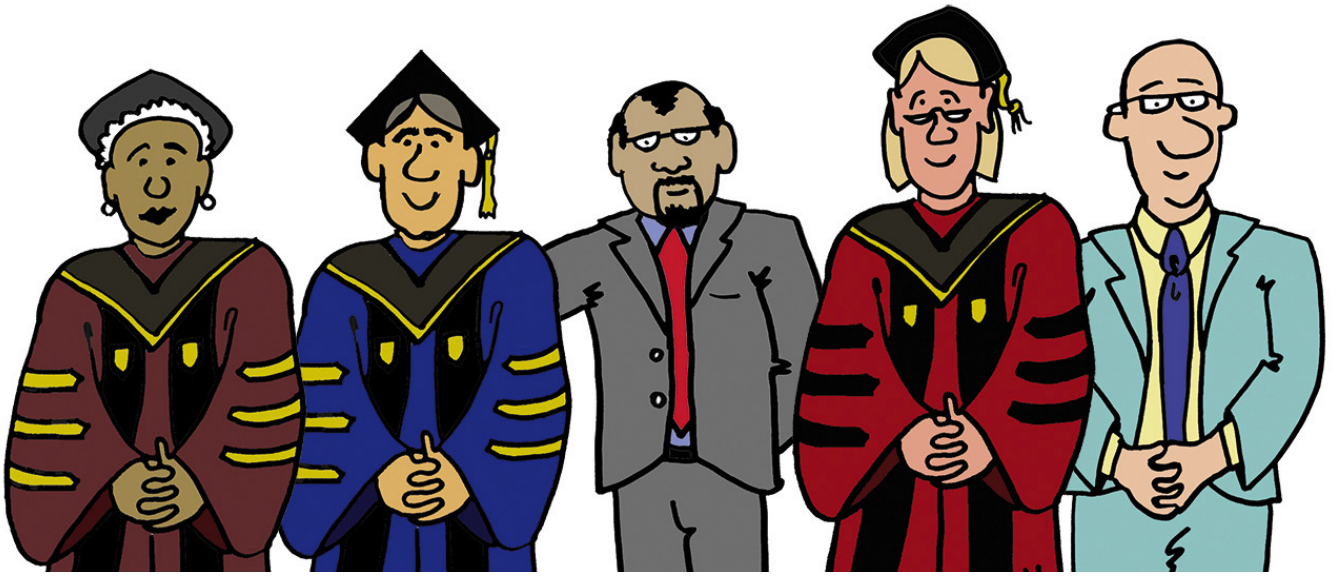

The role of the faculty in shared governance

Round table participants

Sarah Drummond is vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton, Massachusetts.

Israel Galindo is associate dean for lifelong learning at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia.

Joretta Marshall is executive vice president and dean at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas.

Rebecca Slough is vice president and academic dean at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana.

No one disputes the central role of faculty in the classroom. But what role do faculty members have in the boardroom? *In Trust* wanted to know, so we asked Nadine Pence, executive director of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, to recommend a few conversation partners. Pence suggested four respected academic leaders, each representing a different seminary, and *In Trust* invited them to discuss how shared governance plays out on their campuses.

The topics ranged from ways to build trust among campus leaders to strategies for introducing junior faculty to the complexities of shared decision making.

An edited and abbreviated transcript of their conversation follows.

Q HOW MUCH INPUT DO YOU AND YOUR FACULTY HAVE IN YOUR SCHOOL'S GOVERNANCE?

Joretta Marshall: As executive vice president and dean, I sit in on board meetings and am the staff liaison for the board's academic affairs committee. Because no other faculty person (besides the president and me) attends board sessions, I try to represent the diversity of faculty interests. When my voice is present, it's usually as an interpreter of the faculty and of the institutional and academic ethos. My sense is that because board members don't live in these institutions day by day, it's helpful for them to hear an interpretive word from the faculty in this way.

Sarah Drummond: I have a similar role at Andover Newton. As dean, I advocate for the best interest of the faculty, but as vice president for academic affairs, I advocate for the best academic interest of the school.

Of course, sometimes the best academic interest of the school isn't what the faculty wants, and the reverse is sometimes true, too.

In board meetings I am a voice without a vote.

The board often asks me, "What does the faculty think?" I'm pretty careful in responding because our faculty is made up of 14 human beings, and they don't aggregate easily. Two faculty, elected by the faculty association, attend board meetings, and each board committee has a faculty representative.

Rebecca Slough: We have a five-member administrative cabinet, and all of us attend board meetings. We submit reports to the board and always are available for consultation. We also have a faculty representative and student representatives who give reports. I try not to take anything to the board that the faculty hasn't discussed first. I find it's increasingly part of my job to interpret to the board the wider world of theological education and the kinds of possibilities and stresses that exist. A lot of work goes into keeping board members up to speed and expanding their views on the nature of theological education in the 21st century.

