RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

Report of the Task Force
on Shared Governance

December 5, 2017

Contents:

Submitted to:
Dr. Beth E. Barnett, Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs
Dr. Tae Y. Kwak, Faculty Assembly President, Associate Professor of History

I. INTRODUCTION

The Task Force on Shared Governance (hereafter "TFSG") was established in Spring 2017 and was jointly charged by Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs, Dr. Beth E. Barnett, and Faculty Assembly President, Dr. Tae Y. Kwak. The TFSG was charged with "developing principles of shared governance that are in keeping with the mission of the College and that will allow the institution to fulfill its vision and strategic goals." The TFSG, however, was not the first step taken toward strengthening and formalizing shared governance at the College.

The TFSG was informed by the 2014 work of the Subcommittee on Shared Governance which was established by the Faculty Assembly Executive Council, and which may be viewed as a launching point for the work of the TFSG. More generally, the TFSG could be seen as a response to the growing recognition across stakeholder groups that shared governance at Ramapo College must be strengthened and improved in order to meet present day challenges while continuing to provide the high quality education that is the College's primary goal. While the TFSG was charged only with developing "principles" of shared governance, its internal deliberations as well as broader stakeholder input pushed it to go a bit further.

Pursuant to its charge, the initial work of the TFSG was the development of principles of shared governance at the College. These principles (see Section II) should be viewed, centrally, as the foundation for the full content of this report. Following the establishment of the principles, the TFSG designed a dynamic protocol for approaching shared decisions (see Section III). This protocol was particularly designed for decisions of a transformational rather than a transactional nature. Without anticipating specific issues that may arise in shared governance, the TFSG then generated practical recommendations (see Section IV) for putting the principles into action and facilitating healthy shared decision-making.

Four significant themes are evident throughout the report. The first theme is that trust, as opposed to strict legalism, is the foundation for healthy shared governance in the long term (Kezar, 2004). We must, as a community, find ways to build trust, and this is, in part, why communication is emphasized so strongly in the practical recommendations. The second theme is the importance of consultation across constituents. While respect for

primary decision-making roles is essential, it is also essential to recognize when stakeholder groups should have a secondary role and, in such cases, to engage in consultative decision-making processes. The third theme is the critical importance of <u>getting out in front of important shared decisions</u>. It is too often that unclear expectations, diverging viewpoints, and misunderstandings emerge and/or persist throughout a decision-making process. These complications lead to conflict that cannot be easily resolved once the time-frame is compressed and expediency becomes a determining factor. The fourth and final theme, which is perhaps encompassing of the three previously identified themes, is the importance of both <u>vertical and horizontal communication</u>. Communication that is rooted in trust, that is multi-directional, and that is clear strengthens the decision-making process and can foster the effective resolution of seemingly intractable conflicts. To these thematic ends, the Dynamic Protocol for Decision-Making within Shared Governance (see Section III) aims to further mitigate conflict by clarifying expectations at the outset.

Please note that this report is not a detailed blueprint for shared governance at Ramapo College. It does not attempt to foresee all possible issues and prescribe specific courses of action for each. Rather, it establishes a set of common expectations for shared governance at the College, and proposes a conceptual framework upon which a robust system of shared governance may be built over time. Irrespective of principles and framework, the TFSG acknowledges that improving shared governance at the College will require not only trust but also hard work and a willingness by a much greater number of College members to participate in the process. With sufficient commitment by all participants, it is our hope that this report will serve as both a framework for shared governance and a catalyst for the accompanying change in institutional culture, expectations, etc., thus enabling us to advance our collective efforts toward the College's primary goal, the provision of a high quality education.

II. CONTEXT, PRINCIPLES AND OUTCOMES

Context

The imperative for effective shared governance at Ramapo College arises from the need to advance necessary institutional change, to uphold the College's core values and academic freedom, and to reinforce collaborative relationships across campus.

