

PRESIDENTS AND THEIR CONSTITUENTS: LEADING FINANCIAL TURNAROUND IN
AN ENVIRONMENT OF SHARED GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

PRESIDENTS AND THEIR CONSTITUENTS: LEADING FINANCIAL TURNAROUND IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF SHARED GOVERNANCE

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This study focused on presidents of small, private, tuition-dependent institutions who led the institution through a financial turnaround. The purpose of the study was to explore the ways presidents engaged with the key stakeholders of shared governance—the faculty and the board—in implementing the turnaround process and the degree to which these presidents leveraged hard and soft power in pursuing their change agenda. Through a qualitative case study of three institutions, this study investigated the ways each president led a financial turnaround and the manner in which they leveraged power and engaged their stakeholders in the process. The institutions in the study were selected for being similarly sized—fewer than 3,000 students—and undergoing a financial turnaround after the 2008 financial crisis but before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. At each institution, the president who led the turnaround remains the president today. At each institution, the financial turnaround has been maintained for an extended period and shows signs of a long-term positive trajectory. Data for this study were gathered primarily through participant interviews as well as through document analysis.

The study found that in leading a financial turnaround, presidents must successfully engage both their faculty and the board, but that much of this engagement takes place outside of the formal structures of shared governance. Successful presidents invested significant time to build personal relationships with key constituents, which enabled them to use soft power most of the time; they judiciously chose occasions to leverage their structural hard power to pursue their

change agenda. These presidents carefully crafted a narrative around change and helped key stakeholders to see their own role in the story of the college's transformation. The study found that while formal faculty governance did not have a strong role in the agenda to achieve financial turnaround, it could play an important part in institutionalizing that change and integrating it into the narrative and identity of the college.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Many small, private colleges in the United States are facing tremendous financial stress driven by changing demographics and enrollment pressures. “Tuition dependent” colleges are defined as those whose tuition makes up 60% or more of their revenue (Shewey, 2019). The term applies to an increasing number of small, private institutions whose tuition may constitute up to 80 or even 90% of total revenue (Sapiro, 2019). At the same time, demographic shifts have resulted in fewer college-aged students choosing to attend college, a problem that will be magnified when the number of traditional college-aged students in the United States drops by 15% between 2025–2029 (Grawe, 2018). While few colleges reach the stage of financial exigency that forces them to close, many are operating in unsustainable conditions. *Inside Higher Ed’s* 2022 survey of business officers revealed that more than 50% of surveyed institutions would have had a negative operating budget in 2021–2022 without federal COVID-19 recovery aid (Jaschik & Lederman, 2022, Slide 8).

Addressing this problem requires the participation and input of multiple stakeholders at the college, including the board, the administration, and the faculty. Institutions of higher education are generally organized and governed around the principle of shared governance, a management structure that includes the division of power and authority between the board of trustees, the faculty, and the administration (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 1966; Apkarian et al., 2014; Birnbaum, 1988; Eckel & Kezar, 2016). This notion of shared decision-making is particularly strong at small colleges (Birnbaum, 1988; Bowen & Tobin, 2015a; Kaplan, 2004; Minor, 2004).

Decisions made by these groups have institutional repercussions and impact a larger audience, including students, employees, parents, alumni, and the local community. The process

of forming and executing a plan of action to stabilize a financial downturn is a complex one in this type of a college because stakeholders expect to be involved (Bowen & Tobin, 2015b; Martin & Samels, 2009). The tactics necessary to accomplish a financial turnaround in small colleges may be controversial and important stakeholders may disagree about what should be done. Financial turnarounds require effective leadership (Martin & Samels, 2009; Middleton, 2009; Sapiro, 2019). The president is pivotal to this process; they can reach and influence all key stakeholders and have a role interacting with and influencing various stakeholder groups. The objective of this study is to explore the role of the president in facilitating the process of a successful financial turnaround in the context of shared governance.

The President

The role of the president is especially crucial at small, private, tuition-dependent colleges that are often operating on a thin margin of financial viability. The president manages the day-to-day operations of the campus and creates and communicates a vision for the future. This person is responsible for making sure that the institution has the financial resources required to function effectively. To this end, the president is often the lead entrepreneur of the university (Eckel & Kezar, 2016; Fisher & Koch, 2004). They spend much of their time with external constituencies, fundraising with alumni and donors and lobbying with legislators and grant-funding entities. They represent the college as its chief advocate, facilitating partnerships to secure the recognition and resources the institution needs to thrive. The president is the spokesperson of the university who must “represent the institution to its many publics” (AAUP, 1966, p. 138) with the authority delegated down to them by the board (Eckel & Trower, 2019) and up from the faculty (AAUP, 1966; Bowen & Tobin, 2015b). The presidents of these institutions must be tireless advocates and unflagging innovators. They must simultaneously be successful at

increasing revenue, decreasing expenses, creating operating efficiencies, and defining their institutions in the competitive marketplace to prospective students (Martin & Samels, 2009).

Shared Governance

In addition to the financial and market constraints presidents of small, private, tuition-dependent colleges face, they must also lead within a system of shared governance, which distributes power across multiple stakeholder groups. Shared governance, a system that distributes power between the faculty, the board, and the administration, requires significant cooperation and compromise between these entities for a decision, initiative, or change to move forward (Apkarian et al., 2014). Shared governance is applauded for producing strong, long-lasting decisions that benefit from multiple viewpoints, deliberation, and the careful vetting of ideas (Birnbaum, 1988). The system is criticized for being unwieldy and slow, requiring too much deliberation, and being subject to starts and stops at the whim of a relatively small number of participants (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a; Collis, 2004; Hamilton, 1999).

As a system, shared governance reflects the “inescapable interdependence among governing board, administration, faculty, students, and others” (AAUP, 1966, p. 2). The most common formal stakeholders—trustees, the president, and faculty—each have individual responsibilities but must also act collaboratively to advance institutional interests. In the AAUP’s (1966) idealized version of shared governance, the board of trustees has legal and fiduciary responsibility for the college, the faculty provide the content and subject matter expertise, the administration oversees the day-to-day business functions of the institution, and in the vast areas where these authorities overlap all bodies are consulted in decision-making.

The AAUP (1966) statement defines the role of the board as managing the reputation and resources of the institution and ensuring its proper management through the selection and hiring

of key personnel, such as the president. The board's purview generally includes mission and strategy, performance assessment, selection of the president, stewarding of finances, and representing the institution to external stakeholders (Eckel & Kezar, 2016). The role of the administration, defined by AAUP as the president, is to operate the institution through procedures that "conform to the policy established by the governing board and to the standards of sound academic practice" (AAUP, 1966, p. 138). Essentially, the administration must oversee the non-academic business of the institution, especially the management of resources, but must do so both in line with the instruction of the board and with respect to the academic direction of the faculty. The faculty are acknowledged as the producers of knowledge and education, which is the product of the university (Mintzberg, 1993, Chapter 10; Morphey, 1999). As such, their role in shared governance includes authority over "such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process" (AAUP, 1966, p. 139). The faculty determine what will be taught, how it will be taught, and who will teach it, essentially defining the core of the institution and the education it offers.

The version of shared governance articulated by the AAUP does not reflect the myriad variations of shared governance that are practiced at individual campuses. Each institution's articulation of shared governance reflects their own culture, priorities, and power dynamics, and it is unique to their campus (Birnbaum, 1988). The values of a campus community are expressed both in the model of shared governance they adopt and the way they organize their formal and informal governance structures (Minor, 2003). While some campuses rely heavily on formal structures of governance like a faculty senate, others may have a more complex, nuanced approach to feedback and idea sharing with working groups, open forums, or standing

committees that work alongside of or parallel to formal senates. This variation impacts both how shared governance will operate and how a president can most effectively interact with both these formal and informal structures to effect change.

Role of President in Shared Governance

The president occupies a unique role in shared governance, sitting at the intersection of the board, the faculty, and the administration and often serving as a formal member of each (Apkarian et al., 2014). As such, they are uniquely positioned not only to influence each of the three bodies individually but also to bring them together, find common ground, and facilitate compromise. The AAUP's 1966 Statement on Shared Governance affirms the president's role as a mediator in shared governance, and this duty has been articulated by many scholars subsequently (Benjamin et al., 1993; Birnbaum, 1992a; Bowen & Tobin, 2015a; Fisher & Koch, 2004). The president is the conduit through which the board's decisions pass to the campus community to be carried out (AAUP, 1966; Eckel & Kezar, 2016). However, the lines of influence go both ways, as the president also bears the responsibility to "ensure that faculty views, including dissenting views, are presented to the board" (AAUP, 1966, p. 138). The president's function is in many ways that of a go-between, connecting the faculty and the board in communication with one another. This is an especially critical task since "boards have ultimate responsibility in most higher education institutions and typically have the lowest level of interaction with faculty members" (Apkarian et al., 2014, p. 156). Given their vastly different vantage points, it makes sense that "tensions between trustees and faculty are not new" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 5). Without the president helping to translate, provide meaning, and facilitate communication between these two bodies, it is easy for the board and the faculty to end

up at loggerheads, an environment that can lead to gridlock and an inability to implement necessary initiatives.

The primary criticism of shared governance is its inefficiency resulting from its values of consultation and consensus-building and therefore its proclivity to favor the status quo (Benjamin et al., 1993; Collis, 2004; Hamilton, 1999; Keller, 2004). This creates problems for presidential leadership. At its core, the tension of shared governance is that there are “different and competing sources of influence where various stakeholders seek to exert leadership” (Eckel & Kezar, 2016) both over the areas where they have direct control but also over the expansive landscape of decisions that do not fall neatly into one body’s sphere of authority. Presidents are expected to lead, but at the same time have limited authority (Birnbaum, 1992a).

Because direct authority is limited, there is a case to be made that helping the trustees and faculty make sense of the challenges and opportunities so that they can reach points of consensus is a key function of the presidency. The president has specific means at their disposal. One set, which Birnbaum (2004) terms “hard power” are inherent to the president because of their title and formal structural role in the organization. However, Birnbaum (2004) argues that the true value of the president is in their “soft power” (p. 12), which is about creating and perpetuating the narrative of the college and influencing the behavior of key stakeholders both individually and as a group. Birnbaum (1992a) characterizes the soft power role of the president as “constantly reminding people of the values they cherish and helping them act in ways consistent with their beliefs” (p. xi). It is not the president’s official authority but their skill in “shaping interpretation and meaning” that “allows presidents influence across numerous stakeholders” (Eckel & Kezar, 2016, p. 163). By embracing soft power, the position of the president can be

used to facilitate communication and foster a sense of fairness, due process, and distributed authority on campus.

The dual notions of hard and soft power mean that the president can successfully progress a leadership agenda both within the formal faculty senate and outside the formal structures with faculty and others outside this body. Sharing ideas and asking for feedback from faculty known to be influential on campus may do more to secure campus buy-in and achieve a desired outcome than explaining at a faculty meeting that the president has the authority to make this change unilaterally. The ways in which a president chooses to utilize their authority, both hard and soft, may depend on a variety of factors, including the campus's culture of shared governance, the campus's position and challenges, the expectation of campus stakeholders, and the personality traits of the individual president. The actual practice and execution of shared governance depends dramatically on the institution and its culture, including the financial position of the institution (Benjamin et al., 1993; Morpew, 1999; Pierce, 2014), the interest of the faculty in participation (Minor, 2004; Kaplan, 2004; Williams et al., 1987), the culture and customs of an institution (Birnbaum, 1992a), and the body's bargaining power in the higher education market at that time (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a). Understanding how a president leads within the context of shared governance first requires learning what shared governance means at that institution, how it operates, and how power is distributed.

Leading a Financial Turnaround

The context of shared governance is particularly challenging for presidents of institutions facing financial pressures where the necessary solutions may require potentially unpopular or contentious decisions. These might include cuts to personnel, academic programs, and other elements held dear by campus constituents as well as new initiatives that require the

community's trust, buy-in, and a new financial investment (MacTaggart, 2007). The process almost always includes a combination of balancing the budget, deciding on an area of focus, and improving quality in that chosen area.

