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Faculty Powers in Shared Governance

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This article names many of the changes being experienced by theological schools and their constituencies, identifies new realities in governance, and argues for new understandings of vocations and roles to meet those challenges, particularly with reference to the faculty. To the question of how the school's theological, human, and fiscal powers can be directed to get the right educational work accomplished in the midst of change, the author explores the facets of faculty powers in shared governance. The article insists that the faculty's work of teaching and learning are the most powerful work of an educational institution, but that even in the educational area where the faculty rules, shared governance means shared stewardship. The conclusion challenges faculty to embrace the promise and risk of generative governance to help their schools meet the needs of the twenty-first century church and world.

When he returned to Harvard from the State Department, Henry Kissinger reportedly noted, "The rancor is high in faculty meetings because the stakes are low!" Grim humor about faculty meetings is a cliché, like jokes about deans, plucking at academic anxieties. Why do faculty with great personal and intellectual capacities feel powerless in the midst of institutional realities? When schools face real and identifiable threats, such as an economic recession, faculty courage can often be rallied to contribute intelligence to wise actions. But when administrations and boards initiate efforts in less critical times to alter the culture or direct the institution's educational mission, diffuse distress may flourish like fungus in the petri dishes of faculty meetings.

Both cynical humor and unfocused anxiety about change are counterproductive for institutions of higher learning. The days are past when shared governance meant merely how much influence the faculty could have in administrative or board decisions. A labor-versus-management mentality is unworthy of faculty vocations and defeating for theological schools. Shared governance is now about the interesting and complex question of how to align every center of authority to accomplish the educational mission needed by those who rely on the institution. In theological schools, the full powers of the faculty need to be put to work as communities confront profound change.

The new authoritative handbook on not-for-profit board governance is *Governance as Leadership* by Chait, Ryan, and Taylor.¹ The word *leadership* already signals change. Because of the external worlds of financial reporting, institutional advancement, and educational accountability, board governance can no longer be as sharply delimited as in the days of "noses in, but fingers out." Presidents and deans must also be involved in the educational work of the school in places faculties often have regarded as their precincts. "Why can't you just leave us alone to teach and do our research?" they ask. Blame the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, or the seminary's reliance on its constituency, or the federal

Department of Education's pressures for accountability in accreditation. But shared governance is the hallmark of vibrant institutions of higher education.

No sane interpreter of the new realities in governance is arguing for a return to times when external systems directly controlled the schools. Some theological faculties with long memories recall days when their boards directly hired and fired the faculty, even annually, or when a president or church official simply appointed teachers. Some of these "governors" even insisted on approving courses and reading final exams. Whenever such rare intrusions happen, the warnings sound: this school's place in its own community may well be in jeopardy, and accreditation standards could soon be invoked.

But the story of the past half century of governance of theological schools has been much more about the ascendance of faculty authority. Deans and presidents, including those who came from the faculty, often shake their heads in disbelief when faculty accuse them of "running everything." Long established and tenured faculty are well aware of their authority, and some use it well to move the school forward. Faculty are right, however, in sensing they will not be left alone to do their work in the "splendid isolation" long admired as the privilege of European academics. They sense the claim on their work in the rising accountability of the schools for educational effectiveness.

In a time of change in the world, in communities of faith, and in theological schools, leadership is needed in every sector, with every group working at full strength: boards, faculties, staffs, and administrations. Reactive barriers against change are futile. Nervous fretting about who has the "most" or the "real" power must yield to a more proactive intelligence: how can the school's theological, human, and fiscal powers be directed to get the right educational work accomplished in the midst of change?

The words *power* or *powers* are used in this essay like the parlance of high school physics to identify the capacity to accomplish work. This is not a simple appeal to trust those in authority. Power and powers are often misused, especially when the purpose served is less than clear. But mere suspicion of "those people in power" is self-serving when the faculty itself exercises the school's greatest educational powers. And schools are places that promise quality learning. *Governance is the stewardship of powers to accomplish and sustain an educational mission in service of the church and the world.* To develop a shared vision of the excellence of a school's work, the governance questions are: Who depends on this institution to do its work? How can its educational mission best be accomplished? And who has which powers to do it well?