Effective shared governance is a means by which long term institutional well-being is strengthened. As the environment within which higher education operates continues to shift and grow increasingly competitive, scholar Steven Bahls reminds us that change is best effected when it is aligned to institutional mission. "Effective and responsive governance is vitally important during times of change in higher education. Sharing governance in the face of sweeping and transformative change can help shift the thinking of boards, faculty, and staff from protecting yesterday's parochial interests to aligning efforts to address tomorrow's realities. When efforts are aligned, solutions are often more thoughtful and implementation time is faster," wrote Bahls (2014). The challenges confronting higher education continue to mount and institutional capacity to anticipate and respond to them demands "unprecedented cooperation and collaboration." (Bahls, 2014).

During times of both institutional upheaval and stability, effective shared governance also fosters trust-based relationships that, at their core, illuminate an institution's core values and perpetuate academic freedom. It is accepted that, on balance, while shared governance processes may slow down the making of decisions, they also "assure more thorough discussion and provide the institution with a sense of order and stability." (Kerr, 1963). Participants in shared governance further accept that a complex institution like Ramapo College is well- served when its members collectively agree that it can and should require responsibility, collegiality, and accountability while simultaneously encouraging academic freedom, and asserting varying levels of decision-making responsibility.

Moving Toward a Definition of Shared Governance

At Ramapo College, effective shared governance embodies the building and nurturing of partnerships and collaborative relationships across *and within* stakeholder groups. Such relationships form a foundation from which healthy, shared decisions, related to institutional

policy and involving multiple stakeholder groups, become possible. At its best, such a form of governance gives standing to stakeholder groups including students, faculty, staff and administration through suitable representative mechanisms.

Organizing Principles for Effective Shared Governance

In order for shared governance to be implemented well, stakeholders must appreciate and adhere to three organizing principles:

Principle 1: Respect and Collegiality

- Stakeholders will be considered to be well-intentioned and working toward what is in the best interest of the College according to their own understanding of the College's strategic plan and objectives.
- Stakeholders have different yet often complementary expertise and information, which can be leveraged to improve decision-making and mitigate potential conflicts.
- Decisions that are grounded in a robust collaborative governance model may not satisfy all stakeholders but are still respected as the products of a shared, collaborative process.

Principle 2: Trust and Transparency

- All stakeholders have a responsibility to proactively cultivate trust.
- Trust is best fostered by the maximal appropriate level of transparency.
- Communication is most effective when it is multi-directional and timely.

Principle 3: Clarity and Compliance

- At the outset of shared decision-making, the process, timeline, and relative roles (i.e. primary, secondary, tertiary, etc.) should be understood by all involved stakeholders.
- Cyclical reassessment processes will reveal opportunities for improvement and reinforcement.
- Pressures on compliance may include time limitations, external regulations, accreditation stipulations, and other such constraints.

Five Outcomes of Shared Governance

When the context within which effective shared governance is understood and necessitated, and when the principles of (1) respect and collegiality, (2) trust and transparency, and (3) clarity and compliance are adhered to, shared governance is expected to yield five overarching outcomes (see Figure 1):

1. Strengthening the quality of our collective decisions by valuing expertise and diversity of perspectives.

2. Advancing the College's strategic goals.

3. Facilitating inclusive and aspirational thinking.

4. Fostering a culture of mutual ownership, support, and accountability.

5. Providing an effective forum for honest dialogue about crucial and controversial issues.

Outcomes:
Strengthening quality of decisions
Advancing strategic goals
Facilitating inclusive / aspirational thinking
Fostering culture of mutual ownership/accountability
Providing forum for dialog

Principles:
Respect & Collegiality
Trust & Transparency
Clarity & Compliance

SHARED GOVERNANCE

Context:
Advancing Change
Valuing Academic Freedom
Reinforcing Collaboration

Figure 1: Context, Principles, and Outcomes

III. DYNAMIC PROTOCOL FOR DECISION-MAKING WITHIN SHARED GOVERNANCE

The ability to consult and collaborate on important decisions is a central objective and essential ingredient of shared governance. Hence, the following protocol is designed to facilitate decision-making within shared governance and across stakeholder groups. The protocol is "dynamic" in the sense that it does not attempt to enumerate all possible types of decisions and lay out, in advance, specific processes for each. Rather, it provides general guidelines, which should empower leaders of stakeholder groups to come together at the outset to construct a decision-making process that both optimizes the quality of the decision and minimizes the potential for misunderstanding or conflict.

