

Joint Faculty Senate/Provost's Task Force on Shared Governance

Final Report — Spring 2023

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1. Task Force Charge and Context

The following charge was presented to the Joint Task Force on Shared Governance by Faculty Senate Speaker Kathy Ott-Walter and Provost Heather Coltman on October 13, 2022:

Comprised of four Faculty Senate representatives, four academic administrators, and three ex-officio members, this joint task force will deepen and expand our collective understanding, expertise, and best-emerging practices for activating shared governance across the range of activities, responsibilities, and areas in Academic Affairs and across campus.

The Task Force met 14 times from late September 2022 to May 2023, including for one full-day writing retreat. We collaboratively developed operating agreements, critically interrogated our charge and initial set of expressed goals, built a working library of shared documents and resources, and grounded our discussions in readings and research. Task Force members undertook numerous additional working sessions in small groups to develop draft recommendations that speak to ongoing faculty concerns, held joint discussions about campus needs, collaborated on shared documents asynchronously, and engaged in conversations with their constituencies.

This work was undertaken in the context of 1) a recent Campus Climate report that suggested the need to revisit shared governance practices; 2) tensions among faculty and Academic Affairs leadership; and 3) the backdrop of university life more fully emerging from the shared trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic. This challenging context animated our efforts in several important ways, informing ongoing conversations and driving recommendations with a bent toward practical action.

The Joint Task Force on Shared Governance worked collegially together in adverse circumstances to discuss difficult issues, respectfully weigh differing opinions and perspectives, and create common ground in the best interest of the institution. Through this process, we remained conscious of the danger of falling into a managerial mindset about possible outcomes — either based on our original charge and goals, or on perceived shortcomings of JMU’s current shared governance environment.

The group developed the critical ***Introduction to Shared Governance*** that follows, and worked together to generate and refine **44 core recommendations**. All proposed recommendations were brought back to the full Task Force for synchronous and asynchronous discussion. Forty of these are grouped into seven critical areas of focus: Shared Understandings; Policies; Structures and Practices; Campus Climate; Feedback and Voting; Learning and Problem-Solving; and Accountability.

We additionally collaboratively developed a set of **10 important meta-recommendations**. Six of these are meant to support the health of shared governance generally as a crucial and sustaining higher education practice at JMU. The final four meta-recommendations are offered to support the fruitful formation of future joint task forces like ours.

2. Introduction to Shared Governance

Shared governance has emerged over the past 50 years as the optimal response to a question that rests at the core of higher education institutions: ***How should decision-making occur in a distributed organization with multiple sources of authority?***

Certainly, shared governance is not the only form of governance, nor is it uniformly practiced in the same way across all higher education institutions that strive toward its implementation. Yet, in this degree of ambiguity rests the true value of shared governance: once contextually understood and locally operationalized, it can be progressively implemented in durable ways that become core to institutional life and identity.

This introduction draws on resources provided by key informational actors, such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), but was also drafted to speak to our local context. We therefore hope it provides **connections between external resources and internal thinking**, as well as serves as a living document guiding future action.

In this spirit, we quote and endorse the closing sentence of the introduction to the AAUP's 1966 *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*: "A University in which all the components are aware of their interdependence, of the usefulness of communication among themselves, and of the force of joint action will enjoy increased capacity to solve educational problems."

A brief definition of shared governance

In brief, shared governance is a methodology. It is the practice, facilitated by structures and processes, through which core institutional stakeholders—primarily governing boards, administrative leadership, and faculty—engage **mutual understanding** to exert **joint effort** over decisions that affect the institution.

While the influence and decision-making authority of each stakeholder group will necessarily vary depending on the applicable domain, legal context, and institutional structure—shared governance at JMU rests on a commitment to responsible and meaningful collaboration.

Why is Shared Governance important?

As decades of scholarship and practice indicate, shared governance is important because it acknowledges and embraces the complexity of decision-making within the special context of higher education organizations. Born out of practice and sustained throughout the literature base, one way to think about this complexity is through Birnbaum's paradigm of the *dualism of controls* that exists between leadership structures (e.g., Board of Visitors, President, academic leadership) and faculty. Each group should have a voice in how the University operates, though their sources of authority differ—governance/leadership through positional authority, experience, and expertise; and faculty, beyond appointed or elected positions (e.g., Faculty Senate leader), through their positional responsibilities, experience and expertise. In order to effectively deliver on the mission, vision, and values of a university, this '**inescapable interdependence**' between and among constituencies must not only be recognized, but realized.

Scholarship by leading authors (e.g., Birnbaum, Kezar) and professional reports (e.g., AAUP, AGB) emerging during the past two decades have paid particular attention to the importance of shared governance in addressing the challenges confronting postsecondary education in the 21st century. These challenges have included: a sustained decline in state support for public institutions; changing student populations and increasing imperatives among stakeholders for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion; greater attention to research and knowledge production; and a host of issues idiosyncratic to institutional identity (e.g., location and competition).

Broadly, scholarship indicates that working toward an ideal state where all organizational members experience social justice and equity requires trust among faculty, administrators, and board members. Trust, in turn, must be formed by policies, practices, and cultures through which voices are listened to and held as legitimate. The discourse on shared governance, then, seeks at every turn to remind key stakeholders that there are many common values and priorities, and that the mission of universities can be best realized through acting collaboratively in a paradigm of **full opportunity**.