The president's ability to lead through hard and soft power is especially critical when significant, important, difficult change is needed as in the case of financial crisis, a status that is increasingly common for institutions that operate on the margin. In *The College Stress Test*, Baldrige et al. (2020) argue that 10% of institutions face substantial market risk and are in danger of closing, and an additional 30% must make changes to be sustainable. The institutions that are most at financial risk are those addressed in this study, colleges that are small, private, and tuition-driven (Baldrige et al., 2020). As it happens, the faculty in these small, private institutions are also the most likely to be engaged and have high expectations for faculty involvement in shared governance (Kaplan, 2004; Minor, 2004). These faculty place a high value on their role in shared governance, and so we can expect to see robust systems for faculty governance and consultation. At the same time, Morpew (1999) argues that financial pressure at an institution can result in a decreased commitment to shared governance, specifically when it comes to faculty consultation. The stakes for the college are high, and the president is under pressure to act with expedience; to successfully oversee financial turnaround in these conditions, they must facilitate constructive shared governance in a way that produces long-lasting, high-quality results that are seen as legitimate by the college community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to understand how presidents at small, private, tuition-dependent colleges led financial turnaround at their institutions and did this within the context of shared governance. In an environment where many colleges are failing to balance their budgets,

these institutions managed to reverse the trend and instead improved their position, putting their college on more secure financial ground. The president did this in an environment where they presumably could not unilaterally dictate change but rather had to work within a system of distributed power and multiple stakeholders. The primary research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do presidents of tuition-dependent, private colleges lead financial turnarounds in a context of shared governance?
2. In what ways do presidents engage key shared governance stakeholders—faculty and boards—in implementing financial turnaround processes? How do they interact with faculty in general and formal faculty shared governance? How do they interact with the board?
3. In what ways do presidents leverage hard or soft power in working within the framework of shared governance?

Significance of the Study

By studying the president's leadership during financial turnaround at small, private colleges and the way they choose to utilize their authority within the structure of shared governance, we can better understand how presidents can positively lead their institution through financial strain or other crises. The experiences of the institutions in this study can offer a valuable perspective for current and aspiring presidents, trustees, faculty leaders, and others interested in the intersection of presidential leadership and shared governance. Birnbaum's 1992 study *How Academic Leadership Works: Understanding Success and Failure in the College Presidency* analyzes the ways presidents can positively influence their colleges. The study examines longitudinal data from 32 institutions over 5 years collected by the Institutional

Leadership Project (ILP). Birnbaum's objective is to investigate "institutional renewal" and the way "college presidents influence this process of renewal" to have a lasting positive impact on their institution (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. xi). Institutional renewal is a broader, more encompassing, and ambitious objective than financial turnaround, but the role of the president may have important overlaps in each. The focus of this study is specific to financial turnaround but may have larger implications for how presidents can affect other types of change or renewal in the context of shared governance.

Understanding the ways presidents lead financial turnaround has never been more relevant than in today's climate of financial turmoil and college closure, especially at small, private, tuition-dependent institutions. The cases in this study may be useful in charting a course for presidents, trustees, and faculty leaders who find their college in a state of financial distress and in need of a financial recovery plan. This study does not address the specific financial strategies the institution employed but rather the way the president went about leading that strategy with the board and faculty leadership. As such, the cases and lessons we can extract are relevant to institutions regardless of their financial strategy and perhaps even to colleges trying to undergo a different type of significant change or renewal.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to understand the role of presidents at private colleges and how they work with shared governance in times of financial turnaround. The following sections explore the background and models of shared governance as a structure, the ways presidents use different sources of power to lead change within that structure, and the intersection of authority and decision-making on a college campus. This chapter seeks to provide context about the governing structure of the types of institutions in the study and the challenges they face both in their financial and resource constraints and in their opportunities to effect change to address those constraints.

The Evolution of Shared Governance

The first organized and systematic demands for shared governance by faculty was the 1915 founding declaration of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). This document focused on securing the right of academic freedom for faculty in the areas of research, teaching and “extra-mural utterance and action” (Wilson, 2016, p. 2). Prior to this time, there were examples of faculty at individual institutions that secured authority over topics like student conduct and curriculum, such as at Harvard in the 1820s (Morphew, 1999) and at the University of Michigan in the 1850s (Birnbaum, 2004), but these concessions were localized and did not confer an expectation of these rights on faculty at other institutions. In general, colleges were instead managed by strong presidents and the board who wielded “exclusive authority over the operations of the college” (Morphew, 1999, p. 73). The faculty were hired to do the work of teaching but had limited autonomy over the topics they taught and researched and could be dismissed for sharing opinions counter to those of the institution. The growth during this time of the professor’s purview to include scientific research rather than just the teaching of

undergraduates strengthened the faculty's bargaining position. The demands of the 1915 declaration were largely accepted because there was a shortage of qualified research professors at the time, creating market pressure and the need to cede this requested authority (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a). It is noteworthy that the original motivator for faculty to organize and exert their collective bargaining power was academic freedom, a topic that continues to be an important defense for shared governance in the modern era (Birnbaum, 2004; Gerber, 2001).

The modern basis for shared governance models in the United States stems from the AAUP's 1966 "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities." This statement was negotiated and endorsed not only by the AAUP but also by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). The stated objective of the document was the "clarification of the respective roles of governing boards, faculties, and administrations" (AAUP, 1966, p. 135), but it accomplished a great deal more in securing the rights of faculty in institutional decision-making. The statement created normative standards about which body had control over which areas of responsibility, and it then identified three additional areas where all bodies should be consulted: long-range planning, the college's physical plant, and budgeting (AAUP, 1966). Even though the statement did not give faculty direct authority over these latter areas, the normalization of faculty involvement on these topics broadened the rights of faculty to consult on a much wider array of decisions than had previously been common (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a). As in 1915, timing proved to be important to the faculty's bargaining position as the 1960s saw a shortage of qualified faculty to teach the swell of students entering college because of the baby boom and increased college participation rates (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a).

Besides setting out the topics and areas that are the purview and responsibility of each group, the AAUP statement also established which groups are and are not formally involved in shared governance. The statement asserts that the groups holding an official role in shared governance are the board of trustees, the faculty, and the administration as represented by the president (AAUP, 1966). Other key stakeholders, namely students, alumni, and governmental and external groups are not included and are therefore understood to be constituents rather than formal governing entities. This is a critical definition as it establishes who has an official role in shared governance and who are considered external constituencies.

This distinction does not downplay the influence of these key external stakeholders. On the contrary, “these groups articulate their interests in many different ways, bringing pressure on the decision-making process from any number of angles and using power and force whenever it is available and necessary” (Baldrige, 1971, p. 20). Since Baldrige’s writing in the 1970s, many other scholars have reiterated the power that non-governing constituents have on the workings of governance and the way this adds complexity to an already complicated system (Burgan, 2004; Keller, 2004). Benjamin et al. (1993) argue that these groups not only hold significant sway but may also “reduce the real options open to administrators and force them to pursue particular paths” (p. 28). This is especially true for institutions like those in this study contemplating dramatic and transformational changes that will impact all constituent groups. The fact that these groups have such significant influence over the faculty, administration, and the board adds a layer of complexity to governance and creates what Baldrige (1971) refers to as a “politicized” institution, one in which all eventual decisions are “forged out of the competing claims of multiple groups” (p. 20). Though these external constituencies do not vote on budgets or create curriculum policies, it is impossible to understand the actions of the board,

administration, and faculty without considering the role of these external stakeholders. Alumni, students, and parents are, in effect, the university's clients or customers, and so all actions and activities are undertaken with their reactions in mind.

Shared Governance: In Search of Definition and Structure

As addressed in the previous chapter, the AAUP statement defines the role of the governing groups in a standardized way. The board manages the reputation and resources of the institution and ensures its proper management through the selection and hiring of key personnel, such as the president (AAUP, 1966). The administration, led by the president, oversees the non-academic business of the institution, especially the management of resources, both in line with the instruction of the board and with respect to the academic direction of the faculty. The faculty produce knowledge and teaching, the key product of the university, and have authority over the subjects that will be covered and the way they will be taught. The faculty negotiate with one another and then express their collective will through faculty governance, models for which are extremely diverse and vary greatly from one institution to another.

Within the formal shared governance operation, the roles of each of the three groups—the board, faculty, and administration—have enormous swaths of overlap and ambiguity (Apkarian et al., 2014; Eckel & Kezar, 2016). As a result, the way shared governance is practiced will vary dramatically at every institution (Birnbaum, 1992a). What this power sharing looks like in practice is unique to each campus and many scholars have written about the disagreements that arise because of competing ideas about how shared governance should be executed (Hamilton, 1999; Keller, 2004; Tierney, 2004). Specifically, there is controversy about the appropriate scope of influence and authority for each body (Minor, 2003). One school of thought establishes that empowering and involving the faculty as decision-making partners in

nearly all matters strengthens the institution and leads to more effective governance (AAUP, 1966; Birnbaum, 2004; Eckel & Kezar, 2016). In contrast, Bowen and Tobin (2015a) make the case that effective shared governance requires limiting the purview of faculty governance to specific arenas; namely, subjects where their experience and background give them an advantage in decision-making. This system allows administrators and the board to manage the broader direction of the institution and make informed, pragmatic operational decisions without having to achieve buy-in or agreement from the faculty.

This fundamental dispute about what shared governance entails can result in gridlock and “many campuses experience strained decision-making as a result of competing interpretations of the meaning and process” (Minor, 2004, p. 130). Minor (2003) lamented that while many scholars had written about the problem of definitions in shared governance, none had studied it in an empirical manner. To remedy this, he conducted a survey of more than 2,000 faculty members, faculty senate leaders, and academic vice presidents at a variety of institutional types and sizes and then followed up in an interview with a subset of respondents. He used the language and sentiments they expressed to craft three definitions of shared governance, specifically regarding the role of faculty.

Minor’s results yielded three distinct interpretations of shared governance: *fully collaborative*, *stratified decision-making*, and *consultative* (Minor, 2003; Minor, 2004). “Fully collaborative,” a model described by 48% of survey respondents, includes “constant consultation between all internal constituencies on all policies and procedure issues” (Minor, 2004, p. 131). This model most closely resembles the normative ideal of shared governance described in the AAUP statement, and it is plausible that Birnbaum (2004) would also endorse this definition.

“Stratified decision-making” is distributed, rather than shared, authority in which the constituency that is best suited to make the decision has the power to do so. This model, supported by 20% of respondents, “draws clear lines of decision-making authority with minimal influence from other constituency groups except under unusual circumstances” (Minor, 2004, p. 131). This model is similar to the one described by Bowen and Tobin (2015a) who are adamant that they are not trying to cut faculty out of governance but are instead focusing the attention of faculty and faculty governance on areas where they can be most productive and away from areas where a small faction of faculty can halt critical progress. The “consultative” model, ascribed to by 32% of respondents, gives the president and administration the power to make “the majority of decisions ... with the expectation that they take into consideration the input of campus stakeholders” (Minor, 2004, p. 132). While in this model the president confers regularly with faculty and other constituents, the model differs from fully collaborative because the president has no obligation to act on these faculty recommendations so long as “a clear rationale is provided by the decisionmakers” (p. 132) for their eventual choices.

Rather than trying to determine the relative merits of each model in comparison with the others, it seems more useful to acknowledge that each of these models could work effectively provided there is an understanding and an acceptance of the model by the participants. The culture of governance at an individual campus is “organic, not mechanical. It is not designed as much as it evolves” (Birnbaum, 2004, p. 24), and it must operate flexibly to meet the needs of the community it serves. This, in turn, means that the president must approach their work with similar curiosity, flexibility, and the willingness to adapt to meet the needs, desires, and culture of the individual institution they lead. Like governance structures, they cannot take a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach to campus leadership (Birnbaum, 1992a; Fisher & Koch, 2004).

Acknowledging that even arriving at a common definition of shared governance is fraught, the following section addresses several other key challenges to the operation of shared governance and how these might impact a president's execution of their duties.

The Challenges of Shared Governance

Efficiency

Shared governance has been criticized for being inefficient as a system because of its requirement of consultation and consensus-building and therefore its proclivity to favor the status quo (Benjamin et al., 1993; Collis, 2004; Hamilton, 1999; Keller, 2004). Hamilton (1999) articulates the problem clearly: most boards are focused on the market pressures of enrollment, tuition costs, and the threat of competition. They perceive faculty governance to be “so cumbersome that timely decisions are difficult to make and small blocking factions are often able to impede making any decision at all” (Hamilton, 1999, p. 24). Bowen and Tobin (2015b) lodge a similar complaint about the danger of allowing faculty governance, especially a small minority of naysayers, to prevent the administration from taking action that is necessary for the institution's progress.