Purview of Shared Governance

Before presenting the protocol, it is important to address the question of which types of decisions fall under the purview of shared governance and warrant such a consultative and collaborative process. In the ideal, these would be decisions that have broad impact across multiple stakeholder groups and/or which would clearly benefit from the levels of expertise embodied within the diverse stakeholder groups. For decisions of a more transactional nature, there may already be a clear, established process, and hence the proposed protocol is not needed. For decisions that are more transformational in nature, and which do ideally warrant a collaborative and/or consultative decision-making process, there may be external factors such as prevailing collective bargaining agreements**,** state/accreditation mandates, or justified expediency that preclude ordinary shared governance and/or impose restrictive parameters. Thus, the types of decisions for which the following dynamic protocol applies should be taken, in summary, to be those decisions that (1) meet the ideal stipulations, (2) are of a transformational nature and (3) are open to shared governance from the standpoint of collective bargaining and/or other restrictive parameters and external factors.

Decision-Making Plan

Once a decision is deemed to meet the above criteria, at the outset of the shared decision-making process appropriate leaders of the involved stakeholder groups (often Faculty Assembly Executive Council, Student Government Association Executive Board,

and/or the President/Provost) should meet to agree upon relative levels of responsibility (primary, secondary, tertiary, as defined below) and construct a Decision-Making Plan. If there are restrictive parameters stemming from collective bargaining or other external factors, these should be made clear at this time. Also, if a decision is meant to resolve a particular problem, all parties should have a common understanding of the nature of that problem and what would constitute a resolution. The Decision-Making Plan should then be jointly constructed and identify the following information:

1. the most appropriate and effective channels for facilitating essential communication/consultation/information gathering and sharing (see Appendix B: Current Channels Diagram);

2. external and internal data that must be gathered and considered;

3. a reasonable timeline, given (1) and (2);

4. how the final decision shall be made; and

5. how and when to communicate results to the broader community.

The protocol is designed to get out in front of important decisions and make sure that all groups have a common understanding at the outset. In doing so, the fundamental aim is to improve the quality of the decision itself. Adherence to the protocol should serve to minimize the potential for misunderstanding and/or conflict, and to avoid being forced into poor decision-making due to the need for expediency.

Relative Levels of Responsibility

While, in reality, roles for decision-making within a shared governance process should be viewed as a continuum, the following rough classification of relative levels of responsibility may serve as a useful starting point.

Primary Responsibility: Essentially, this is the stakeholder group/body that makes the final decision. Decisions of this group/body should be followed except in extraordinary circumstances and for compelling and clearly articulated reasons. Practically speaking, there should be only one group/body fulfilling the primary decision-making role for most decisions. In exceptional cases, it may be possible to share primary responsibility or assign to different groups primary responsibility for different aspects of a decision,

provided that the process for making the final decision is carefully stipulated and clearly understood by all.

Secondary Responsibility: This stakeholder group/body has no formal role in making the final decision, but should be formally and meaningfully consulted (often due to general expertise and/or high impact on function). There can be multiple groups/bodies fulfilling secondary roles. Groups/bodies fulfilling secondary roles may initiate a shared decision-making process. Throughout the consultation phase, groups/bodies fulfilling primary and secondary roles have equal voice and interaction should be viewed as a partnership.

Tertiary Responsibility: This stakeholder group/body is informed/updated regularly throughout the consultation phase, and is consulted with as needed on an ad-hoc basis due to specific expertise (perhaps related to implementation) and/or significant impact.

