

Editor's Note

Shared Governance in Higher Education Redefines Community

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Many members of shared governance in higher education have made identical discoveries: within governance, unexpected communities exist. Surprisingly, these communities are not limited to in-person collaborators. As this book illustrates, many who invest in shared governance in higher education never actually meet, and yet they are closely connected to each other's ideals and goals. We form our own *de facto* communities when we share passion, values, and commitment regarding shared governance.

Centuries ago, community was largely defined by geography. Whether the community consisted of neighbors who were within a day's walk or ride, or part of faith-based or ideological groups who shared written documents, the outreach one made or received was primarily tangible or visible. Even in death, one stayed close to those who had been in one's life; visiting a cemetery to connect with a departed loved one usually did not require extensive travel. In the last two centuries—with the addition of flight, population migrations, and enthusiasm for the unknown—geographically dispersed communities (in life, and in final resting places) became more common.

In our current century, community has again been redefined: some communities are composed of members who will never meet, yet thrive virtually, 24 × 7 × 365. And the members of our virtual community are the authors of the chapters of this volume, each of whom has been directly involved in many roles in shared governance. As readers become part of our extended community, you will find that the authors have

many pertinent observations and suggestions to share. In fact, we may have more in common with our readers, and other virtual governance colleagues, than we do with our nearby nongovernance friends.

This century requires much more of those of us committed to governance. The intense and detailed requirements of governance ask us to reach out virtually (sometimes, desperately) when we seek answers to specific concerns. When help is received, we are instantly and deeply appreciative of these helpers (some of whom will forever remain invisible to us). Like other long-lasting virtual communities (e.g., the community that is enfolded by the time and space defined by *Star Trek*), the authors of this volume share unusual, vital connections to others in the governance universe.

Many communities thrive on shared values, and the virtual governance community (like the *Star Trek* community) resonates to beliefs that have always been at its core. It takes time spent in one or more of the roles within governance—committee member, elected representative, officer, leader—to recognize the commonalities that surface within face-to-face or virtual governance communities. When we see problem-solving at its best, or hear eloquent arguments, we feel the intoxicating pull toward aspects of governance to which we can relate. While within the *Star Trek* universe, members evidence commitments to exploration, and to family (biological and crew), the universe of shared governance repeatedly offers endless variations of how organizations progress toward reoccurring goals. This can include appreciation of how challenges are overcome, or how some members collaborate to propose novel solutions. We recognize a fellow governance leader's courageous and selfless acts and strive to incorporate these behaviors into our own governance worlds.

Within this volume, you will have the opportunity to learn from individuals who have, collectively, devoted hundreds of years and thousands of hours to governance. Although each author has powerfully articulated his or her own experience, emphasizing generalities from which others can benefit, we can look behind their words and see that their wisdom emerged from substantial mental and emotional investments. Without such generosity, nearly always uncompensated, their institutions and the SUNY system would be the poorer.

The opportunity to be part of the governance community is humbling. Each member knows that for every accomplishment, many invisible hours were spent drafting documents, formulating arguments, or working out political difficulties. Each member recognizes that governance cannot be done alone—it is always a shared experience. With these chapters, each

author has invited you, the reader, to enter into his or her governance community. We welcome you to our worlds: let your imaginations transport you into membership in our community. Make use of what we have learned.

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