These criticisms are largely focused on the speed of decision-making and the inability to take swift action even when the situation demands it. Birnbaum (2004) disputes these criticisms, arguing instead that existing governance structures have been responsive to changing pressures on higher education and, more importantly, have produced quality decisions that last because they have the support of the affected parties. He maintains that “the greatest danger to higher education may be not that decisions are made too slowly because of the drag of consultation, but that they are made too swiftly and without regard for institutional core values” (Birnbaum, 2004, p. 6). Birnbaum makes a strong defense of shared governance's overall efficiency, but this does

not diminish the challenge presidents face when trying to get an action through the complex structure and politics of faculty government.

Effectiveness

Birnbaum's arguments in support of shared governance focus on the quality, effectiveness, and longevity of the decisions reached through this collaborative process. Other scholars dispute this, pointing to the challenges that shared governance can pose in developing effective, workable solutions. Hamilton (1999) notes that when a decision is finally reached through faculty governance, it often does not address the problem, both because it was reached by consensus and because "faculty governance tends to be impervious to the bottom line" (p. 24). The challenge of reaching effective decisions is particularly noticeable in times of financial distress. When financial pressures require swift and decisive action, institutions must devise a strategy and choose where they will focus their limited time, personnel, and resources to carve out a space where they can be successful (Martin, 2017). If the institution avoids setting strategy and selecting priorities, instead subjecting all areas to increasingly anemic funding, "the perverse effects of across-the-board cuts become clear and salient enough to persuade most participants in the governance system that another method of resource allocation is needed" (Benjamin et al., 1993, p. 28).

Making effective decisions in any governance structure requires setting and adhering to priorities. Selecting priorities definitionally entails moving resources toward some activities and away from other activities that may be seen by faculty or other constituents as having had equal merit. In a structure where consensus and faculty participation in decision-making is highly valued, if administrators or the board try to "establish priorities and implement selective cuts in academic programs, they are vulnerable to criticism" (Benjamin et al., 1993, p. 30). Morpew

(1999) expresses concurring sentiments from the perspective of the faculty, writing that when administrators, in an effort to make effective decisions, act on matters that affect the faculty without proper consultation with faculty governance, they “demonstrate to the campus community that shared governance ideals may sometimes be set aside or ignored by the campus administration” (p.77).

It is this conundrum that many presidents of small, private institutions find themselves in today, especially if they are suffering one or more of the trials of decreased enrollment, a limited endowment, and a rapidly increasing tuition discount rate (Baldrige et al., 2020). Regardless of which of Minor’s models of shared governance a campus has adopted, the president is challenged to collaboratively include faculty in the painful process of cutting programs, faculty, and resources while making effective decisions. This is especially true if the faculty are focused solely on academic quality, assuming that the “availability of resources will somehow take care of itself” (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a, p. 177). This commonly puts the faculty senate at odds with the president and administration and is one argument for Bowen and Tobin’s position that faculty authority in governance should be confined to arenas appropriate for their expertise, ensuring that decisions can be made effectively and efficiently.

Faculty Participation

Calling into question not only the effectiveness but the very legitimacy of shared governance is the issue of faculty engagement. While faculty participate in shared governance through a variety of structures, the most common is the faculty senate (Minor, 2004). The strength and power of faculty senates vary tremendously across institutions and whereas in “some cases they have juridical authority over areas of faculty welfare, curriculum, and educational policy; in other cases they may be nearly moribund” (Apkarian et al., 2014, p. 157).

Interest in participating in the faculty senate varies substantially, Minor (2004) found, from a low of 19% at doctoral institutions to a high of 54% at baccalaureate colleges (p. 133). The reasons faculty opt out are myriad but fall essentially into structural challenges, such as the notion that the senate is inefficient or a waste of time, and cultural ones, including a lack of confidence in the process or distrust of the administration (Minor, 2004). Critically, many faculty members under the pressure of securing tenure may simply not have the time to commit to additional committee meetings while balancing the competing priorities of research and teaching. Speaking particularly to the plight of faculty at research universities, Williams et al. (1987) assert that faculty participation in governance “requires that he or she make careful, and perhaps painful, trade-offs” (p. 629). The problem of faculty engagement is compounded by the percentage of faculty that are now adjunct or non-tenure track (Eckel & Kezar, 2016; Morpew, 1999). These non-tenured faculty are sometimes not given the right to sit on certain committees or they choose not to because they feel they cannot “speak up on governance issues without fearing retribution” (Eckel & Kezar, 2016, p. 168).

While faculty engagement is likely to be an ongoing challenge, Kaplan (2004), like Minor (2004), found that participation at small, private institutions like the ones in this study was fairly robust and also that the faculty at these colleges gave the highest ratings for the quality of campus relations between faculty and administrators (Kaplan, 2004, Table 7.2, p. 176). He hypothesizes that these high ratings are “likely due to the closer relations between faculty on such campuses and the manageability of smaller decision groups” (Kaplan, 2004, p. 175). The faculty of small, private institutions have expectations of being involved as “genuine participants, rather than as co-combatants, in the decision-making process” (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a, p. 183). This may be good news for presidents at these types of colleges who need true

partners in making the difficult decisions facing their institutions. As a leader, they may perceive high rates of faculty involvement in shared governance as an asset or as a liability, but either way they must contend with this reality.

The Board

By virtue of their legal and fiduciary responsibility for the college, the board has enormous weight in the operation of shared governance. This can pose challenges. Like faculty senates, these bodies can be robust and functional, inhabited by experts in their field who also work together cooperatively and defer to the president and the faculty at all the right times. They can also woefully underperform as a result of individual personality conflicts, or a mismatched understanding about the role of board members, or because members become focused on managing rather than governing (Chait, 2009; Eckel & Kezar, 2016).

Chait (2009) identifies the three traps boards most often fall into: prioritizing board structure instead of board effectiveness; focusing on the details of strategic planning instead of strategic thinking; and prioritizing board members' philanthropy over their ability to govern. The result may be a board that is "lawfully mediocre" and where trustees "misconstrue due diligence as evidence of effectiveness" (Chait, 2009, p. 3). The board is in a unique position, because of the diversity of their perspectives and because of their more removed vantage point, to lead the conversation on the college's strategy, a "clear and specific game plan for how to deploy its resources to effectively achieve the results it desires" (Chait, 2009, p. 3). The board cannot do this if they are focused on overseeing the details of the college, giving input on athletics schedules or hiring decisions or other topics suitable for the college's management.

As discussed earlier, the board and the faculty often have limited interactions with one another and this, coupled with their vastly different vantage points, can lead to tensions between

the two groups (Apkarian et al., 2014; Birnbaum, 1988). The president can serve as an important link between the two bodies, but they must have the aptitude for helping to translate, provide meaning, and facilitate communication between the two groups. Critically, the president and the board, especially the board chair, must have a positive and productive relationship because “when there is a power struggle between the chair and the president, regardless of which individual wins, the institution rarely does” (Eckel & Trower, 2019, p. 198). Importantly, the faculty and the board must have shared expectations of the role of the president so that the board can pursue “hiring a capable president suitable to the unique needs of the institution” and then “ensuring that the president remains effective over time” (Michael et al., 2001, p. 332). The president is a key figure in linking the board and the faculty together, closing the loop of communication between all the bodies engaged in shared governance.

Structural Tensions

Assumed in the purpose of shared governance is the notion that all participants have the same goal and a united purpose: to educate students to the best of the students’ and institution’s ability. The challenge with shared governance is that the “interests of all are coordinate and related, and unilateral effort can lead to confusion or conflict” (AAUP, 1966, p. 136). Engaging in shared governance means that issues of overlapping authority, staying in the appropriate lane, and offering the required deference (or not) to the other groups are constant sources of tension. Power sharing is not a neat process. Baldrige’s framework of the university as a political model rather than a bureaucratic one leans into this tension. In a bureaucratic model, each body’s role would be distinct, and the objective of the model would be to achieve maximum efficiency (Baldrige, 1971). In contrast, in the university setting “academic leadership, of necessity, is the responsibility of many people” (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. xii). Who these people are, how they define

their work, and how they exert power and influence is different at each institution and from person to person, and these differences dramatically impact the way shared governance plays out in practice.

Even for a campus that successfully wrestles with these questions and finds solutions, their work is never done because “shared governance is not a static condition. It is fluid over time, often responding to environmental changes, changes in the tasks of the college, or a combination of both” (Morphew, 1999, p. 78). The spheres of authority for faculty, administrators, and the board will change as priorities evolve (Birnbaum, 1992a) and as the bargaining power (especially of faculty) ebb and flow with the hiring market (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a). Fundamentally, one key tension is that the faculty, who “perform the core functions of the institution (i.e. teaching and research)” (Eckel & Kezar, 2016, p. 170) do not control the university but must share this authority with non-faculty board members and administrators. As a professional bureaucracy, the faculty are the experts in their field, but to have the time and space to practice their craft, they must yield many decisions “to administrators who, by virtue of the fact that they do not wish to practice the profession, probably favor a different set of goals” (Mintzberg, 1993, p. 200). This push and pull, the shift between collaboration and friction between the faculty and the board and administration stems from this difference in perspective and goals. It is easy to see how faculty decisions about curriculum could butt up against the board’s position on mission and reputation. Or perhaps the faculty have a curriculum objective that exceeded their allocated resources budgeted by the board. Almost no topic of import to the institution will fall squarely into the purview of one of these three groups, and so structural tensions will always be present (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a; Burgan, 2004; Pierce, 2014).

Illusion of Unity

A final issue critical to understanding the struggles of shared governance is the notion that each of these three “bodies” operates as an indivisible unit. Referring to the “faculty” in the singular is somewhat absurd as that body includes many distinct individuals, each with their own opinion on any given matter. As individuals, they come from one of dozens of academic disciplines, from any geographic point on the globe, and may have been at the university for 6 months or 50 years; it is reasonable to assume they will not see eye-to-eye on most issues and may struggle to advocate together as a bloc (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a). March (1994, Chapter 5) outlines this as each person’s conception of order, which is made up of their reality, their understanding of causality, and their sense of intentionality. Each faculty member participating in senate is going to have their own opinions, so even just identifying and understanding the “voice of the faculty” is no simple matter.

At many institutions, the board struggles similarly to act as a unified entity. While the board “should and need to act as a body” (Eckel & Kezar, 2016, p. 157), they are made up of a group of independent individuals with their own backgrounds, expertise, and opinions, and they sometimes choose to operate alone. This phenomenon is even more pronounced among boards than within the faculty because the board members are not employed by the college, do not work together regularly, and are only intermittently engaging with the institution. This service, though often very important to them, is an interlude to their real life, and they are not subject matter experts on either this institution or generally of the academy at all (Birnbaum, 1988; Eckel & Kezar, 2016).

Shared governance requires that decisions be made by diverse groups at a variety of levels and then those individual decisions create a solution that is adopted and executed by the

institution. At each of these levels there are group dynamics in the political system of the university as Baldrige (1971) explains. There are challenges in coming to a decision within each body, in communicating those decisions to the other relevant bodies, and then in forging a compromise that is accepted by all groups and can be communicated to the broader campus and all its constituent stakeholders. The president can and often does serve an important role in facilitating these steps.

The Role of the President

In addition to being the college's standard bearer, its chief communicator, fundraiser, and innovative entrepreneur, the president sits at the convergence of the bodies involved in shared governance. As a result of these myriad internal and external responsibilities, "most higher education scholars agree that presidents occupy the most important, strategic office with a potential to achieve an institution-wide impact" (Michael et al., 2001, p. 332). The significance of the role in the success of the college means that the list of required skills and traits to be a successful president is both endless and seemingly contradictory. Indeed, Eckel and Kezar (2016) warn that "the complexities of the job and the real limits to leadership affect the extent to which presidents can be effective leaders" (p. 164). The complex nature of a college environment means that there is no playbook for being a successful president. Every president approaches the job differently based on the culture of their campus, the needs of their constituents, and their own personal traits and strengths.