Guidelines for Assigning Relative Levels of Responsibility

While we are able to offer some guidelines for assigning relative levels of responsibility for decision-making within a shared governance process, it is important to recognize that no such list can ever be exhaustive. If there is a disagreement over relative levels of responsibility for a particular decision, one approach toward resolution would be to appeal to past practice, externally recognized best practices (i.e. Association of Governing Boards, American Association of University Professors, etc.), or benchmarking with comparable institutions. In the end, it may be necessary to find a compromise position along the lines described above in the description of primary responsibility.

The most important guideline that we offer concerns issues related to curriculum. Although curriculum is traditionally and uncontroversially the purview of the Faculty, it is not always clear how broadly the term "curriculum" may be applied. While some decisions do not concern curriculum directly, in the strict sense of defining or restricting the content of courses or programs, they may nevertheless indirectly affect that content and/or its delivery. This is the motivation behind the following distinction of curriculum direct and curriculum indirect:

Curriculum Direct: Curriculum direct decisions pertain to the content of credit-bearing courses and the selection of courses and other learning experiences that make up an academic program. For decisions regarding curriculum direct, Faculty have primary responsibility. However, the Administration has secondary responsibility if and when the decision will substantially impact administrative functions at the College, be subject to external limitations, or require significant resources. Faculty are hence obliged to meaningfully consult with the Administration on such issues.

Curriculum Indirect: Curriculum indirect decisions do not concern curriculum direct (as defined above), but they nevertheless have high impact on the ability of the Faculty to effectively deliver the curriculum and fulfill the College's educational mission. For such decisions, the Administration has primary responsibility and Faculty have secondary responsibility. The Administration is hence obliged to meaningfully consult with Faculty on such issues.

Students and Staff

Students and Staff may also have a secondary or tertiary level of responsibility for a decision related to curriculum direct and indirect. This would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis depending on the level of impact on, and expertise of, each group related to that particular decision.

The TFSG sought to offer some guidelines for Student and Staff participation. In particular, Students should have secondary decision-making responsibility when a shared governance decision directly concerns or has high impact on the overall student experience and/or campus life. Some examples include but are not limited to:

- Housing/Dining
- Sports/Recreation
- Support Services (i.e. Office of Specialized Services, Counseling and Health Services, Orientations, Center for Reading and Writing, etc.)
- Club/Organization Policies
- Decisions Pertaining to Campus Climate

This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Moreover, this protocol does not preclude the possibility of Students having primary decision-making responsibility in some decisions, depending on level of impact and expertise.

In addition to potential responsibility related to curriculum, as described earlier, Staff may have secondary or tertiary decision-making responsibility when a decision directly concerns or has high impact on the overall Staff experience. Some examples include but are not limited to:

- Professional Development and Training Opportunities
- Campus Climate
- Parking

Again, this is an incomplete list. This protocol does not preclude the possibility of Staff, like Students, also having the primary decision-making responsibility in some decisions, depending on level of impact and expertise.

IV. Practical Recommendations for Implementation

In order to effectively implement the shared governance framework that has been presented in the preceding sections, it is imperative that strategies to improve transparency, trust, communication (both between and within stakeholder groups), and effective representation are enthusiastically considered. The following 13 practical recommendations for implementation are meant to specifically address these vital issues.

Recommendation 1: Make meetings more open and transparent.

    a) Provide consistent advance notice of meeting agendas.

    b) At the close of each meeting, explicitly set a list of takeaways so that liaisons/representatives report out consistent information to their respective constituent groups.

    c) Review and/or adjust meeting management to ensure that the reporting out by liaisons/representatives is inclusive and adequate.

Recommendation 2: Maintain a centralized website with current information on all standing College committees and governance groups to include committee charges, membership, and in what capacity members serve.

Recommendation 3: Multi-channel dissemination of information about items currently under review.

  a) An excellent example of this is the system currently used by Provost's Council, which places voting items into a 30-day review cycle, during which time representatives engage their constituencies and gather feedback.