Key stakeholders and the relationships among them

With respect to shared governance as a practice and process of decision-making, three main constituencies are established in the literature: **board members, senior administrative leaders, and faculty**. We also briefly consider the role(s) of **students**. We briefly describe each

constituency and then move to consider the principles and processes of shared governance and areas of primacy that apply to them.

Board of Visitors: The James Madison University Board of Visitors (BoV) is comprised of 15 voting members appointed by the governor. A student representative and the Faculty Senate Speaker also serve. The BoV manual lists, as a recommended qualification and competency for service, that board members demonstrate “respect for the concept of shared governance and the distinction between the Board’s duties and the role of the President and Administration” (p. 17). The BOV’s authority is codified by statute in the Code of Virginia § 23.1-1602 and 23.1-1301.

President and Senior Administration: The President and senior administrator team are essential actors in shared governance via their positional authority and influence over strategic institutional decisions. This constituency notably includes the Provost and other senior Academic Affairs administrators, who must work collaboratively with faculty to implement the academic mission of the university.

Faculty: Faculty comprise instructional, administrative, and professional faculty at James Madison University. In matters of shared governance, instructional faculty function individually within their own working academic units (e.g., departments). They also have opportunities to exercise their viewpoints collectively at the department level and through their representatives in the JMU Faculty Senate. (We address a gap in the Senate representation of *professional faculty* members in shared governance at JMU in our meta-recommendations below.)

Students: Students include those at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, who are enrolled either part- or full-time at the university, whether as regularly admitted or as transfer students. Regarding shared governance, students should be involved in feedback processes concerning issues that directly impact them, such as academic-related policies, student-written resolutions, and proposals for new committees and student-focused campus programming through the Student Governance Association and Graduate Student Association—both of which are student-led and student-run organizations. With respect to these areas of direct impact, students should be afforded substantial agency in exercising their voices in decision-making, both individually and collectively.

While the remainder of our report primarily treats shared governance among Board, faculty, and administrative constituencies, we further offer these guiding words from the 1966 joint

AAUP statement: “If institutional support [for students] is to have its fullest possible meaning, it should incorporate the strength, freshness of view, and idealism of the student body.” Striving toward shared governance that is inclusive of student perspectives holds substantial promise for delivering the best possible learning and developmental experiences for students.

Principles of Shared Governance

Traditional and established principles of shared governance include:

1. **Collaboration & Consultation:** Shared governance involves collaboration among different stakeholders, such as faculty members, students, and administrators. All stakeholders must work together to achieve the institution's goals.
2. **Communication:** Open communication is critical for shared governance to work effectively. All stakeholders should have access to relevant information about the institution's operations, policies, and decision-making processes.
3. **Inclusivity:** Shared governance should be inclusive and involve all stakeholders who are affected by the institution's decisions. This includes students, faculty members, staff, and administrators.
4. **Shared Responsibility & Transparency:** Decision-makers should take responsibility for their decisions and be accountable to other stakeholders. They should be willing to explain and justify their decisions and be open to feedback from other stakeholders.
5. **Equity:** Shared governance should be equitable, and all stakeholders should have an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. This includes ensuring that underrepresented groups have a voice in governance.
6. **Continuous Improvement:** Shared governance should be an ongoing process of continuous improvement. Institutions should regularly evaluate their governance structures and processes and make changes as needed to improve their effectiveness.
7. **Alignment to Institutional Mission and Values:** Shared governance is guided by the institution's mission and values. Decision-making processes are based on the institution's goals and objectives, and all stakeholders work together to achieve them.
8. **Flexibility:** Shared governance is flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. Decision-making processes are responsive to the needs and challenges facing the institution, and stakeholders work together to find innovative solutions.

Processes of Shared Governance

What follows are general, top-level guidelines surfaced in the peer-reviewed and professional literature base concerning principles and processes of shared governance. Instantiation of shared governance through these principles and processes requires *trust and reciprocity among stakeholders*.

Roles & Responsibilities

The essential roles and responsibilities of the **faculty** are to ensure academic quality, provide high quality curriculum and instruction, conduct research, and adhere to self-directed departmental standards. To be successful in these endeavors, faculty must operate in a context that prioritizes **academic freedom** and **academic responsibility**.

The essential roles and responsibilities of **presidents/senior administrators** are to provide institutional leadership, create and sustain an institutional vision, ensure the financial health and ongoing viability of the institution, and lead in strategic planning. To be successful in these endeavors, senior leadership must solicit input from key stakeholders, which include faculty, administrative staff, and students.

The essential roles and responsibilities of **governing boards** are to provide fiduciary oversight, hire and oversee the President, and ensure that the institution fulfills its mission. To be successful in these endeavors, governing boards must have a healthy relationship with the President and solicit input on strategic decisions from key stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, students, and community members.

Communication and feedback channels

Enacting shared governance requires open lines of communication between and among key actors. This includes communication within groups (e.g., board-member-to-board chair; President-to-Provost; faculty-to-faculty), as well as across groups (e.g., Board-to-President; Provost-to-faculty). Such communication can take a wide variety of forms, including formalized efforts through organizing bodies (e.g., Faculty Senate) and many informalized efforts (e.g., intra-departmental communications).

To best enact shared governance, communication channels must be created to solicit and interpret feedback on university-wide matters, as well as provide avenues for voicing and resolving disagreements and other disputes. At all turns, communication should strive to reaffirm the principle of **mutual understanding**, while also ensuring that areas of faculty, administrative, and board primacy are respected.