Chait, Ryan, and Taylor's interpretation of governance as leadership highlights three distinct phases or moments: fiduciary governance, strategic governance, and generative governance. Their focus is on board governance, but their insight illumines shared governance, welcoming faculty leadership in using their powers.

The following table is an effort to map shared governance with board governance as the foundation. Presidential and administrative governance stand on the bridge between board and faculty governance, all seeking to serve the educational work of the faculty and students. The argument is that faculty leadership in governing the school's educational mission must (1) respect the

separate fiduciary powers for which various groups are responsible, (2) collaborate (“co-labor”) with the powers of other governance groups to advance the effort strategically, and (3) welcome the lively vision of stakeholders from beyond and within the institution of what is needed from the school.

The commentary will begin at the lower left of Table 1 on the next page, rising up the fiduciary governance column through administrative to faculty governance. Then the analysis will move up through the strategic governance column. Finally, generative governance will be explored as the arena where the enterprise becomes a whole. The goal of this essay is to honor, assess, and explore the validity and value of faculty powers in shared governance.

Fiduciary governance

In figure skating terms, *fiduciary governance* is doing the compulsory figures before the free skate. Boards that do not execute their fiduciary responsibilities should be replaced before they are sued or the school loses its accreditation. The graduates, the school’s constituencies, or the state may criticize a faculty or an administration, but the boards will ultimately be held legally and publicly accountable for the educational, fiscal, and operational integrity of the school. The double bottom line on the fiduciary side of the table is both the school’s financial viability and its educational vitality as a theological school. One institution may intend to serve the academic world, another will provide leadership for communities of justice and liberation, the third will tend closely knit communities of conviction. “No money, no mission!” in most theological schools also means “No mission, no money!”

The table is a modest device for mapping the distributions of powers, and the items listed in each section are only suggestive. Each institution must fill in its specifics, rather than arguing with the table. Chait, Ryan, and Taylor’s thorough discussions of fiduciary, strategic, and generative governance will yield deep and rich understandings. Nevertheless, the separation of powers in this left column of the table is a reminder of the ultimate responsibilities of the board for the work of the administration and the faculty.

The approval of degrees and even the financial audit are no longer rubber stamp tasks, although most boards probably still operate as if voting the degrees is perfunctory. In order to own their fiscal accountabilities, many boards regularly ask administrators to leave the room before formally approving the audit. The evaluation of the president and administration is also the board’s work, with faculty and staff counsel as needed. The day may come when boards will also attend more critically and formally to how well the school has accomplished the learning outcomes promised in the degrees of graduates. The solid lines between the fiduciary responsibilities of the groups means each has its own work in this column, with responsibility to the world and the other groups.

Even inside the administration, a segregation of duties will be needed to satisfy the auditors about fund management and to protect educational integrity. Decisions will be required in conflicting claims for financial support. Everyone can’t make all the decisions or the school will be transfixed in processes. Administrators must also make calls in the educational arena. For example,

Table 1: Faculty Leadership in Governing the School's Educational Mission

Governance: The stewardship of powers to accomplish and sustain an educational mission in service of the church and the world.	
Roles	Fiduciary Fundamental (Management) Strategic Logical (Stewardship) Generative Visionary (Leadership)
	Fusion of Thinking: Collaboration
Faculty, Students, and Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design the curricula • Guide student learning • Teach, publish, and profess • Recommend degrees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show learning results • Professional development • Honor the school's calling • Ask, listen, and learn <p>"Now you are the body of Christ individually members of it." The Apostle Paul</p>
President, Dean, and Administra- tion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate the mission • Advocate the curricula • Care for the people • Build and track the budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance the mission • Allocate the resources • Track "dashboards" • Ask, listen, and learn <p>"A shared vision is not an idea. It is, rather a force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. At its simplest level, a shared vision is the answer to the question, "What do we want to create? Shared visions derive their power from a common caring." Peter Senge</p>
Boards and Constituencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt the mission • Approve, audit, and budget • Award/comment degrees • Review the president 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify "dashboards" • Authorize leadership • Develop the boards • Ask, listen, and learn <p>"You got'ta serve somebody!" Bob Dylan</p>