Recommendation 4: Mentorship for new members of representative bodies, with emphasis placed on effective representation within the context of that group.

Recommendation 5: All stakeholder groups should recognize Institutional Research as the College's official resource for publicly available data and should be encouraged to make use of its data.

Recommendation 6: All stakeholder groups should be encouraged to designate a liaison to advise/report on matters pertaining to College-wide accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Recommendation 7: Conduct regular joint meetings between Stakeholder leadership.

Recommendation 8: Establish an Annual Shared Governance Retreat.

Staff Representation

One additional issue of representation concerns the Staff (as a stakeholder group), which do not currently have a representative mechanism that is specifically designed to formally participate in College governance. It is beyond the charge of the TFSG to recommend such a mechanism. However, we acknowledge this significant need.

Recommendation 9: The College-at-large should actively support any effort by the Staff to establish a mechanism for representation in College governance.

Reassessment and Continuous Improvement

Another set of recommendations spring from the Organizing Principle of Clarity and Compliance which notes that cyclical reassessment process will reveal opportunities for improvements and reinforcement. As we work to implement shared governance at the College, particularly at the outset, it is imperative that we learn from our missteps and make changes to our process and expectations accordingly. In other words, shared governance at

the College should be assessed cyclically for the purpose of uncovering opportunities for improvement, and mechanisms must exist for acting on any conclusions that may be drawn (i.e., closing the loop). The following recommendations seek to address this need:

Recommendation 10: Annual meeting of stakeholder group leadership to engage candidly on shared governance events/issues from the preceding year and suggest changes that may improve shared governance moving forward.

Recommendation 11: Biennial survey of the entire College on the state of shared governance at the College, soliciting suggestions for improvement; this will be followed by an open forum of the College.

Recommendation 12: Shared governance decisions will be memorialized through documentation that includes the Decision-Making Plan that was devised between the representative groups (as outlined in the protocol section of the report), the decision that was made, and a rationale for that decision.

Recommendation 13: Allow formal amendments to this report, incorporating ideas for improvement that are endorsed by all stakeholder groups.

<div align="center">###</div>

This report was developed by and is submitted on behalf of the Task Force on Shared Governance:

- Ken McMurdy, Associate Professor of Mathematics, Task Force Chair (TAS)
- Beth Barnett, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs
- Marta Bautis, Professor of Documentary and News Production (CA)
- Dean Chen, Associate Professor of Political Science (SSHGS)
- Kirsten DaSilva, Vice President of Administration and Finance
- John Gronbeck-Tedesco, Associate Professor of American Studies (SSHGS)
- Stephan Lally, President, Student Government Association
- Nicholas Lapiska, Senate President, Student Government Association
- Christopher Romano, Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs
- Eddie Saiff, Dean, School of Theoretical and Applied Science
- Marcia Sexton, Technical Services Librarian (George T. Potter Library)
- Gladys Torres-Baumgarten, Professor of International Business (ASB)
- Ashwani Vasishth, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies (SSHS)
- Brittany A. Williams-Goldstein, Chief of Staff and Board Liaison

V. APPENDIX

A. Brief History and Charge

B. Current Channels of Communication/Shared Governance

C. Citations

Appendix A: Brief History and Charge

In Fall 2013 the Faculty Assembly Executive Council (FAEC) Subcommittee on Shared Governance was established. The Subcommittee proposed a set of general principles and a methodology for assessing shared governance at the College via case study analysis (leading to two annual reports). One crucial limitation of the Subcommittee's work was that the principles and assessment methodology were developed completely by the faculty, rather than through a shared process. Moreover, there was no formal joint commitment to adhere to the proposed principles.