Decision-making process

The best decisions are well-informed ones, grounded in accurate information and solid communications practices. That said, it is important to remember that shared governance is **not** the idea that a lot of conversation must happen within and among many campus groups—board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students—before *any* decision gets made. To illustrate this, it is helpful to consider academic and non-academic decisions.

Senior administrators and board members should typically respect the expertise of the faculty on curriculum; subject matter and methods of instruction; research; appointment, reappointment, and non-reappointment of faculty peers; tenure, and faculty promotion.

In non-academic matters, decision-making processes can vary greatly. One general rule of practice is that non-academic decisions should, to the best extent feasible and possible, involve those organizational members who will be subject to the outcome of such decisions and who have relevant subject-matter expertise. Such decisions can involve hiring and evaluation of administrators, development of the university's physical plant, and strategic planning.

Certainly, there are many decisions that involve all parties. For these decisions, it is recommended that **joint planning** is engaged to reach decisions that include many voices, center equity, and are aligned with the mission, vision, and values of the university.

A related principle is **joint effort** engaged by core constituencies. Expression of this principle is especially important (for instance) in budgeting, broadly defined in the 1966 AAUP statement as “the allocation of resources among competing demands.” Given its connection to decisions between and across insitutional levels, **budget decision-making is an instructive example** of an area where key stakeholders “should...have a voice in the determination of short- and long-range priorities,” and in which choices are best guided by access to information. The differing roles of the governing board, administration, and faculty in budgetary matters “should be understood by all; the allocation of authority will determine the flow of information and the scope of participation in decisions” (para. 16).

In short, decision-making processes based in **clarity of roles, mutual understanding, joint planning, and joint effort** are essential to effective shared governance practice.

Transparency & Accountability

It is likewise essential to ensure transparency and accountability when engaging shared governance. Practices such as the publication of meeting minutes and agendas, for example, are helpful in broadcasting the activities of units, including the governing board and faculty senate. However, the scholarly and practice literature frequently remind us that such required forms of transparency alone are insufficient and must also be supplemented through other avenues. Additionally, there is valuable commentary in the literature on the relationship between transparency and accountability in, to quote Tierney and Minor (2003), creating “the conditions for trust” (p. 19). Such conditions are vital to engaging **joint effort**.

Continuous Improvement

As reflected in a 2017 statement on shared governance issued by the Association of Governing Boards: “*Effective shared governance, focused on open communications, shared responsibility, a commitment to accountability, and alignment of institutional priorities, is broadly seen as advantageous but is less commonly achieved*” (p. 3). This quote serves as a helpful reminder that shared governance is **an evolving practice** that is dependent upon university actors and the development of shared norms reflected both formally (e.g., policies, documents) and informally (e.g., patterns of communication). As such, engaging in shared governance requires continued improvement through joint action.

Areas of Primacy

Here we outline the areas over which each constituency might best be positioned to exhibit primacy. It is important to remember that shared governance does not—and operationally, provided the scope of work, *cannot*—mean that all actors must share authority for all decisions. Instead, it is vital to consider, based upon factors such as expertise, the **weight of each voice** in making decisions that affect the overall university and its components (e.g., divisions and colleges).

A recent survey by AAUP (Tiede 2021) demonstrates that institutions vary widely in terms of which groups have **dominance** and **primacy** over decisions. (It treats [29 areas of institutional decision-making](#), grouped for interpretation into three main categories: **academic**, **personnel**, and **administrative**. See Figure 2 in the article linked above. The survey categorizes department chairs as “faculty” in decision-making *only* if those chairs are “chosen by departmental election

on a regular schedule.” Administrators at the associate dean/associate provost level and above are categorized as “administration” in the survey, regardless of whether they also hold faculty rank.)

In addition to concepts of dominance and primacy, some institutional decisions are made through negotiation, collaboration, diplomacy, and **joint authority**, in which groups (e.g., faculty and administrators) exercise balanced influence. More explicit definitions quoted from the AAUP shared governance assessment tool (p. 2) are as follows:

Dominance: This level of participation means that a group is making decisions in an area essentially unilaterally. The other group is informed of the decision or consulted in a pro forma fashion, but generally has no influence on the outcome.

Primacy: This level of participation means that a group has primary authority for an area, but that the other group has an opportunity to participate meaningfully in the final decision. If there is disagreement between the two groups, the group that has primacy normally prevails.

Joint Authority: This level of participation means that both groups exercise equal influence in making decisions in an area.

As referenced above, principles of shared governance recommend that **faculty** hold **dominance** over many aspects of curriculum development, instruction, and the pursuit of their research and creative responsibilities.

Board members and senior administrators hold **dominance** in areas that concern the fiscal health and daily operations of the university, including ensuring that the university follows relevant regulations and laws. They also hold **primacy** in setting the long-range vision and strategic plan for the institution, administrative hiring, and broad adherence to the institution’s mission.

At the risk of oversimplifying matters, **joint authority** can be—or at least holds the opportunity to be—exercised over the many other challenges that confront university life. Two examples from the 2021 AAUP survey found joint authority highly present across institutions in areas such as establishing programs (41.6% of institutions surveyed) and intellectual property policies (44.4% of institutions surveyed).

Though broad, the language of **dominance, primacy, and joint authority** can be helpful in better understanding *where in the governance structure certain decisions rest, and the extent to which those locations are agreeable to all stakeholders* within an institution. Areas where dominance, primacy, and joint authority are agreeable and well-practiced might serve as exemplars for further considering those areas where disagreements may emerge. As revealed by the 2021 AAUP report, these areas vary among institutions, most notably with respect to whether key decisions hold administrative primacy, joint authority, or faculty primacy.