Adding to the intricacy of the role, presidents cannot just carry the leadership skills they acquire with them from one position to another because "research findings suggest that successful leadership in different roles requires distinctive approaches and skills" (Kezar et al., 2006, p. 104). The ability to change and adapt to new roles or new requirements of an existing

position is key for the success of the president or any leader, but the lens through which a president views both the role and themselves will impact their starting place. Just like each member of the faculty and board of trustees, the president has their own opinions about what their role entails, and “as a result of their differing beliefs about the organizational world and leadership role, presidents are likely to differ in their agendas and in how they carry out the presidential job” (Neumann & Bensimon, 1990, p. 678). This may lead presidents to place more focus on either their external or internal constituents, on being a charismatic leader or a group facilitator, on inspiring visionary change, or on making improvements to the existing process. To understand how the president behaves, it is almost more important to consider what the leader thinks of themselves as “the *knowing* (that is, personal theories) embedded in leaders’ actions is just as important as the *action* itself” (Neumann & Bensimon, 1990, p. 680). The presidency and the actions required of it are subjective and change depending on the reality of the person, the role, and the needs of the campus.

Presidential Leadership

Expectations of presidential leadership have evolved over time. In the 1990s, higher education faced headwinds similar to those experienced by many colleges today: demographic decline, enrollment challenges, and funding shortages. Fisher & Koch (1996) argued that the style of leadership they called “transactional,” defined as a collegial leader focused on bringing their colleagues together in a democratic structure and valuing consensus above all else, was no longer appropriate for the challenges higher education faced. Instead, they advocated for the rise of the transformational president, a leader who comes to the post with a unique vision for the future of the institution and then works energetically to enact the changes necessary to make that vision a reality (Fisher & Koch, 1996). Writing at almost the same time, Birnbaum makes nearly

the opposite argument, positing that the days of one strong leader directing the institution were over and that instead, presidents achieve ambitious results not by dictating orders but by inspiring others to choose to join them in a shared vision (Birnbaum, 1992a). More recently, Kezar (2014) sides with Birnbaum, arguing that the current literature on presidents and change focuses too much on the ability of the leader to effect change directly rather than facilitating and enabling others in the institution to be change agents. Rather than bringing about change themselves, the successful president should create an environment in which others have the ability and inspiration to act (Kezar, 2014).

This debate about what good presidential leadership entails is highly relevant in the context of financial turnaround, especially in an environment of shared governance.

Transformational leadership, as envisioned by Fisher and Koch (1996), requires the president to lean into action and decision-making even if it comes at the cost of consensus-building. This is at odds with the traditional values of shared governance, which focus on consultation and building agreement between constituents. Successfully striking a balance between these competing priorities is critical in solving “modern issues, which demand a more egalitarian and equitable approach to higher education” (Barnes & Gearin, 2021, p. 54). Current presidents are expected to be successful at both simultaneously; the modern president is evaluated on their ability to both facilitate greater participation and achieve outcomes in the “complex and confusing academic environment” (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. xiii).

Presidential Leadership During Financial Turnaround

The literature suggests that the president, at the intersection of shared governance and operating as a key figure in leading change, will play a major role in an institution’s success in achieving financial turnaround. In analyzing institutions that were successful in achieving other

types of transformational change, Kezar and Eckel (2002) argue that “large-scale institutional change is about meaning construction ... a process known as organizational sensemaking” (p. 318). The position and reach of the president provide a prime pulpit from which to lead this sensemaking exercise. Martin and Samels (2009) underscore the importance of the mere presence of the president in financial turnaround. They cite the “defection of the president” (Martin & Samels, 2009, p. 235) as a prime derailer of turnaround strategies and the “repeated churning of presidents” (p. 4) as an underlying reason for many colleges’ financial stress in the first place as this upheaval and transition leads to “institutional deterioration and neglect” (p. 4).

Beyond the requirement of simply being present, the financial turnaround process adds complexity to the job of the president as well as changing the calculation on priorities. In her book, *The Small College Imperative: Models for Sustainable Futures*, Marcy (2020) outlines the differences between the job of a president at a financially healthy institution and that of one under financial stress. Presidents at financially stable institutions are essentially executing a stewardship model, “expanding resources and reputation beyond the existing assumptions” (Marcy, 2020, p. 10). Marcy does not dismiss the challenges of a stewardship model president—their task requires constant effort and endless activity—but what needs to be done is relatively straightforward. In contrast, a financially strained institution requires “bold decisions by the president” (Cormier, 2019, p. 100), and often those decisions must be made quickly. Presidents in this situation can be “shocked at the pace of decision making needed” (Townesley, 2019, p. 129) to arrest financial decline and launch an effective financial turnaround. This requires different skills and priorities than the stewardship model president and these priorities often “do not convey the familiar forms of collegiality” (Martin & Samels, 2009, p. 30) that are the usual

virtues of American higher education. Presidential leadership during a financial turnaround requires a strong stomach.

Financial Turnaround

A college's financial turnaround naturally involves complex data and strategies. The purpose of this study is not to evaluate these data, strategies, or their merits but rather to understand the process through which the college collectively made that change. Financial turnaround is a specific type of transformational change, one that often requires the dual provocation of investing in untested new activities while moving away from existing priorities. However, it shares important features with other transformational changes on campus, and some elements can be evaluated similarly. Kezar and Eckel (2002) address the necessary ingredients to undergo significant change, the first being "a willing president or strong administrative leadership" that "facilitates the change process allowing it to occur more quickly since they can secure human and financial support and focus on institutional priorities" (p. 298). Additionally, leading transformational change requires a collaborative process, persuasive communication, and a compelling mission and vision to motivate this change (p. 299).

There is an increasing body of literature on college closures, which is valuable as a juxtaposition to financial turnaround, this being the direst outcome of a failure of financial improvement. It is worth noting that many American colleges have survived a vast array of internal and external disasters during their history. In her working paper, Sapiro (2019) notes that prior to 1889, "no fewer than 62 institutions of higher learning burned to the ground" (p. 5), and yet these institutions managed to recover. Today's struggling institutions largely face a problem of simple math—their expenses outpace their revenue in a manner that is unsustainable in the long term. This crisis usually includes a drop in enrollment, which might happen because the

population of the region has a decline in college-aged students, or the students choose to go elsewhere, or the students choose not to attend college (Carey, 2014; Sapiro, 2019; Shewey, 2019).

Colleges have employed myriad strategies to address these shortfalls, including cutting pay, enrolling students they previously had not considered, cutting programs, launching new programs, increasing fundraising, or dipping into the endowment (Sapiro, 2019). The challenge is that many of these strategies are “obviously designed for short-term amelioration and are sometimes counterproductive in the longer term” (Sapiro, 2019, p. 7). True financial turnaround, in which an institution substantively improves their financial situation in a manner that is sustainable and expected to be long term, is rare and difficult to accomplish. A president attempting to lead a financial turnaround has two urgent priorities that must take place simultaneously: cut costs and increase revenue. Immediate cuts can balance the budget in the short term, but revenue must go up for the financial ship to be righted in a sustainable manner. The campus attempting financial turnaround must be “fiscally austere and creative at the margins as they seek to find efficiencies on the one hand and new sources of revenue on the other” (Marcy, 2020, p. 11).

Martin & Samels (2009) prescribe a set of priorities for presidents attempting financial turnaround. In order of importance, they recommend the president focus on the college’s mission, finances, infrastructure, accreditation, and campus engagement. The focus on mission first, seemingly contradictory, acknowledges that it is often necessary to “rethink the institution’s original vision and goals in order to get underneath the current causes of its fragility” (Martin & Samels, 2009, p. 236). The mission of the institution will direct the financial priorities which then allows the campus to shore up its position on infrastructure and accreditation. Campus

constituents must be engaged throughout as the “drivers of a successful process are board and employee engagement, courage, and decisiveness” (Martin & Samels, 2009, p. 239).

This emphasis on mission first followed by action and collaboration is borne out by other studies that found that successful improvement rested on leaders who were transparent, decisive, and committed to clarifying and articulating the mission of the institution in a way that shared a clear purpose with all constituents (Carey, 2014; Cowen, 1993; MacTaggart, 2007; Townsley, 2019). MacTaggart (2007) conducted a case study of 40 colleges in acute financial distress and in danger of closing to determine what was required to execute a successful financial turnaround. He developed a conceptual framework for this process that began with restoring financial stability, which then allowed the college to brand or rebrand their academic programs, and finally to shift the culture to emphasize academics and overall improvement (MacTaggart, 2007). In a qualitative case study, Carey (2014) examined two small, private colleges that had experienced such a change. This small-scale study suggested that “entrepreneurial presidential leadership was found to be a critical factor to institutional transformation” (Carey, 2014, p. 306). Presidential leadership is nearly universal in the literature about transformational change and financial turnaround, presumably because the president’s position is both powerful and influential in the complex infrastructure of a college campus.

Power in Organizations

Baldrige’s 1971 book *Power and Conflict in the University: Research in the Sociology of Complex Organizations* established the groundwork for understanding the university in a political context. The dynamics of power, influence, and authority are inherently political; this lens is useful for understanding the dynamics of shared governance and the role of the president in decision-making. The seminal work on where power is derived from was written by French

and Raven (1959) and asserts that there are five bases of power: referent, expert, legitimate, reward, and coercive. Raven (2008) later updated this list to add the power of information. Since the writing of French and Raven, many scholars have contributed additional nuance to the concept of power. Some definitions focus broadly on the ability to change another person's behavior or create a different outcome (Vecchio, 1997). Others are more prescriptive, tying power to "the ability to alter another's state by either providing assistance or withholding something" (Kovach, 2020, quoting Keltner et al., 2003).

Most definitions of power acknowledge some level of personality traits as a factor. Bolman and Deal (2017) include an individual's personal characteristics as well as their connections with other influential people as a factor in their power (see also Eckel & Trower, 2019). Anderson et al. (2012) similarly assert that power stems from and exists relative to a person's connections with other people in the group. A simple but useful definition of power might be "the potential influence that one has over another person or group" (Kovach, 2020, p. 2). Eckel and Trower (2019) helpfully connect the terms "power" and "influence," pointing out their similar meanings while acknowledging their differing connotations and asserting that "influential individuals are able to sway thinking or drive ideas because they have various levers of power" (p. 181).

Birnbaum's (2004) framework of hard and soft power specifically addresses the influence and power of the college president. He defines hard power as the authority afforded the president by virtue of their title and structural role in the organization. Soft power, by contrast, is the way the president can influence the behavior of key stakeholders both individually and as a group by creating and perpetuating the narrative of the college. Soft power is essentially the president's ability to share a vision and inspire others to join them. French and Raven's bases of

power fall largely into Birnbaum's hard power category. The president holds an organizational position that provides authority (legitimate), offers others positive incentives or threatens negative consequences (reward and coercive), and positions the president to be more knowledgeable on the matters being decided than most other parties (information and expert). Only referent authority, "power that stems from an individual wanting to be like the person of influence" (Eckel & Trower, 2019, p. 181), would fall into Birnbaum's soft power category. Bolman and Deal's (2017) definitions ascribing power to an individual's personal traits and connections to others much more closely matched Birnbaum's definition of soft power. The president who effectively wields soft power has the "ability to build collaborations to get things done" and the "charisma, elocution, [and] vision ... [to] 'light up a room'" (Eckel & Trower, 2019, p. 181).

The president's understanding of their own skills and sources of power will influence both the way they build relationships with key constituents and the way they engage with shared governance. This is especially visible in the case of a transformational change like financial turnaround, which impacts all constituents and puts a sharp spotlight on the way decisions are made at an institution. The nature of financial turnaround includes difficult and often unpopular cuts coupled with new, untested strategies. The objective of this study is to understand the ways the president led financial turnaround and how they leveraged power in engaging with shared governance to successfully navigate this change.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this study was to understand how presidents at small, private, tuition-dependent institutions who led a financial turnaround process did so within the context of shared governance. The institutions in this study began their change process under financial strain and ended it in a demonstrably stronger position in terms of program offerings, enrollment, and finances, putting their institution on stronger fiscal footing for the future. The presidents at these institutions oversaw these turnarounds in an environment of shared governance where authority was at least ostensibly distributed between the administration, the board, and the faculty. One objective of the study was to understand, both from the perspective of the president and others in the campus community, how the presidents led in this system of distributed power. By studying these examples of success, we can better understand the way individual presidents utilize both hard and soft power to navigate shared governance to achieve this important institutional priority.

