

UTK/UTIA Faculty Senate Committee White Paper on Faculty Trustees and Shared Governance

The 2018 UT FOCUS Act, which, for the first time in Tennessee's history prohibits anyone employed in higher education from serving on the UT Board of Trustees, should be amended to restore a voting faculty trustee and all-campus ERS representation. A voting faculty trustee *and* faculty representation from all four campuses on the new Education, Research and Service committee will be critical to the future success of UT by connecting board members with the educators who are responsible for the university's mission. This amendment would also be consistent with the 2016 FOCUS Act, which reorganized the six former TBR (LGI) universities and retained or created a faculty trustee position on each of their boards.

During deliberations concerning the 2018 UT FOCUS Act, the Tennessee State Legislature heard reports related to the removal of a faculty position from the UT Board of Trustees. These accounts included an oversimplification of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) assertion that faculty board representation could create a conflict of interest for the faculty member and the institution. In fact, the AGB advocates the retention of a faculty trustee if one already exists. Furthermore, most faculty serving on university boards serve relatively short-term appointments, thus limiting the opportunity for conflict of interest. A [2012 study from the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute](#) cites greater dialogue between faculty and boards of trustees as a key characteristic of highly effective boards, as well as a growing number of boards of trustees that include faculty membership. An article from the [Economics of Education Review](#) also notes that the gender composition of boards (including faculty trustees) can have a big impact on successful diversity initiatives.

The American Association for University Professors' position paper "[Faculty Communication with Governing Boards: Best Practices](#)" concludes: "In sum, effective faculty-board communication is a critical component of shared governance. Its absence can result in serious misunderstanding between campus constituents and in significant governance failures leading to flawed decision making."

A 2014 AGB report on shared governance makes the following five recommendations that we believe will lead to greater success in the future of UT. A faculty representative on the UT Board of Trustees will help the trustees to understand the importance of all of these:

1. Actively engage board members, administrators, and faculty leaders in a serious discussion of what shared governance is (and isn't).
2. Periodically assess the state of shared governance and develop an action plan to improve it.
3. Expressly support strong faculty governance of the academic program.
4. Maintain a steadfast commitment to three-way transparency and frequent communication.
5. Develop deliberate ways to increase social capital between board members and members of the faculty.

The UTK/UTIA Faculty Senate continues to support amending the 2018 UT FOCUS Act to include a voting faculty trustee, rotating among the four campuses and elected by their respective faculty senates, and encourages the board to reinstate the position until such time as the legislature can amend the Act. Resolutions passed by the faculty senates in 2018 on each of the four UT campuses support retaining faculty and student trustees on the UT Board of Trustees. Faculty and student trustees ensure that the UT Board will make informed, transparent policy decisions that will promote greater board, administrative, faculty and student communication, understanding and success.