

Time for Change



Paul LaFollette, Editor

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. We have killed him-you and I. All of us are his murderers." – Friedrich Nietzsche

I don't propose, in this editorial, to announce anything as momentous as the death of God. I do, however, want to suggest that shared governance at Temple is moribund, and we are partly responsible.

By "shared governance," I mean three things.

1. That faculty recognize that the Board has final authority and responsibility for governing the university,
2. That the Board and administration recognize that the faculty has wisdom and expertise in the realm of academics that the Board may be lacking,
3. That we all agree Temple is best served when faculty are consulted in advance of making decisions, especially those involving academics and academic personnel, but also matters of institutional philosophy and mission. In keeping with point 1, above, we as faculty should not expect our recommendations to be blindly followed, but we should expect them to be taken seriously and, when ignored, we should expect some explanation as to why.

When I first arrived, governance within our department (Computer & Information Sciences) and our school (at that time the School of Business) worked in much this fashion. The Dean had the last say, as is proper, but the collegial assembly met regularly, conducted business, made recommendations, and were taken seriously by the dean's office. The Senate and its various standing committees functioned similarly well.

Much of this changed around the turn of the 21st century when Temple chose a president who was largely antipathetic to the notion of shared governance, indeed who announced to the faculty senate of an institution where he had previously served that those present at one of its meetings would be better served by sitting in their offices and polishing their CVs. He created policies that required collegial assembly bylaws to be revised to include several mandatory clauses. (These can be found at <http://policies.temple.edu/PDF/346.pdf>. The pertinent part of this document is the memorandum to the Board at the very end.) Some of these requirements made sense, some were inconsequential, but three of them served, and continue to serve, to hamper effective faculty contribution to collegial governance. These are the requirements that:

- The Dean of each school/college shall be an ex officio member without vote of all standing committees of his/her school or college.
- The Collegial Assembly shall be authorized to recommend school/college bylaws and other school/college policies for approval by the Dean. However, all such bylaws and policies shall be subject to University Policies.
- Procedures for amendment of the bylaws. Such provisions must include review by the Dean and approval by the President or the Board of Trustees, after review by University Counsel.

The problem with bullet point one is that it can be, and in some schools and colleges has been used to intimidate faculty from the freedom to debate and conduct business which might be distasteful to the dean. The bigger problem lies with the latter two points, in that they require that deans approve changes to bylaws before those bylaws can be sent to the legal department for vetting.

There are schools and colleges in which their current bylaws effectively inhibit free discussion, and there is no way to change those bylaws if the deans of those schools and colleges like that state of affairs. If we are to reanimate an interest in real shared governance, these things need to change. It is up to us to work for such change.

Several years ago (in 2012), the Faculty Senate passed a resolution titled Statement of Guiding Principles for Collegial Assembly Bylaws. (Republished in this issue.) It strongly affirms that the voice of the faculty should be independent, protected from fear of administrative reprisal. That resolution should long ago have resulted in some dialog between the Senate and the administration. That it has not yet done so is largely our own fault.

For a long time, many of us have been expressing concern about the increasing disinterest in our governance structures as evidenced by poor attendance at meetings and the increasing difficulty in finding faculty to do service work on standing committees. It is time for us to start doing something about it. I propose the following as a start:

1. Meetings should be an opportunity to conduct business, not listen to reports which can be sent out by email. Power points presentations are almost always boring and a waste of time that could be spent in making, discussing, and passing motions. Let us make clear to those who run our collegial assemblies, and those who run the Faculty Senate, that this is the way in which we expect to spend our valuable time.
2. We need to be certain collegial assembly leaders and deans' offices understand that they have certain responsibilities with respect to the Faculty Senate, and to hold them accountable for performing those duties. These responsibilities include the election of representative senators and Steering Committee representatives.
3. Those of us who care about governance need to encourage our colleagues to involve themselves. Attending one Faculty Senate meeting a month should not be burdensome. Attendance at collegial assembly meetings should be expected. If we can achieve point 1 above, point 3 should be easier to achieve.



4. It is time for us to seriously encourage the administration to talk to us about the “Guiding Principles” resolution. It is a negotiable document, but we need to make it clear that we expect to negotiate about it. Re-vitalizing shared governance demands that we clear away the obstacles that an unfriendly president burdened us with nearly two decades ago.
5. Finally, and most importantly, when I say “we” and “us” above, I mean you. Not the Faculty Senate, not the full professors, not the leaders in your department, but you – you and me and all of us. So when you meet a colleague who seems disinterested in assuming the responsibility of applying his or her wisdom to help guide Temple, explain to them why their help matters.