



This issue of the Faculty Forum has four faculty commentaries about shared governance and several responses to last month's issue. Enjoy the conversation.

Shared Governance and a Moral Vision of the University

**David Henderson, Assistant Professor
Philosophy & Religion**

Shared governance requires substantial work. If it is seen as so much drudgery, then resentment and minimal participation by faculty will render it hollow. Meaningful participation requires a vision of what the university is and can be. We have to care about the university as such, not just our field and our students. Like most of you perhaps, I came into academic life for the love of my field and of teaching and learning. It was only through the particular social consciousness of my mentor in graduate school that I began to be enchanted with the university as an institution writ large.

My vision for the university—and I speak not just of our beloved Western, but of the university as one of the defining institutions of western civilization, like the nation state, the church or the market—takes a long view of its history and is centered around ideals of intellectual freedom in the pursuit of truth, cosmopolitanism, egalitarianism and eventually democracy. The University of Paris, one of the oldest universities, is said to have started as a unionizing of teachers and students in order to stop police brutality toward foreign students. Universities have been defined since by a series of fights over these principles, from whether the Church could keep the faculty from teaching Aristotle in the 13th c. to the free-speech riots at Berkeley in the 1960s.

The university has not always been the best version of itself, but for the past thousand years it has been overall a source of intelligence, tolerance and equality. It has given space to many who would speak truth to power. It has preserved and cultivated knowledge, wisdom and creativity. By my reckoning it's the best institution to come out of the western civilization.

Mostly this has been possible because the universities have maintained a measure of independence from other authorities, whose interests may include squashing dissent and criticism. This independence was hard won from the beginning. The *Parens scientiarum*, a 13th c. papal bull granting the University of Paris independence from local governments, took a strike, a shutdown and having an alumnus in the papacy. But the substance of this independence today is faculty governance. Faculty are the heart of the university, and we must be the stewards of its ideals. If faculty shirk the work of governance, then we may become less the mother of the sciences than the handmaiden of the NFL.

Shared governance for me is about standing in solidarity with faculty here, across the state, nation and globe, and across the ages in a fight to preserve and grow the values and ideals that define what it means to be a university.

David Henderson joined Western in 2008. He specializes in environmental philosophy, especially American wilderness thought. He also enjoys hiking, practicing martial arts and training for Ninja Warrior. David is the Secretary of the WCU Faculty Senate.



The Faculty Role in Shared Governance and the Future of the UNC System

**Vicki Szabo, Associate Professor
History**

When John Fennebresque, Chairman of the UNC Board of Governors, announced the forced resignation of President Tom Ross in January, faculty and administrators around the state were shocked to see a highly-regarded and effective president so brusquely cast aside. Faculty response to this travesty was quick and visceral online, partially because many of us trusted and admired President Ross' leadership, but also because this was a unilateral action by the Board, without consideration of input from anyone within our seventeen system institutions. Marching orders from Raleigh - not academic concerns - were the primary factors at play, or so it would seem. Did the Board have the right, the power, to fire President Ross. Yes. Should they have done so in the manner they did? No.

While this was the most shocking of the Board's actions this year, it was one of many that indicate an activist posture on their part. In a recent [editorial](#), Fennebresque rejected criticisms that many of the Board's decisions, including the removal of President Ross and the closing of the Center on Poverty, had "chilled academic freedom." What is chilling is what might come next. We may anticipate that [this Board of Governors](#) will continue to act unilaterally and without explanation in the future, as we see at institutions across the country ([Wisconsin](#) is the poster child, but also [Cornell](#), [George Washington](#), and others). [Shared governance](#), the principle that academic faculty have the right and obligation to participate in the maintenance and operation of our university system, would seem to dictate outreach from the Board to faculty on many issues, seeking our insight on directions and concerns. Our Board of Governors takes a minimalist approach to this principle, which erodes faculty trust and highlights separation between two groups that should be working toward shared goals, namely the education and improvement of our state. Faculty have an obligation to play a role in the governance of our institution and system; to borrow a friend's recent sentiment, we can no longer afford to be silent.