Such variation again reflects the idea of shared governance as an ongoing and evolving process. It also reflects the importance of emphasizing **mutual understanding** in shared governance practice.

Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Shared Governance

It is necessary more explicitly to express the close relationships that exist between **academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance**. A 1994 statement issued by the AAUP reflects on and articulates this relationship. Echoing sentiments expressed above, this statement advances three main reasons why it is essential for areas that have historically been ascribed faculty dominance and primacy to remain so: 1) Allocation of authority is the best way to accomplish the university's ultimate objectives; 2) Teaching and research are the very purpose of academic institutions; 3) "Allocation of authority to the faculty in the areas of its responsibility is a necessary condition for the protection of academic freedom within the institution." All three matter greatly, and this third reason holds *substantial importance* in the current climate of higher education.

Tenure—its progression, achievement, granting, and maintenance—is an important avenue through which the work of shared governance and expressions of academic freedom come to be fulfilled. Indeed, it is the bedrock of the educational enterprise and a necessary condition for the cultivation of the very best teaching, research, creative activity, and service. It is often tenured faculty who are asked to serve in representative capacities on behalf of their colleagues, sometimes in ways that conflict with the ideas of administrative leaders. In addition, it is often tenure that provides distinctive opportunities for faculty to engage in open-ended forms of expansive inquiry, which drive those forms of innovative inquiry that propel the university's mission forward.

All of our faculty, regardless of tenure status, should be afforded the protections of academic freedom. However, together tenure and academic freedom create a uniquely safe environment

for faculty to participate in open and honest discussions with colleagues and administrators. Without these protections, faculty may be reluctant to challenge authority on institutional issues or advance knowledge through new and potentially controversial research, thus undermining both shared governance and the purpose of higher education. Therefore, **it is in the best interest of universities that value shared governance to support and protect tenure and academic freedom**, and to understand the crucial connections among these three concepts.

Conclusion

As Birnbaum writes in his 2004 paper on the topic: *“Shared governance may often be frustrating and exasperating, but I believe that it is **the most effective process through which academic institutions can achieve their indefinite goals**”* (p. 8). It is through this collaborative paradigm that we have introduced this report, offered guidance from the literature and best-practices knowledge base, and introduced core concepts for consideration.

In the coming pages, we provide specific recommendations that respond to the charges of this task force, aiming to provide pathways toward enacting improved shared governance at James Madison University now and, hopefully, well into the future.

3. Task Force Recommendations

With these understandings in mind, grounded in research and practice, we now turn to a set of **44 recommendations** that speak to the **7 priority areas of attention** that the Task Force on Shared Governance developed in response to our charge.

However, in a spirit of shared governance, we first offer the following **10 meta-recommendations**. These are meant to benefit the campus writ large and to support the the establishment and work of future joint Provost/Senate task forces similar to ours.

Meta-Recommendations for campus as a whole:

M1. Protect tenure and academic freedom.

The Task Force recognizes the **crucial connection between tenure and academic**

freedom for faculty, on the one hand, **and genuine shared governance** on the other. JMU must reverse trends toward contingent hiring in the academy (both adjunct teaching faculty and those on other time-limited, non-tenure-track faculty contracts) in a concerted effort to restore an historic balance of tenured faculty in our faculty ranks and avoid the adjunctification that is sweeping higher education. (Local data analysis on this issue would be key.) This is the most primary and fundamental step JMU could take to creating a *sustainable* ongoing culture of meaningful shared governance. Substantive and meaningful faculty participation is a function of the health of the faculty as a whole, including the percentage of tenured faculty who have the necessary job security and academic freedom to speak truth to power.

M2. Slow down.

Wherever possible, and particularly in areas of joint authority and faculty primacy, JMU must resist the frenetic pace that seems to drive us to rapid decision-making and action as a default stance. We should recognize that we often make mistakes as a campus by moving faster than is necessary or supportive for shared governance. Slowing down is not an obstructionist tactic, and (importantly) does not mean that all parties must agree before action is taken; it simply leverages the power of shared governance to **employ campus expertise more fully** to inform decision-making and seek positive outcomes. A **slower pace wherever possible** would support better communications among stakeholders and encourage all parties to verify assumptions before acting. Key to breaking a pandemic-induced cycle of treating all action as emergency action will be the embracing of procedures that call for meaningful faculty input and require effectively “closing the loop” in communications.

M3. Advance these recommendations as one JMU.

This Task Force report and set of recommendations should be **received jointly** by the Faculty Senate and the Provost’s Office, **jointly owned, taken forward, and considered to be a living document**, with regular reporting to the President’s office and BOV, as well as clear intervals established for re-assessment of progress made and new initiatives needed to support the health of shared governance on campus.

M4. Include all faculty.

To ensure full and effective voice for JMU's instructional *and* professional faculty in matters of shared governance, and the fair representation of faculty with *professional* appointments among our A&P faculty ranks, the JMU Faculty Senate should create a pathway to election and representation of **JMU's professional faculty members** on the Senate. This could be similar to the recent inclusion of adjunct faculty senators or could entail the creation of new structures to represent A&P faculty concerns.

M5. Meaningfully include staff and students.

More attention should be paid to **the role of staff members and students in shared governance** at JMU, perhaps even through future examination of this issue in a dedicated committee or task force.

M6. Stay accountable for progress.