Research Design

This research study took a qualitative approach to allow for an in-depth exploration of the experience of presidents and their campus constituents during the process of financial turnaround. The value of qualitative research is that it “consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, quoting Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 7). The goal of this study was to understand in rich, contextual detail the position of a college and its community before their financial turnaround and the experience of presidential leaders in that turnaround from various perspectives and viewpoints. A qualitative approach is appropriate to address the specific research questions in this study:

1. How do presidents of tuition-dependent, private colleges lead financial turnarounds in a context of shared governance?
2. In what ways do presidents engage key shared governance stakeholders—faculty and boards—in implementing financial turnaround processes? How do they interact with faculty in general and formal faculty shared governance? How do they interact with the board?
3. In what ways do presidents leverage hard or soft power in working within the framework of shared governance?

Case Study Research

In qualitative research, the goal of the researcher is to “try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20). While there are multiple ways to design a qualitative research study, the research questions in this study lent themselves best to a case study. In a case study research project, “the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bound system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection ... and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). By looking at each of the three institutions as its own case, it is possible to look at the same set of events from the perspective of many different people, thereby making meaning of those events in a different and more nuanced way. The case study method allows patterns and themes to emerge so that we can make connections between actions, positions, and outcomes that might be relevant to institutions in a similar position.

Site Selection

The focus of this study was on small colleges (fewer than 3,000 students) that are private and tuition-dependent, and that underwent a financial turnaround. Tuition-dependence is defined

here as colleges that rely on tuition for 60% or more of their total revenue (Shewey, 2019). There are multiple valid methods for identifying instances of financial turnaround. Most of these methods, such as those articulated by Baldridge et al. (2020) in *The College Stress Test*, triangulate data about revenue and expenses by way of enrollment, discount rate, and endowment spend. In addition to these, I considered trends to observe whether the institution experienced an improvement followed by a loss, whether the improvement was a fluke, or if the improvement was gradual and sustained over time. The objective in looking at these trends was to identify institutions that seem to have undergone meaningful financial transformation that was likely to be sustained.

To identify institutions that best met these criteria, I relied on the opinions and recommendations of faculty at Penn GSE and their professional connections to create a list of seven potential institutions and rank them. I then made contact with the presidents at the first three selected institutions: Idyllic University, Athletic College, and Veritas University. I had a 30-minute phone call or Zoom meeting with each president to explain the study and learn if the institution would be willing to participate as well as to understand the college's culture and framework around shared governance. It was important that the colleges selected as sites for the study had at least some culture of faculty governance in place to ensure meaningful data about the ways the president interacted with shared governance while leading financial turnaround. A final criterion for selection was that the current president had been at their post for the period the financial turnaround took place and was still the current president of the institution. The decision to include three case studies allowed for different patterns and themes to emerge while still adhering to these foundational criteria.

All three college presidents included in the initial outreach agreed to serve as sites. I then worked with the president and their executive assistant to identify faculty members, trustees, and administrators to participate in interviews. In each case, this was a collaborative process to find participants with different viewpoints who had been at the institution throughout the period of financial turnaround. The original goal was to speak with 7–9 participants at each campus for a total of 24 interviews. The list of participants expanded over time, and I eventually conducted 34 total interviews: eight at Idyllic, 10 at Veritas, and 16 at Athletic. This expanded list of participants provided rich contextual data about the phenomenon of financial turnaround in the context of shared governance.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study focused on both interviews and document analysis. The documents used were found on the institution’s website, in news reports, or from Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data. Documents were largely comprised of campus announcements, presidential messages to campus, and meeting minutes. Institutions’ websites on governance, strategic planning, and annual reports were also consulted to understand the context and framework of the institution and their governance structure. Interview data was collected through semi-structured interviews, a common method of data collection in a case study. Semi-structured interviews provide a framework for the conversation so that key topics are covered with all participants while allowing sufficient flexibility for the researcher to ask follow-up questions based on the direction the participant takes the conversation in their initial answers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). This was especially important for understanding the ways the president interacted with key stakeholders, the faculty and the board, from the perspective of these stakeholders. In all cases, I started with a basic set of five questions and followed up with

more specific questions about constituents' interactions with the president and the change process.

All 34 interviews took place over Zoom and lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed for coding and analysis. The goal of the interview protocol was to learn about the experiences and examples that the participant perceived to be relevant to financial turnaround and the president's interactions with key stakeholders. In reviewing the verbatim transcripts of these interviews along with other institutional documents, I looked for patterns and themes to emerge about the ways that presidents interacted with the faculty and board to affect change. To answer the third research question about hard and soft power, it was important to understand the strategies the president utilized, either consciously or not, to move the institution's agenda forward. When looking at the concept of "soft power" (Birnbaum, 2004), I noted words like "collaboration," "consensus," "culture," "community," "well-being," and "connectedness." I looked for activities around building consensus and achieving buy-in from multiple campus constituencies. When looking at the concept of "hard power" (Birnbaum, 2004) inherent to the position of the president, I noted words like "authority," "power," "rules," "structures," and "bylaws." I noted explanations around formal authority and what group or person had the authority to make certain decisions. These interviews were augmented by reviewing faculty senate minutes and other committee notes, reports from the board, and available communications from the president to the campus community about the process of financial turnaround. I used both in-case and cross-case analysis to analyze the findings of these three cases.

Validity and Additional Considerations

As in any qualitative research, there was a great deal of the unknown involved with this study; part of the value of the research is approaching it without preconceived notions of the results. Ensuring the validity and trustworthiness of the findings was a top priority, second only to ensuring that participants were treated with respect and care and were engaging consensually at each step of the process. Because of the number of interviews at each site, conflicting data and viewpoints emerged frequently. I have tried to clearly identify points of agreement and disagreement among participants in each case and specify whether events were understood similarly or differently by various groups. At each site, there were minor disagreements about timing of events as well as about some financial figures and enrollment numbers. A draft of each case was sent to the college president and their assistant to check for accuracy. Two responded with minor corrections and one declined to make edits. When there were minor disagreements about figures and dates, I adopted the corrections of the president. The purpose of these member checks with institutions was to ensure that I understood participants and did not misconstrue their message or take them out of context. Whenever possible, data about events, strategies, and shared governance was triangulated with records or news stories.

Positionality of the Researcher

As a college administrator, I acknowledge that I have biases and preconceived notions about how colleges should and do operate. My experiences have primed me to be generally sympathetic to the college president, especially in these cases where they have taken on the important task of righting the financial ship of their institution. The interpretive framework I utilized in this research was social constructivism. This framework maintains that rather than starting with a theory, we will look to obtain rich, descriptive data from participants and then look for patterns in the responses of the participants to “seek understanding of the world in

which they live and work” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 23). The way presidents lead financial turnaround within their individual context is a question that lends itself easily to assumptions and hypotheses. One of the objectives of this study was to set aside preconceived notions about the most effective way an institution can achieve financial turnaround within the confines of shared governance and instead allow the responses of the participants to stand alone in directing the findings of the study.

Ethical Considerations

At each of the three campuses, I interviewed a minimum of two board members, two faculty members, and two administrators along with the college president. Each participant signed an informed consent agreement. At the beginning of each interview, I confirmed the content of that agreement with the participant and asked again for their verbal consent. I explained that the interview would be recorded and transcribed and that both their institution and their responses would be anonymized. All names provided in this study are pseudonyms. This fact was especially important to some faculty participants who acknowledged the president’s influence over their professional life. Key parts of the interview included participants’ opinions about how the president interacted with key stakeholders and the strategies the president used to gain consensus for their initiatives. Participants had both positive and negative feedback on the president and wanted to know that their comments would not be shared with the president attached to their name.

Limitations of the Study

This study was focused on three specific institutions with their own unique contexts and experiences. It does not purport to represent the experience of other institutions that have undergone financial turnaround, even institutions that have similar demographics or challenges.

The actual turnaround strategies for each of these institutions were markedly different, and so the value of the study lies in the ways the president led change and interacted with constituents throughout their turnaround process.

The concepts of shared governance and faculty governance are present continuously throughout the study. Chapter two devotes considerable attention to framing these notions both individually and in contrast to one another. Despite this, these terms remain ill-defined and are understood differently by various participants, which impacted responses to questions about both shared and faculty governance. In addition, these concepts are both understood and practiced differently at each institution, adding further complexity when making comparisons in the cross-case analysis. I've made every effort throughout the study to note when the issue at hand was shared or faculty governance and to add context around these notions to participant responses when they are referring to one but also addressing the other.

A significant limitation of this study was the number of participants interviewed at each campus. While 8–16 interviewees at each site provided a variety of insights, there were many valuable perspectives that simply could not be included. Each board member, faculty member, and administrator will have had their own view on how the president interacted with them and their peers and how those interactions impacted the change process; this study was not able to benefit from hearing from more viewpoints than those of the interview participants. Although there was no indication of this, participants may have felt constrained by their employment status and by the practical limits of anonymity when speaking candidly about the president's actions and their effectiveness with key stakeholders. Beyond participants' conscious choices, their responses may have been impacted by their own memory bias or by participant bias, the phenomenon where participants share what they think the researcher wants to hear.

Lastly, there are significant dangers in generalizing from only three cases. Expanding this study to four or five sites would have provided a broader lens through which to look at financial turnaround, but this scope was not feasible in the allotted time period. There is value in analyzing the cases in their own context without overreaching and assuming that what is true at one institution would hold at another. The analysis of this study focused on the conclusions that are reasonable and defensible within the limited scope of participants and sites.

CHAPTER 4: IDYLLIC UNIVERSITY

Idyllic University has held many names since its founding in the mid-1800s as a small, religiously affiliated women's college, which educated young women of modest means. The institution is located in the town of Idyll in the southeastern region of the United States. The town boasts a population of just under 1,800 residents and is known for its scenic beauty and its prowess in breeding thoroughbred racehorses. The institution is religiously affiliated but maintains a secular education and enrolls students of all religious backgrounds.

Until 2016, the residential college was restricted to women, but co-ed night classes represented a significant percentage of the overall student body for many years. Idyllic had also rented classroom spaces in other towns to provide courses for both male and female students outside their region. In 2012 the college enrolled 1,567 students, but of these only 342 were part of the residential women's college. The remainder of the students were both male and female adult learners taking courses at night, online, or at one of these branch locations. Despite this reality, the college's identity was still strongly tied to being a women's college.

Since 2013, the university has been led by President David Brown who came to the institution from out of state where he had risen through faculty ranks and served as a provost at another institution. This is David's first presidency. Though neither David nor the board of trustees understood this at the time of his hiring, the institution was running a \$1.8M operational deficit on a \$20M budget when David arrived at the college. The college owed an additional \$14M in debt service, much of which was imminently coming due in a balloon payment. Enrollment data for this transitional period is ambiguous as there is evidence that students were being counted twice, but tuition revenue was in sharp decline, leading to these operational deficits. Enrollment continued to decline for the first few years of David's presidency, reaching a

low of 968 overall and 239 traditional daytime residential undergraduate students in Spring 2016. Today, Idyllic enrolls 1,945 students, 852 of whom are traditional daytime undergraduate students, and 434 of these undergraduate students live on campus. The remaining students are a combination of daytime undergraduates, graduate students, and online or evening undergraduate students. Only 51% of the traditional daytime undergraduate students are women. The university maintains revenues of \$36M, exceeding their \$33M in expenses by 10%, and maintains an endowment of over \$30M.

A College in Crisis

In 2010, Idyllic University (then known as Idyllic College) announced it would begin a specialized graduate professional school at a new campus located two hours away from their main campus. While the college had often offered classes away from their main site, they had never had another permanent location, had never provided graduate education, and had never run a professional school. The initiative was the idea of a single donor who promised to fund the entire project. The purpose of this initiative was to “help the college develop an economically disadvantaged section of the country, attract students and tuition dollars, and fill a vital niche in the community,” according to a news article describing the effort. But by 2011 the project was in peril. Georgina Elway has served as the vice president for communications at Idyllic since 2009 and explained that the project stalled almost immediately because “we were on the path of no success to getting the accreditation for various reasons and so that project was failing.” Belinda Adams, chair of the finance committee of the board of trustees concurred, saying, “This [specialized graduate school] was really outside our scope, we were in over our heads here and we must be bleeding money” to pull this off. By March 2012 the then-president announced his

resignation, effective immediately, and in June 2012 the graduate school project was publicly abandoned.

