President's Work Group (PWG) on Participatory Governance and Committee Structure – Report and Recommendations to the College Governance Council

MAY 20, 2020
PRESIDENT'S WORK GROUP

President's Work Group

Introduction

Among Skyline College's goals for the 2019-2020 Academic year was for the College to engage in self-reflection and to take a close look at the participatory governance process and the committee structure that underpins it. To that end, the College Governance Committee (CGC) created a workgroup consisting of faculty, staff, and students appointed by the constituency groups, and facilitated by the Interim President and the Dean of PRIE. (See **Appendix A** for membership and charge.) Beginning with an initial meeting November 6, 2019, the President's Workgroup (PWG) solicited direct feedback from campus committee members via a survey, and established the goals identified below.

Overarching Principles

> Skyline's values statement regarding participatory governance states:
> > *We value just, fair, inclusive, and well-understood, transparent governance processes based upon open and honest communication.*

> One of the college's goals is to:
> > *Enhance institutional effectiveness in planning and decision-making processes through cooperative leadership, effective communication and participatory governance.*

> Furthermore, the President's Work Group recognizes that:
> > *Robust participatory governance contributes to Skyline College's ongoing work toward becoming a more student-ready College.*

In keeping with these guidelines, the PWG's goal was to recommend changes that would:

- increase transparency in decision-making;

- streamline the decision-making processes to increase effectiveness and efficiency;

- eliminate duplication and support a sustainable work load;

- increase awareness and understanding of the committee structure;

- increase communication and sharing of information; and through these actions,

- enhance participation in the decision-making process.

Survey of Committee Members

The PWG worked with the Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness (PRIE) office to develop and disseminate a campus-wide survey as a follow-up to the participatory governance survey conducted in December 2018 (**Appendix B**). PRIE administered the survey between January-April 2020, to members of all committees, work groups and task forces listed in the Compendium of Committees. Unlike the 2018 survey, the PWG survey is committee-specific. That is, the questions are specific to a particular committee, and faculty, staff and students received a separate survey link for each committee on which they serve. (See **Appendix C** for PWG survey invitation and instrument and **Appendix D** for a presentation of the survey results.)

- A total of 554 survey invitations were delivered to students, faculty members, classified professionals and administrators who serve on one or more of the 30 committees included in the compendium

- Received 214 valid survey responses (39% response rate)

	# Responses
Administrator	78
Full-time faculty member	61
Classified professional	56
Unknown	11
Student	6
Adjunct faculty member	2

Key survey findings described below include:

1. Respondents expressed overwhelmingly positive perceptions of their committee's contribution to the College mission and strategic goals.

2. Respondents were less positive about the value of the time they spend on committee meetings, and about how effectively the committee uses its time.

3. A number of respondents question whether the committee makes good use of their expertise and skills, and how seriously the committee and/or the College values their input.

4. A considerable proportion of committee members are unclear about their role on the committee, or lack confidence in their understanding of the work of the committee.

5. A large proportion of respondents believe that new members require additional preparation to effectively engage in the work of the committee.

6. Information shared at committee meetings, and decisions or recommendations up for consideration, are not being consistently communicated to the constituent groups that members represent.

President's Work Group

This report includes the aggregate survey results for all committees, and does not provide committee-specific findings, which are intended for the exclusive use of the committees themselves. In addition to informing the work of the PWG, the survey results are meant to be used by the committees to spark deep discussion about the operation, effectiveness and contribution of the committee to the College. Due to the Covid19 Pandemic, the distribution of committee-specific results to the leadership of each committee for dissemination and discussion among the membership has been postponed to Fall 2020.

Key Survey Findings

1. Respondents expressed overwhelmingly positive perceptions of their committee's contribution to the College mission and strategic goals:

   - 88% "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "the work of this committee aligns with the College's Mission-Vision-Values"

   - 85% "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "the work of this committee contributes to achieving the College's strategic goals"

   - 82% "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that "this committee makes a positive difference to the College"

     Respondent comments:

     o *The meetings are typically well-run, efficient, effective and [provide a] relevant review of work flow and policy as it pertains to successful implementation of strategic goals and College MVV.*

     o *This committee is among the most effective in breaking down functional silos at the organization. In addition, this committee serves the principal benefit of collecting, organizing, and evaluating inbound information and instructions from the District, other SMCCD sites/organizations, State, municipal and federal sources.*

