ASSESSMENT REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Governance

**Assessment of University of Scranton
Governance Committee Reforms,
1999-2002**

June 2006

Executive Summary[1]

During the 1999-2002 span, the University of Scranton, guided by a newly-formed Governance Committee, underwent a comprehensive study of its internal governance structure. This study was initiated in reaction to inadequacies identified during the University's 1998 Self-Study and the subsequent review of the Self-Study by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Upon the completion of the 1999-2002 Governance Committee study, the revisions made within the University's governance structure[2] were endorsed by the its Board of Trustees. The Committee produced a *Statement of Governance Principles*[3] and an Overview of the University's governance structure. This structure includes: the University Council, the Student Government, and the Faculty Senate[4]. Governance was defined as "a system of consultation, communication and decision-making that produces institutional policies." As part of its endorsement, the Board charged the institution with ongoing review of its governance structure, asking the campus community to *engage in a formal review of the newly-adopted governance system during the 2005-2006 academic year*.

The Planning, Assessment & Institutional Research Office (PAIRO) was asked to design this follow up assessment. The assessment was designed to see in what ways the reform process improved the governance system from the vantage point of several University constituencies. The assessment focused on reviewing perceptions of the three representative governance bodies at the University: the University Council, Student Government, and the Faculty Senate, while addressing, to some extent, the University's committee structure and the role of the Administrators' Conference. The assessment took place over the winter and spring months of the 2005-2006 academic year, and included a survey of faculty, staff, and students; a series of targeted interviews, and focus groups.

PAIRO also completed a literature review designed to determine elements of effective governance as indicated by recent scholarship. Definitions of governance vary, but some common traits of effective governance include:

- *participation*, *responsiveness*, and *efficiency* (Kezar, 2001)[5]
- *a match between the expectations of constituents and how the process and outcomes evolve* (Kezar and Eckel 2004)[6]

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[1] For the full Assessment Report on Governance, contact PAIRO.

[2] For documentation of these changes, see the University's *The Scranton Record* (June 2002), *President's Letter* (September 2002) [see: Appendix 2], and *Periodic Review Report to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education* (June 2003).

[3] See: Appendix 1.

[4] See: Appendix 2, *Governance Flow Chart*.

[5] Kezar, Adrianna. (2001). Seeking a sense of balance: Academic governance in the 21st century. AAC&U Peer Review, pp.4-8

[6] Kezar, Adrianna and Peter D. Eckel. (2004). Meeting today's governance challenges. The Journal of Higher Education, *74* (4). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Literature also emphasizes the need for clearly delineated responsibilities, trust, and effective communication between and amongst groups engaged in governance. This material was found to support the University's governance principles, formed in 2002.

Key Assessment Findings:

- For each of the five elements of governance[7] addressed in the survey of students, faculty and staff, mean levels of their perceived importance for the overall student group and the faculty/staff group fall between *somewhat important* (5) and *important* (6); overall mean levels of satisfaction with the degree to which these elements of governance have been fulfilled by the University fall between *neutral* (4) and *somewhat satisfied* (5) [on a scale of one (1) to seven (7)]

- Based on the survey results, there appears to be some "ambivalence" towards the governance expectations addressed in the survey. None of the five items was regarded very highly or poorly, and despite gaps between levels of importance and satisfaction for every item, for both faculty/staff and students, the mean levels of both importance and satisfaction for each of the five survey items stays relatively steady, between four (neutral) and six (important/satisfied). No "hot button" issues emerged from amongst those included in the survey.

- Findings from the **interview** portion of the assessment converge on the following recurring themes (in no particular order):

    1. <u>Communication</u> – many interviewed did not recollect the governance reform and the changes resulting from it; current communication about governance now and between/amongst governing bodies needs improvement.
    2. <u>Effectiveness</u> – perceived general lack of collaboration between/amongst governing bodies; University Council widely viewed as ineffective. Those engaged with Faculty Senate and Student Government are generally satisfied with how these two groups function, with some issues of concern noted.
    3. <u>Committee Issues</u> – streamlining regarding committees over time has been positive, but some feel we could do more; many unsure of what role committees have in governance, many believe that issues go to committee and problems remain unsolved.
    4. <u>Structure/role of governing bodies</u> – general lack of understanding about what governance is and what the roles of the bodies involved in governance are.

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[7] These elements are: (1) the University promotes an understanding of the basic principles of governance; (2) communications regarding the governance processes and activities are widespread and regular; (3) there is an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the governing bodies; (4) the governance system addresses issues considered to be pressing by the campus community; and (5) the campus community is encouraged to participate in the governance process.

- Findings from the **focus group** portion of the assessment focus on the following areas (in no particular order):

    1. <u>Knowledge of governance structure</u> - participants across all focus groups seem to agree that the University of Scranton governance structure is "complex" and not understood by all members of the community. Faculty members seem to have the most comprehensive understanding, but have still described the system as complex and mysterious.
    2. <u>Confidence in governance structure</u> – many participants were not sure of what the groups do and what their role is. Constituents feel left out of the process.
    3. <u>Communication between governing bodies and those they represent</u> - communication regarding governance is a concern of all groups. These concerns were most emphatically expressed by staff members who participated in these groups. The widest variation of opinion seems to be amongst students with some feeling that communication is good and others believing there is significant room for improvement. All groups expressed a desire to more involved, including consultation and input before decisions are made.

