Memorandum of Understanding on Shared Governance

Shared governance is one of the key tenets of higher education and refers to the responsibilities of faculty, professional staff, and administrators with regard to decision-making about the operation of their institution. According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), governance in higher education should result from cooperation and interdependence between and among the administration, governing board, faculty, professional staff, and where appropriate, students. The faculty have primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life that relate to the educational process. In addition, the AAUP emphasizes the importance of faculty involvement in personnel decisions, selection of administrators, preparation of the budget, and determination of educational policies according to the AAUP Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities.

At the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), the following principles inform decisions that require shared governance:

1. Faculty and professional staff with academic responsibilities set academic standards and curriculum.

   Faculty and professional staff, particularly those directly involved in teaching, conducting research, and working directly with students, should have the leading role in determining curriculum content, degree and certificate requirements, procedures and standards of instruction, student achievement/competence standards, grading, and all matters relating to student progress in academic programs. To fulfill this responsibility effectively, faculty and professional staff must be given access to relevant information and resources.

2. Faculty and professional staff require academic freedom.

   Faculty and professional staff engaged in teaching and research must be able to exercise independent academic judgment in the conduct of their teaching and research. Administrators and administrative staff should not interfere in these matters except in proven cases of academic incompetence or wrongdoing. A strong tenure system is the key to protecting academic freedom against intimidation and arbitrary dismissal of faculty. Beyond that, protections of free expression should be extended to all faculty and staff to ensure openness, objectivity and creativity.

3. Faculty and professional staff should have primary responsibility for decisions on academic personnel and status.

   Faculty should have the primary (albeit not exclusive) initial role in interviewing and recommending candidates for academic appointment to the faculty, as well as administrative appointments that impact directly on academic issues, and a continuing role in decisions related to tenure, promotion and dismissal, research support, sabbaticals, standards of faculty competence and ethical conduct, and other incentives and measures of academic quality. Similarly, professional staff should have the primary role in interviewing and recommending candidates for appointment to their ranks, for advancement and promotion and for other incentives and measures of professional quality.

4. Structures that promote the principles of shared governance include:

   A well-functioning college or university is one that ensures that all faculty and all staff—from full professors to adjunct lecturers, from librarians to departmental support staff have the opportunity for their voices to be heard and given proper consideration in decisions that affect the mission and operation of the university. At UNK, the Faculty Senate, UNK Education Association (UNKEA), and the Staff Senate all have significant roles in shared governance. Areas of primary responsibility granted to the Faculty Senate are delineated in the Board of Regents By-Laws and include issues addressed by the following mandated committees: Academic Affairs, Professional Conduct, Grievance, and Academic Freedom and Tenure. The union and collective bargaining do not supplant the effective structures of shared governance, i.e., those structures that derive their legitimacy from genuine representation of faculty and staff. Areas of responsibility granted to UNKEA are contained in state law, delineated in the contract and arrived at through collective bargaining, which strengthens collegiality by establishing and enforcing contractual ground rules supporting it. The Staff Senate acts in an advisory capacity to the Chancellor, the administration, and other University groups in accordance with its bylaws of October 2008.

Approved by the Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Committee, November 21, 2013