Financial Viability and Theological Integrity ← → **Educational Excellence and Public Impact**

when student dismissals are required, the school's educational integrity must be protected, knowing it may be challenged legally.

In theological schools, faculty often wear administrative hats. They must be aware when their decisions adjudicate conflicting values. Faculty may wonder if administrators understand what is important, but they recognize the practical reality that someone must make the call. They tease, "That's why you get the big bucks!" The powers of senior administrators are accountable for the well-being of the people, the school's financial health, and ultimately for the educational mission to which the school is called, tracking the effectiveness of curricula to accomplish the learning objectives.

Teaching and learning are, however, the most powerful work of an educational institution. That strong collaborative effort between faculty and students occurs in the upper left hand segment of the table. Everything else flows into this sector and out from it. This is where the significance of the school accumulates its distinctive character and impact. The solid line between administration and faculty does not license faculty to teach whatever they please, but it protects the faculty's authority (power) to pursue the teaching, learning, and research that will accomplish the educational mission.

The classroom or teaching-learning context is the primary location where faculty members lead and govern, stewarding the powers of what is taught and learned in a subject matter or method that will be valuable for students. Experienced teachers have few illusions about the immediate efficacy of their craft, but those entrusted with theological students are aware that this is good (and underpaid) work, if you can get it. In time, their students become colleagues in public leadership and ministries around the world, friends who remember their teachers as important to their lives and vocations.

The privilege of teaching in a theological school, however, increases faculty responsibility for clarity in the school's educational purposes. The old wisdom affirmed the virtues of a good teacher at one end of the log and a good student at the other. The rise of the disciplines of theological education then commended high faculty competence in the methods and contents of biblical, historical, theological, ethical, and pastoral studies. Perhaps excellence could then be tracked by the graduate's mastery of these disciplines. But many faculties know this understanding of educational quality is inadequate.

Leadership in curricular design and tracking is probably the faculty's greatest power beyond the teaching/learning context itself. At their best, curricula are educational strategies to accomplish the school's teaching and learning goals, not mere political *détentes* between disciplines. Curricular reform is not only an exercise to be tolerated once every decade, but an ongoing deliberation about whether the students are learning what their degrees promise to them and to the communities they will lead. Faculty governance requires time and energy attending to the educational work of the school, seeking together how to track and measure what is learned, not only what is taught.

Student enrollments may be enough to justify offering elective courses, even if the topic seems irrelevant to others. Many students long remember their delight on entering a faculty member's research interests or passions. But if a course is required for a degree, that class must be accountable to the

standard that what is taught and learned is demonstrably valuable to what students need to learn. Even in the educational arena where the faculty rules, shared governance means shared stewardship.

As they manage their primary powers to accomplish the educational mission, faculty need to assess whether their committees and faculty meetings are productive. How many professional hours are being expended in plenary meetings? The educational mission identifies the criteria for the question, is this discussion worthy of our time? Raising the stakes in faculty governance means taking leadership in building agenda and exercising discipline in deliberations to focus on effective work in teaching and learning.

All faculty research will not be immediately relevant to the school's educational purposes. The specialized knowledge and interpretive skills of theological faculty are alternatively appreciated, resented, or ignored in congregations, denominations, and other publics. Theological schools are places where scholarship must be shielded from the tyrannies of relevance and enforcement. The public mission of theological education relies upon the work of the faculty in their research and writing, some of which may be solitary, personal, and entrepreneurial, but not private. The teaching office of theological educators is a public calling in the academy and in communities of faith. Although academic freedom can never be an unqualified claim for theological schools, faculty research and teaching are crucial assets that a school's fiduciary governance must protect.