The Provost's Office and Faculty Senate should commit to and publish **a timeline for regular cycles** of ongoing, joint faculty/administrator/board assessments of the state of shared governance at JMU. These assessments should lead to **the development of action plans** to address areas identified for improvement.

Meta-recommendations for future joint task forces:

M7. Continue crafting charges jointly.

For the establishment of future joint Faculty Senate/Provost's task forces, it is crucial to ensure that members of the Provost's Office/JMU senior administration and elected representatives of the faculty (through the Faculty Senate, college councils, appropriate department-level faculty committees and groups, etc.) have a **co-equal and substantive opportunity** to shape charges, goals, and timelines. This will enable the best choices to be made as to leadership and representation or membership for any given charge, and will allow for shared understanding as to goals and expected outcomes to be built and transparently communicated to all constituencies.

M8. Broaden involvement.

We further recommend that **intentional pathways** be created to ensure that different individuals (administrators and faculty) are nominated to task forces when multiple, interconnected efforts or parallel task forces are ongoing simultaneously. This could include, for example, open calls for participation and self-nominations. This will broaden leadership opportunities, help minimize confusion among efforts, maximize institutional knowledge and the diversity of perspectives represented, and avoid the misperception that broad, shared, and critical institutional efforts are driven by special interests or bound to reach foregone conclusions.

M9. Balance representation.

Likewise, where possible, task forces should be designed with attention to **balanced representation** across JMU's colleges and relevant administrative units. Task forces should additionally commit to ensuring that the voices of all relevant faculty constituencies and stakeholder groups (tenured, tenure-track, professional faculty, adjunct faculty, and those on other contingent contracts, such as RTA appointments) are represented through open comment periods and other **inclusive feedback** mechanisms.

M10. Communicate frequently.

Joint Provost/Senate task forces should have a standing invitation to Faculty Senate as part of "Other Committee Reports" and an **expectation of reporting out**. They should also be expected to join periodic meetings of Academic Council. In both cases, this would be to share work in-progress and present emerging questions or requests for feedback.

We now address 44 core Task Force recommendations grouped into seven themes: Shared Understandings; Policies; Structures and Practices; Campus Climate; Feedback and Voting; Learning and Problem-Solving; and Accountability.

Core Recommendations by Theme

1: Shared Understandings

JMU should **build a resource library and broadly accessible “gateway” page on shared governance**. This could include definitions and research-based best practices, as well as a JMU campus statement on shared governance.

1a. Landing Page

Faculty Senate and Academic Affairs should jointly create and maintain **a simple landing page for shared governance** at JMU. Models for such a page can be found at Virginia Tech and Grand Valley State University.

1b. Shared Governance Statement

The most prominent feature of this page should be **a common statement of values around shared governance**. This Task Force—based on research and deliberative discussion—has crafted a starter draft for the common statement, shared here as an appendix. It now needs to be socialized, further edited, and adopted by the campus.

Once Senate Steering and the Provost’s Office agree on the content of this statement, we recommend it go to Academic Council and the full Faculty Senate for further discussion and possible approval. Next, we imagine it would be shared with the President’s cabinet and taken to the Academic Excellence subcommittee of the BOV for consideration and potential adoption by the board and campus as a whole.

1c. Continuous Improvement

Once the gateway page from 1a is established, it should be **continuously improved upon** based on models from other institutions and in conversation with relevant campus offices and groups. Its publication should launch **a broader institutional effort to foster conversations** about shared governance at the college and department level, in support of a cultural shift in favor of implementing and embracing shared governance at all levels. See area 6 below (“Learning and Problem-Solving”) for related suggestions.

2: Policies

JMU should **make visible and accessible a set of links to existing university and Academic Affairs policies particularly relevant to shared governance.**

Such a library would also help support ongoing policy development needs. During the work of this Task Force and informed by our conversations, the Provost's Office created a **new round-up page** of faculty-related [Policies, Handbooks, Reports, and Manuals](#) in Academic Affairs. This is a good start.

2a. Maintaining a Policy Round-Up

We recommend that the page linked above be located on or linked to the “landing page for shared governance” we outline in recommendation 1a, and that the Faculty Senate and Provost's Office develop and document a shared understanding about **who should maintain** this round-up page and what its **regular review and revision cycle** should be.

2b. Revising the Faculty Handbook

Commission a joint faculty/administrative group to undertake a **comprehensive review and wholesale re-write of the Faculty Handbook**, to carefully consider and address flaws and points of confusion in handbook areas in need of greater clarity, such as the faculty grievance policy. This group should make such revisions with an eye to developing and enhancing structures and policies related to shared governance. Establish a regular schedule of whole-scale refresh and re-consideration (alongside the regular, more incremental work of the handbook committee). Give special consideration to the role of shared governance throughout.

2c. Creating Clarity on Appeals

In cases of disagreement between faculty and administration/board leadership, where both have responsibilities (e.g., tenure), the faculty handbook and other governing documents should clearly state **how disagreements are addressed/appealed** and by whom.

3: Structures and Practices

JMU should **ensure that shared governance structures and communication practices at the campus- and college-levels are robust and well-documented**, and we encourage faculty to engage actively in shared governance opportunities, as essential stewards of the university's mission. To promote awareness of existing structures and ensure that documentation reflects active governance bodies and practices in place at all levels, it must be created or confirmed as accurate with faculty input.

