

OBSERVATIONS FROM SHARED GOVERNANCE OPEN FORUMS  
Held in February and March, 2020  
Arkansas Tech University

OBSERVATIONS FROM DR. PAT BUFORD AND DR. ROCKIE PEDERSEN  
Shared Governance Open Forum, March 5, 2020 (for deans and department heads)

See the accompanying pdf.

OBSERVATIONS FROM DR. CAREY ELLIS LAFFOON  
Shared Governance Open Forums, Feb. 24 and March 2, 2020

Ad-hoc committees, appointments by administration, need more faculty led committees, decisions by faculty.

See more faculty not participating ("record high") due to working hard on projects, programs, etc and then things are stopped, no explanation.

Not following handbook. Taking responsibility away from committee's (duties that are part of the Handbook) because a new committee has been formed by administration.

Who is the EC, why are we told "The EC made this decision"? When are their meetings, where are their minutes? If they are more than advisory and are going to be given authority to make decisions that impact the university then they should have minutes.

Faculty need a speaking position at Board meetings.

There needs to be a way to report problems with shared governance.

Things happen and there is no explanation. The lack of communication across campus is staggering.

Why do we continue to add more VP's, Assistant VP's and faculty lines are not filled.

Suggestions: have a faculty area where people can have lunch together.

OBSERVATIONS FROM DR. DAVID J. ESHELMAN  
Shared Governance Open Forum, March 4, 2020

Concerns fell primarily into four areas:

Representation. Standing committees should be used more instead of ad hoc committees. Appointed members should not serve as leaders of committees: leaders should be elected when possible.

Communication. Messaging is inconsistent.

Responsibility/accountability. Evaluations of leaders need “teeth.” Also, faculty members need to do their part and feel that they are called upon to do their part. One forum participant was adamant that deans and department heads step down from these roles if they receive two years of evaluations of less than 70% approval.

Primacy of academics. Structural changes should be implemented to ensure that academics are key to the university’s concerns at every level.

OBSERVATIONS FROM DR. SEAN HUSS  
Shared Governance Open Forums, Feb. 24 and Feb. 25, 2020

**SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS/ISSUES/RECOMMENDATIONS AT TWO SHARED GOVERNANCE FORUMS**

Preliminary Comments:

The following summary reflects my notes based on comments held at two Shared Governance forums. Across both forums, the total number of participants was 21, representing faculty from across most colleges at ATU.

Faculty Concerns:

Both forums began with general questions on issues faculty felt were driving faculty mistrust the administration. What follows summarizes the general themes/issues that faculty raised.

1. Too many ad hoc committees—faculty feel that all committees on issues related to faculty should include faculty appointed by the Faculty Senate or faculty at large. Administration should not create ad hoc committees and administration should never appoint a faculty member to a committee.
2. Gatekeepers—faculty feel that there are many hold overs from the Brown administration in positions of authority in the administration. These individuals often claim to serve the function of “institutional memory” and advise higher ups in ways consistent with the Brown administration. These gatekeepers frequently block faculty initiatives and push faculty away from full participation, and even block faculty from offering input on decision-making. These

gatekeepers may be the reason there is still some issue/concern over the “Brown administration.” As one faculty member put it, “...Brown is gone but they aren’t.”

