

Hamilton College
Strategic Planning: Preliminary Report. February 2008
Subcommittee on Shared Governance and Administration

The subcommittee on Shared Governance and Administration has been meeting regularly to gather resources, solicit opinions, identify concerns, and discuss proposals related to the College's governance structures and processes. We have begun the process of reviewing the handbooks, manuals, and other documentation of the faculty, the administration, the trustees, the staff and the student body, all with an eye towards how they might be improved to be more transparent, inclusive, and effective for the Hamilton community at large.

Our deliberations to date have led us to focus on two related threads of activity. First, we were mildly surprised to learn that, despite the negative connotations of perceived "silos of governance," not only do many of the constituencies on campus appreciate the autonomy of their governance structures and processes, but they also respect the autonomy of other constituencies. Certain of these constituencies are less interested in actually "sharing" governance (to the extent that they feel capable of, or are interested in actually participating in administering) than they are at being made and kept aware of administrative procedures and decisions. The key words that keep coming up in our readings and discussions are "communication," "transparency," and "awareness." We are currently considering a variety of ways that build on existing, successful methods (such as the President's open hours, faculty-trustee dinners, the regular and wide distribution of student assembly minutes) to improve our governance on all of these fronts.

The second thread that we are pursuing is a slightly more formal one involving the state of our written regulations. The Board of Trustees has its handbook, as do the administration, the faculty, and the staff. We are concerned that these handbooks are complete, useful to their intended audiences, and consistent in areas of potential constituency overlap. Furthermore, in our litigious society, each of these handbooks is increasingly subject to legal interpretation. Certain of these documents have been passed by College lawyers to insure that the language therein is consistent with relevant state and federal laws, but to our knowledge all of the documents have never been reviewed together to insure that they do not allow for ambiguous interpretation collectively.

While we continue to pursue these activities, we are simultaneously soliciting more input from the alumni body (we have asked two alumni, and they have agreed, to join our subcommittee immediately) and from the student body (we may conduct an online poll to get at issues of particular interest to current students). We are also seeking more information about the available channels of information flow between the staff and the administration.

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