearing, in fact, according to Bertell Ollman in his undated work published by New York University's educational project, *The Ideal of Academic Freedom as the Ideology of Academic Repression, American Style*, emphasized that he opposed child labor in coal mines, despite the fact that an influential Wharton trustee was a mine owner.

The AAUP formed a committee to investigate the case. Its report was highly critical of Penn's actions. Nearing became such a *cause célèbre* that Penn altered its procedures for terminating a faculty member to conform to the AAUP's recommendations. Nearing then went to the University of Toledo, where he was fired in 1917 for opposing the United States' participation in World War II.

1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure

With the primary goal of protecting academic freedom and the Nearing case very much on its mind, the AAUP issued what was the first of many statements of principles, the *1915 Declaration of*

Principles on Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure. This document also was the first to create the notion that boards, the president, and the faculty share in the governance of colleges and universities with "equal responsibilities" except in scientific and educational matters, where the faculty has primary responsibility.

In the *1915 Declaration*, the AAUP defined what it saw as the three critical elements of academic freedom: "freedom of inquiry and research; freedom of teaching within the university or college; and freedom of extramural utterance and action." The *1915 Declaration* also made a distinction between proprietary schools, which exist to fulfill a charge established by donors, and the vast majority of colleges and universities in the country, which the AAUP characterized as a "public trust."

The *1915 Declaration* further argued that even though faculty members are appointed by the institution's board, they are not employees. Rather, they have a primary responsibility to the public and "to the judgment of [their] profession." Perhaps even more critically, the *1915 Declaration* asserted that trustees "have neither competency nor moral right to intervene" in the professional activities of the faculty.

One of the most critical statements in terms of governance in the *1915 Declaration* was this: "Official action relating to reappointments and refusals of reappointment should be taken only with the advice and consent of some board or committee representative of the faculty."

Since 1915, the AAUP, in partnership with other higher education organizations, has twice issued revised statements about governance, in part prompted by the climate at the time relating to academic freedom.

1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure

The *1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, a joint effort between the AAUP and the AAC (now the American Association of Colleges and Universities, or the AAC&U),

essentially reaffirms the basic tenets of the *1915 Declaration*. However, the context of the *1940 Statement*—a time when there was widespread discussion about whether the United States should enter World War II—may well explain the additional principles that cautioned faculty members about what they said both in the classroom and without. For example, the *1940 Statement* cautioned:

> Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter, which has no relation to their subject.

This document further noted that although faculty members should be afforded the rights of free speech of any citizen, "[a]s scholars and educational officers, they should remember that the public may judge their profession and their institution by their utterances."

Academic Freedom and Tenure in the Quest for National Security

This statement was published in 1956 during the McCarthy era, a time when there was great public concern about the presence of communists on college campuses and little tolerance in some quarters for those who dissented from the government. During the so-called "Red Scare," faculty members and others accused of being communists lost their jobs. Many campuses banned controversial speakers. Many public institutions required faculty members to sign loyalty oaths. I think it safe to say that during this period many institutions neither protected academic freedom nor practiced shared governance.

Margesson reports that in that setting, the AAUP took a strong stance in favor of academic freedom, arguing that individuals not be prohibited from teaching positions because of "their beliefs or associations." Without naming communism, the AAUP's statement asserted, "We cannot accept an educational system that is subject to

the irresponsible push and pull of contemporary issues" (Margesson, 2008, p. 119). The document also rejected the notion of loyalty oaths. The AAUP took a fair amount of criticism for this report.

1966 Statement on Governance of Colleges and Universities

The pendulum swung back in the 1960s, when faculty and students alike began to question the nature of authority and responsibility. At the same time, as the *1966 Statement* asserted:

> The academic institution, public or private, often has become less autonomous; buildings, research, and student tuition are supported by funds over which the college or university exercises a diminishing control. Legislative and executive governmental authorities, at all levels, play a part in the making of important decisions in academic policy. If these voices and forces are to be successfully heard and integrated, the academic institution must be in a position to meet them with its own generally unified view.

