

# **The Role Of The Academic Senate In The Contemporary Community College**

by Carmen Decker

In order for us to understand the legitimacy of our function and to appreciate our present position in the policy-making circles of higher education in California, it is necessary to be familiar with the history of the development of our Academic Senate and the history of faculty governance in American colleges and universities. It is instructive to remember that the statewide Academic Senate was formed in 1968-69, and it was not until 1978 that we became legally recognized by the Board of Governors. In 1978, the Board of Governors amended Title Y of the Administration Code to include a section on "Academic Senate for California Community Colleges." The amendment consists of only two short paragraphs, but these two paragraphs recognize, give legal status to, and delineate the functions of the statewide Academic Senate. The sections state that,

a) In order that the community college faculty of California may have a formal and effective procedure for participating in the formation of state policies on academic and professional matters, an Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges has been established through ratification by local academic senates or faculty councils.

b) The Board of Governors recognizes the Academic Senate of the California Community Colleges as the representative of community college academic senates or faculty councils before the Board of Governors and the Chancellor's Office."

The recognition of the Academic Senate by the Board of Governors was an important step, and one that placed our Senate on an equal standing with the senates of the other two segments of California public higher education.

A cursory review of the patterns of governance in European and American colleges and universities shows that the faculty, the administrators, and the regents, governors or trustees have competed as sources of authority in education. Each of these three groups has waxed and waned in its influence over the colleges throughout various historical periods. However, even though each of the sources of authority has experienced periods of ascendancy, there does not appear to be any long-term tendency to displace any of the authorities, or to give total control to any of them. Nevertheless, within American universities in the last century, the tendency has been to give campus administrators greater authority in the administration of the campus, and the delegation to the faculty of authority over education matters. This division of labor in university decision-making was made possible by the acceptance of the idea of collegiality, a concept that assumed that the individuals who served as campus administrators were colleagues who were temporarily on loan from academic departments in order to perform the administrative functions. The concept of collegiality, therefore, assumed that administrators were first and foremost academicians, not career administrators, and that the interaction between administrators and faculty was one based on a peer relationship, not a hierarchical relationship of superior to subordinate. The administrative faculty partnership was one based upon mutual respect for each other as members of the academic profession, and not as a relationship of employer-employee, or

boss-worker. Disagreements between the faculty and university administrators were treated as professional matters in the collegial atmosphere, which was reflective of the division of labor and functions that was accepted by both parties.

I am sure that everyone has noticed a recent trend in our colleges and universities away from the collegial model, and in its place has emerged an assumption of authority and decision-making by individuals who are not members of the academic profession. It would not be fair to say that this is a universal trend, but we do see it happening at an alarming rate. Where it is occurring, the pattern seems to be one where the governing board hires administrators who are imbued with a managerial mentality, i.e., the campus is viewed as an industrial system that is managed to produce with the greatest amount of efficiency and cost consciousness. Programs and courses that are not “profit producing” are eliminated, and if the instructional program of the college threatens to interfere with other more productive uses of the campus facilities, then even the instructional program may be curtailed. The need for additional funds for our campuses is very real, but we must resist the temptation to increasingly use our facilities for non-educational purposes.

What has happened to educational Values and goals under the managerial mentality? Who is upholding the traditional values of the academic profession? The answer is, quite simply, the Academic Senate, the senate on each campus and our collective efforts at the statewide level. Collective bargaining has emerged as a necessary protection against the adversarial mentality of the modern managers in areas of working conditions. But the Academic Senate retains its obligation to defend academic and educational values by involving ourselves in the formation of educational policy at every level. It is important to note that in the contemporary context, the Academic Senate is more necessary, is more vital, than in any period of the history of education. The collegial relationship still exists, but all too often today it exists only among faculty members, who themselves are threatened with exclusion from a meaningful involvement in the decision-making process of the college.

The current structure and directions of authority and decision-making in higher education are not comforting, but neither should we despair. Past experience tells us that the pendulum will once swing in our direction, because the more remote our colleges and universities become from the wisdom available from the professional community of academics, the more essential our educational values and goals will become. In the meantime, we must defend the long-range interests of our colleges and our communities by defending our values and by participating in educational policy decisions at every opportunity. We have learned to be adaptive as we have moved from crisis to crisis over the last few years, and I would be remiss if I did not warn you that there are surely more crises to come in the next few years, but we are capable of meeting each of these as they come. We are confronted each year with new challenges to our authority, but each time we must redouble our efforts, because to do less would be a disservice to those who have gone before us, but especially to those who will inherit what we will have created.

## References

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