Elway shared that beyond the cost of the failed project itself, this endeavor had consumed the primary attention of the president and key administrators for several years and:

took a lot of time and attention away ... and so you take your eye off the ball of what's really needing the attention and that was probably kind of what pushed it [the college's operations] really in a bad, bad way.

The college's woes were not just financial. Issues of culture and morale were prevalent, especially among the faculty who were routinely absent. Participants reported that during this time, campus culture had deteriorated to the point where many faculty were barely coming to work. The faculty handbook did not specify a number of hours faculty were required to be on hand, so many full-time faculty were teaching their classes, sometimes only online, and were otherwise not available to students for advising or for any other committee or college service work.

To make matters worse, the college had taken on debt in 2003 and then again in 2009 for new building projects, right after the 2008 financial crisis. The background of the president at the time was in fundraising, and he convinced the board to take on this debt temporarily with the understanding that the college would then fundraise to pay off that debt well before the loans came due. Because the debt was meant to be temporary, it was not amortized over 20 or 30 years but rather was set to come due in a few large installments starting in 2014. Caroline Davis joined the board in 1998 and became the board chair in 2013 when David was hired. She shared that as an institution with "no wealthy alumni, mostly first-generation students of single parent families," fundraising had always been and continues to be a challenge for the institution. The board, inexplicably, still agreed to take on this debt both in 2003 and 2009. Current Chief

Financial Officer (CFO) Roberta Leon has worked in various roles in the college's business office since 2010. She explained that this debt was for building projects deemed critical by the president and board at the time and they took the "approach of we'll just pay that debt off when we get the fundraising dollars in, but we didn't get fundraising dollars in so the debt just stayed."

Making sense of this case requires accepting that almost no one at Idyllic University in 2012 had a full picture of the college's financial situation. Based on the responses of all participants, it is likely that only the then-CFO, and perhaps the outgoing president, had a clear understanding of the college's dire financial position. Roberta Leon, the current CFO, shared that "there was not a lot of communication between departments, especially coming from the finance department, probably because we were not doing well financially and no one really wanted to talk about it." At the time, Roberta was working in accounts payable and explained that "I remember as I'm building these financial reports out, I'm going 'it's not making sense. You say we've got this enrollment growth; however our revenues are declining. So how can we have more students and less revenue?'" The explanation, discovered much later, is that Idyllic counted students based on distinct student populations, but many students fit into more than one population and so were being counted multiple times. The CFO at the time shared these misleading enrollment figures with the board in place of actual revenue figures, allowing the board and the rest of the campus to believe the budget was balanced. It is not known the degree to which the previous president was aware of these financial realities.

The Search for David Brown

A presidential search committee was formed upon the president's resignation in 2012 and was chaired by Caroline Davis. Caroline was not on the executive committee until after leading this search for David Brown, when she became board chair. While the presidential search was

underway, the board hired an external interim president to serve from March 2012 to January 2013. The interim president had held several presidential positions previously, including interim positions, and his short tenure was focused on operations and improving faculty and staff morale. All participant accounts indicate that the interim president was unaware of the college's financial position and that the CFO did not apprise him of the fiscal constraints on his morale-boosting efforts. During the interim president's short tenure, his improvements included hiring new faculty and staff, giving an across-the-board 5% raise, and providing free meals and coffee for everyone on campus. These well-intentioned initiatives resulted in a nearly \$1M addition to annual personnel costs that further exacerbated the college's financial woes.

The interim president's morale-boosting efforts also compounded the problematic faculty culture. The faculty negotiated permission during this interim period to rewrite the faculty manual. Their proposed edits affirmed their autonomy to teach when they chose, online or in person, without a minimum number of hours on campus. Absenteeism was rampant and these changes were meant to formalize the faculty's right to set their own schedule. The changes also established the faculty's right to work directly with the board without going through the president. None of these issues came to light during the search process, but all would require David Brown's attention once he arrived.

Perspectives differ among board members about how much the board knew about the financial challenges of the college during this search process. Caroline Davis is adamant that:

we were not apprised ... we did not know what we were asking [the new president] to do. We did not know it was going to be a turnaround because we didn't know of the financial situation. The board had been kept in the dark.

Belinda Adams, chair of the board finance committee, felt that "the board knew we had severe financial challenges, but they didn't understand just how massive the problem was. But we knew

that the [previous] president was not capable of restoring it.” Davis acknowledged that the board understood that “enrollment was not great” and that fundraising had long been a challenge, but they were not in search of a turnaround president when they hired David Brown. David himself posits that the extent to which an individual board member understood the financial realities of the college at that time likely depended greatly on whether or not they served on the executive committee and the finance committee and their experience with profit and loss statements. All agree the word “turnaround” did not come up in the job interview.

David Brown’s First Days in Office

David Brown began his tenure on February 1, 2013, entirely unaware of the college’s dire financial position. In a 2018 interview, he shared that “I knew [Idyllic] had a failed school of [graduate study], but I didn’t know how severe the financial issues were. I did not know it was a turnaround situation.” Reports conflict slightly about how long it took for the president to understand the full reality of the college’s finances. Roberta Leon, who was then an accounts payable clerk, said that by March 2013, one month after David’s arrival, “we were having trouble starting to pay some of our vendors because we were running out of cash.” This fact seems not to have been shared with the new president. Approximately 4 months into his tenure, David came upon Roberta working late one night and asked why he was hearing rumors that the college was not paying their vendors. Roberta broke the news to David that the college was paying utility vendors but had not paid anyone else in months; furthermore, they would not be able to make the next month’s payroll. Current accounts payable exceeded \$2M with no cash to cover these debts.

David Brown took office at a moment when the college had just suffered, according to him, a “multi-million-dollar loss” on a failed graduate school. In addition to this, tuition revenue

was in decline, operational expenses were up because of increased payroll expenses, and \$10M of the \$14M borrowed in 2003 and 2009 were coming due in 2014. After learning of the college's financial realities from Roberta Leon and following the CFO's departure, David got to work immediately making presentations to banks for a line of credit. Most turned him down. As he shared, "Banks were not willing to work with us. They found us a risky proposition. Fortunately, we found one community bank that was willing to work with us, and we were able to refinance our debt." David then refinanced the \$10M bond through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) so as not to default on the loan.

As soon as he understood the scope of the crisis facing the college, David set out to update the community and keep everyone apprised throughout the crisis about next steps. In the summer of 2013, he called a meeting and laid out the financial realities in plain terms for all faculty and staff. He was blunt and direct. He instituted immediate austerity measures such as removing the perks of free food for all faculty and staff, and the use of university vehicles that had previously been provided for several staff members. He announced an immediate freeze on wages and positions. He did not approve the proposed changes to the faculty handbook and instead consulted with legal counsel and articulated clear standards and expectations of the faculty for their attendance and attention to students. These new changes to the handbook were then submitted to the board for approval.

Addressing these financial problems quickly was critical because the college had not had a balanced audit for the 2012–2013 year and they were up for reaffirmation of accreditation in 2014. David shared that he was acutely aware that the 2013–2014 academic year would "have to have a balanced audit, otherwise we were going to jeopardize accreditation." The only way to accomplish this so quickly was to make major and immediate budget cuts. By September 2013,

projected enrollment for Fall 2013 had come in under target. As a tuition-dependent institution, enrollment numbers being down meant there was no opportunity to increase revenue, so the only other option was to reduce expenses. Eight months into his term, David Brown found himself in the unenviable position of having to make additional cuts to both budgets and personnel. This time, faculty were let go.

Rightsizing the Workforce

Enrollment dropped 13% in a single year between Fall 2012 and Fall 2013, from 1,567 students down to 1,362. Of these, fewer than 250 were full-time residential students. In September 2013, David addressed the campus with Board Chair Caroline Davis by his side. He announced that significant faculty layoffs would take place impacting 14 of the 54 full-time faculty. In addition, the retirement match was suspended. The staff had already been reduced significantly in the earlier round of austerity measures. This sharp enrollment decline, along with a \$1.8M operational deficit, required drastic changes. David shared his thinking at the time that:

there were seven-figure operational losses, and I knew we had to get our house in order as quickly as possible. So the enrollment was in, and it's a tuition-dependent institution. There wasn't much I could do to increase revenue at that point unless we were going to receive some huge donation, which didn't seem likely because we had a damaged reputation. So my only option at that point, I felt, was to reduce expenses.

Across the board budget cuts were necessary and personnel costs were the college's largest expenses. Reducing the workforce was also prudent because the declining number of students did not justify the number of faculty and staff on the payroll. David did not want to cut personnel in his first 6 months as president, but his assessment was that:

I knew that we were overstaffed for the number of students we had in terms of both faculty and staff, and that's why those decisions were made to reduce our biggest costs, which is personnel, and that was very difficult to do.

Unaware that personnel cuts were on the horizon, David had spent his first month as president meeting individually with every full-time member of faculty and staff on campus. This quickly earned him the reputation of being dedicated, paying attention to detail, and caring for people on campus. By the end of this tour, he knew every person's name and their role, and by his own account, he also had a sound initial assessment of these individuals' job effectiveness. This information was valuable when these layoffs became necessary. These individual meetings "gave me a chance to, you know, assess people as much as you can from an initial meeting." Times were changing and the message that everyone needed to pull their weight was communicated clearly. Vice President (VP) for Communications Georgina Elway shared her impression that "I think a lot of people were being asked to be held much more accountable than in the past, and that's difficult for people who maybe have been in a position and very comfortable and not quick to change."

These faculty layoffs, accomplished both by contract termination and non-renewal, were necessary because of the enrollment decline and the college's operational deficit, but they also served to combat the toxic faculty culture and absenteeism that had emerged over the previous years. David shared that the situation was such that:

many [full-time faculty] were operating as adjuncts ... so I knew that there was the wrong culture for the institution, and one of the things I did at that time was reinstate the values of our founders ... we're really here for the students, and we're here for the right reasons, so those who stuck with us are already committed.

One former dean reiterated the prevalence of this problem where faculty would teach their classes and immediately leave, not being available to students for office hours or any time out of class. In addition to being terrible for students, this caused a lot of conflict among faculty when specific departments rejected these norms and required their faculty to be on campus 32 hours

per week for committee work, department meetings, and student interaction. In addition to making massive and unpopular cuts, David realized that it would fall to him to dramatically adjust faculty expectations, autonomy, and workload.

In the early 1990s, Idyllic had abolished their tenure system, which made faculty termination possible in a way that may not have been on many other campuses. Seven of the 14 affected faculty sued the college citing age discrimination and calling on the college to liquidate its endowment to pay their contracts. The lawsuit dragged on for years and participants offered differing perspectives on how much they felt the lawsuit impacted faculty and staff morale. Board Chair Caroline Davis described how “the faculty were not so happy in those early years and a few made life miserable.” Roberta Leon, now CFO, was deeply involved in the process but felt that “it really didn’t affect a lot of morale on campus because it got quiet ... it just lingered so blasted long that I think everybody honestly forgot about it.”

The lawsuit dragged on and the college was portrayed very negatively by the local press. Caroline Davis, while acknowledging the challenge, says she felt confident in the college’s response, saying that even at this early stage, David had:

established himself as somebody who was making sound decisions based on research. There were no flippant decisions made, and he was recognized early on [for] that. This is a man that is bringing ethics to this campus, which had been missing, who was changing the culture of the campus.

The board did not prevaricate; they fully supported the president. They understood that reducing the faculty and staff was a matter of existential preservation, and even with the president’s brief tenure they had confidence they had found the right person to lead the college through this change.

Board Governance in Financial Turnaround

David reached out to the president of Idyllic's accrediting body early on in his tenure. The college had no strategic plan and was up for reaffirmation of accreditation the following year. David had concerns about both faculty and board governance and wanted some assistance in clarifying the expectations of both groups. Dr. Warner, president of the accrediting body, agreed to come to campus. She worked first with the board, who had begun getting involved in campus operations during the college's troubled last few years. Out of concern, trustees were reaching out to vice presidents for more information and the result, according to David, was a:

muddying of roles ... some board members were starting to get involved in operations. I think they were looking for information, and really all the board should have the same amount of information. If you have board members calling around to different staff or faculty, they're going to have different information. It's also causing confusion and can usurp the authority of the president when you're doing that ... and then if you don't know who is contacting who, there is just chaos.

