

Presidents' Discussion Series
Institutional Governance
January 9, 2013

David Docherty, President

GFC is starting to get its feet and understand its multifaceted role in terms of its relationship with its committees, the Board of Governors and Faculty Councils. MRU is progressing in its understanding of the nature of these relationships, but we still have a ways to go. There are still some inconsistent practices across the institution that need to be addressed.

Phil and I attended AUCC's workshop in December on the strategic leadership of senates (GFCs). It was fairly helpful and provided ideas for improvement on a number of fronts. This workshop also provided a broad picture of senates across the country. A report from the workshop will be posted on the web and it will be presented at the GFC meeting next week.

Phil Warsaba, Associate VP Enrollment Services

There was diverse representation from many schools at the workshop: there are better and worse senate structures than what we have. We are still trying to figure out how best to govern academic affairs through GFC and are open to making changes. This puts us in a better position than others whose senates are steeped in tradition and, thus, difficult to change.

A 2012 study on university senates was presented. The study looked at the general structures of senates across the country. Some senates are comprised of as few as 50 members and some have as many as 200: the average is 77. The number of senate subcommittees ranges between 1 and 20.

Perceived Role of Senate/GFC (see slide 4 of workshop report)

- Most faculty members surveyed across institutions think Senates should be doing certain things but do not think they are doing them.
 - Periodically review its own performance
 - Regularly review the performance of the University in Academic Areas
 - Defend and protect the autonomy of the university
 - Play a role in determining the future direction of the university
 - Ask tough questions of senior Administrators
 - Pay a role in setting the university's budget
 - Play an active role in monitoring and trying to influence government policy
 - Play a role in establishing research policies and strategic research directions
 - Play a role in defining priorities for fundraising and development
 - Act as the *final* authority in approving major academic policies

Levels of engagement

- Average length of senate membership is three years
- Senate Members spend, on average, 6.5 hours per month on senate work
- Most are well prepared: 90% prepare and 75% feel they have the information they need.
- 51% of senate members feel that their orientation was adequate

Shared Challenges Across Institutions

- Managing intersections between the BoG and GFC
- Clearly defining GFC's powers
- Effectively consulting and engaging stakeholders

Strategies for Improvement

- Cross reporting at board and GFC meetings
 - We have started to do this at MRU and are having success with it
- Senate planning and priorities committee
 - This seems compelling and we may constitute such a committee here
- Regular updates on government relations
 - We have started doing this
- Budget presentations to faculty councils
 - At the workshop there was agreement that the role of GFC was to provide advice to the

- board on academic priorities, and that it is the board's role to manage the budget
 - We need to clearly articulate roles and responsibilities in this area
- Facilitate interaction between GFC and the board.
 - One possibility is to have joint functions held for the board and GFC with a dinner to follow. This would meet with mixed success due to difference in sizes.
 - A better option would be for the chairs of board and GFC committees to meet twice per year. In their first meeting they could share their priorities and, at the second meeting, they could report back and review how they did.
 - This would help both groups better understand each others' roles and would facilitate good conversation on where authority lies in different types of projects.
 - David is thinking of implementing something like this in the fall
- Advisory powers
 - Create and distribute a document on this to all GFC councillors
 - Advisory powers are delineated in GFC's bylaws but councillors do not necessarily know the bylaws
- Clarification needed on bicameral governance and how it is different from the Canadian parliamentary system
 - In bicameral governance, GFC is responsible for making academic decisions and the board is responsible for administrative/financial decisions. This is different from parliament wherein all decisions would be made by both governing bodies.
 - Problems arise because there is, obviously, overlap on some matters that are both budgetary and academic.
 - In some institutions, the academic plan does not need the Board's approval: this emphasises the role of GFC as the primary decision making body for academic matters.
 - There is also disparity between faculties, misunderstandings of the relationship between Faculty Councils and GFC. We need to make sure that all members of Faculty Councils have had an opportunity to discuss things before they get to GFC: we need to look at the best ways to do this. If we want something passed in January we need to determine where it goes first, where it comes from and where it goes. We need to take a bigger look at this from the perspective of looking at the whole academic year.
- Effective consultation and engagement
 - Guest speakers at GFC addressing relevant issues may improve engagement.
 - Having special topics on the agendas.
 - We are trying to do this. These topics would be to generate discussion only: they are not decision items.
- Increase the amount of prep time spent on GFC Meetings
 - We need to spend more time preparing for GFC meetings.
 - We tend to elevate the financial matters and spend more time preparing for Board meetings. We should spend as much time thinking about academic (GFC) matters.
- Striking a balance between efficiency and discussion
 - We are doing more this year to achieve a better balance
- Comprehensive orientation process
 - For new and returning members and for members of standing committees
- Regular assessment and evaluation of GFC
 - This is something we do not do that other universities are doing. These reviews can generate interesting and useful data
- Alternative Rules of Order
 - A lot of places are developing comprehensive rules of order so they do not have to refer to Roberts rules.
- Improving overall understanding of the role of GFC in Academic leadership
 - GFC should have effective oversight of programs etc.
 - Clarification of the role of GFC and its advisory powers
 - GFC can have legitimate influence on anything related to quality of teaching and programs: we should embrace this.
- Mobilising academic leadership to seek out the best candidates for GFC
 - This is a good idea