3a. Documentation

In accordance with section IV.A of the JMU Faculty Handbook, every college (and academic unit or school that does not exist within a college) should determine “the specific structure and membership of its governance bodies,” to include “elected faculty representatives from each academic unit of the college.”

We recommend that, by a deadline to be determined by the Provost’s Office and Faculty Senate, **these college-level structures and memberships/membership practices be posted on the colleges’ publicly-accessible web pages**. Any shared governance structures created or described as part of this process should address meaningful faculty participation in areas of curriculum, personnel, and budget and planning, with attention to faculty advisory and oversight roles, as defined in the handbook for each of the three areas.

3b. Refresh and Reaffirm

We recommend **regular refresh/reconsideration and reaffirmation** by faculty and academic leadership of all guiding documents at the college level. A planned schedule for periodic reaffirmation should be published.

3c. Communicating Across Divisions

Regular campus-level communication practices should be created to ensure that faculty are aware not only of strategic planning activities in Academic Affairs, but of all JMU division-level **strategic planning** (e.g., Student Affairs, Access & Inclusion, Advancement, etc.).

3d. Communicating in Colleges and Units

Every college and administrative unit of Academic Affairs in which faculty are employed

should communicate to all faculty and staff a plan for (or a reminder of) their shared governance pathways and **ongoing, intended communication practices**, designed to keep lines of discussion open and foster effective bi-directional communication between faculty and administrators. This plan should be developed in consultation with faculty governance bodies.

3e. Shared Governance at the Unit Level

Section IV.B of the Faculty Handbook merely says, regarding academic unit-level governance, that it should exist. It then only specifically references the role of the AUPAC. Just as college-level structures and communications practices are addressed in 3a and 3d above, every academic unit should be charged with **documenting and publicly/transparantly communicating its unit-level governance practices**.

3f. Senate Engagement

The Provost's Office should **actively engage the full Faculty Senate as an advisory body** to provide meaningful faculty input on matters of budget and strategic planning that cross all colleges. To ensure effective representation in this advisory role, Faculty Senate should be encouraged to hold an open discussion about its own methods for engagement with administrators and fellow faculty. We acknowledge that all sides can do better in collaboration with each other on matters of mutual concern.

3g. Access to Information

Data and documents pertaining to non-confidential/non-personnel issues should **be stored and communicated in uniform and familiar ways**, equitably accessible to faculty and administrators alike. This applies equally to information compiled by administrative offices, departments and colleges, and by the Faculty Senate. We recommend that non-confidential information relevant to faculty, such as departmental bylaws, etc., be stored in more transparent, easily accessible places, including—where appropriate—behind simple password protection or on the open Web.

3h. Senate Transparency

The Faculty Senate should **clarify, streamline, and make more transparent its own processes and voting practices**. Participation and transparency on the part of faculty would be increased, and opportunities for dialogue with a broader array of administrators would be created, by instituting **robust and publicly-accessible ways of tracking issues and faculty concerns** from the moment they are introduced, either to

amicable resolution or to creation of a formal Resolution. One possible model is the [Virginia Tech Resolutions Tracker](#). Best practices for feedback and voting are addressed in section 5, below.

3i. Senate Subcommittee on Shared Governance

The Faculty Senate should add a **standing subcommittee on Shared Governance** charged with leading and participating in ongoing conversations and initiatives to improve the state of shared governance at JMU.

4: Campus Climate

JMU must **openly address issues relevant to perceptions of the state of shared governance** documented in the most recent COACHE survey and Campus Climate Study reports. For a full summary of findings related to shared governance in those two reports, please see Appendix B, drafted by a small faculty working group in response to our charge and task force goals.

It is important to note that the 2021 COACHE survey report itself summarizes Spring 2020 feedback, and the 2022 Campus Climate Study report summarizes Fall 2021 feedback from JMU faculty and our broader campus community.

4a. Climate Study Reporting

We recommend **regular reporting back from the Climate Study Implementation Group** to the full Faculty Senate and Academic Council.

4b. Faculty Voices on Climate Implementation

In keeping with COACHE recommendations and best practices of shared governance, we also recommend the **addition of more faculty voices on the Climate Study Implementation Group**.

4c. Focus on COACHE

We recommend that the **Faculty Senate prioritize its attention to the COACHE survey recommendations** and follow up with faculty and administration on those recommendations as originally planned. Open reporting of progress made is key.

5: Feedback and Voting

JMU must create **better-documented, more trustworthy and transparent systems for voting, conducting surveys, and other faculty/staff feedback-gathering and data collection activities** relevant to shared governance.

5a. Best Practices Manual

Create a **draft manual of best practices with data management and the development of qualitative/quantitative surveys** (including ballot development, records management policies/retention schedules, ensured confidentiality, etc.) from experienced areas at JMU, such as the Office of Institutional Research, Libraries, IRB, and Center for Faculty Innovation (CFI), as well as from knowledgeable faculty. A strong model for this now exists in the College of Science and Math, and working documents are available from the Task Force upon request.

5b. Community of Practice

Foster, resource, and publicize a cross-college **community of practice for continuous improvement** of survey and feedback processes in Academic Affairs.

5c. Documented Processes

Every academic department and administrative unit in which faculty are placed should **document its processes and practices related to online and in-person voting/survey-taking**. These should be aligned with the best-practices document described in 5a above.

5d. Default to Open

JMU should promote open deliberation, voting or use of feedback mechanisms, and sharing outcomes of deliberations in a transparent manner as **the go-to way to inform decisions** across the board. It is important that these approaches include open calls for feedback and discussion, and that all voices can be included in deliberations.

