Book Review

**Locus of authority: The evolution of faculty roles in the governance of higher education**

Reviewed By Daniel Easton  
Ed. D. student in Leadership for Educational Equity  
University of Colorado, Denver  
1380 Lawrence St.  
Denver, CO, 80204  
Daniel.Easton@colorado.edu

**Citation**


Book Information:  
380 pages  
Hardback  
$29.99

**Keywords:** higher education, governance, leadership

As higher education institutions continue to grapple with questions of cost, retention, educational outcomes, value, and changing expectations about the nature of higher education, the process by which institutions are governed has come into question. *Locus of Authority: The Evolution of Faculty Roles in the Governance of Higher Education* uses the history and current state of faculty roles in higher education governance to make recommendations about the future of governance in higher education. The authors argue for a form of corporate governance that intends to protect academic freedom, while allowing administrative leaders more authority in the institution overall.

The authors argue that faculty roles in governance have always changed to meet the challenges of institutions. Using case studies from four different institutions, the University of California system, Princeton University, Macalester College, and City University of New York, Bowen and Tobin show how the history of these institutions and the broader historical context built the current culture of faculty governance. This is meant to help the reader be more open to the idea that higher
education governance has never been static and that, when needed, decision-making authority has shifted. This lays the ground work to explore the current challenges of higher education and make governance recommendations based on those challenges.

The authors are clear throughout the text that they mean only to alter, not diminish, the power of faculty, but the repeated claims that they only want to refine the faculty role seems somewhat disingenuous since many of the recommendations provided in the text would decrease faculty authority and none would increase faculty authority. The recommendations proposed would lead to a governance structure akin to a soft-corporate model in which presidents provide institutional vision for the broader organization and faculty control academic content and standards. They are loathe to use the phrase “corporate” due to the political baggage the phrase carries and they do not advocate for a fully corporate model. However, they want to introduce market or corporate elements into higher education governance that have broad implications for the core identity of higher education.

Both faculty and administrative leaders in higher education will find this book useful in discussing how they want to structure authority in their institutions.

The approach of the book is to first provide a general history of faculty’s role in governance, and then use case studies of four institutions to explain how the current role of faculty in governance is problematic to the broader goals of higher education. The early history of faculty governance demonstrates how faculty have generally interacted and influenced higher education institutions. It tracks the changing nature of faculty from acting as both teachers and administrators to the era of strong Presidents setting institutional vision to the Golden Age of the faculty voice reigning supreme, and ultimately to raising concerns about the way faculty voice has negatively impacted governance in the modern day. The authors use the challenges with the Pathways Initiative at CUNY, online education at the University of California, Berkeley, and other contemporary challenges faced by these four institutions to set the stage for more centralized governance and new ideas about academic control. That being said, history is not always the best guide for the future, nor should it be. At best, the focus on history helps readers who believe that faculty role in governance has been static to be open to that there may be times that faculty roles ought to change, but it does not mean they ought to change now.

The authors make five specific recommendations about the role faculty ought to play and six general recommendations about effective university governance. This review will focus on a few of them to give a representative picture of how the authors envision the future of governance. For these recommendations to be supported, the authors need to effectively illustrate the current challenges of higher education and show how these recommendations meet those challenges.

The text argues that faculty should maintain their current authority when it comes to academic freedom, setting academic standards and curriculum, and assessing student performance. These functions are core to the academic mission of the

http://nau.edu/COE/eJournal/
institution and faculty are uniquely qualified to decide what ought to be taught and whether students have achieved mastery of the subject area. The authors advocate that administrators should play a role when it comes to approval for the resources to entire courses of study, but that programs should not be approved without faculty approval. However, faculty should also not be given veto authority or new ideas about teaching content and organizational structure. Since administrators are responsible for the financial well-being of the institution, they need to approve programs, however, departments would maintain the authority to allocate resources within the department. Similarly, administrators would have the ability to close programs without faculty approval since faculty members would have a conflict of interest.

The authors qualify academic freedom to mean the ability to teach, express ideas, and research in ways that fall within “professional standards” of conduct with the field of faculty. They do not define what this means, but do say that faculty, not administrators, must self-regulate this freedom. The role of administrators in academic freedom is to defend academic freedom from government and other outside groups. This highlights the importance of faculty holding each other accountable to professional norms since administrators need to trust faculty to hold that standard in order to effectively defend academic freedom to outside groups. The authors advocate that department chairs should be appointed by administrators, such as deans of colleges, to give administrators a significant measure of control of academic programs. They also say that administrators have the responsibility to build trust and ensure faculty have a strong voice in all matters related to academics. This allows the institution to have legitimacy both within and outside the organization.

With these recommendations, the focus of faculty roles are then on teaching, and removed from broader leadership in the institution. Faculty are given control of what should be taught, the evaluation of the students in the program, and control over how funds are dispersed within the department, but that funding is given with administrative support. The authors’ recommendations place significant authority in the hands of administrative leadership. The appointment of good leaders would, ideally, mean that administrators know when to defer to the judgment of faculty, but there is no guarantee of that type of leadership.

While the authors argue that administrators must have support from faculty to have legitimacy and that a board of trustees should remove administrators from leadership positions who do not have that support, this also assumes that a board of trustees supports faculty authority in academic matters. These changes are described as realigning roles with the responsibilities of those roles. What defines these roles as supporting a “soft corporate” model as opposed to being fully corporate, like the University of Phoenix, is the control faculty maintain on the curriculum. They argue that this model allows for administrators to implement innovative programs more easily and make decisions more quickly, thus saving money and time and allowing institutions to respond more quickly to the changing demands on higher education. The limit to administrative power is in directly affecting research, curriculum, and teaching, whereas in fully corporate models,
administrators have the authority to direct teaching content, and research is not a priority.

There are several other recommendations the authors make about altering the faculty roles in higher education governance related to online education curriculum, adjunct faculty, the selection of the university president, and shared governance. All of these are similar in terms of cementing faculty authority in teaching and research and empowering and holding accountable administrators in the general leadership of the institution.

Readers should be cautious about committing to the slippery slope fallacy and assuming these changes will lead to a fully corporate higher education. The recent action by the federal government against corporate institutions, such as the University of Phoenix, for ineffective educational practices, illustrates that state and federal governments will act when institutions do not meet their core functions. That being said, these recommendations do represent a significant shift in higher education governance and the function higher education plays in society.