As faculty, we are invited to serve on committees, councils, advisory boards, and groups that help shape our institution. Every service opportunity that you find yourself in (even the occasionally mind-numbingly boring one) is an opportunity to learn a discrete part of our university and our role within the UNC system. While often feeling like a burden, service, or shared governance, has long-term rewards. Shared governance allows us to engage with administrators – local and statewide – in productive and professionally meaningful ways, not only to accomplish tasks, but to promote a sense of social cohesion and community. We are fortunate at WCU to have real opportunity to contribute and collaborate, working alongside an open and transparent Chancellor and [Trustees](#). At the state level, though, shared governance means minimal compliance, only necessary for show.

Service is often the unwanted burden that we do out of obligation, the impediment to our true passions as faculty of teaching and scholarship. But we won't get to do either of those if this activist Board of Governors decides to ignore the value of shared governance and the collective



wisdom that we hold as a faculty. Shared governance is a unique right, one that we perhaps take for granted. By engaging more actively in service and governance across our university and our system, maybe we can forestall or prevent further assaults upon higher education in our state. Small acts will show our higher administrators that we take our roles in university governance seriously. We need to inform ourselves on current initiatives taken by our state legislature that affect [our universities](#) (and [public schools](#)). On a local level, we can stay engaged by reading Senate [resolutions](#), attending forums, providing feedback, completing surveys – all small acts, but all important in keeping ourselves at the center of university and system initiatives. Shared governance – active service – helps us to protect what we love most about our roles as educators, scholars and servants of this institution and region.

As the crow flies, Raleigh is about 750 miles from Madison, Wisconsin. Ideologically, Raleigh and Madison – or Pat McCrory and Scott Walker - are much closer. The tyranny that Gov. Walker's administration has imposed upon the Wisconsin university system should terrify us. Assaults on [tenure](#), assaults on [shared governance](#), assertions of [faculty laxity](#) as seen in Wisconsin could be our future (some would argue [our present](#)). Shared governance is essential to a strong university, and a strong university system is essential to a [healthy state](#). Our Board of Governors (and working behind them our state legislators and our Governor) imperils our students and our state through their unwillingness to engage meaningfully with faculty and to seek out the expertise we can provide.

A faculty member at WCU since 2001, Vicki Szabo (szabo@email.wcu.edu) teaches ancient, medieval, and environment history. When not serving on committees, she hikes, builds trebuchets, and scavenges marine mammals.

Shared Governance – Rights and Responsibilities

David McCord, Professor
Psychology

Shared governance refers to the active collaboration among faculty, administrators, and the board of overseers in making decisions about university goals, policies, and operations. Along with tenure and academic freedom, shared governance is one of the foundational elements of the American university system and is credited with being one of the reasons American universities have achieved world prominence in a relatively short period of time.

Here at Western we have a remarkable opportunity to restructure the faculty role in shared governance. Our Chancellor is the most transparent and accessible leader most of us can remember, our current Board of Trustees is similarly open and collaborative, and now is a great time to think about what types of involvement we should have in various institutional processes.

To stimulate thought and debate, let me suggest that based on the core mission of the university, *the creation and dissemination of knowledge*, there is not a single activity that should exclude faculty voice. Every committee, task force, council, initiative, project, program and center should include faculty input. Faculty should be in on every decision, including types of



landscaping, parking facilities, new academic programs, new buildings, all budgets, athletic issues, student affairs, admissions and registration, as well as traditional areas of academic programs and curriculum.

But increasing our voice necessarily entails increasing our own levels of responsibility and accountability. Future debates are likely to include big issues like teaching load, workload more broadly defined, and tenure. If we insist upon transparency in our governance partners, we need to become more transparent ourselves. This means being comfortable with openly sharing and defending our records, dossiers, grade distributions, teaching evaluations, scholarly productivity records, and so forth. Importantly, if we expect faculty voice in every university activity, we all need to be ready to step up and serve.