5e. Conflict of Interests

An Academic Affairs policy or guidelines document should be created that covers **conflict of interests** (COI) more broadly than merely speaking to Virginia statutes related to nepotism and financial COI—and that also treats the *perception* of conflict of interests (e.g., a person on the ballot should not be overseeing an election process). Individual academic departments should use this as a starting-point for documents specifically related to conflict of interests in connection with voting and survey processes.

5f. Dispute Resolution

Should a dispute arise from the creation, interpretation, or deployment of surveys or ballots, we recommend **creation of an ad hoc committee that includes all stakeholders** involved to resolve the issue together. We recommend that there be a clear and shared formula to follow in the registration of a need for such a group and in the creation of these ad hoc committees.

6: Learning and Problem-Solving

JMU should develop **an action-oriented program for ongoing campus conversations, shared learning, listening, and concrete problem-solving** around the lived experience of shared governance.

Experiments with programs, such as the ones described here, should focus on *campus practices* associated with shared governance, instead of on establishing a *campus definition* of shared governance. The task force agrees that we can consider shared governance to be adequately defined in the literature (as outlined in our introduction), and that we should depend on the separate efforts recommended in 1b for the establishment of a campus statement. In other words, we hope area 6 would **build on the work of this task force and not repeat it**.

6a. Action-Oriented Fellowships

Create **a fellowship-like program for faculty** who want to learn more about shared governance and collaboratively workshop and work on real-world shared governance problems with administrators and peers. The idea would be that faculty would then return to their units or colleges to test or implement the possible solutions they develop in the program. Consider whether this program aligns with the newly-created Faculty ASPIRE associates program out of the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs and Curriculum, or would be a new, needed offering from CFI.

6b. Deliberative Democracy

Consider a **“deliberative democracy” discussion model** to foster a culture of shared governance at JMU. Deliberative democracy cannot be applied to all situations, but is an emerging, creative, and potentially effective method for fostering dialogue and shared understanding. (Working documents related to this concept are available from the task force on request.)

6c. Campus Conversations

Consider developing a **Campus Conversations Committee** responsible for hosting and facilitating regular campus conversations on critical issues or major pending changes or decision points. The committee must have a coordinator and at least a part-time support staff member. (Working documents related to this concept are available from the task force on request.)

6d. Onboarding and Ongoing Learning

As part of **routine onboarding** for all parties, regularly and actively engage and educate members of BOV, administration, faculty, and student leaders on the established principles of shared governance. We observe considerable confusion about the basic tenets of shared governance among all stakeholders, and see onboarding as a golden opportunity to address the issue. We also recommend that JMU provide **ongoing opportunities for learning** for all of these stakeholder groups.

6e. BOV Transparency

Continue positive developments in BOV transparency by communicating more broadly with faculty as to the availability of committee and full board agendas ahead of meetings, and outcomes thereafter, including the availability of minutes and a summary of key decisions and areas of conversation. Commit to earlier posting of Board agendas, open invitations to faculty to observe committee meetings, and broad circulation of the livestream for the full Board.

6f. Faculty Input

By regularly conducting town halls at the university and college levels, **provide faculty an opportunity to discuss their views on issues before the administration and Board.** Clearly communicate to faculty the decisions being considered by the BOV and the

president's executive cabinet, why those decisions are before the board or cabinet, the timetable for decisions, and the extent of the faculty's opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. Conduct periodic faculty forums with key administrative and board decisionmakers. For instance, the BOV's Rector could present to faculty on how the board makes decisions, or JMU's chief financial officer could present on how budgets are developed.

6g. Human(e) Connections

Actively develop, resource, and cultivate intentional ways to **increase social capital among administrators, board members, and faculty**. Treating each other with kindness, charity and respect is a crucial start. Then, as board members, faculty members, and administrators work together in shared governance frameworks, they will naturally develop social capital.

However, social capital also can be developed and deepened outside of a formal shared governance process. Consider these potential practices:

- With faculty leaders' awareness and consent, consider inviting board members and senior administrators to occasional faculty meetings, followed by a reception. Board members usually are impressed with the quality of deliberation at these meetings, just as faculty members usually are impressed with the quality of deliberation at board meetings;
- Seat BOV members, administrators, and faculty members in the same area at athletic events, concerts, and other special occasions, and at meetings and dinners where both are present;
- Publish BOV and faculty leadership biographies. Let faculty members know that board members may be available for invitations as guest lecturers in classes that touch on their areas of expertise;
- Invite a BOV member to participate in part of a study abroad program or field trip for students. Invite board members to celebrations of student and faculty scholarship;
- Hold a reception during BOV meetings on campus to give faculty and the broader campus community the chance to get to know the board and vice-versa.

7: Accountability

JMU should consider the following **additional recommendations related to issues of accountability, checks and balances, and transparency** in policies and processes.

7a. Communicating Accountability

Identifying responsible stakeholders is an important component of accountability. We understand the value of subsidiarity in higher education—the organizational practice that **decisions should be made at the lowest level possible**. This ensures that people most affected by decisions have voice in the decision-making process, allows academic units and the faculty therein discretion over how to fulfill their education mission, and aligns with the principle of academic freedom. This may create confusion and stress, however, as an unavoidable diversity of practices leads to inconsistent experiences across colleges and academic units.