- We are working on our nomination and election process, but it would be good to find people well suited for these roles. This would improve effective engagement in GFC.

Jeff Keshen, Dean of Arts

We want to do things in an efficient manner so we have time for teaching and research. The MRU inclination toward policies, processes and acronym speak is not conducive to this end. Being process heavy, as we are at MRU, has advantages and challenges. Consultation is a good thing but it can lead to indecision, decision paralysis and endless consultation. Part of this is due to unclear messages on governance and on who/which group has the ability to make decisions.

I see governance as who is in power: who is responsible for making decisions, informing stakeholders and achieving resolutions efficiently and transparently.

Current issues and examples demonstrating the need for improved understanding of governance

- When I arrived at MRU, AFC was thinking it should have a speaker as it was a sub body of GFC which has a speaker. A speaker would make the meeting more efficient and the Dean could pay more attention and take notes. This seemed to be a good structure to move things along and get things done. The speaker could also ensure we had reports from GFC and its sub-committees. However, creating an AFC speaker was delayed due to concerns about the relationship between AFC and GFC. There were differences of opinion over whether we should or were obliged to copy GFC's structure. So, we imported the roles of speaker into the position of a Facilitator and it works very well. This is an improvement that can be made in other Faculty councils but it is still indicative of the broader issue and uncertainty of where AFC, faculty councils, stands in relation to GFC.
- We are in the midst of producing a Comprehensive Institutional Plan and much of it will deal with pedagogical/academic issues. Then, does it go to GFC for approval? GFC is meant to deal with scholarly matters so it should, but the question is not definitively answered.
- As a professor, I understand the workload implications of changing credit accounting and would agree that is is a pedagogical matter that should go to GFC. However, I would also argue that class sizes affect pedagogy yet some departments increased their class sizes without GFC approval.

Governance is setting clear lines of decision making that move us toward our goals. We have work to do in how we define workload, budget and pedagogy and in clearly specifying where decisions are made on each type of item. We need to know what goes from faculty councils to GFC and what is reported at faculty councils. These are things we need to think about, clarify and publicize. Finally, we all need to be clear on which matters are academic and which are budgetary.

Pat Kostouros, MRFA's Academic Liaison Officer

The mandate of the Academic Liaison Committee is about communication within faculties and between faculties. One of the things we recognized was that there was a lot of siloing going on among faculties. Items that were priorities in some areas were not reported in others. Credit accounting is a good example of this because it does not affect a lot of Faculties and, without discussing the matter, they do not understand the broader needs of the community. Without understanding, councillors cannot contribute to discussions or decisions. To improve communication ALC first had to access various groups in order to gather people's voices. To do this we encouraged the creation of caucus. Caucus is a way to improve communication. In caucus members can be given information about the issues coming to GFC from faculty, administrative and contractual perspectives. This ensures that members are better informed: when councillors go to GFC they have already thought and talked about the items on the agenda.

ALC is composed of a member from every faculty each member is to ensure that there is a caucus meeting held in their Faculty. ALC then meets to discuss the GFC package, what is going on at faculty councils, and what information could be brought to GFC as a written question. ALC is, therefore, bringing in conversations not just responding to GFC packages. We are trying to facilitate deeper conversations about GFC and governance.

