

My name is Linda Olson, I have been a faculty member at Castleton University for 27 years and I am the Vice President of Higher Education for the American Federation of Teachers Vermont. AFT VT represents over 3000 faculty and staff at the VSC and UVM as well as thousands of nurses working on the front lines of this pandemic. Thank you for this opportunity to speak in favor of Senate Bill 248 and I am asking that you vote this out of committee. Recent and recurring events within the administration of the VSCS indicate that the existing governance model would be greatly enhanced with direct and consequential communication between the trustees and members of the faculty and the staff.

The fundamental premise for a shared governance model to succeed in higher education requires students, staff, faculty, administrative team, and trustees to participate in the decision-making process of an institution. In a shared governance model these constituents enjoy a sense of responsibility for, and ownership of, their institution. According to the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges shared governance strengthens leadership and decision-making, but to be effective and sustained there needs to be an atmosphere of mutual “trust, collaboration, communication, transparency, inclusiveness, honesty, and integrity”. Such an atmosphere does not currently exist in the VSCS, but for the well-being of our institutions we need to foster one and a system of shared governance would help that process.

Benefits of Shared Governance:

- The Board of Trustees (BoT) are not on campus and lack the day-to-day perspective of campus life. Adding staff, faculty, and students would contribute this perspective.
- Very few Trustees have higher education experience.
- Student-facing people on the board will inform decisions and reduce changes that have unforeseen consequences.
- The trend of the Chancellor’s Office and the Board of Trustees has to hire outside experts rather than asking campus experts. 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. Campus experts in the staff and faculty understand the day-to-day workings of colleges that these outside experts do not and the board should be consulting with campus experts in a more meaningful way. This would 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). 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. An example of this is that public comment is allowed at these meetings, but only at the end after all the decisions are made. This is what I mean when I say shared governance right now is ceremonial rather than effective.

Shared governance would enable the board to create institutions that can do what we have been charged by the legislature to do, work for the good of Vermont. Thank you again for this opportunity to speak.

Linda Olson
Middletown Springs
802-353-1965
Linda.olson10@gmail.com

Figure 6. Model of shared governance for the Vermont State University.

The staff and faculty Senate will include faculty and staff from all three campus hubs and their associated community college sites. The Senate will work with the faculty, staff, and students from across the system, partnering with the Executive Team (President and Deans) and the Board of Trustees (Governing Board) for operational and curricular decision making and budgetary approval. The inclusion of all the partners in carrying out important decisions will assure a broad and integrated perspective of the needs of the institution as well as increasing success of implementation