Dr. Warner worked with the board to clarify its role, and by all accounts they took this to heart, especially Caroline Davis. She took up the mantle of Dr. Warner's advice, reminding the board to this day that their role is governance, not management.

It was not all smooth sailing with the board in those early years. Just before David's presidency and in his first year, 10 trustees left the board. Finance Committee Chair Belinda Adams posits that:

they just couldn't believe that this could have gone on and that ... you know ... the management wasn't on top of things. And I don't think they wanted to be part of anything super negative that could get some bad press ... they just walked away. But the core board ... I think we felt a little guilty ... as a board that all this was going on, and we weren't asking the tough enough questions to really uncover things. And so I think we decided that we were going to redouble our efforts and be more engaged.

The result was a much smaller but engaged board with a very clear collective understanding of their role: policies, mission, fiduciary oversight, and fundraising. The board had previously not

had a strong background in finances, but now they had a new board chair, a new finance committee chair, and a clear understanding of how to support the president.

David credits Dr. Warner's intervention at this early stage in the crisis for putting the board on this path of strong governance. He shared that:

Dr. [Warner] was very supportive during those times ... I found her to be very helpful. I was a brand-new president, and certainly nervous about the circumstances, and I found her support invaluable and certainly helped strengthen my relationship with the board ... as I thought the relationship should be in terms of what our responsibilities are.

This early intervention set the tone for the president's ongoing relationship with the board and especially with the board chair. Caroline Davis is extremely serious about her responsibilities as board chair and shared that "for it to be successful, the chair and the president have to have a very good working relationship and an open communication between the two, and we have that. So I think that has gone a long way."

Under previous presidents, the board received short reports from the relevant administrators at their board meetings three times a year. They received a board book, which indicated that the finances were in order and received updates from the president and other members of the leadership team. Georgina Elway, VP for communications, recalls that previously there was never much discussion because the board meetings were not set up for that. In contrast, she shared that David "is really good at telling them what they're seeing on paper. What the report really says and what the message between the lines is and how our status today plays into the coming year and the coming years." The board is active and engaged. In the early years of turmoil and crisis, David and Caroline spoke almost every day; now they speak weekly. There is consistent and meaningful communication from both the chair and the president to the

board so that they are informed and knowledgeable about what is going on at the university, its opportunities, and its challenges.

Reinventing Faculty Governance

Under the interim president, the faculty had rewritten the faculty handbook seemingly with two objectives: to formalize their lack of required work hours and to usurp the power of the president by communicating and advocating their own position directly with the board. David rejected these edits outright, went back to the original handbook, and worked with legal counsel to make revisions that were then approved by the board. He gave the faculty very little say in the matter. David acknowledges that:

it sounds heavy handed, but we had to do that in the beginning because there was so much chaos on campus, and people didn't understand their roles, and the faculty had tried to rewrite the handbook and were basically trying to take over the institution.

The new handbook created a Faculty Council, a faculty governing body made up of all members of the faculty. The council meets monthly and according to Dr. DelPrix, faculty council chair, usually keeps meetings under one hour. The council receives a short update from the president or provost and then conducts their business approving committee reports, voting on curriculum, or holding committee elections. Other updates or longer presentations are done through a lunch and learn program where administrators or committee heads or others share projects or topics in more detail in a setting where they are not limited to a few minutes on the faculty council agenda.

The faculty council gives voice to all faculty equally; complementing this structure is the Faculty Leadership Council. This group is made up of one representative from each of the three schools along with the chair of faculty council and the provost. The purpose of this council is to address faculty matters directly with the administration in a small, workable group that is action-

oriented and focused on problem-solving. Individual faculty members can speak anonymously with their representative, avoiding the temptation of addressing grievances at faculty council meetings and allowing faculty to have their concerns addressed without having to voice them in council. Faculty participants shared that both the president and the provost have an open-door policy and that it is easy to get an appointment with either if needed. However, grievances are addressed through the appropriate chain of command with faculty instructed to speak with their Faculty Leadership Council representative first, who would then bring their concern to the council. Alternately, the faculty member can address the issue to their department chair who can then go to the dean and then to the provost. These structures seem to be well understood by all relevant participants.

The process for sharing new ideas and academic program ideas is similarly well understood. Faculty proposing a new initiative bring it to a departmental meeting with the chair. If approved there, it would go to the dean and be brought up at a school meeting. Then if there is support at that level, it will go to the curriculum committee. All these changes happen quite swiftly. One faculty member shared that she “feel[s] very blessed to be in a place where you can be innovative.” Being busy and having enrollment growth is appreciated, but she shared that this could easily have come with a culture of administrative dictates whereas what is unique about Idyllic is “to have that spirit of innovation kind of thriving here is really important as well.”

When David Brown arrived at Idyllic and needed to make drastic changes to compensation, personnel, and budgets, he did not include faculty governance in this process. In part, this was because the faculty governance system was not high-functioning or set up to engage productively with these questions. In reinventing faculty governance with the faculty council and faculty leadership council, David and the board empowered the faculty to take

ownership over the academic curriculum. They created a system of governance that would allow the faculty to oversee academic program development while also meeting the business needs of the college.

Dr. DelPrix, faculty council president, was one of the first new faculty hired after David's arrival. She explained that faculty governance directs the academic curriculum, which has expanded now to include more than 25 undergraduate and graduate majors. She shared that the president and provost encourage the faculty to think about what programs will meet the needs of the community and attract students, but that instruction about program creation "never came down from the administration." Faculty participants were consistent in stating that new programs and academic growth were driven by the faculty. The administration provides information about trends, legislation, and potential opportunities but leaves it to the faculty to determine which programs will be written and proposed.

Idyllic's timeline for program approval is extremely aggressive. Throughout the year, faculty bring their ideas to the deans for potential new programs. Every September, after enrollment figures are in, David hosts a retreat with the deans and vice presidents to decide which programs will go forward that year. If a program is given the green light, it has to be written very quickly. The faculty responsible for writing the program get it to the curriculum committee within weeks, then it goes to Faculty Council for approval and is with the board by the November board meeting. This way there is time for the program to go to the regional accreditor if necessary and can be implemented the following fall. All participants were proud of this impressive timeline. David remarked that "we operate very quickly. I've been in institutions where it takes 2 years for a new program. We do it in one semester." Remarkably, faculty are not

compensated or given course release time for writing new programs and manage to do this under aggressive time constraints in addition to their 4:4 teaching load.

Taking Idyllic Co-Ed

Once the initial crises of accreditation, bond refinancing, and budget stabilization had been addressed, it was time to find a longer-term solution for Idyllic's structural deficits. David had broached the notion of co-education early in his tenure, but it was contentious at the time.

Georgina Elway, VP for communications, articulated the gradual change in attitude about going co-ed:

I think there was an anticipation from our board and from some others that it [going co-ed] would be a huge life-altering thing, and so when it was first broached, it was kind of like, "no, we don't want to do that, we're not ready to do that." And so when it came time seriously to do it, when [David] put the research together and approached it, it was survival. It's survival, I mean it was not a sustainable model at all.

Though the institution had a proud history as a women's college, it had offered co-ed online and evening programs for decades, and the students in these programs made up the vast majority of the total student body. In 2013, only 292 of the college's 1,362 students were members of the residential women's college. In 2014, in an effort to increase international student enrollment, the vice president for academic affairs introduced a partnership with the Panamanian government that brought 24 Panamanian students to Idyllic for their full four-year college experience. Some of these students were men and while they were housed separately, the taboo of men on campus as students during the day was broken. Combined with the fact that the financial realities simply did not support having an all-women's college prepared David to try again with the board.

Dr. DelPrix articulated the reality of the situation, saying, "It's always been a women's college, and there's a wonderful identity with that, and history, however, we need to grow."

Helen Jones is both an Idyllic trustee and the institution's largest donor. She credits David both for the idea and the timing of going co-ed:

He had done everything he could to make things work in terms of paring down budgets ... everything he could possibly do. So he came to the board and he said "I've done everything I can and the only thing left is to go co-ed. I really believe we will die if we don't." And the board voted that day to go co-ed.

Like all of David's proposals, all participants shared that this one was extremely well-researched. Caroline Davis shared that the relevant information was presented at two consecutive board meetings and included both quantitative and qualitative data making the case. Presidents from other institutions that had gone co-ed joined them via Zoom. Four participants from Idyllic independently quoted the statistic that only 2% of the high school population is interested in attending a women's college. This fact was extremely well ingrained for all of them, having apparently been repeated frequently during this period.

The board voted to go co-ed at the May 2016 board meeting. The intention was to share this news, make preparations on campus to accommodate men, and then begin recruiting a small cohort of male students to start in the Spring 2017 term. Weeks after the board meeting, President Brown received a phone call from the president of a nearby college. Due to significant financial challenges, that college was closing, effective immediately, and they were looking for teach-out partners for their students, but they were having a problem placing their athletes. They had several sports teams, and their men wanted to transfer and play together, but other colleges couldn't promise to take them all as a group since they already had rosters of athletes for those sports. Would Idyllic consider taking whole teams and creating men's athletic teams from scratch?

The Summer of 2016 was described by all participants as a chaotic frenzy of activity. Idyllic University, with a residential population of only a few hundred women, agreed to take 105 students from the closing institution, many of them male, for the fall semester and start three varsity men's athletic teams. They had to figure out how to house men by integrating them into existing residence halls. Men's sports were added immediately, some by bringing the coaches over from the neighboring college and in some cases by having the women's coach take on a men's team in addition to their existing duties. Despite describing it as stressful and chaotic, participants remember this time fondly. The faculty participants praised the administrators for their dedication and effort over the summer. The administrators talked about pulling together to get the job done. One credited the president, saying that "I think that was only possible because of the building blocks that Dr. [Brown] had put in because he had the right people in the right positions at the time."

David Brown's Leadership

The three board members participating in interviews for the study all confirmed that David Brown was the board's first choice for president because, as Caroline Davis shared, "he is a very strong leader. He was willing to take risks, and he has a mind for detail." Attention to detail was referenced by all three board members as well as by administrators and faculty. Caroline shared that in David's first days in office there was "not one rock that went unturned. He interviewed every faculty and staff member ... which I think was just an incredible exercise." Another trustee shared that the president went to every activity, looked at every expense item, policy, and how that translated into the college's financials. The board quickly trusted the president, and so when he came to them with the need to make a drastic reduction in force in

Summer and Fall 2013, Caroline shared that “the board did not fight [David] on the reductions” because they knew it was necessary and that he would do it the right way.

The terms “thorough” and “transparency” came up repeatedly with each participant.

Georgina Elway, VP for communications, described what it is like to work for David:

He asked a million questions. He always wants to hear multiple perspectives and multiple people’s take on a piece of information. You know, what does this really mean? And how does this impact your area? Which was not something that I was used to in a president.

While this trait is lauded by many, participants also acknowledge that David’s style is not for everyone. Georgina acknowledged that “he’s very direct, and I think some people don’t react well to direct.” While the president does not see everything at the university as his job, it is all his business, and he asks detailed questions to make sure he understands and can support the decisions being made by others. Caroline Davis explained that “he doesn’t micromanage, but [he] wants to know what is going on on campus and I support that.”

David was described repeatedly as being a detail-oriented person who is also kind and pays attention to everyone. A previous dean shared that “one of his major strengths is shared governance. He gets input from everyone. All the constituents.” Dr. DelPrix reflected on the president’s leadership, saying:

I have never seen him treat people in a hierarchical way. It’s very holistic, so admissions are important as faculty, just as important. And staff, any administrative staff and faculty, everyone is deemed as important to the team and respected, and they’re given chances to speak at Faculty Council, and faculty are invited to talk and do different presentations. What we offer is a very collegial environment.

No one seems to mistake the president’s kindness or fairness for weakness. On the topics that are important, Caroline Davis says that “he is firm. He doesn’t put up with foolishness.” Faced with the college’s initial financial crisis, he took decisive action even when it was deeply unpopular

and potentially put the institution in legal jeopardy. When addressing the ill-advised faculty-revised faculty handbook, he rejected it outright, rewrote it himself with legal counsel, and had it approved by the board without faculty consent.