ALC is also trying to ensure that processes are followed by watching how things unfold and

considering what is in the way of us moving forward. We consider how Roberts Rules are working or if they are working at all. For instance, when students requested a roll call vote on the grading policy there was one; according to Robert's Rules, you cannot have such a vote without first voting on whether or not to have one.

Because we do not understand the processes or the rules we may be subverting them to the point that people do not believe in them. If people believe in the process and a bad decision is made at least we could know that due process was followed. The literature says that good academic governance is transparent and trustworthy and it is shared: faculty have as much say as the administration in what policies are implemented and what they consist of.

Suggestions for improvement

- We need to cut down on the idea that we are there to debate when we are really there to dialogue. People are concerned about landing on the right side of a debate and may not speak as freely as a result: we are just trying to talk about the issues.
- We need to understand Roberts Rules better and use them consistently: the orientation is great but it is very basic. GFC members need to know Roberts Rules better
- We could make better use of Faculty Councils
 - Decision items are going to GFC before ever being discussed at some Faculty councils
- Consider having a form of trilateral governance. That is, not just having the Board and GFC but having representation from the MRFA as well. Because so much is embedded in the collective Agreement, should we not have a voice present on how decisions impact or are impacted by the Agreement.
- Take the time to consider things when needed. In terms of process, we have used time as an excuse and as a pressure. We do not want to stop things from moving forward but we do need to fully consider important things. We cannot push things through that have not been given enough thought.

Discussion

Many of the initiatives that get in front of GFC may have started at deans' council but it is concerning when we talk about us vs. them or of ALC being a watchdog of the administration. Most of GFC is made up of faculty and most decision items have already been discussed at various committees which are also made up of faculty. What would the point be of having any type of trilateral governance including the MRFA when faculty already comprise most of GFC and its committees?

- It has to do with awareness and understanding of the Collective Agreement. Knowing the impact of decisions made at GFC and contractual obligations of all parties would be useful.
- Things are not currently going through the correct process and people may not even know about it. People are not willing to say at GFC that processes may not have been followed, that items were not discussed at the faculty level first.
- The MRFA provides a collective voice for its members, it works hard to determine the interests of the membership on matters important to the membership and works strategically to advance those interests. This is quite different from how faculty act as members of GFC. Moreover, there are significant intersections between GFC business and articles in the Collective Agreement. For example, the evaluation of teaching is an academic matter which effects the terms and conditions of our members. Though we have not done so to this point, the MRFA could include the evaluation of teaching in the Agreement. Even if such items are considered and decided upon at GFC, the MRFA members still have a collective interest that could be expressed by the MRFA which could not be expressed by an individual member.
- GFC councillors are unsure if they represent their constituents views or their own

Councillors have been told they are there to represent the best interests of the university and there was a strong message not to represent the specific views of their constituents. This is what faculty were told though this is not what is in the bylaws.

Last year there was discussion on the role of deans on GFC and it is apparent that they are given their marching orders and vote collectively at GFC. They are to vote in the way that deans' council has decided. Is this still how it should be done?

