

Statement of the Faculty Advisory Council of the Illinois Board of Higher Education on Shared Governance Participation in Budget Decision-Making and Policy Implementation

Endorsed June 11, 2010

Difficult economic conditions have compelled institutions of higher education across Illinois and the United States to consider and/or implement an array of strategies to deal with their budget crises. These strategies have included furloughs, hiring freezes, program reduction and elimination, and reductions in staffing.

While the Faculty Advisory Council recognizes the significant difficulties facing higher education in Illinois, it is concerned that financial stress can be or is being used as an excuse for university and college administrators to make decisions without appropriate consultation with campus institutions of shared governance. Since the productivity and morale of a university or college depend on the faculty's conviction that they are deeply invested in the mission and processes of their institution, actions taken without consultation with appropriate shared governance bodies can only undermine the long-term health of our higher education institutions.

Yet even as the Faculty Advisory Council is concerned that financial stress might be used as an excuse for university and college administrators to make decisions without appropriate consultation with campus institutions of shared governance, it also recognizes that education administrators must make difficult decisions, often under severe time constraints. Accordingly, the Faculty Advisory Council believes that campus institutions of shared governance must be responsive if they are to be effective.

The Faculty Advisory Council believes all institutions should follow the following principles as they deal with decisions regarding budgets and policy implementation in these difficult times.¹

1) University administrators must facilitate early, careful, and meaningful faculty shared governance participation in decision-making and policy implementation. Such participation includes, but is not limited to: a) encouraging faculty to raise issues of concern; b) assisting faculty in gathering and collecting information relevant to an issue; c) working with administrative staff to collect and present information relevant to an issue; d) considering seriously any draft plans and policies faculty groups have developed for commentary and consideration; e) responding in a timely manner to requests for information; f) allowing shared governance groups to access appropriate means of communicating and promulgating their plans, policies, and requests for information to the community; g) responding to complaints from shared governance groups that they have encountered difficulties, such as unresponsive staff persons or scheduling conflicts, in carrying out their responsibilities; and f) allowing faculty groups to have appropriate time to understand the issues that come before them.

2) If a decision to reduce or eliminate an academic program is made after early, careful, and meaningful faculty involvement, it is the responsibility of the faculty to determine where within the program reductions should be made. Rights under academic tenure must be protected to the fullest extent possible. In those cases where, after full consideration of viable alternatives, there is no realistic choice other than to terminate the services of a tenured faculty member, granting of at least a year of notice is expected, as is the giving of preference for openings for which the faculty person may be eligible within the state. When one institution merges or purchases the assets of another, the negotiations leading to merger or purchase should recognize the terms of appointment of all faculty members involved.

3) Campus shared governance groups must respond to issues before them in a timely manner. They must consult broadly with relevant groups affected by particular policies and issues. They must engage in professional, respectful debate on the facts and policies they consider and practice due diligence in considering issues and their alternatives. Shared governance groups must offer full, fair, and serious consideration of the realistic issues and concerns associated with particular policies or programs and, once a decision is reached after engaging in a thorough and serious discussion of the issues at hand, must cooperate with University administrators and other constituents in achieving shared goals.

Keeping these principles in the forefront of our work will help all of us achieve our shared goals more effectively and efficiently.

(1) These statements are adapted from the American Association of University Professors at: <http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/4D42E708-51CA-4ED8-9D9B-AEE9E7224207/0/OperatingGuidelines.pdf>; and Illinois State University Academic Senate's policy "Powers and Responsibilities of Committees of the Academic Senate," promulgated August 2006, at: <http://www.academicssenate.ilstu.edu/Committees/PowersResponsibilities-SenateCom2007-03-15.htm>