

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

“Sense of the Senate Resolution on Improving Shared Governance”

(Voting Units: Full Senate)

We propose that the University Senate initiate changes to improve shared governance at Michigan Tech, for example, by amending, as appropriate, the University Senate Constitution and Bylaws, by introducing new Senate proposals, and by amending existing proposals.

Background

A. A Brief History of Michigan Tech’s Commitment to Shared Governance

According to David T. Halkola’s history, *Michigan Tech Centennial, 1885-1985*, Michigan Tech President (1956-1964) J. Robert Van Pelt

was concerned about the needs of the faculty and its status. He wanted to include the faculty more directly in academic affairs and, early in his administration, he encouraged the establishment of a faculty senate. The Senate constitution was accepted by the Board in June 1958, with the words, “the Board welcomes the establishment of the Senate as a major forward step in the evolution of the college’s guidance of academic policy.” (115)

Later, Halkola writes,

During the Van Pelt years, the status of the faculty improved, as an advisory group to the administration, with the creation of a Faculty Senate. Some faculty members felt the Senate did not really reflect the grassroots membership and that it was heavily dominated by the administration, since the president of the University was also the president of the Senate. Therefore, a movement was started that carried over into [Raymond L.] Smith’s presidency to bring about a more representative Faculty Senate which the administration could not dominate. The faculty accepted the concept of a senate with representatives from each department as well as some members elected-at-large. The new Senate constitution was approved by the Board in the spring of 1966. (151; see also Senate Proposal 1-62)

Beginning in 1995—under then-President Curtis J. Tompkins—the Senate experimented for two years with a constitution that included professional staff (see Senate Proposal 1-94). As part of this transition, the University broadened its commitment to the principles of shared governance. Below are two related excerpts from the section on Governance in Michigan Tech’s 1997 Self-Study Report <http://www.admin.mtu.edu/admin/nca/report/ch2/ch2p3.htm> :

After a two-year trial period under a new constitution which broadened participation by professional staff in the Senate, the 1995 Senate constituents voted in Spring 1997 to affirm the new constitution and it was approved by the Board of Control in June 1997. This constitution clarified and expanded the role of faculty and professional staff in governance of the University. The level of involvement of the University Senate in shared governance activities increased under the new Senate constitution.

[S]hared governance . . . is defined in the *Faculty Handbook* [1.2A, Section 1.4] and on the [Administration web page](#) as “the faculty, staff, and the administration participating cooperatively in developing policies for governance of the University.” Effective governance is considered a product of trust and shared responsibility. Shared governance is also stated as an objective in the strategic plan: Involve the faculty fully in the governance of the University (subgoal 4.2.2).

B. Concerns about Current Practice

During the September 25, 2013 meeting of the University Senate, Administrative Policy Committee Chair Gerald Caneba read into the record summaries of comments from the Senate’s 2012-13 President and Executive Team Online Evaluation. For comparative purposes, the Academic Policy Committee’s report also included summary comments from the 2011-2012 survey, one of which was, “There is the sense that the university is drifting towards an administration-driven organization.” Collectively, the comments from both surveys suggest (fairly or not) a widely held belief that senior members of the University administration exercise arbitrary authority.

C. Shared Responsibilities for the Success of Shared Governance

If faculty and staff value shared governance, then we must be willing to do our part. The above results are not ~~unlikely~~ likely to change unless and until structural changes more clearly define the limits of administrative power. Hence, the University Senate does not well serve either the University or the University administration by failing to introduce such changes, as, for example, by amending, as appropriate, the University Senate Constitution and Bylaws, by introducing new Senate proposals, and by amending existing proposals.

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