Finally, while the shared governance issue entails increased faculty voice at all levels, why not start at the top? I suggest we actively explore the idea of having a faculty member on the Board of Trustees which automatically includes the elected President of the Student Government Association as a full member. It seems it would be appropriate to also include an elected member of the faculty. There are arguments on both sides of this issue, and at present the UNC Code disallows it. But the Code can be changed, and we should certainly give this some serious consideration. And we can work down from there. (Heads up, Executive Council!)

David McCord joined the WCU faculty in 1989. He is a professor of psychology and specializes in personality theory and assessment. He is chair-elect of the WCU Faculty Senate.

Faculty Governance: Why I Care

Leroy Kauffman, Associate Professor
Accounting

I care about faculty governance because I love my university and being involved in governance is one way that I can actively be a part of shaping the future. Faculty governance is one way that we, as faculty, can shape the future of our university. It provides an opportunity to proactively shape the future. Western Carolina University, at the current time, enjoys a great working relationship with administration. Our current administration welcomes and invites faculty involvement in setting policy and shaping our future. It has not always been that way and I suspect will go through times in the future when faculty voice may not be as welcome.

Now is the time to be involved. We dare not wait until times of crisis to assert the faculty voice into shaping our future. I am not so naïve to suggest that our voice as faculty will be accepted without testing, but if we don't speak and be involved, we will forfeit the opportunity to have voice.

At the UNC system level, Faculty Assembly is one of the avenues for faculty voice to be heard. The Faculty Assembly is primarily a body to provide counsel to the university president. We counsel UNC-GA on various topics, some of which they solicit and some of which we



initiate. We do not set policy but we certainly speak to policy setting. The faculty voice to the UNC Board of Governors is primarily through the individual university campuses. Faculty Assembly provides a forum for coordinating that campus voice and providing perspective on happenings. Recent events would confirm this role. I believe that all campuses provided feedback directly to the Board of Governors regarding the way they handled President Tom Ross' employment, as well as the Board actions regarding the closing of some centers and institutes, although some campuses were more directly impacted than others.

I would invite any and all of you to be engaged in faculty governance. Nominate yourself or a colleague for open positions. Proactively engage the debate around policy issues and help shape our future.

N. Leroy Kauffman is an associate professor in accounting. He is currently the Faculty Senate Chair and has served on numerous committees, councils and task forces. He has served in a variety of administrative roles at Western in the last 21 years as well. He loves to garden and spend time with his family.

Responses to the March Faculty Forum about a Proposed River Park in Cullowhee

The March issue by Maurice Phipps and Anna Fariello received several responses from faculty and staff:

Tim Carstens, Hunter Library: I agree that the proposed river park would be a great thing for WCU's students and that it is in the university's interest to promote this endeavor. We need to support everything that gives students more reason to "stay and play." The proposed river park and the new mountain bike trails are just the kinds of things that encourage students to come here in the first place and to stay in Cullowhee on the weekends rather than heading back home. If our "outdoorsy" students stay here to play then other students will stay too because they won't be looking at an empty residence hall on Saturday night. The more Cullowhee becomes a fun place to be, the more our students will want to stay here. And that will help both retention and recruitment.

Josh Whitmore, Outdoor Programs: Speaking from my position as the Associate Director of Outdoor Programs, I would be thrilled to have a river park in Cullowhee. Our program would benefit greatly from having such a resource at our back door. I'd love to be able to rent tubes to students for an afternoon float or to be able to rent a kayak to someone learning how to paddle that they could potentially carry to the river from our office and back. As more and more students are attracted to WCU for the outdoor lifestyle perks, enhancing this resource can only add to richness of their experience here.

Speaking as a community member who grew up in Brevard and has lived in Sylva/Cullowhee for the past 10 years, I'm excited to see this kind of development of recreation



resources in our county. As our rural mountain community transitions more firmly to a tourist driven economy, any enhancement of our recreation resources will bring the kind of growth and prosperity that I want to see. As an outdoor, active person myself, I will certainly use the river park, but will also enjoy the infrastructure of businesses that could build around it in old Cullowhee.