- Findings from the **committee inventory** portion of the assessment indicate that there are 89 committees[8] currently engaged at the University (56 of these are also identified by the Provost's Office inventory), ranging from long-standing committees that deal with recurring issues and those that appear to be more ad hoc, dealing with a current issue or "hot topic". Review of past committee[9] listings indicate that there were 60 committees active on campus in 2004-2005, and 65 in 2003-2004.

Overall Conclusions and Observations:

- There exists some congruence between findings of interviews and focus groups. Both revealed concerns had by faculty, staff, and students about *communication* regarding governance, the *unclear role/ineffectiveness of the University Council*, and a *lack of universal understanding of the general role of governance and the bodies involved in the process*. This includes the relationship of the Board of Trustees and the Administrators' Conference to the governance process.

- Amongst those involved in the Faculty Senate and Student Government, there is a sense that the groups generally function well. However, many of those involved

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[8] This figure does not include standing committees or subcommittees of the Board of Trustees, Faculty Senate, University Council or any other subgroup. It does not include institutional search committees.
[9] Numbers of committees in 2005-06 include those captured by Provost's committee inventory *and* committees identified via the Annual Report system. Figures for previous years reflect *only* those committees identified in the Provost's inventory.

with University Council exhibit confusion over the role of the Council and frustration with its functioning.

- It is unclear to what degree additional streamlining of committees – per the suggestion of Middle States – can occur. The University may wish to further review and perhaps define what a "committee" is at the institution, and discern if there is a difference between this definition and the roles of various working groups, taskforces, and other groupings on campus.

The University's *Statement of Governance Principles* describes the elements of governance that the institution feels are essential for an effective system – elements that are also considered by contemporary scholarship on effective governance in higher education to be indicators of sound structure and process. The first of these eight principles states that governance "seeks to ensure widespread communication, understanding, participation, and practical consensus." The findings of this assessment indicate that there exists on campus a perception that this principle— and several others—have not yet been fully realized. These findings corroborate findings regarding communication and decision-making processes from both the 2004 Campus Climate Study and subsequent Communications Audit.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON

Statement of Governance Principles

Governance at The University of Scranton is rooted in the identity of The University as an American and Jesuit institution of higher education at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As our statement of mission articulates, "The University is a community of scholars whose ministry of education is informed by the vision of life contained in both the Gospel and the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola. The University is therefore dedicated to freedom of inquiry, the pursuit of wisdom, integrity and truth, and the personal growth and development of all who share in its life and ministry." The University's Governance Principles flow directly from this Statement of Mission and are informed also by the principles enunciated in the Joint Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities (1966) formulated by the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

An effective system of governance, therefore, appropriate to this institution at this time in its history, is essential to the fulfillment of the University's goals, since it will allow all of the members of the University community to "share in its life and ministry."
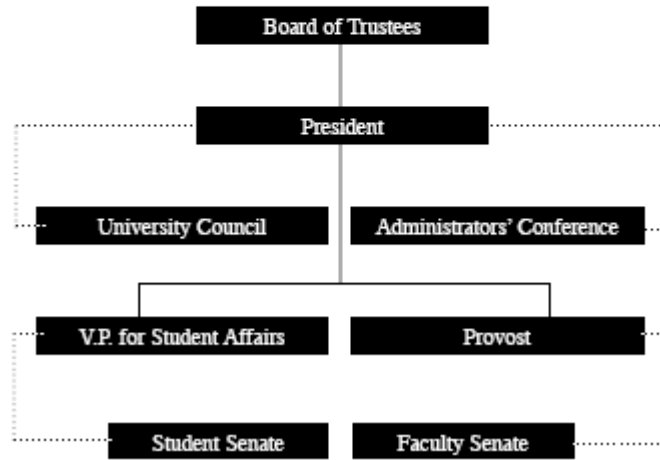
The Governance System at The University of Scranton:

A. Seeks to ensure widespread communication, understanding, participation and practical consensus.
B. Addresses pressing issues in a streamlined, adaptive, flexible way and encourages the appropriate use of sunset rules for committees and task forces.
C. Attempts to generate widespread understanding throughout the University community of the differences among policy-making, implementation of defined policy, and consultation regarding policy.
D. Allows stakeholders in the policy-making process to express their views and suggestions when policies are being reviewed and when the best solutions are being considered.
E. Recognizes that the influence of stakeholders is directly dependent on their degree of responsibility for implementation of the policy being determined.
F. Ensures regular, two-way communication between representatives of stakeholders participating in policy-making and those they represent.
G. Seeks to guarantee that participants in the policy-making process are provided with the appropriate resources and information so that they may participate in a timely fashion.
H. Recognizes that the primary responsibility for policy-making and decision-making in each area of University life must be clearly designated.

Each governance body of The University of Scranton is responsible for ensuring that these principles are reflected in their constitutions and bylaws and otherwise upheld by their governing policies.

Appendix 2: *Governance Flow Chart (2002)*

The University of Scranton
Governance Flow Chart

Board of Trustees

President

University Council   Administrators' Conference

V.P. for Student Affairs   Provost

Student Senate   Faculty Senate

THE UNIVERSITY OF
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A JESUIT UNIVERSITY

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