

A Faculty of One with Faculty Affairs: An Undepartmentalized Model of iSchool Faculty Shared Governance

Joseph T. Tennis

Abstract

As iSchools grow there are questions about how to maintain high quality faculty life while maintaining an investment in shared governance. The University of Washington iSchool has made a commitment to a *faculty of one* model, that is, an undepartmentalized model of shared governance. The case study presented here outlines the organizational structure, policies, and practices that allow for a growing faculty to maintain its unity by focusing on faculty affairs. This allows for cohesion across disciplines and helps work toward a balance of governance work and research and teaching.

Context and Case Study

In the interdisciplinary field of information, investigation, research, and teaching take many forms. The disciplinary norms assumed present and constant in many units on university campuses are intermixed and mercurial in iSchools – based on our variety in the disciplinary composition of the faculty. This leads to complexity in governance and career milestones, and a multilayered set of conversations about hiring, merit, promotion, and excellence in the field. In some units these challenges lead to a delegated governance model of departmentalization. The rationale for this is that it simplifies procedures by constructing disciplinary silos that feed into the administrative leadership. As with any decision there is a cost-benefit analysis that comes with this path. What we gain in simplicity, we lose in shared and intentional investment in the governance of the school.

The case study presented here is a different model. The University of Washington iSchool has made commitment to the principle of a *faculty of one*. This is a model of shared faculty governance that is decidedly undepartmentalized. Where departments and chairs of departments would take decisions about faculty career, curriculum, and request resource allocations from the Dean, in a faculty of one we have put into place a different structure. We were inspired by Syracuse University, but made it our own unique leadership structure at the University of Washington.

A faculty of one is not split along disciplinary lines. It focuses on the functions of the school and allocates staff and leadership to those functions. Those functions are research, academics, faculty affairs, planning and administration, staff unit leadership (e.g., human resources, advancement, communications, etc.), and faculty representation to administration. The first four of these functions have Assistant or Associate Deans who lead in their respective capacity. The latter two are councils. The first made up of faculty and staff and the second made up of faculty at each rank (i.e., lecturer, assistant professor, associate and full professors).

Further, wide consultation is the *modus operandi* for a faculty of one, both in faculty meetings, and in the committees and councils which constitute a subset of the

faculty. This requires coordination across a growing faculty, approaching 60 core members by 2018.

Key to this structure at the UW is attention on faculty life. In order to allow faculty to focus on research and teaching while at the same time participate fully in a faculty of one, the iSchool has constructed a leadership role for faculty affairs. The Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs is responsible for a joyful faculty life in the school. The Associate Dean works in close collaboration with other leaders to ensure timing, execution, and evaluation of the major considerations of faculty life and governance are established. This includes policy review, managing faculty search with human resources, aiding the Personnel Committee on reappointment, promotion, and tenure cases, and serving as a continuing voice, *ex officio*, to the elected body of the faculty – the Elected Faculty Council, which advises the Dean on resource allocation and represents the faculty to the administration and across the university.

With close to 60 faculty the focus needs to be on a high quality interaction with the school, its procedures, and a clear understanding of the benefits of shared governance. Faculty Affairs serves as this advocate for faculty time and for a continued commitment to shared governance. Balancing the two requires a collaborative mindset, a set of established principles for communication, service, and compliance – both with university regulations (as a public university) and with our own internal norms that support our ethos of a faculty of one.

In the presentation, further details will be provided about the structure, procedures, and culture advanced in University of Washington iSchool's faculty of one, and supported by a functional leadership model, which includes an Associate Dean in faculty affairs that collaborates with many units to advance a high quality of faculty life.