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Steven C. Bahls

Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois, stevenbahls@augustana.edu

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Shared Governance: Dividing Territories or Aligning Priorities

Steven Bahls, President of Augustana College (Illinois)

The goal of this presentation is to develop ways to help chairpersons work with faculty and administrators to develop effective systems of shared governance to embrace common solutions to the challenges ahead. In order to do so, the presenter will work to develop a common understanding of the advantages of sharing governance, including higher quality decisions and decisions that are easier to implement.

One of the reasons shared governance often fails is that different constituencies define shared governance differently. The presenter will discuss the four primary definitions of shared governance: (a) shared governance as equal rights to governance; (b) shared governance as the obligation to consult; (c) shared governance as a set of boundaries and rules of engagement; and (d) shared governance as a way of creating alignment for shared responsibility and shared accountability. The components of shared governance as a way of creating alignment, which the presenter will advocate, include a culture of transparency and open communication, a commitment to jointly consider difficult issues and jointly develop strategic directions, a shared set of metrics to measure success and effective checks and balance to ensure that the institution remains mission-focused.

During the workshop, participants will be encouraged to assess how various constituencies view the current state of shared governance at their institutions, as well as what they view as the optimal state of shared governance at their institutions. The remaining parts of the presentation will discuss how to bridge the gap.

The presenter will facilitate a discussion of common barriers to achieving the optimal state of shared governance – which are usually attitudinal, structural and behavioral.

How to remove the barriers to effective shared governance and best practices for effective shared governance will be examined and discussed. Best practices will include examining sustained advocacy of the importance of shared governance, periodic assessment of the state of shared governance, ways to strengthen faculty governance (in order to strengthen shared governance), maintaining steadfast commitments to two-way transparency, and how to work with administrator and faculty in creating the best culture for faculty/administrative engagement.

After helping to identify the gap between the current and desired states of shared governance, the presenter will work with department chairs to develop an action plan to narrow the gap – including doing a shared governance survey, developing a shared governance grid, initiating a shared governance task force, etc.

The audience will be involve by breaking into small groups to discussion how shared governance is defined at their institution, as well as discussing barriers to shared governance and how to remove those barriers. If time permits, the presenter will provide a hypothetic case study for participates to discuss.