It was in this setting that the AAUP, in collaboration with ACE and AGB, developed the *1966 Statement on Governance of Colleges and Universities*, which more fully defined the notion of shared governance. Although the AAUP does not keep track of how many colleges and universities have formally endorsed this statement by referencing it in their governing documents, the *1966 Statement* is often cited by members of the faculty in cases of disagreement about governance. Moreover, faculty members who believe that the tenets of this statement have been violated can also ask the AAUP to send a team to investigate. If the team discovers sufficient violations, it may recommend censure, and the designated AAUP committee will vote to put the institution on its censure list.

The *1966 Statement* is the most explicit about shared governance, advocating that colleges and universities practice it in the areas of planning, communications, facilities, the budget, and

hiring a new president. In brief, the *1966 Statement* explains that even as ultimate authority and responsibility for an institution resides with the governing board, the board typically delegates operational responsibility to the president, while the faculty has primary responsibility for academic programs and educational policy. The *1966 Statement* also asserts that the president's authority is delegated to him or her by both the board and the faculty. In my experience, few if any boards or for that matter presidents would accept the notion that the faculty delegates to the president, and not the other way around. Boards and presidents would also view the faculty's role in most matters other than the curriculum and academic standards as advisory.

In a 2007 piece for the American Association of Colleges and Universities' *Liberal Education*, "What If the Faculty Really Do Assume Responsibility for the Academic Program?," Jerry Gaff summarizes the key tenets of the *1966 Statement*:

> The faculty has *primary* authority over the academic area, including such matters as the curriculum, standards of faculty competence, and standards of student achievement. In this area, the governing board and administration should "concur with the faculty judgment except in rare instances and for compelling reasons which should be stated in detail." The board and administration, the statement says, should have primary authority over mission, strategic direction, physical plant, and fiscal resources. In these areas, the faculty has *secondary* authority and should be consulted and informed about major decisions.

Differences over the Nature and Pace of Change

Many of the conflicts about governance in recent years have been prompted by differing views about who is responsible for the nature and pace of change, particularly but not exclusively when it comes

to academic matters. In fact, *Inside Higher Ed*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *New York Times*, and other national publications now routinely report instances where differences about this question have led to significant schisms among the governing board, the administration, faculty, the staff, the students, and even the alumni.

In today's environment, in which many colleges and universities are struggling to balance their budgets, to deal with declining enrollments and rising tuition discounts, and to determine how to deal with new populations of students and new methods of delivering education, boards and presidents increasingly want to make programmatic decisions, including those in the academic realm, very quickly. They typically also argue that it is essential that their institution be disciplined in how it allocates resources and that it become more entrepreneurial in generating new revenue streams. In contrast, members of the faculty typically resist what they view as hasty decisions and resist even more the involvement of boards and presidents in academic matters. As I will discuss in more detail in later chapters, on many campuses the faculty is losing this battle, with boards and presidents creating structures, policies, and hiring practices that diminish the faculty's role in governance.

The Effect of Program Prioritization on Governance

In light of economic pressures, some presidents, sometimes at the prompting of their trustees, have in recent years initiated efforts to prioritize programs. Often inspired by Robert C. Dickeson's 2010 revision of his Jossey-Bass book, *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance*, those involved call for a reallocation of resources to programs that advance the institution's mission and to programs "that they can accomplish with distinction" (p. 15).

But Dickeson himself believes that program prioritization almost always elicits resistance from the faculty because, in his

view, it "violates the egalitarian ideology in higher education," which Dickeson describes as follows:

> If all programs are more or less equal, who's to judge their relative worth? I'm an expert in one discipline, and I rely on my college experts in other disciplines to do their work. I am just as incapable of judging the value of their work or the worth of their programs as they obviously are of judging mine.

A less generous view of objections to program prioritization is that faculty members have at least a tacit agreement that they will not be critical of or take an adversarial action against another program so long as their colleagues in those programs don't criticize or make such judgments about their programs. It is also the case that the very language of program prioritization concerns faculty, because this language suggests that some programs may no longer be considered a priority and therefore de facto become second-class.