2. Respondents were less positive about the value of the time they spend on committee meetings, and about how effectively the committee uses its time:

   - 33% responded with "disagree," "strongly disagree," or "don't know" to the statement "my participation on this committee is a valuable use of my time"

   - 28% believe that their committee spends "too little," or "far too little" meeting time on "action/decision-making"

     Respondent comments:

     o *These meetings are long, and not always productive. Sometimes I feel I could have made better use of my time.*

- o *With the amount of [necessary work] we are seeing through the committee, we are not able to engage (as much as needed) in the deep and meaningful conversations we should be having as an institution.*

- o *There were not many opportunities to be collaborative or focus on projects/tasks.*

- o *We are in the process of re-examining the charge, mission and work of this committee, and I hope that moving forward my participation on this committee will be a valuable use of my time (which is why I checked agree for this current year), as I do not feel that it has been a valuable use of my time in the past.*

3. A number of respondents question whether the committee makes good use of their expertise and skills, and how seriously the committee and/or the College values their input:

- • 17% responded with "disagree," "strongly disagree," or "don't know" to the statement "I have an opportunity to apply my expertise and skills on this committee"

  Respondent comments:

  - o *I'm there because someone from my constituency has to be there. Thankfully, we cancel meetings whenever there isn't much to be discussed. I find it frustrating that members of my own constituency attend without fail, while others consider it OK to skip.*

  - o *Routinely, I felt that my role on the committee was to have a warm body belonging to my constituency in the room so that administration could say that I was there and what they were saying was "discussed." Too frequently, there was more telling and less discussion.*

4. A considerable proportion of committee members are unclear about their role on the committee, or lack confidence in their understanding of the work of their committee:

- • 16% responded with "disagree," "strongly disagree," or "don't know" to the statement "I understand my role and responsibilities on this committee"

- • 15% responded with "disagree," "strongly disagree," or "don't know" to the statement "I have sufficient knowledge of the topics covered during committee meetings to participate effectively"

  Respondent comments:

  - o *I do struggle with the roles of members on the committee...I'm a bit uncertain as to our particular purposes.*

  - o *I think I'm only on this committee as an FYI.*

5. A large proportion of respondents believe that new members require additional preparation to effectively engage in the work of the committee:

    - 29% "disagree," or "strongly disagree," that "this committee provides sufficient training/onboarding for new members."

    - Another 16% "don't know" whether "this committee provides sufficient training/onboarding for new members."

        Respondent comments:

        o *As an adjunct faculty member, I have to conduct a large amount of independent research + collaboration with colleagues to gain sufficient knowledge to understand what is being discussed.*

        o *This is a very important and relevant committee, with little to no onboarding. It's a difficult topic to grasp, especially for students with no higher ed work experience.*

        o *We need to be moving away from committees attracting people who are in the know already and stay on the committee out of longevity; we need to be able to train and onboard new people so that it's not such an issue if some folks retire or have to rotate out. We want to broaden the knowledge base at the college.*

6. Information shared at committee meetings, and decisions or recommendations up for consideration, are not consistently communicated to the constituent groups that members represent:

    - 18% respondents who represent a constituent group reported that only "sometimes" do they "communicate information and/or decisions from committee meetings to my constituent group"

    - Another 12% of respondents say they "rarely" or "never" "communicate information and/or decisions from committee meetings to my constituent group"

        Respondent comments:

        o *I would like to see the division reps consult with their constituents more regularly, and I think having easy to read notes from meetings would help them.*

        o *Bilateral flow of information is communicated "always," when appropriate or valuable. Committee members are judicious in using committee time efficiently and effectively. Not all constituent views merit sustained committee attention. Not all information and/or decision emanating from [Committee X] are relevant to [Group Y].*

        o *It's unclear exactly how, and how often, the constituent group should be consulted or informed.*

o *There is rarely anything substantial to report.*

o *…there was one case where we were asked to present scenarios to our divisions and return with their response, and that was really well-received and went a long way in making campus members feel that they had input. I have hope that this will continue.*

o *To clarify, I take responsibility for the lack of communication, but it's also difficult to find the time in all of our schedules and the engagement from non-members. I ain't tellin', but also no one's askin'.*

