A Century of Shared Governance:  
Addressing Big Questions in Higher Education Today

Senate Centennial, 2012-13

Digital Education:
*Can the faculty be replaced by robots and videos?*

The University, as a land grant research institution, has a primary responsibility to Minnesota citizens and students even as it contributes to the advancement of knowledge for all. What is our role in providing education and information to citizens who may never visit our campuses? What are the pedagogical, financial, and academic implications of increasing reliance on online courses and other forms of digital education? How can we learn to do research and teaching effectively in an increasingly digitized environment? How will all university constituents, especially educators, be engaged in formulating standards and policy, given rapid technological innovation?

Private Sector Collaboration:
*Are profit motives less noble than those guiding traditional funding mechanisms?*

The University has been and may continue to be transformed by a reduction in state funding and by decreased public research funding at the state and federal levels. Reductions in public research funding have led ever more faculty and staff to seek projects sponsored by private industry. What risks do such arrangements pose to the University’s independence? What is the right balance between University and private ownership of intellectual property? What responsibility does the University of Minnesota have, as a public land-grant university, to collaborate with the private sector? Are there better mechanisms to manage intellectual property ownership in order to secure financial stability? What role should shared governance play in overseeing these relationships?

The Economic Future of Public Research Universities:
*Why don’t citizens and public officials see a research university as worthy of state investment?*

Financial pressure on public higher education budgets is having a far-reaching influence on the scholarly and instructional environment in public research universities. How will the University maintain excellence in research, teaching, and outreach given these unrelenting budgetary pressures? What are the organizational consequences of the ongoing privatization of public universities? What are the effects of a tuition-driven model? What challenges and solutions are unique to the status of the University of Minnesota as a public, land-grant, flagship, research university? What should be the role of governance in advising the president and Board of Regents on maintaining excellence in the face of this financial pressure?
Shifting Faculty Demographics:  
*Are tenure and academic freedom at risk?*

Financial pressures have yielded national trends that result in the shrinking and even elimination of traditional academic departments. At the same time, scholarly information is rapidly expanding and driving demand to hire larger numbers of faculty who can capitalize on new research trends, technologies, and other opportunities. Across the country tenured professors are being replaced by contingent faculty who are vulnerable in their positions. What are the implications of this “collapse and condense” strategy? How do we define ourselves and our work, given widespread reorganization? How do we respond to public perceptions of tenure as simply “job protection”? What are the implications of structural reorganization for our students, the institution of tenure, the nature of our University, and the common good for our state?

The Future of Governance:  
*How can shared governance prevent well-intentioned but potentially awful institutional decisions?*

The intended purposes and intended effects of governance at the University of Minnesota are several. Governance provides the potential for faculty, staff, and students to work with administrators and the Board of Regents to think about the meaning of external pressures and how they should be addressed in new practices and resource allocations within institutions. Governance provides the only permanent and institutionalized process for adjudicating potential differences within the faculty as well as between the faculty and administrators. What are the best mechanisms for identifying potential problems and examining them before they become raging conflicts? What best practices in governance can inform decisions, promote transparency, and help avoid merely quantitative measure of academic health and productivity. What should be the agenda of shared governance in the coming years?