Dickeson also argues that the faculty's "common mistrust of administrators to do anything right unites [the faculty] in opposition to management efforts to poke around in, and likely destroy, what we've worked so hard to establish" (p. 21).

But despite the reluctance of many faculty to participate in the process of evaluating and even making recommendations about the fate of academic programs, increasing numbers of colleges and universities—public and private alike—are discontinuing programs for which there is no longer demand or which for varying reasons are no longer an institutional priority. Those that rely on pre-professional and technical programs are adding and subtracting programs explicitly based on market demands. Some institutions are becoming more experimental and innovative in shifting resources from these programs to new programs that they believe will increase net tuition revenue.

The Creation of Alternative Structures to Skirt Issues of Governance

Until the past decade, few colleges and universities even contemplated offering new academic programs without the engagement and even commitment of the faculty, who for their part, on the one hand, are not susceptible to notions of urgency and, on the other hand, are risk-averse. That practice has changed. Numerous institutions, for instance, that previously had emphasized undergraduate education are now investing in new graduate programs, often in education, the health sciences, and business. Some of these offerings are online. Some take a blended approach, combining on-campus classes with online components. Some take place on satellite campuses. Many rely on part-time adjuncts hired on a contract basis without benefits and who, as chapter 3 explains, have no role in governance.

Despite the fact that some of these new programs are generating significant revenues and subsidizing the undergraduate programs, on some campuses the undergraduate faculty have balked at the reallocation of resources to these new programs. Faculty often argue that these new programs are of a lesser quality or are not tied to the institution's original mission. If these programs are successful, these concerns tend to be ignored because the programs often are keeping the institution afloat.

When confronted with such resistance, a number of presidents have simply created alternative structures for the new programs and new methods of review and approval for these programs. In several instances, presidents simply have created a new graduate school, a school of professional studies, or a school in one of the new disciplines. The deans of these new schools are given the responsibility for and authority over the new programs, including curriculum, hiring, and academic standards.

As I will discuss at some length in chapter 3, the faculty in these programs often are contingent faculty—that is, faculty who

are neither tenured nor on the tenure-track and who generally are part-time adjuncts who in fact do not participate in governance at all. In addition, many such new programs are taught online, again by contingent faculty who often are part-time and who also do not typically participate in institutional governance.

Impact of Conflicts over Governance on the Presidency

The contentious environment on many campuses may well be discouraging talented people from considering both the presidency and trusteeship. This is a significant problem because colleges and universities today need presidents and trustees who are intelligent, perceptive, informed, and committed. Colleges and universities also need presidents and trustees who take seriously the fact that they are entrusted with the health and integrity of the colleges and universities they serve.

Just as important, in my judgment, our institutions of higher education need presidents and trustees who understand that the faculty ultimately is the heart and soul of the institution, that an institution's academic mission should drive resource and policy decisions, that ensuring academic quality is paramount, and that protecting academic freedom is essential.

To be successful, in my judgment, presidents need to be able to inspire their faculty colleagues about the president's vision and to lead colleagues at least to understand, if not to agree with, the decisions that the president is making. Presidents need to explain why shared governance, to work, now needs to move much more quickly than in the past. The good news, as the final chapter will illustrate, is that there are such presidents who have led their institutions to change and that there are faculty members and trustees on these campuses who support these presidents' efforts.

I have been struck, nevertheless, in the past several years by how many successful presidents have shared privately with me their concern that the job of being a college president is

becoming untenable. These include a handful of presidents, several within their first few years, who have received high praise for being present on their campuses and for spending time actively listening to students, faculty, and staff. Each of them has been an exceptionally good fundraiser.

All of them described their biggest discouragement as being tensions with or even overt conflicts with the faculty, tensions and conflicts that stem from problems not of the president's making. All insisted that although needing to work seven days and evenings a week takes its toll, they had anticipated and acclimated to that. Rather, they described how discouraged they felt when, despite evidence to the contrary, faculty members seemed to assume that they were the enemy.