Brian Castle, English: I feel fortunate to have landed at a university with the kind and number of recreational, adventure, and outdoor activities offered here at WCU; I wholeheartedly agree with Maurice's and Anna's call for future development, support, and resources in those areas, and for WCU to focus on those aspects in its branding. Unfortunately, I believe WCU's current marketing focus on the "Top Adventure College" award is inappropriate.

When I mentioned the "Top Adventure College" award to a colleague at another institution, she congratulated me and then asked "based on what?" That question made me consider this "award" in the context of what we do here at WCU. Most of my classes include assignments meant to develop skills related to argumentation, logic, and analyses. I tell my students that, no matter what their chosen profession, they will be required to propose answers and solutions based upon criteria appropriate to the audience and context, to bring evidence to bear in support of that proposal, and often to apply appropriate research (that they have evaluated and deemed appropriate to the disciplinary issue at hand). So we discuss things like the fact that the popularity of an online source does not necessarily reflect its accuracy or validity. And that the "best" or "top" *anything* can only be determined by applying criteria appropriate to the context; a Prius might be the "top" pick for someone who wants good gas mileage, but not for someone who needs to haul tons of manure on a weekly basis.

Which is why the University's focus on the "Top Adventure College" award upsets me so much (I see it promoted almost ubiquitously on billboards, web sites, emails, press releases, social media, etc.), not because I don't think we are a great outdoor/adventure school, with authentic, engaged, learning experiences associated with those activities (because I do), but because that particular "award" stands in opposition to what we are trying to teach our students with respect to academic and intellectual work. The "Top Adventure College" award is, in reality, a popularity contest; whoever receives the most votes wins. It isn't even democratic since people can vote multiple times (each virtual "person" once a day). Nor is it "awarded" since no one is really doing the awarding but ourselves. When I discussed the award with one of my classes, one student said "but it must be valid because it was bracket, like the NCAA!" And therein, as they say, lies the rub.

Basically we won an online poll because we (faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends we cajoled) voted for ourselves more than other institutions voted for themselves. I don't blame WCU for using that in its marketing, but this accolade seems an inappropriate one on which to place too much emphasis. By all means, highlight the excellent work our programs and people (like Maurice, Anna, and others) are doing; that's what we should be proud of and what we should foreground in our branding. But let's refrain from participating too heavily in the very cult of popularity we work so hard to interrogate in our classes.



Phil Cauley, Admissions: The Office of Admission and the University have been more proactive in recent years in promoting the uniqueness, opportunities and strength of our location, including outdoor recreation activities. Some examples include, but are not limited to:

- Incorporating in our recruitment literature and Web presence more photos of the mountains and examples of outdoor activities such as Base Camp Cullowhee, the Tuck River Clean-up, the new hiking and mountain biking trail, etc.;
- Incorporating into our recruitment communication the brochures that the Parks and Recreation Management students created that highlight various aspects of outdoor recreation;
- Accentuating the strengths of our location in terms of activities in presentations (i.e., Open House welcome; WCU on Tour keynote presentation; campus tour scripts and presentations; etc.);
- Collaborating with vendors who assist with the identification of potential prospective student populations to publicize the outdoor recreation aspects of the campus and the region;
- Incorporating outdoor experiences into recruitment and transition programming (i.e., tours of the Campus Recreation Center during open houses, pre-orientation session whitewater rafting options, First Ascent climbing option for new students just prior to the beginning of new students' first semester, FYE Bucket List items that promote the outdoors); and
- Showcasing outdoor opportunities during and through transition events such as Valley Ballyhoo, the Week of Welcome, and Winter Welcome.

I do believe the university has been more proactive as a whole as to outdoor programming options and promotion. The addition of the Campus Recreation Center and the hiking/biking trail are examples. The increased emphasis on wellness has enhanced outdoor activities (such as the CRC group hikes that are offered each semester), and additional campus events (the Turkey Trot, Mountain Heritage Day race, and Valley of the Lilies Half Marathon that is co-sponsored annually now in the spring by CRC and Physical Therapy).