Our emergence as an R2 institution provides an instructive example. Some members of the academic community have communicated increased expectations related to research productivity, while others have not. Faculty with questions are often directed to a myriad of places and people responsible for the changes. **Mixed messaging erodes trust**. It also most usually occurs through verbal exchanges. Therefore, we recommend writing down changes related to policies, procedures, and workload where an authority figure can be identified. Additionally, sometimes this problem is dismissed as an issue of ‘centralized’ versus ‘localized’ decision-making. We encourage academic leaders (the Provost, deans, and AUHs) to clearly communicate 1) where mandates and initiatives come from, and 2) to what extent colleges and departments have discretion.

7b. Rotating Department Chairs

Where vacancies in the AUH position arise and involved faculty are willing, **allow academic departments to select leadership from among their internal ranks and experiment with a rotating chair model**. Such a faculty-elected internal chair would come with expectation of re-election/re-affirmation on regular intervals.

Implementation of this practice should acknowledge the Faculty Senate resolution already passed and build upon the experience of departments that are already testing this model.

7c. Interim AUHs

Regardless of the approach taken to 7a above, faculty feedback should always be solicited and strongly considered in the appointment of **interim AUHs**.

7d. AAUH Policies

Consider a new, standard policy or guidelines document addressing the appointment, evaluation, and participation in shared governance of **assistant and associate academic unit heads**. Models could be solicited from departments that have successfully implemented and documented such processes.

7e. Evaluation of Administrators

Ensure that **regular and transparent evaluation of all administrators** includes robust faculty feedback. Faculty should regularly be invited to provide feedback on the performance of AUHs, deans and associate deans, vice provosts, provost, and the president of the university. This should be done with attention to “closing the loop,” or appropriately and without breach of confidentiality, reporting that the feedback was received and any results or actions taken by the administrator in response.

This is intended as a positive, responsive, trust-building recommendation, so that faculty can adequately speak to the work of administrators (and build understanding of the work they do on behalf of the institution). Therefore, as part of this regular performance evaluation process, administrators should provide a brief summary of their activities.

7f. Elected Faculty Representation

Increase accountability of faculty representatives to their peers by fundamentally altering the way they are placed on key task forces and committees. Currently, faculty are appointed by administrators or through Senate Steering recommendations; shift this practice, where possible, to **open election of faculty representatives to task forces and committees** by their peers.

7g. Senate Onboarding/Sharing Best Practices

Increase the accountability of faculty senators to their peers and the trust of administrators and BOV members, so that Faculty Senate represents the will of the faculty, by **improving shared senator onboarding processes** and creating **venues in which senators can share best practices** with each other, in fostering department

discussions and coming to collective decisions on the casting of votes. Questions of unevenness in department-level representation can erode trust in outcomes. See Virginia Tech's approach to senator onboarding.

7h. Faculty Input into our R2 Development

To fully leverage faculty expertise and enact shared governance in the context of our R2 transition, we recommend that a campus-wide **representative faculty body, qualified to speak to research and scholarship needs** from a faculty viewpoint, be created. In other words, a working group with a faculty majority should be established to look into typical practices of research support at the R2 level, and identify areas for improvement at JMU. The Vice Provost for Research and Scholarship should be asked to issue quarterly progress reports on JMU's efforts to align our research initiatives and resourcing with R2 priorities.

7i. Expected Response Times

To foster accountability and better respect everyone's time, administrative offices should institute a practice of publishing **expected response times**, where possible, for queries faculty make related to various policies or the routine business of faculty support. Where *standard* response times are not applicable, individual queries should be acknowledged with an anticipated response time and redirected if a query cannot be answered by the office to which it was addressed.

7j. Enhanced Mediation Offerings

Enhance JMU's faculty ombuds services to include **mediation offerings** beyond those offered by JMU Human Resources. Currently, the ombuds office is explicit about not offering mediation. The task force recommends mediation offered through a new/enhanced service more closely aligned with the university ombudsperson as a first point-of-contact, more low-stakes way of attempting resolution, especially in cases involving faculty members and their AUHs or deans.

7k. Anti-Bullying Policies

Continue ongoing conversations about the creation of an **anti-bullying policy** at the campus level.

7l. Access to Hiring Information and Trends

The Provost's Office should produce a detailed longitudinal report with information sufficient to analyze **year-to-year trends related to areas of faculty line growth/contraction**. While much of this information is available on request to deans and AUHs, we hope a report that pulls together division-wide data disaggregated by college will provide a valuable, holistic perspective. After the report is produced and distributed, the Provost's Office and Senate Budget Committee should collaborate on a plan for future data collection strategies related to frequency and necessary report elements.

The initial report should include:

- Longitudinal departmental-level data that track the number of tenured, tenure-eligible, and RTA instructional faculty for each year included in the analysis;
- Information on the rate at which vacant instructional faculty lines are replaced;
- The number of class sections taught by adjunct faculty, aggregated by department, for each year included in the analysis.

7m. Faculty Input in Budgeting

College-level structures to **involve faculty in budgeting deliberations and decisions** are mandated by the JMU Faculty Handbook (IV.A.2). In academic units and at the division level, where such structures are absent, they should be created.

Recommended Readings

American Association of University Professors (AAUP) (1966). *Statement on the government of colleges and universities*. <https://www.aaup.org/report/statement-government-colleges-and-universities>.

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Tierney, W., & Minor, J. (2003). *Challenges for governance: A national report*. Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED482060>.

Appendices

Draft Institutional Statement on Shared Governance
State of Shared Governance as Reflected in Climate Study and COACHE Survey
Task Force Meeting Agendas, September 2022-May 2023