Strategic governance

In the *strategic governance* column, the lines are dashed to recognize a division of labors with increasing interdependence between boards, administrations, and faculty with students and staff. Fiduciary governance is managerial and incremental (i.e., how can we improve what we are doing now in service of our mission?) Strategic governance, in turn, is analytic and forward looking (i.e., given our strengths and/or weaknesses and our opportunities and/or threats, what priorities or changes will we need to strengthen our position in theological education in a three- to five-year period?)

The faculty's greatest influence in the fiduciary column is in stewarding the educational mission. The administration stands on the strategic bridge between the faculty and the board asking: Do we have the right goals? Who have we benefited by this work? Compared to others, what can we do to enhance our results? The assumption of strategic governance is still improvement, not transformation.

On the basis of the learning goals of the curricula as stated by the faculty, the board will seek to help improve the school's performance in a three- to five-year period. Along with annual "dashboard measurements" (imagine automotive gauges, meters, and warning lights) of the institution's resources, graduation rates, and health, the board will publicly identify and plan to enhance the school's educational excellence by meeting institutional goals in a period of years. Boards and administrations also provide strategic leadership raising current funds for the school's priorities and building capital strength.

Seeking to improve the educational results, all the players in shared governance will continue to ask, listen, and learn from those the school serves.

The administration's strategic leadership begins in seeking critical intelligence from all quarters: constituents, faculty, students, and board. Since the mission is education, the faculty's powers with the students and staff make the greatest enduring impact, but shared strategic governance requires faculty to welcome the administration's efforts to identify results that matter beyond the school. This intelligence is essential to developing resources for the effort. Faculty multiply the effect when they join the efforts to raise and allocate resources strategically to "make it happen!" The full powers of every group are needed, and at times they have different values to the institution's mission. Honoring the full fiduciary powers of the faculty and the board (educational and fiscal) empowers the president and administration's leadership in the strategic column.

Strategic thinking is systemic, seeking to multiply the school's excellence, generally without challenging the standards by which that excellence is measured. Strategic leadership builds on strengths to enhance and advance the institution. Faculty engagement, therefore, is essential in building shared understandings of quality. Shared governance in change calls for faculty leadership in defining the school's educational results, and the faculty's professional development must be disciplined to serve the mission. Strategic planning in theological schools is about more than raising more funds to keep the school alive. Even if the goal is simply to do a better job, faculty powers in shared governance must be rallied for the school to become smarter about new hires, course allocations, study leaves, and learning assessment.

Loyal opposition builds the organization's character as the faculty helps devise the right measures and practices. But cynical disdain and skeptical distance undermine the shared stewardship of the school's powers. A senior faculty member once told a young president, "Your job is to make us look good!" It was a prudent place to begin. That same professor later said, "We need to help you do your best too! If this school is going to go somewhere, we are in this together!" The school's strategic culture is healthy when faculty welcome the legitimate strengths of administrations and boards while they are engaged in the use of the powers of the faculty. Everyone is playing "for keeps."

Generative governance

Generative governance is inspiring, powerful, and risky. Fiduciary governance is about protecting the school's educational and financial assets. Strategic governance is about building upon the school's distinctive strengths and opportunities and abandoning its weaknesses and threats. Generative governance happens when schools are caught up in a vision of the world God loves and become committed to serve the callings of the communities of faith who need graduates to lead them in new times.

The risks of generative governance are manifold because most theological schools were established to conserve a particular view of the world and the church. Even the university-based divinity schools once had specific theologi-

cal and ecclesial mandates, and their mandates for the study of religion continue to have identifiable publics. The discussion about the future of the MDiv degree in several of these universities signals complex considerations of their identities as graduate theological faculties and/or professional schools. And who shares the governance of their educational missions?