3. Job Searches—faculty often are excluded from administrative job searches and not allowed to rank candidates when faculty do participate. Job searches, particularly for administrators, are often secret and open forums aren’t announced. It is common for faculty to be notified of an administrator open forum the week or even the day of, with little to no information shared about that candidate. As some speculated, this exclusionary practice and little notice is what is driving down faculty participation in those forums right now.
4. Preventing Shared Governance/Denying Faculty Expertise—Many faculty members expressed concerns over being excluded from policy creation or university planning by pointing to the same faculty being selected for major committees. Such faculty often do not have the expertise that non-selected faculty have on the issues being addressed. The perception is that there is an overuse of consultants and “headhunter” agencies when faculty are equally if not better qualified. Further, the overuse of certain handpicked faculty members to always take on leadership roles on university initiatives suggests to faculty that there are clearly “favorites” or “cool kids” that get all of the opportunities. Such opportunities then become closed off to the remainder of faculty.
5. Lack of Acknowledgement of Effort—Many faculty members expressed concern over the lack of recognition the faculty get. They pointed to the general comments of gratitude in larger university-wide meetings as “hollow” and “meaningless,” and, in some instances, dismiss such expressions as merely “pro forma” rather than true acknowledgement of effort. Across both sessions, several examples of faculty efforts that have resulted in no action or being dismissed by administration were shared (examples may lead to inductive disclosure of commenter and are not presented in these notes).
6. Administration Lack Understanding of What Faculty Do and Who ATU Student Are—Many faculty members pointed to what appears to be a lack of focus on academics. This lack of focus on academics seems to be underpinned by the belief that the administration has no understanding of what faculty do. Many faculty members pointed to several administrators as having little to no real classroom experience. Other suggested that most do not have experiences in teaching classes at ATU with our students. These claims were coupled with concerns over higher research expectations while being overworked, especially with overloads (paid and unpaid).
7. Communication and Transparency—Faculty generally agreed that one of the most serious problems underpinning issues at ATU was poor communication and a lack of transparency. The most common issue related to the lack of transparency was the Executive Council. The purpose, function, and decision-making process of the Executive Council is unclear among faculty. Most faculty at the forums felt that the Executive Council is where the problem in deprioritizing academics occurs. No one in the forums expressed trust of the Executive Council. Many felt that having a Provost would better represent academic and faculty issues on the Executive

Council. In terms of communication, faculty feel that communication is bad and that the Communication Committee does not serve its function.

8. **Academics Not A Priority**—This was mentioned almost unanimously in each meeting. Concerns over Student Services controlling decision-making and low budgetary priority of academics. These issues have been discussed widely among faculty and administration and have been taken up with the Faculty Senate. Little was added in the discussions in the forums on this topic that has not already been said, but this does appear to be one issue that faculty agree on.
9. **Other Issues**—Several other issues arose in relation to the broader themes above. To save time, I will list some of the more frequently mentioned:
  - a. Lack of paying attention to issues of diversity
  - b. Vulnerability of the staff
  - c. Serious culture lag and a lack of forward thinking at ATU
  - d. Values and actions do not align
  - e. Too many appeals to tradition as a basis for continuing bad policies
  - f. “Where is Dr. Bowen?” Lack of visibility of or engagement from the President
  - g. The Deans of some college are advising that faculty do not participate in Shared Governance forums or in commenting more generally about their concerns regarding ATU administration.

#### Faculty Recommendations:

What follows is a summary of the recommendations from the faculty when asked “What do you think would build trust and help build more shared governance in decision-making at ATU?”

1. **Acknowledge and Draw Upon Broad Faculty Expertise**—Administrators should seek out from among the entire faculty individuals with expertise on specific areas directly related to the decisions being made for ATU. Administrators should not choose to hire consultants first, but instead work with faculty. It is important to note that many faculty members suggested that, while they feel overworked, they are more than willing to play a role in such decision-making. This change would go a long way toward acknowledging the expertise of the faculty, as well as empowering and engaging the faculty.
2. **Faculty Control Over Handbook and Any Changes**—There was some concern over changes to the Faculty Handbook (related to Gatekeepers and Effort above). Faculty suggested having majority control over the Faculty Handbook, with any changes recommended by administration requiring Faculty Senate or general faculty vote approval. In short, faculty members want to control the document that would govern policies that affect them, which is a central shared governance issue.
3. **Faculty Controlled Elections**—Elections are currently run through colleges and by Deans. While this process is quite frequently just procedural, some faculty feel that the Faculty Senate should control all elections to avoid any administrative interference in the electoral process. Note that some faculty recommend electing the Faculty Senate Chair from among senators seeking the

position through a nomination and general faculty election (this is to avoid the passing of the office around among a small number of faculty representatives who may or may not always act in the best interest of the faculty). Other faculty recommended a “tenured only” faculty to avoid fear of action or position.

4. Faculty Voice on Executive Council—Faculty recommend having faculty representatives on the Executive Council. These faculty members should be nominated and elected from the general faculty during the regular election period.
5. Faculty Voice/More Faculty Contact Between Board and Faculty—Faculty are generally concerned that faculty issues are being presented in a manner that does not reflect the true underlying concerns or issues. Faculty familiar with state law did note that a faculty member cannot be appointed to the Board of Governors. But, the same faculty members pointed out that the Board controls its own agenda and may provide space for a faculty report. This report may be provided by the Faculty Senate chair or from a faculty member generally elected.