

# Introduction

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“Everybody talks about shared governance, but nobody does anything about it.” With all respect to a paraphrased Mark Twain, this statement is incorrect. With appreciation to former SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher for allocating funding for discussions about shared governance, SUNY Voices has made it possible: We talk about shared governance in shared spaces, and we try our best to get it right. As the essays in this volume illustrate, there are many different ways, strategies, and approaches to “getting it right.” From campus-specific examples to system-wide rubrics, SUNY campuses are committed to shared governance.

The contributions in this volume are from two SUNY Voices conferences with a resonant theme: empowering and including as many people as possible to make the life and work of our campuses a shared process. At its essence, each essay works to grapple with how and what shared governance is, using examples of success and occasional failure to learn from mistakes and highlight best practices.

In the beginning, there was shared governance, and it was good. But “good” might be in the eyes of the beholder. In “Characteristics of Shared Governance,” Diane Bliss, Renee Lathrop, and Jeffrey Steele ferret out key elements of shared governance. Comparing systems across three different institutions allows for a high-level view of common practices and evolving issues. Because shared governance should be both dynamic and responsive, some policy areas, such as how to be more inclusive of part-time staff within a governance structure, are currently unresolved. As Noelle Chaddock and Gordon Bigelow remind us in “Framing the Role of Faculty Governance Toward Institutional Diversity and Inclusion,” governance can be a place and space for new issues. Are there ways shared governance can be more inclusive and more responsive to larger campus issues of diversity and inclusion? Can shared governance spaces model

best practices and infuse this vision across campus? Finally, three neighboring community college presidents, Belinda S. Miles, Cliff L. Wood, and Kristine Young, present their views on shared governance particularly in regard to Middle States Commission of Higher Education standards. The perspective of campus leaders is a good contrast to the faculty, the other side of shared governance. Their advice and insight about working under tight deadlines, transitions, and a continual influx of new students offers an illuminating look at the challenges (and frustrations) shared by our partners in governance.

With a common language and understanding, what does it take to make governance work smoothly? The three keys are communication, communication, and communication. Joe Marren highlights specific and generic strategies that can be used on a campus level in “The Rights, Wrongs, and Challenges of Governance Communication.” The use of social media may or may not work on a specific campus, but the common tools of basic communication, properly deployed, will ensure that everyone on campus has the ability to be well informed. The ability to communicate well, honestly, and openly is at the heart of “Developing Rapport and Relationships with New Administrators” by campus governance leader Margaret Ann Hoose and Provost Barry Spriggs. A new governance system and a new leader could be a difficult transition, but with open conversation and adherence to bylaws, an institution can move forward in a productive and inclusive manner, with buy-in from faculty and staff, students, and administration.

Communication does not always mean that honest and open conversations are occurring, however. To that end, we offer some best practices across SUNY and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Deborah F. Stanley, president, and Lisa M. Glidden, campus governance leader, offer a case study from SUNY Oswego. A committee set up through shared governance allowed this campus to think creatively and long term about the needs and desires of the campus to grow and expand its physical facilities. Working collaboratively enabled the committee to think big and position itself well: when resources were available, the campus was ready with a process, a plan and a goal in mind. Another example of best practices is “Development of a Rubric for Assessing Shared Governance,” which came out of the SUNY Committee on Assessment. Deborah L. Moeckel shares the rubric and the process for creating something applicable across a varied 64 campuses. Finally, Michael DeCesare uses the AAUP’s 1966 “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities” to bring us “Back to the Past: Imagining the

Future of Academic Governance.” He balances breakdowns on some campuses with suggestions for strengthening shared governance.

All of these tools and best practices can be seen in the shared lessons learned. Kenneth P. O’Brien reflects on “Chancellor Nancy Zimpher and SUNY’s Shared Governance” from his position as president of the SUNY University Faculty Senate in Zimpher’s first four years. A champion of shared governance, he assesses two particular cases in which working with governance leaders was fruitful to Zimpher’s larger agenda. Taking Zimpher’s words about shared governance to heart, campus governance leaders Philip L. Glick and Dominic J. Licata argue that transparency is perhaps the best tool deployed in shared governance. They argue that transparency fosters shared governance, just as true shared governance fosters transparency.

Are transparency and communication enough? When Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), an accrediting body, comes to visit, the answer can be varied. As Valerie H. Collins illustrates in “Nassau Community College at a Turning Point,” sometimes it takes hard work through shared governance. A new university president and a new vice president of academic affairs arrived on campus in fall 2016, following MSCHE putting the campus on probation. Building trust and using tools from AAUP and Middle States, the campus regained its footing and was fully accredited. Olin Stratton and Wendy Tarby, in “Accreditation Academy: An Organic Approach to Preparing for the MSCHE Site Visit” offer a proactive response to MSCHE. In advance of accreditation, they held campus-wide workshops to inform everyone about the process, timeline, and responsibilities. This helped ensure that everyone was familiar with accreditation and ready for the visit, having fully been involved in preparing the report. Finally, in “A Comparative Analysis of Regional Accreditation Guidelines: Role of Shared Governance in Accreditation,” Peter L. K. Knuepfer compares accreditation bodies across the United States to find similarities and differences. The commonalities are reassuring, the disparities somewhat surprising.

From basic definitions and a common understanding to accreditation, from failure to success, shared governance offers campuses a path to collaborative and productive wins for faculty, staff, students, and administrators. These essays offer a unique perspective on shared governance, with applicability beyond the specifics.