In Fall 2016, a joint process to address shared governance was initiated. Supported by the Office of the Provost, an FAEC delegation attended the AAUP Shared Governance Conference. Shortly thereafter, the Faculty Assembly President and the Provost agreed to constitute a Task Force on Shared Governance and jointly composed its charge as follows:

> The Task Force on Shared Governance at Ramapo College is charged with developing principles of shared governance that are in keeping with the mission of the College and that will allow the institution to fulfill its vision and strategic goals.

Appendix B: Current Channels of Communication/Shared Governance

The following diagram identifies channels of communication that exist at Ramapo College under the current governance structure. The main point of this diagram is to illustrate that, when stakeholder group leaders are devising a Decision-Making Plan for a particular decision (see Section III), it is important to identify the most appropriate channels to facilitate essential communication, consultation, and/or collaboration for that particular decision.

The diagram should **not** be interpreted as a hierarchical governance structure or organizational chart. It does reflect the fact that the President delegates to and is advised by the Office of the Provost on academic matters, and delegates to and is advised by Cabinet on largely non-academic matters. The cluster in the lower left-hand corner indicates that while Faculty Assembly (FA), led by FAEC, is the formal representative voice of the Faculty on governance matters, essential communication, consultation, collaboration by and/or with Faculty may come through channels including but not limited to Conveners, Academic Review Committee (ARC), etc.

Current Channels of Shared Governance at Ramapo College
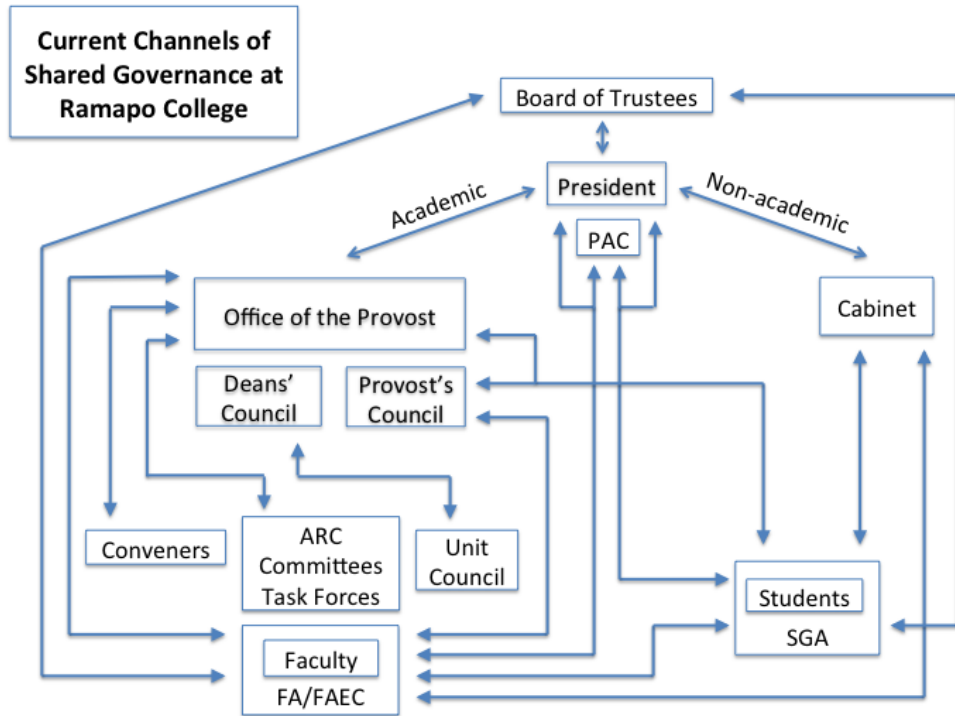
Appendix C: Citations

- Bahls, S. C. (2014a). How to make shared governance work: Some best practices. *Trusteeship*, 22(2). Retrieved from http://agb.org/ trusteeship

- Kerr, C. (1963). *The uses of the university*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Kezar, A. (2004). What is more important to effective governance: Relationships, trust, and leadership, or structures and formal processes? *New Directions for Higher Education*, 127, 35-46