

COSFL Position Paper on University Governance
Adopted 3/24/01

The Coalition of Senate and Faculty Leadership (COSFL) endorses the "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities" jointly formulated by the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges in 1966 (see AAUP Policy Documents & Reports, 8th Ed. Washington, DC: American Association of University Professors, 1995, 179-185).

COSFL believes: that a collegial system of academic governance adds value to higher education; and that collegial governance both sustains and extends the missions of a college or university in teaching, research, and service to the institution and to the wider communities it engages.

Academic governance derives its authority from the institution's mission. It is rooted in the responsibility all members of the academic community bear in achieving the purposes of the college or university. The academic community includes: students, faculty, staff, administrators, members of governing boards and alumni. A collegial system is based upon the participation of all stakeholders, each in their own way, in the discourse from which policy and practice are constructed.

Collegial governance is characterized by:

- the recognition of and respect for the many and varied roles that members of the academic community perform in a complex institution;
- the timely disclosure of information needed to participate meaningfully in the discourse that makes good policy and practice, wherever those conversations take place;
- the opportunity for members of the academic community to provide input before decisions are made;
- the principle of dissent.

In a diverse academic community, the participants will not and should not always be of one voice on matters of policy and practice. It is imperative that dissent from the majority view be respected by all involved.

(continued on reverse)

As a practical matter, collegial governance is seldom exercised in the committee of the whole. Rather, the various authorities in a complex institution speak through groups or offices: governing boards, administrative officers, students, faculty and staff and their representative bodies. Whatever an institution's structure, however, the spirit and practice of collegiality calls for either the election of these people or their appointment with the broadest possible consultation, representing diverse points of view. Moreover, the spirit and practice of collegial governance requires these people, once having been elected or appointed, to maintain their discourse with their institutional constituents. In a spirit of full and open disclosure there is little that should be excluded from community discourse. While, for example, it is the traditional responsibility of a collegiate faculty to establish admission and graduation requirements, to approve academic programs, or to approve changes to program curricula, that faculty best does so when it consults with the students, staff, and administrators. Additionally, the primary responsibilities of administrators can best be accomplished when they consult with other members of the academic community. Since academic institutions are primarily made up of people engaged in teaching and learning, scholarship, and service to the institution and the wider community, no realm is more sensitive to the spirit and practice of collegial discourse than the appointment and review of personnel.