These presidents were also discouraged by the fact that even actions that they had taken to support the faculty were being criticized. For example, although each of these presidents, despite inheriting budgetary problems, had balanced the budget and given raises of varying percentages to faculty and staff members who had not received raises under the previous administration, each was criticized because the raises were not in the minds of the recipients adequate enough to compensate for the years without raises. One discouraged president described the situation this way: "We worked very hard to give everyone a 2.5 percent raise at the end of my first year even though I had inherited a deficit budget. Rather than being glad, many people told me that they were insulted by the low amount."

Chief Academic Officers Are Increasingly Uninterested in the Presidency

Chief academic officers (CAOs)—provosts, academic vice presidents, and deans—of course witness the dynamic between the president and the faculty, with the result that many of them decide that they do not want to become presidents. The data are clear: declining numbers of CAOs are interested in the presidency.

According to a 2009 ACE report on the college presidency, *National Census of Chief Academic Officers*, more than two-thirds of CAOs do not "intend to seek a presidency, despite ACE data that show the most common path to the president's office is through the chief academic officer." Indeed, that same study shows that currently only 20 percent of CAOs actually go on to become presidents.

The ACE study reports that the major hesitations that CAOs have about becoming presidents are that they "find the nature of presidential work unappealing (66 percent), are ready to retire (32 percent), are concerned about the time demands of the position (27 percent) and don't want to live in a fishbowl (24 percent)."

At the same time, many boards of trustees today believe that their institutions would be best served by a president from outside the academy who, they argue, will bring a fresh perspective to the work of the president and who will have expertise in allocating and reallocating resources and generally in dealing with financial matters.

The implications of the declining interest of CAOs in the presidency and the growing interest on the part of boards to go outside the academy is that increasingly boards are appointing nontraditional candidates as presidents. For instance, ACE reported in *The American College President—2012* that for one out of five presidents, the most recent prior position was outside the academy, "up sharply from 13 percent in 2006 and 15 percent in 2001."

Traditional Versus Nontraditional Presidents

There are certainly examples of very effective nontraditional presidents—that is, those whose professional experience has been outside the academy. University of Oklahoma president David Boren and former Davidson College president Bobby Vagt come immediately to mind. Boren of course was a Rhodes Scholar and then a very effective US senator, and Vagt was a Davidson graduate who throughout a distinguished career remained committed to the college, receiving its Alumni Service Award and serving for two

years as national leader of its annual fund and as a member of its board of visitors. His wife and older daughter were Davidson graduates, and his youngest daughter was enrolled as a first-year student.

Although there are certainly many examples of presidents who have come up through the faculty ranks and who have not been successful in their presidential role, in my experience, presidents who have been faculty members have one important advantage over those who come from outside the academic community or who come to their presidency from a vice presidency in a nonacademic area, such as finance, advancement, enrollment, or student affairs. Specifically, people who have themselves been faculty members generally tend to be pretty tolerant of faculty dissension. They are inclined to understand that most people who choose to go into college teaching do so because they are independent, critical thinkers who are used to being given deference for their independent and critical thoughts. Certainly, during my own presidency, I was aware that even though I celebrated the critical stance of my colleagues in terms of their teaching and scholarship, I often wished they would not apply that same approach to what often appeared to me to be everything that I did.

The Difficulties of Dissent for Some Nontraditional Presidents

Dissent about and even overt resistance to presidential decisions on the part of the faculty and sometimes the students can prove very difficult for some nontraditional presidents, particularly those who come from worlds where there is a formal chain of command. The following examples illustrate the difficulty presidents have when they don't fully understand how to manage in an academic environment.

- A new president—used to being a high-level executive in a Fortune 500 company—took any questions about her decisions to be challenges to her personal authority. In fact, she viewed any criticism from members of the faculty as

insubordination. As time wore on, she chose to deal with the situation by communicating very little with the faculty, including attending faculty meetings only sporadically. The more she shut down, the more the faculty raised questions. When the faculty senate invited her to attend a meeting of the entire faculty to discuss concerns about a personnel decision that she had made, she refused the invitation, saying that she was doing so on the advice of counsel. The faculty as a whole voted no confidence within months. Her board was confused because her predecessor and faculty members had enjoyed a positive relationship. This president eventually resigned.