While the debt of the "good theological school" of the mid-twentieth century to a common curricular design was evident, the broad spectrum of schools in ATS resists the dominance of any one "shared vision" in the twenty-first century. In general, theological faculties still tend to own an identifiable responsibility for "conserving" something for some group(s), at least in protecting "what we do" as educators from "what they do." Liberal schools define their work in reaction to what the fundamentalists do. Evangelicals distinguish themselves from the liberals, Roman Catholics from the Protestants. And confessional theological traditions may define themselves in contrast to everyone else.

Some ATS member schools are highly conscious of what they are designed to prevent, and better, what they are intended to accomplish. Many constituencies of theological schools are impatient with historic academic or denominational differences. They "simply" want better leaders and often challenge the schools by what they see in other traditions. Faculties, in turn, know there is nothing "simple" about leadership in faith communities. The shared governance of theological schools becomes truly powerful when the question becomes how theological interpretation properly equips leadership in faith communities. Faculty can't raise this question only among themselves, but their participation is essential for their schools to sustain and enact educational responses in new times.

A new president who asked the school's alumni/ae for counsel received hundreds of responses filled with gratitude for the faculty but also criticism of the school's educational mission. "Quit preparing your graduates for a church that no longer exists!" Then in the midst of a board-faculty consultation on a strategic plan titled, "Excellence for Ministry," a faculty member spoke softly, but firmly. "We are rearranging the chairs on the Titanic. We are just getting better at what we know. We must listen and change!"

The board and administration were focused on strategic governance. Many of the faculty were already concerned that the school would betray its historic strengths with fluffy slogans. The courage to welcome profound change requires faculty leadership from within and loyal criticism from outside the school. Generative governance is a change process, collaborative in its soul, calling for courage from experts and wisdom from the faithful. "I have no idea how we should change this school," said a board member, "but we all know the communities that depend on us need something different."

What is powerful about generative governance in theological schools is that generative forces are abundant, and these forces come from beyond the walls of institutional identification and transcend the internal divisions of labors. While theological schools are designed to conserve and advance their strengths, generative governance opens the windows to the winds of change,

perhaps redirection or even conversion, in the primary biblical sense of being turned or turning toward God.

Faculty powers are the educational engine in shared fiduciary governance, and they can be driving forces toward excellence in improving and advancing the institution's mission. But what if the very character of that excellence is challenged? Can faculty exercise leadership toward reform without betraying their academic interests or guilds? "No one puts new wine into old wine-skins;" warned Jesus, "otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed . . . And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine, but says, 'The old is good.'" (Luke 5:37, 39 NRSV)

Generative governance depends upon fiduciary discipline in educational and financial management and relies on strategic thinking, planning, and implementation. These logical and empirical disciplines test the validity of any transformative vision. Faculty leadership (1) is essential to doing a good job in our educational mission and (2) is critical in deciding how to improve the benefit of our educational work in three to five years.

Faculty leadership in generative governance, however, (3) comes primarily from welcoming inspiration from outside the institution, opening the windows to new realities. This is why even the dashed lines disappear in the third column of shared governance.

Faculty leadership in shared governance brings more than expertise in the disciplines or even more than competence in effective theological education. In the generative moments of shared governance, faculty leadership means following an inspired vision of a calling into "paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown."

A deep transformation of theological education as leadership education has already begun in many member schools of the Association. No uniformity is possible or desirable because the wealth of traditions and the diverse sizes of the schools are assets. The powers of the faculties are needed at full strength to bring the distinctive strengths of all the schools to identify the changes facing theological education and to address the challenges at the local and global doorsteps of the communities and publics they serve.

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ENDNOTE

1. Richard P. Chait, William P. Ryan, and Barbara E. Taylor, *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005).