

Integrity of UNC faculty governance questioned

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When French professor Hassan Melehy attends UNC's Faculty Council meetings, there are times colleagues ask him, "Are you going to say anything controversial today?"

During the council meetings, Melehy doesn't notice much debate between the faculty and the administration.

"I get the impression some people are afraid of disagreeing with administration," Melehy said. Public universities are seeing a decline in their faculty governance systems. State budget cuts have caused universities to adopt a more corporatized model to make up for revenue losses, says David Schultz, a professor at Hamline University in Minnesota who has extensively researched the topic.

The result: A shift in the way faculty governing bodies operate in university systems. UNC is no different, some critics say.

UNC's faculty council is composed of 27 faculty committees — 12 of which are elected — and comprises about 3,500 faculty members who are able to vote, said Joseph Ferrell, secretary of faculty.

Ferrell said that in spite of the complex structure, the faculty and administration work well together.

"It is definitely not adversarial," he said. "We work with the chancellor and the provost as colleagues."

Ferrell said the only change he has seen with faculty governance is the meeting-time limitations, which restrict how much work can get done in each session.

But Melehy sees things differently. Melehy sees a more exclusive culture within the council.

He takes particular umbrage with the nomination process for becoming a part of the council. Melehy said many choose names to nominate to committees simply because they've heard them before.

"People aren't aware of how tight the circles are," he said. "Many of the same people serve on multiple committees."

Melehy said the council should do more outreach to have more diversity on the committees.

Schultz, who in 2005 published a paper called "The Corporate University in American Society," said the corporatization of universities has widely lessened the faculty's decision-making power.

"In general, to a large extent, faculty governance is somewhere between a sham and weak at best," he said.

Because of state budget cuts, public universities have had to pay more attention to donor money and, as a result, less to academic integrity, Schultz said.

And because of this, he said, school administrators make decisions based more on money rather than simply the good of students and faculty.

“Smart universities would realize it’s the faculty that really generate the attraction for the university,” Schultz said. “They would recognize the value faculty have.”

Geography professor Altha Cravey, a member of the council, said she thinks faculty governance is weak at UNC. She said it seems to deal with the politics and legislature in Raleigh “microcontrolling” things at the University.

Cravey served on the council a few years ago, took a break from it and returned this semester. She said many faculty members are afraid to speak up and feel like they couldn’t make a difference if they were to voice their opinions.

“When [Tom Ross was fired](#), many colleagues were afraid to speak up,” she said. “And the chancellor barely said anything when she spoke.”

Cravey said the situation illuminated the type of leadership at UNC and reflected the fear and apathy of the faculty.

“We still don’t have an administration that is willing to be transparent,” she said. “The administration is only worried about public relations.”

However, faculty Chairman Bruce Cairns said the University has one of the strongest systems of faculty governance.

“I think faculty governance here at UNC is multifaceted and multilayered,” he said.

He said one of the reasons for tension on the subject is that when a challenging issue arises, not everyone will be satisfied with the end result.

Cairns said the University does not adhere to the corporate university model. He affirmed that the school’s first priority is education.

“(The corporate university) implies that the administration tells faculty what to do,” he said. “If the concern is losing our identity, it is our duty to protect the mission of the University.”