

Public Higher Education Shared Governance Bill

Over 26 percent of public universities in 13 states have faculty representation on their board. Shared governance guarantees that key stakeholders, and those most knowledgeable about the university operations, can help guide it. For personnel issues boards have specific protocols for executive session to avoid conflicts of interest.

This bill adds faculty, staff, and student representation to the UVM and VSCS Boards of Trustees to support and democratize governance by the universities most experienced and knowledgeable stakeholders.

Proposed Board Structures	VSCS	UVM
Appointed by the Governor	3 (decrease of 2)	3
Student Trustees	3 (increase of 2 2ug/1g?)	3 (increase of 1)
Faculty	4 (new)	4 (new)
Staff	4 (new)	4 (new)
Total	23 (increase of 8)	34 (increase of 9)

Term Limits: 8 years

Vermont is experiencing a crisis in public higher education. After years of underfunding public higher education, the people of Vermont are at a crossroads. In April 2020, the VSC administration threatened to close three of its residential campuses and UVM faculty and staff faced significant layoffs and threats of salary cuts. First and foremost, the state needs to adequately fund public higher education in Vermont so that our Vermont students have an affordable option. Public higher education is an economic engine for the state. This is especially important at a time when Vermont is starving for skilled workers. Students who attend one of the public colleges are more likely to stay, live, work, buy homes, and raise their children in Vermont. We need to transform public higher education in Vermont to best serve the interests of all the state's population. One way this transformation can occur is by ensuring that everyone has a seat at the table. This is a change that costs the state nothing but has far reaching implications.

Many university systems across the country are engaged in this debate about shared governance. The top down, corporate model of higher education that now dominates public higher education does not serve the students or the public good of the state. It is critical that as UVM and the VSCS goes through this transformation, that the interests of all our students and our state be represented. We believe this goal is best achieved by having all constituencies at the policy making table.

To protect and preserve shared governance Vermont faculty and staff need and deserve voice in university governance, they need to be on the Board of Trustees.



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Benefits of Shared Governance

- The Board of Trustees (BoT) are not on campus and lacks the day-to-day perspective of campus life.
- There needs to be people who have experience on campus on the BoT. Campus reports come from the administration whose jobs depend on being successful. They tend to present a rosy representation of campus status rather than a truthful one.
- Very few Trustees have higher education experience.
- Student-facing people on the board will inform decisions and reduce changes that have unforeseen consequences.

Too often the VSCS and UVM administrations rely on outside experts while overlooking the expertise of those who work in the institutions.

- Outside experts are costly: NCHEMS (National Corporation for Higher Education Management Systems) charged approximately \$250,000 to compile their report on the future of the VSCS. The RPK group which was hired to make recommendations about academic consolidation cost \$195,000.
- UVM has a history of hiring outside consultants who frequently have no understanding of the needs of Vermont. The Huron Group has contracted with the UVM administration for \$3.9 million over the past 5 years. The Administration has refused to provide information current on the consulting services provided despite a FOIA request. We believe the contract involves a restructuring of UVM.
- Inside experts in the staff and faculty understand the day-to-day workings of colleges that these outside experts do not. Without incorporating this expertise, the result could be costly and detrimental to the system. This expertise should be utilized before hiring costly outsiders.
- The Board of Trustees should be consulting with inside experts in a more meaningful way. This would naturally occur if they were on the BoT.
When the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) called for greater communication between faculty and governing bodies in universities they stated that currently, “communication between faculty and board members, when it occurs at all, tends to be ritualized, infrequent, and limited to specific agenda items” (p. 1, 2014). It is also important to have the voices of staff members on the board as well. Student representation has been on the board for years. It is important that the board hear from all constituencies. To not hear from all people makes the board more ceremonial than effective. It also means the board is making decisions without full understanding of what is happening on the campuses, sometimes with disastrous results. Shared governance becomes a platitude rather than a reality.
- The VSCS’s previous chancellor’s proposal to close NVU (Lyndon and Johnson campuses) and VTC (Randolph) is an excellent example of this.
- Similarly, UVM’s closure of its childcare center and other programs further exacerbated the problem in a region that already experiences a shortage of childcare.

We need to hold our institutions of public higher education accountable to the Vermont families who rely on them.