Increased community development of outdoor recreation has aided campus outdoor interest. The positive influence of a mountain biking shop in Sylva and the attraction to the sport among faculty and students have led to increased mountain biking interest and opportunities (CRC hosting a large mountain bike race last spring). The addition of the first portion of a new Greenway near campus has garnered attention. I have already been on the greenway dozens of times and have seen numerous WCU faculty, staff and students using this new resource. I can only imagine interest growing even more when the bridge is added to connect the greenway to the new river access. The addition of the new river access points along the Tuck has increased river access and usage by kayakers, fishermen, tubers, etc. Our family has our own kayaks, and we've already used several of the new river access points and witnessed firsthand the popularity of those additions. The promotion of the Fly Fishing trail and the hosting of a national fly fishing tournament brought greater attention to the Tuck.



Having been here now for over three decades, I believe the emphasis of the importance of health and wellness, the recent enhanced access and opportunities for diverse outdoor activities, the growing notoriety of the travel and tourism industry in this region, and the emergence and growth of additional outdoor programmatic offerings at WCU have attracted more students with an affinity for outdoor activities, have introduced more outdoor novices to these activities, and have fostered greater participation among students and faculty than what I observed as a student and staff member in the 80s and 90s.

My wife is from Brevard and my folks lived in Brevard during my college years. We have often heard and made comparisons to the Sylva and Brevard areas, but through the years, my wife and I had commented numerous times that while both are mountain valley communities, we didn't have to travel as far in Brevard to have access to outdoor activities—be it hiking, biking, etc. Opportunities seemed to abound just outside of your front door. While the Sylva/Cullowhee area is in the heart of the mountains, for years it still seemed as though you had to travel further to enjoy the outdoor possibilities. While the mountains haven't moved any closer to Cullowhee, in recent years it sure feels as if access to the mountains has moved much closer to campus. From the on-campus trail system to the greenway to the new river access points to the removal of the dam and the rafting options in Dillsboro to added outdoor health and wellness facilities and programming, WCU and Cullowhee seem even more like an outdoor enthusiast's destination.

Editor's Note: This is the last Faculty Forum of the 2014-15 academic year. Send your ideas for topics to cover next year, and plan to write a lead commentary or a response. Your comments and suggestions are welcome. Many thanks to all the contributors this year.

Lead Commentary. This is an essay written by a faculty member addressing an issue, hot topic, or project of interest to the general faculty. Let me know if you have a topic you'd like to write about in the fall.

Responses. These are faculty comments about and reactions to the previous months' FF. They are often substantive, even critical responses. If you thought about writing a response but didn't get to it, you have one more chance. Take a look at the 2014-15 issues, send a response, and we will publish them in May before the end of the semester. Here are the topics we have covered:

August. [Welcome to Greater Cullowhee!](#) [36 Hours in Greater Cullowhee](#) with articles on hiking, biking, children's activities, whitewater recreation, fishing, and non-commuting. Contributors include *Maurice Phipps, Chris Cooper, Libby McRae, Hal Herzog, David Claxton and Brian Gastle.*

September. [Where We Live and What We Do](#) by *Catherine Carter*

October. [The Challenges - and Rewards - of Teaching WCU Students with Disabilities](#) by *Vicki Faircloth* and [FYI: Laws, Rights and Opportunities](#) by *Lisa Bloom*



Faculty Forum

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for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

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November. [Who has an ACE at this Place?](#) By *Benjamin Tanner*

January. [Gender \(In\)Equity](#) by *Laura Wright* and [“In Compliance” Is an Unreasonably Low Bar](#) by *Hal Herzog*

February. [The Academic Game of Thrones: Scholarship as Bloodsport](#) by *Roya Scales*

March. [WCU’s Next Adventure: A River Park on the Tuck](#) *Maurice Phipps and Anna Fariello*

April. [Essays on Shared Governance](#) by *David Henderson, Vicki Szabo, David McCord and Leroy Kauffman.*

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