Additional respondent comments

The PWG survey included multiple opportunities for entering open-text comments, and at the end asked committee members to "please share your ideas for how this committee can more effectively meet its mission." Below is a sampling of responses to this question:

- *I really enjoy the discussions and topics we address in the committee. What I'm less clear on is how to act on our discussions. We note which areas the college could strengthen to support students, but to whom does this information go to? Who is in a position to implement changes that result from our analyses and recommendations?*

- *We should limit the time people can serve, so that we get fresh ideas and not accumulate a group of negative thinkers.*

- *Require more consistent attendance by separating chronic non-attending members from membership.*

- *When the materials covering topics are provided on the day of the meeting, it does not give members sufficient time to read/study the materials prior to [the meeting, and to] participate effectively.*

- *This committee has been woefully underutilized. It CAN be extremely useful; however, committee leadership has been underwhelming, for sure.*

- *This committee does not need to exist.*

- *A lot of what the committee is charged with has been activated, and now there is disconnect between the committee's mission and the sustained work that is a result of the committee; i.e., committee wants to weigh in on day to day operations it enacted but should not oversee.*

Recommendations to CGC

1. Adopt a standard committee template (**Appendix E**) to be included in a new Compendium.

    Each committee should review and update its responsibilities/charge during Fall 2020, and update the compendium description considering the following factors:

    • How the work of the Committee contributes to making the College more student-ready

    • Membership and length of terms (Review membership with goal of limiting members to minimum required to maintain participatory representation while meeting committee charge and supporting a sustainable workload for members)

    • Note estimating member time commitment beyond regular meeting times, if any

2. Adopt a standard template for meeting minutes (**Appendix F**), to be used by all standing committees for meeting minutes that are publically posted.

    All standing committees are required to keep notes using the minutes template and, once minutes have been approved, to post to the committee page on the Skyline College website (committees may keep another set of internal notes if desired.)

3. Urge each committee to design appropriate onboarding and/or mentoring support for new members to be offered at the start of each academic year.

4. Instruct participatory governance committees that report up to CGC to post or enact by-laws that include a clear process for reaching a decision on making recommendations to the CGC.

5. Agree that constituent committees (Academic Senate, Classified Senate, and Associated Students) and Management Council will create a mechanism for its representatives to participatory governance committees to report on pertinent information in a timely manner.

    The goal is to ensure transparency and opportunity for comment as policy and other decisions make their way through the participatory governance process. It is up to each constituent committee to determine the most appropriate way to achieve this goal for its members.

6. Convene a Participatory Governance/Committees Town Hall or Flex Day session in during Fall 2020 to allow for information sharing and discussion of the PWG's tentative recommendations listed below.

7. Allow the work of the PWG to continue during Academic Year 2020-2021, with a final report and recommendations to the CGC due in early Spring 2021.

Recommendations for Further Discussion with College Community in Fall 2020

The desire for a more efficient and more transparent committee structure is widely shared among members of the campus community, and discussions on this and on participatory governance more generally, take place among numerous groups and in various settings. The PWG recognizes that its membership, while representative of the College's constituent groups, cannot voice all viewpoints and is not aware of all circumstances. With this in mind, the PWG has determined that the more impactful recommendations under consideration must be opened to public discussion to allow for broader community input before they may be brought to the CGC for recommendation to the College President.

Following are the tentative recommendations for further review and discussion:

1. Reorganize the committee structure creating clear relationships among committees and subcommittees, and distinguishing Work Groups, Task Forces, Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees.

2. Define criteria and process for creating, combining and disbanding committees.

3. Disband committees that have completed its charge or may no longer be needed.

4. Consider merging of committees with overlapping responsibilities/charges.

5. Before creating additional standing committees or work groups, attempt to redefine the scope of existing committees and groups to incorporate the responsibilities of the proposed committee

6. Reevaluate the composition (leadership and membership) of each committee reporting up to the CGC, in order to improve efficiency and help create a more sustainable workload for all.

7. Update and clarify the Participatory Governance Decision Matrix (last updated in 2012, **Appendix G**) to create greater transparency and understanding of the participatory governance process.

8. Require that each Standing Committee and Constituent Committee produce an annual report summarizing committee decisions and progress toward the committee charge, such that community members and accrediting bodies may easily locate important committee actions.

Respectfully submitted by the members of the PWG on May 20, 2020.