Israel Galindo: I was more involved with governance when I was dean at another institution. I occasionally would petition for program or curriculum changes, but I did not represent the faculty. We were small enough that if faculty had issues with the trustees, they could speak directly with them. The board was very accessible. This process worked well — people started talking to each other rather than trying to get the dean to address their anxieties or advocate for change.

Like Rebecca, a big part of my job was interpreting the work and culture of the seminary to the trustees. These are good, well-intentioned folks, but the world of theological education is a strange one and often needs a lot of interpretation to understand its inner workings.

Q WHAT DO FACULTY FIND THE MOST DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT SHARED GOVERNANCE?

Joretta Marshall: The hardest part for faculty seems to be understanding who makes what decisions and at what point. For example, our board has few direct decision-making responsibilities related to academics. They approve tenure and promotions, but they don't approve changes in curriculum unless it involves major changes in a degree program or an addition of a program. So, as issues arise, people ask: Is decision making in this case under the board's purview? Is it the president's purview? Is it the faculty's purview? A lot depends on how the president understands his or her role, which, in turn, influences how the dean and board function.

Rebecca Slough: An institution can have its governance process clearly laid out in a document, but those of us living in the campus community are constantly negotiating what governance means. All kinds of things are

decided on a daily basis, and those decisions are what allow the institution's life to go on.

Q WHAT PROCESS DO YOU FOLLOW IN ADDRESSING MAJOR ISSUES THAT REQUIRE FACULTY AND BOARD COOPERATION?

Joretta Marshall: I don't think there's a linear way that this happens in any institution. Sometimes really good ideas come from the faculty; sometimes really good ideas come from the board. Wherever the idea begins to percolate, the next step is to explore it from a variety of angles. Certainly the board has a responsibility for the fiduciary aspects.

Sarah Drummond: I pride myself on operating by the book. The book we rely on is our faculty manual. We follow a careful protocol if we're going to make a change to the manual. For example, my school wants to create a new category of faculty members to give special designation to faculty who are engaging in a phased retirement. They aren't adjunct and they're not emeritus because they're still teaching. Our protocol is very clear on which committees work on this change, who needs to buy in, and the role of the president and dean in making sure the change is in the best interest of the school.

Israel Galindo: When significant decisions are needed, the job of seminary leaders is to get everyone on the same page by working the system, communicating with the players, achieving clarity, and moving past any resistance. After trustees, administration, and the faculty are in alignment, they revisit the issue for more clarity. Deans are key players in this process and often are the background influencers. They don't make the decision, and they don't have the authority that trustees have, but they are in the middle of the three leadership groups and work with the parties to move toward alignment.

HOW TO CHANGE THE FACULTY MANUAL

Andover Newton Theological School implements a six-step process when considering changes to its faculty manual.

1. The Faculty Development Committee (FDC), which is a faculty committee, receives input from the administration and faculty proposing new policies or changes to existing policies.
2. FDC deliberates and brings various forms of the changes to the entire faculty.
3. The faculty adjudicates the policy changes.
4. The changes are then brought to the board's Academic and Faculty Affairs Committee, which brings them to the whole board.
5. If there are human resources issues, the board seeks legal advice.
6. The manual is updated.

Q DOES IT HELP THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IF BOARDS AND FACULTY MEMBERS HAVE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AND HAVE A RESERVOIR OF TRUST?

Joretta Marshall: Absolutely! In some ways I see myself not as building bridges but as helping to create relationships that result in conversations that foster trust among the various parties.

Sarah Drummond: As an illustration, our president was a member of our board for 10 years before he became president. During that time, he was my go-to board member — the person I felt really understood the seminary and its mission. Our current board chair is one of my former students, who came into theological education after a successful business career. Because of these previous relationships, our trust level is very high and, consequently, the level of collaboration between the faculty and board has never been healthier. So much of that comes from the relationship the three of us have had for a long time.

Q HOW DOES A DEAN INTRODUCE NEW FACULTY TO SHARED GOVERNANCE?

Rebecca Slough: I find that for the first couple of years, junior faculty just need to get their feet on the ground and figure out how they're going to teach and learn our school culture. I don't spend a lot of time orienting them to what the board is doing. That comes later. Of course, they have access to the dockets for the board meetings and I'm glad to answer their questions about governance. Often I let their colleagues orient them to the faculty-board relationship.

Sarah Drummond: We try to model a certain attitude for new faculty. We want them to know that the stakes are really high. Right now theological schools are trying to navigate some very rough waters, and the last thing we need are petty disputes between the board and faculty. We have to work on the meaningful disputes and departures in vision, of course, but the petty stuff? Who has time! I think they take that seriously.