• A second nontraditional candidate similarly came to his presidency from the executive suite of a major corporation. Faced with a budget deficit nearly double what he had anticipated, he decided to make cuts. In order to curry favor with the faculty, he decided to leave the faculty and the academic programs intact. He hired an outplacement firm with which he had worked in his corporate role to advise him and then took their advice. The result: on a given day just before the Christmas break, the vice presidents went to the offices of those staff members being terminated, asked them to gather their personal belongings and come with them to a large meeting room on the edge of the campus.

Once the selected staff members were gathered, the vice president for finance explained to them that they were being terminated for budgetary reasons, that each would receive two weeks of severance and that they could come back that evening to the university where, accompanied by campus security, they could clean out their offices. The president, on the advice of the firm, was off campus.

Those who had been terminated included many long-time and admired staff members who provided support to the faculty and who were part of student affairs. The faculty and staff

erupted with anger at how their colleagues had been treated. The students created a YouTube video that went viral among the alumni, protesting the decisions and chanting a variation of "Rehire Them!"

This decision continued to haunt the president throughout his presidency. He nevertheless learned that he needed to consult with people on the faculty and staff whom he respected before making major decisions, and over time he and the campus reached a rapprochement of sorts.

• Another nontraditional candidate was named president of the large public university where he had earned a master's degree. As soon as his appointment was announced, he made it known that he wished to be given tenure, something he thought would give him standing with the faculty. The board said that it would consider doing so but that the president had to go through the same sort of review as any new professor. The department met and voted overwhelmingly not to recommend him for tenure, saying that in fact they wouldn't have hired him as a faculty member at all. This was an embarrassment for the new president and an unhappy beginning to his relationship with his new colleagues.

• The nontraditional president of a private college created a crisis with the faculty when he unilaterally announced new criteria for hiring, tenure, and promotions. In preparation for the decision, he had consulted widely with presidents of aspirant institutions, something he shared with his faculty when he announced the changes. The faculty were not impressed. It was they, they explained to him, whom he should have consulted. The board was supportive of the proposed changes and contemplated putting a hold on all tenure decisions unless the faculty approved the president's criteria. This conflict took precedence over all other institutional matters, including the revised core curriculum for which the president had also asked.

Some Talented People Are Reluctant to Serve as Trustees

It should also be of concern that it is not only potential presidents who now may have hesitations about service. The negative attention that has recently focused on such boards as those at the University of Virginia and Penn State may well lead some potentially talented trustees to be reluctant to serve as board members. Moreover, growing expectations for trustee donations may discourage some capable people from board service.

Pressures on Trustees, Presidents, and Faculty to Change

No alternative model to the traditional notions of shared governance has yet to emerge. Even so, the pressures facing colleges and universities today clearly demand that trustees, presidents (and other senior administrators), and faculty members redefine their roles and responsibilities and work collaboratively in new and more effective ways. Fortunately there are many healthy and thriving institutions where the president, the faculty, and the board work together effectively.

In these institutions, the president welcomes and in fact actively seeks the participation of the faculty in decision making about academic matters. She or he understands and actively considers the perspective of the faculty. In these institutions, because faculty members have confidence in the president and the senior administration, they devote most of their time, attention, energy, and intellectual power to teaching, advising, and scholarship. Faculty members also generously engage in service because they believe that this work is meaningful, will contribute to the education of their students, and will advance the institution's academic mission. In these institutions, with the president's encouragement and help, the trustees understand and value the work of the faculty, and the faculty appreciates rather than demonizes the board.

The strains that I have described in this chapter are both the result of and exacerbated by the various economic pressures that colleges and universities have experienced in the last decade, including but not exclusively those caused by the economic downturn of 2008. The next chapter will also describe the ways in which these economic pressures have impacted institutional functioning, priorities, and governance.