Ad Hoc Council of Faculty Senate Chairs
Report of Campus Focus Groups: Executive Summary

The future of UW, and the future for UW students, depends on a robust intellectual community. The Chair of Faculty Senate convened a committee of past chairs to examine issues confronting this community. Our first charge is to investigate matters of shared governance. At successful institutions strong shared governance is a marker of institutional health: it expresses the commitment of all participants, supports academics, multiplies student opportunity, and sustains a university's national and international reputation. The committee of Faculty Senate past chairs includes: Warrie Means, 2011-12; Ken Gerow, 2000-01; Caroline McCracken-Flesher, 1996-97; and Steve Bieber, 1986-87.

We began by taking the temperature of the campus through focus groups and meetings. We aimed to record the campus's hopes for UW as a flagship and land grant institution, to get a sense of how we meet that vision, and to generate strategies to meet it fully. The committee consulted with: faculty (including emeritus and past chairs of Faculty Senate; 29), staff (including staff senate; 17), and administrators (including Department Heads; 24).

Major conclusions:
- Participants across all levels of UW share respect for and investment in Wyoming's university.
- Faculty, staff and students are strong, but systemic problems militate against UW's current success.
- These systemic problems need urgently to be addressed across the university community.

Action Items:
- We must promptly accomplish a significant and community-building expression of institutional commitment and health—a professional, and appropriately open Presidential search.
- We must restore UW's intellectual community. To that end, we propose a summer caucus to enact policies that will address the findings of this report. Caucus membership should include: President of Board of Trustees, President of UW, Chair of Faculty Senate, President of Staff Senate, VP Academic Affairs, and President of ASUW.

Expected Outcomes:
- Ensure strength in administration at all levels through professional, open and ethical hiring practices, starting promptly at the top.
- Build trust across all levels of university responsibility through functional, open and shared governance.
- Build community between all constituents of the university through frequent and open discussion on matters of relevant importance.
- Support and enable all leaders at UW to do their jobs.
- Enact our commitment to UW's twin responsibilities as a flagship and land grant institution

A university must constantly improve its programs, functions and operations to be competitive in the world of higher education. A period of misdirection or confusion can undo the work of years and may take years to repair. Overcoming the problems currently confronting UW will require the combined and concerted effort of all constituent groups: trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

Shared Governance at the University of Wyoming

A Faculty Senate Project, 2015-

Notes from Focus Groups

Understanding/vision of a university (U.W. in particular)

- Meets the definition of a Land Grant (teaching, research, service)
- Meets the definition of a Flagship (leadership, top tier across disciplines)
- Engages the student, the state, and the wider world
- Provides an education that is recognized for its quality and valuable for students

- Continually improves and advances
- Advances knowledge
- Appreciates knowledge
- Communicates knowledge at the cutting edge
- Communicates capability

- Remembers that the student is an individual
- Prepares students to be open minded, critical thinkers
- Creates opportunities for personal transformation

- Prepares students to engage with a complex and varied world, including the world beyond Wyoming
- Prepares students for a future we cannot predict; where they learn to learn
- Prepares students to be productive members of society
- Enables students to improve the conditions of their lives, generation to generation

Developing new knowledge requires:
- A community of scholars
- The willingness to pursue difficult issues
- An atmosphere of tolerance and inclusion
- A safe place for difficult conversations, conversations that stretch our individual comfort zones, sometimes involving   controversial speakers
- Academic freedom for faculty within bounds of their professional expertise
- Development of faculty knowledge and capacity (e.g. through sabbaticals) to keep at the cutting edge
- A wide range of programs to develop the flexibility to meet an unpredictable future

Facilitating this work requires:
- Collegiality
- Shared governance
- A clear administrative structure
- Transparency in administration
- VPAA to be first among equals—the academic project must drive the university

- Mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration between faculty, administration, trustees, students, staff, legislators, Wyoming citizens

Challenges unique to UW (land grant, flagship, only four-year college)

- To be fully land grant and flagship at the same time
- To foreground learning and its impact on lives—the main point of a university
- To maintain balance across the campus given the desire to be "top tier" in certain disciplines
- To accomplish educational goals given resource constraints
- To maintain this focus on learning while addressing emphases on quantifiable data and job placement (which are not the primary aim of a university)
- To increase enrollment, graduation, and job placement rates, lacking additional resources
- To liaise with the state as a whole—Community Colleges etc.
-       (Service component to some faculty for outreach to the state?)
- To remember that our primary constituency is students and their parents
-

Ways we do not meet our vision, and obstructions to meeting that vision

- We meet our vision less and less
- When we fail to meet our vision, processes across the university are undermined
- When processes are undermined, standards and effectiveness fail

Specifics:
- Search processes at all levels, from the top down, need to foreground clear standards, open calls, professional processes and ethical practices
- Trustee appointments, too, need to model professional processes and ethical practices, meeting state law
- There is an invisible administration (management) that is not openly hired and not seen as invested in the university's primary research and teaching functions
- We seem to be following outside and sometimes short-term interests, rather than developing knowledge in the service of students and their varied ambitions
- Academic Affairs is marginalized and not leading the academic project
- Deans and mid-level administrators are marginalized and disenfranchised
- Faculty Senate is marginalized into a discursive rather than a legislative body
- Lacking communication, relationships essential to the university can become adversarial or participants recalcitrant
- Communication between levels of administration and governance needs emphasis
- Shared governance is difficult but essential to implement

Steps that can further our vision

Administration:
- Implement transparent practices:
    - re. hiring at all levels
    - re. the development, implementation of, and adherence to university regulations
- Clarify that there is broad support for all programs, not just a narrow few (the latter being appropriate for, say, a technical institute).
- Reinstall Academic Affairs as the hub of university activity
- Re-empower Deans
- Avoid an "interim" culture
- Recognize that to be "Tier 1" in a discipline requires us to be excellent across the university
- Promote U.W. vision and the caliber of our people and our work
- Celebrate UW's knowledge production and capacity building

Shared Governance:
- Accomplish representation for faculty at the highest level
    - Faculty Senate chair to sit on board of trustees
    - Meaningful faculty input into administrative searches
    - Staff and faculty senate chairs should attend summer trustee retreat
    - Staff Senate chair should also sit on board of trustees
- Increase collaboration between staff senate, faculty senate, and administration
- Involve faculty and staff in major decisions and policy shifts early in the process
- Increase conversations with community colleges on shared matters of governance
- Build bridges between Faculty Senate and Wyoming legislators

Faculty Senate:
- Reenergize the Senate's legislative role
- Implement occasional "climate" surveys of faculty (on the Staff Senate model)
- Vigorously implement current shared governance policies (in particular with respect to faculty senate committees)
- Build functional ties between faculty senate committees and decision making groups (individuals) in Old Main
- Gain a discretionary budget, on the model of ASUW
- Increase the stakes for faculty senate to
    - (1) Make it more relevant
    - (2) Attract more senior faculty into meaningful participation

Educational Initiatives:
- Put education and the research that supports it to the center of all our endeavors
- Reinstate the Graduate School
- Take advantage of our smallish size to foster interdisciplinary and interdepartmental initiatives
- Increase state-wide outreach, in an organized way. (Saturday U, Articulation meetings, Community College liaison, etc.)