Q HOW DO YOU REACH OUT TO NEW TRUSTEES IN AN EFFORT TO BUILD TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING?

Sarah Drummond: One of our newer board members recently took the initiative to do that herself. She felt she didn't know the faculty as well as she should, so she organized a series of events that brought the trustees to campus for a full-day immersion into the life of the school. They attended classes, ate in the dining room, and had one-on-one conversations with students. Whereas most trustees know that our faculty are fine teachers, they had no idea what it's like to sit for three hours and learn alongside other adults who care about the same issues. I think encounters like these are likely to become more and more important because fewer trustees come from the academy.

Rebecca Slough: That's true, and as a result, too many board members can have an outdated view of education in general and theological education in particular.

Israel Galindo: This gets back to our role as interpreters. It takes a while for trustees to understand the wacky economics of higher education in general and theological education in particular. Also, they often don't understand the often constraining accreditation standards or the nature and necessity of assessment.

Q DO YOU HAVE ANY PARTING THOUGHTS TO DIRECT TO TRUSTEES OR FACULTY MEMBERS ABOUT YOUR SHARED DECISION-MAKING RESPONSIBILITIES?

Rebecca Slough: I have a couple of things. First, our institutions have the task of educating people as whole beings — to help form them in body, mind, soul, and spirit. That's rewarding work, it's fulfilling work, but it's also complicated work.

I find that some of the analytics that we use to evaluate our work don't begin to touch the complexity of it. I hope that when boards meet to make fiscal decisions — decisions that are important and in their domain of responsibility— they take a broad view of what we're trying to do in theological education.

Second, board members can become distracted by the many things that do not necessarily support the curriculum but can take on a life of their own. My hope is that trustees keep in mind that schools exist for the education of leaders. Issues that are on the board agenda for consideration should support that educational endeavor.

Israel Galindo: I agree on both points. The only thing I would add is a reminder to trustees and faculty that we exist for the service of the church. We need more courage and imagination to keep up with what's going on with the church in the world. In the midst of anxiety and shortages, the tendency and temptation is to continue to focus too intently on maintenance and viability and lose sight of the fact that our job is not only to serve our faculty and our students but to serve the church.

A DEAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON SHARED GOVERNANCE

In a seminary setting, "shared governance" means three leadership groups — the board, faculty, administration — participate in the decision-making process. Each group has a primary area of responsibility, but the partners collaborate on decisions that affect the entire institution.

For example: The board is responsible for developing an investment strategy for the school's endowment. Faculty are responsible for designing and implementing the curricula for degree programs. The administration is responsible for selecting database-management software. *(Continued)*

With just minor nuances, however, any of those decisions could require collaboration with the other partners in shared governance. Investment strategies might involve making choices on investments' ethical ramifications, where the faculty could not only enrich conversations, but they also have a stake in the institution's social justice stance. A curriculum change might have an impact on tuition revenue, or necessitate the appointment of particular faculty members, thus necessitating collaboration with the board and administration. A software package might include the platform where faculty members either teach online or manage educational documents, meaning that the administration and the faculty must consult with one another on the package's selection. It is difficult to imagine a scenario where a major decision in a seminary would not require at least some collaboration among the partners in shared governance.

Healthy institutions offer leaders ample opportunities for communication and consultation. They foster collaborative — rather than permission-giving — relationships, so leaders can work together without fear that red tape will choke out good ideas. Typically, a motion or mandate moves from one body to another, with conversation and collaboration as outlined in faculty manuals, board bylaws, and other institutional policies. A vote by all three bodies is rare.

A common question is: Who is responsible for articulating the mission of an institution that is governed collaboratively? The best answer is: Board members are responsible for reviewing the mission and calling for its revision, but they share — intentionally and robustly — the responsibility of establishing and reestablishing the mission.

Shared governance involves checks, balances, and overlaps. The board selects and supervises the seminary's president. The president and board chair interface as colleagues, with the understanding that the chair represents the board that evaluates the president's effectiveness. The president presides over the faculty and administration. The faculty has an academic dean, responsible for representing the faculty's positions and interests. The academic dean reports directly to the president, with the understanding that the faculty has a role in evaluating the dean's work. The president and dean are both leaders and servants. Their working relationships with each other and with the faculty and board require attention, care, and healthy doses of humility and grace.

A helpful mental picture for shared governance is that of a three-legged stool. The board, faculty, and administration each make up one leg, and resting on them is the education of students who are called to ministry. When imagined as a stool, with the seat representing the student's education, one can easily see the negative impact of failure to collaborate on students. That communication, collaboration, and collegiality help students receive an outstanding education should serve as motivation for all partners — boards, presidents and their staff members, and faculties — to engage in the hard work of sharing governance with dignity, courage, and wisdom.

— Sarah B. Drummond

This article originally appeared in the New Year 2016 issue of *In Trust*.