- This is not how things should be done. What is the point of a deliberative body if people cannot be swayed: this should apply to both faculty and deans.
- This raises one of the real challenges: perception vs. reality. Deans have debated amongst each other at GFC. In many cases people never know which way we are each going to vote going into the meeting.
- It could be that deans' council comes to consensus on an issue and that consensus becomes apparent at GFC. If deans fundamentally disagree with something they will not vote for it.
- All members of GFC should be voting with the best interests of the university in mind.
- If matters are discussed at Faculty Councils and problems become apparent these should also come forward in GFC: it is made more difficult if items are not discussed at faculty councils because then councillors have not had the opportunity to establish their own views or to get input from their areas. This causes councillors to simply follow what others are doing in GFC.
- We are maturing as an institution in terms of process.
 - GFC's administrative secretary is a person who is an expert in the rules of GFC and openly corrects the process if it is violated during a meeting.
 - Given that GFC and Faculty councils are new here we are doing very well, but we can still improve.
 - As a dean my biggest concern is trying to have more people enter into the debates. Debates are not a negative thing: this is what we as academics do. I feel that, once we get in the room, administrators are independents and faculty are too.
 - I do not understand the argument of the association playing a bigger role in the governance process.
 - We need to give GFC and FCs the opportunity to mature to the point where everyone brings their opinions to do the best they can in terms of the university and to the point where we can all trust everyone to do their best to make great decisions. This will take time.
- Deans have a responsibility to manage the institution. If the management team has come to a management decision, each dean needs to and is obliged to follow that decision. To deny this responsibility would not be dishonest.
 - This is understandable, but if it is to be the way things are managed then could the deans not provide an explanation of the pros and cons of the issue that brought them to their decision. It would be beneficial for deans to describe to faculty transparently how we came to the decision.
 - This would be better than having the deans simply vote as one based on decisions made.
 - Two thirds of the body never had the opportunity to engage in these discussions. Once deans come to an agreement they need to stick to it: that is fair. But, faculty should have the same opportunity.
 - Shouldn't faculty be having these discussions in Faculty councils?
 - Yes, they should be, but it does not always happen and what is brought to faculty councils is inconsistent across the institution.
- When we look at GFC, or any legislative body, there is the question of whether councillors are functioning as delegates (told which way to vote) or party members (something like the MRFA) or as trustees (entrusted to make their own decision). The interesting thing is that legislative bodies do not have to work on the same principles. There are mixed systems where there are those voting as party members and those representing constituents: it is not black and white. It seems that in GFC, deans are in a different situation than faculty councillors. Faculty members are not delegates they are closer to trustees. Deans come from the body from which items being decided upon often originate: these items are their proposals. It may not have been unanimous approval by deans' council but the body decided to approve it so those on the body are expected to support it. If members of the body do not support it then it is not coming from the body. There still has to be the possibility to change one's mind and to vote differently from the body for some reason that is fundamental.

In the last year and a half we have made a lot of progress. That said a lot of the things we are hearing today are not a problem with the structure or processes. Some of the problems do stem from having the right people in the right positions. If something is not discussed where it should be it is because

someone did not bring it there. Some people are in positions merely for the sake of doing service. There are people who never speak at GFC even though they are there to do a job. If this type of job does not suit you then you should not be on GFC. It is good that deans are looking for people for these positions.

Faculty had a smaller role in Academic Council but their voice was bigger: that faculty voice has been lost in GFC.

- The MRFA played a big role in academic council: it was a hybrid system
- It is important to clarify the roles and boundaries within the institution. GFC makes academic decisions and the MRFA represents faculty in terms and conditions of employment. We need to be clear on which decisions are made where.

To improve the faculty voice at GFC we need to ensure that the conversations are happening at all departments and faculty councils. It would be worthwhile to think about coming up with, specifically in terms of process, those things which have to go to faculty councils before going to GFC and those that do not necessarily have to.

- We have not looked strategically at this.
- GFC cannot deal with any major academic decisions until they have been discussed at Faculty Councils. Deans should be planning their faculty councils and meeting with Chairs with this in mind.
- The process should be that Deans meet with the Provost, then deans meet with chairs, then Chairs share the information with their departments, then it should go to Faculty Councils. All of this should happen in major academic decisions before an item goes to GFC.
 - This regimented system will ensure that all faculty are informed and have had a chance to discuss and digest matters before they come to GFC for a decision.
 - We need to spend some time at the GFC Executive to put structures in place
 - This is a key issue with respect to how well we move forward as an institution and make academic decisions. We need guidance on which items go through such a process and which items do not: we do not want to paralyze the process.

Based on research on senates and GFCs, the fundamental problem from the faculty perspective is that, though they are the majority, these decisions end up being the purview of the administration. It is good to have had discussions and some ideas but all councillors should still have an open mind because the decisions should be made at GFC based on what comes forward in that meeting. Loyalty to the team is understandable but really the basis of decisions should be at GFC. We need to avoid the perspective that decisions are predetermined before GFC. How do we improve this so that all people feel they are taking part in these important decisions?

- Faculty previously block voted to ensure they had a voice in decision, but this is not where we want to go.
- Putting things to Faculty councils first before final decisions are made at GFC is huge.
- The proposal put to GFC that really important items could be deferred: while this slows things down it is important to take the time needed for important decisions
- While policies do originate from the administration this is not necessarily a bad thing: creating policy is not the faculty role. But, we do need people to feel and be well informed.
- One of the ways we can deal with the perception is to set the tone that GFC is bigger than any decision that comes in front of it. It is better to have good will on the floor of GFC than it is to get any given policy passed. It is important to have people to have faith in the institution and its processes. The is the responsibility of the administration because the administrations sets the tone and makes the policies: if we lose the vote it has to be okay.
 - Given this, management is here to manage and it has the responsibility to make decisions. As long as stakeholders are consulted, engaged and allowed to provide revisions the process will be transparent and people will gain faith in the process.
- Another approach could be to have the committees work on the policies.
 - This is what we often do.
- It is reasonable for deans' council to take the leadership role and make proposals to GFC. At that stage though they need to be open to revisions and not be offended. We need to come up

with the best possible policies to move the institution forward.

- Getting over the perceptions is important and getting faculty councils involved and working as well as they can is important.
 - There are faculties where there is not much discussion: it is just information reporting.
 - There is rich discussion in Faculty councils though it can be improved.
 - Faculty councils at other institutions primarily work on the business of the Faculty.
 - We should improve our understanding of how members should prepare for GFC, but Faculty councils should concentrate on business of the faculty. To have all things discussed at Faculty councils in preparation to move them to GFC is a model that is not at all other Universities.
 - At the GFC level it is important that there is trust. That the representatives from the different areas play their proper roles to represent the whole university.
 - The assumption is that Faculty Councils should be talking about things relevant to their Faculty: not that all work of GFC devolve to the Faculty councils. There are things that impact all faculties and they should be discussed in all Faculties. A lot of policies are university wide and should be discussed at all Faculty Councils. It is a matter of finding the right balance

What would happen if deans' council did not revise a policy 3-4 times before it came to GFC?

- Faculty would be presented with ill formed and badly thought out proposals.
- When they have spent time revising something so much they are more committed to it.
 - This is true, but items go back to deans' council after they have sent it to another body for input/revision. The idea is that it goes back to the constituent bodies for discussion before it returns to deans' council to review it again.
- We have improved relationships at the various levels and we need to trust our deans as well
- We could think about presenting draft policies in terms of a problem solving exercise while still allowing the managers to manage. We need to recognize the role that parliament plays in altering policies. There may be opportunity to discuss things at GFC before sending them to the committees.
 - If we did this with one or two things each year it may be useful. This was done with the academic freedom issue and should have been done with the continuing policy.
 - These could come forward as questions where we really get good discussion

We need a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of various groups and clear demarcation between the bodies and what needs to go where. Faculty often do not know how it all works or what their role is. It would be good for faculty to know a bit more: full understanding is required for full participation.

- We need to let people know that it is okay for them to ask questions or bring them to the floor. We need to let people know how they participate in GFC and what the roles and responsibilities are.
- A clear definition of what constitutes an academic matter would be useful as well
- Jane O'Connor was working on a process flow chart but it is not done yet.
- Randy did a presentation at faculty orientation: this will be distributed.
 - This would be good for new and long standing faculty.

There is a comprehensive orientation it has a very positive impact on the operations of GFC. Deans could do this within their Faculties to have more comprehensive faculty orientations.

- When you are new faculty you do not know where you are: we should have a site where things can be posted for reference through councillors' tenure on GFC. Orientations often overwhelm and people do not remember things.
- Resourcing may be better than orientation.
 - Basics on Roberts rules
 - What is my role on GFC
 - Case studies with links to the bylaws.
- Picking the right people for the job

- This is good but we may miss some people who may be quiet or who may have some really good questions and are very bright.
- This is more to have people there for the right reasons not necessarily picking between people that do or do not speak up

Many institutions have gone away from Robert's Rules and created their own rules of order.

- Could this not lead to a more complicated set of Robert's rules?
- The general idea was to provide a comprehensive set of rules that allow members to engage in discussion but not be hampered by adhering to some of the complexities.
- Robert's Rules act as guidelines for us. They are an appendix to the bylaws but we do not necessarily have to adhere to them: we default to them in a number of ways.
 - You do not get to default to Robert's Rules when you want to as that only complicates peoples understanding of the process.

We need to examine the logistics: the scheduling and coordination of Faculty Council and GFC meetings.

- At other institutions Faculty Councils meet more often than GFCs.
 - This is something we should consider as it would give Faculty councils more time to discuss things going to GFC and still have time for Faculty matters.
- You can also have ad hoc or town hall meetings in faculties that feed into the FC meetings