For his own part, David expressed surprise to have made it through his early years in office, saying, “I’m amazed that I have survived ... because usually turnaround presidents have to make difficult decisions to save an institution and then are not beloved. People can’t wait until they leave.” He credits this success to the quality staff and faculty that now make up the core of the institution. He shared that “I think the reason why it worked is because the people who stayed with us, faculty and staff, were the ones who are really committed to the institution.” He and other participants credit Roberta Leon especially not only for uncovering the college’s financial difficulties but also working over so many years with David to get the college back on stable economic footing.

Shared Governance: A Collaborative Approach

Upon his arrival, one of David’s top priorities with both the faculty and the board was to clarify the role of the faculty, board, and administration in governance. This effort appears to have been very successful; participant responses indicated a nearly universal understanding of governance at Idyllic. Every participant described it clearly and similarly. Importantly, the board is extremely clear about its role and careful not to step into the president’s role. Board members do not speak with the faculty directly unless invited to do so and when they contact a member of the administration, they notify the president. The faculty and the board are not kept completely apart, and Dr. DelPrix shared that “there are opportunities throughout the year for faculty to meet the board and interact with them,” but faculty member interactions with the board are through luncheons or fundraising activities. There is a clear distinction that is understood by the

community that communication from faculty to the board travels through the president as does communication from the board to the faculty.

Unlike with previous presidents, the board goes into executive session, and so the chair can be confident that members are sharing any concerns they might have and that no worries are being ignored. Helen Jones, who has been a trustee for 25 years, lauds the new trustees that David and Caroline have brought on for their dedication to the institution, saying, “so many of them are so active, and asking good questions and following along with everything that’s happening. They’re keeping track of where things are going.” Annually, the board evaluates not only the president but also themselves and is very proud of following practices of good governance to ensure that the university’s previous struggles will not return on their watch.

Dr. DelPrix expressed that faculty governance feels empowered at Idyllic. The faculty are proud of their governance structure and the responsibility they hold for directing the academic curriculum and program development of the university. They recognize that program development is critical to the financial sustainability of the university and take seriously their role in maintaining the institution’s financial health. David Brown considers the faculty and faculty governance to be full partners in shared governance through their role directing the curriculum. He shared the success of their programs, saying that:

they’re bringing forward things that they have researched, that they think fit in with our institutional culture, and that will also help us generate enrollment and revenue in the future ... And I think that there has been an entrepreneurial mindset on campus—people are not coming up with unrealistic ideas.

This picture of governance is a stark contrast to the state of affairs David found when he arrived at Idyllic. The faculty and board at Idyllic worked with David to create a system of

governance that empowers each group and fulfills the top business objectives of the university.

David expressed his satisfaction about the progress Idyllic has made on governance, saying:

It certainly helps having a business-minded board, having everyone understand their roles, working collaboratively but not overstepping. And then I think we don't get bogged down in governance and committee work, so everyone understands their role and we can operate quickly.

All participants shared how quickly things move at Idyllic and they are proud of it, recognizing that this is not always the case at other institutions. Board Chair Caroline Davis boasts that "we have given him the opportunity to turn on a dime when he needs to." With that trust comes the expectation that when change is needed, it will happen quickly and everyone will get on board.

An Institution Centered on Mission

When David Brown arrived at Idyllic, one year away from an accreditation visit, the college did not have a strategic plan. This requirement for accreditation had to be remedied immediately and the president hurriedly put together a campus group to make recommendations that could be tackled right away. That process revealed that there was significant confusion about the college's brand, especially because the institution's marketing focused on the evening and online programs, but their identity was focused on being a residential women's college.

There was even confusion about whether Idyllic was a for-profit college. Georgina Elway, VP for communications, shared that through this research they discovered that:

career focus really was kind of one of our niches. We knew people were coming here to become, you know, a teacher or a nurse or they're coming here to finish a business degree to get that promotion ... So that really was part of our brand ... And so from that point forward, that's one of our main talking points, because we really do think it differentiates us.

This orientation toward career outcomes has been championed by the faculty, many of whom have joined the college since 2013.

Hiring new faculty was a slow process after the initial faculty layoffs, but eventually positions opened that needed to be filled. From the start, David took a very active role in hiring faculty. Roberta Leon, CFO, is the administrator who has worked most closely with David over the last 10 years, and she explained this choice, saying:

The big thing is when we're hiring new faculty, it's so critical. Every faculty member does meet with Dr. [Brown]. He interviews every single faculty and tells the story of where we've been and what we're doing—where we're going. And we make sure that we're hiring mission appropriate. Get people that come in here that understand what we're trying to do. And so we've got some great faculty—we've got some that have been here for a very long time and have gone through these changes. There's a whole lot of new faculty as well. There's a few of us that have been through it. But it's just really important to hire to mission.

All participants, but especially faculty and administrators, tied success at Idyllic to taking action “to mission.” This included hiring, curricular decisions, and academic and enrollment growth. Interestingly, their notion of the mission of the university is not the college's 150-year history as a women's college, but rather with building a community that serves students and is a great place to learn and work. David describes these objectives as “making sure that we were student-centered and mission-driven in hiring the right people. Getting a more collaborative culture on campus. Getting the right skill sets. Trying to exhibit more of a caring attitude.”

To charge every member of faculty, staff, administration, and the board with promoting the mission of the university, it is critical that they have a clear sense of the big picture at the institution. David continues to provide all-campus updates, both written and in person, after board meetings and at the start of each semester. He goes into detail with the campus about the

budget, proposed construction, new academic programs, and anything else on the horizon that he can share. He explained that:

I'm very open with information, and I will share with my team a lot. We meet weekly and they use their judgment about what can be shared with their staff as well. And so we do try to communicate. It's never perfect. But we try to share, and I probably share more on this campus compared to campuses where I have worked in the past.

Georgina Elway, VP for communications, described how this communication and mission-centered approach has impacted culture on campus:

Before people just thought they taught at Idyllic. Now they know they're part of Idyllic, and that being part of Idyllic means you understand the role that you play in getting students to come here and getting students to stay and celebrating with them when they graduate and connecting with them as alums. Whereas before I think people just saw this is my little piece of the pie, and this is what I do. I think he [David] helped with that shift change.

Dr. DelPrix concurred, sharing that David "has a vision and he shares that with the faculty, and the faculty who are here support that vision, and I think that that's really part of the collaboration." That vision includes growth that is systematic, sustainable, and strategic but absolutely not slow. In November 2014, the board voted unanimously to change the name of the institution from Idyllic College to Idyllic University, citing the importance of the university moniker to promote international recruitment. This change created a marketing buzz domestically and provided momentum for international recruitment. It also encouraged the faculty to think expansively about program creation, especially with regard to graduate education. In the last 10 years, the faculty have created and launched five new graduate programs and multiple new concentrations in a sixth graduate program. They have also added undergraduate majors. The college has grown from a low of 239 daytime students to over 850, more than 400 of whom live on campus. Enrollment, which hit its low in Spring 2016 at 968 students, now sits at 1,945.

Ongoing Challenges

Today, Idyllic University's primary challenges still have to do with finances. The institution has found many opportunities for growth, currently boasting the largest student enrollment in modern history, but this growth is testing the physical limits of the campus. The university is very short on housing and has been raising money for a new library in order to convert the existing library into another residence hall. Seizing opportunities requires investment. Belinda Adams, chair of the finance committee, shared that the board is always "worried about how to accommodate all this growth without a financial basis and endowment." The obvious answer would be to borrow money, but both the board and David are hesitant. Belinda acknowledged that "the board would fight taking on more debt" but far from being frustrated by this, David seems to sincerely agree with the sentiment. The lessons of his early tenure have stuck with him, and he sees it as a primary responsibility to pay down the institution's previous debt, not add to it, saying that "I'm cautious about if we do have too much capital through debt, and our enrollment were to decline, we could get right back into trouble and I don't want that to happen on my watch." Being cautious about debt does not mean David is not ambitious about growth, and he is proud that "we made a lot of campus improvements ... and so far we've been able to do all those projects without incurring any new debt, so we have a very low debt level compared to other private institutions."

With all of the growth in enrollment, budgets are still very tight and the faculty have taken on continuously more work. David himself shared that faculty continue to propose new programs and then write them in an incredibly short turnaround but receive no additional compensation or course release time for this work. Dr. DelPrix acknowledged that the "advising load has increased considerably and that's an issue, so we have to make sure the communication

is really clear.” However, faculty participants were still very positive acknowledging these challenges and the pains of growth while being grateful for the opportunity to be part of Idyllic’s mission.

CHAPTER 5: ATHLETIC COLLEGE

Athletic College, located in the town of Athletic, an industrial midwestern town, is a small, private college that currently enrolls 1,800 students. Like many colleges like it, Athletic flourished with its liberal arts curriculum in the baby boom and Vietnam eras of the 1950s and 1960s, but by the 1970s, the local and regional economy was slowing down and population was declining. Thus, Athletic's enrollments followed and began a long downturn, declining from 1,600 in the 1970s down to 750 by the early 2000s.

Harold Drake joined the Athletic board as a trustee in 1975 at the age of 38 and has served continuously since. While not an alumnus of the college, Harold grew up in Athletic and was the chief financial officer at a local manufacturing company. He was asked to join the board because of the college's financial struggles at that time. According to Drake, the college muddled along in this state of financial stress for decades, not in crisis but in a slow decline that was not only fiscal but also physical. One faculty member estimated that in 2004, "academic buildings on campus really hadn't even been touched since probably the late 1960s or early 1970s, so I was working at an institution that kind of had a 1970s or early 80s feel."

The college had three presidents during this 30-year period, and each were caring, responsible, competent leaders who followed the status quo, and "we just started to slowly go downhill, and we were basically trying to do the same old things and expecting a different answer" said Drake. When the last of these presidents retired in 2005, Drake went on a mission to break out of this cycle. He agreed to chair the search for the next president and took meetings with several different search firms. He was clear about the committee's objective, which was not to secure a president with the usual academic credentials: "We can't be going looking for a physics professor who taught for 40 years and would like to go out as a college president."

Instead, he was emphatic that “we’ve got to have a change agent who has something else to offer.” Athletic was ready to try something new, and doing something new worked. In 2010, the cost of attending Athletic including room and board was \$32,000; in 2023 it was \$52,000. In that same time, the college’s budget has gone from \$51M to \$91M. Net revenue has grown from \$26M to \$55M, and assets have increased from \$63M to \$114M. The endowment, despite much of the college’s fundraising during this time being focused on capital projects, has impressively grown from \$19M to \$79M today.

The Search for Doc Hudson

One of the questions in Athletic’s presidential application asked candidates what they would do to reverse the enrollment trend. Drake was struck by Doc Hudson’s responses because, according to him, “other than a bunch of gobbledygook words, he [Doc] was the only one that had a plan.” That plan centered firmly on growing athletics. This focus at first seemed ironic as Athletic’s athletic facilities were notoriously weak. The football team played at the local high school stadium, and the teams were generally not very competitive. Doc argued that this weakness could be an advantage, and the fact that the college “had not capitalized on athletics at all meant this was an area where there was the most opportunity for growth,” said Drake.

The plan was extremely ambitious and also eye-poppingly expensive for a board that presided over a college with virtually no debt and a declining bank balance. Doc proposed building a new football stadium that could serve other sports as well. This would allow the college to dramatically increase the number of teams and coaches at the college under a model where all coaches were responsible for recruiting a roster of students. The proposal capitalized on a flat, 40-acre field owned by the college and adjacent to the campus and set an ambitious plan of growth, including building a new hockey rink. Drake recounts that:

there wasn't an indoor sheet of ice in the whole county, and [Doc's] plan was really centered on hockey because he was convinced that there are a lot of people, particularly in the state of [], that play hockey in high school, and they come from families that don't need as much aid and their parents have been putting out a lot of money since they were little kids. And they were good students that came from good families, but they weren't good enough hockey players to get a D1 scholarship, but they still loved their sport.

This hockey narrative describes the target market for the new Athletic student—middle class students who could pay tuition would come to Athletic because they wanted to keep playing their sport. As trustee Gordy Richards put it, a student who would “start out as a football player and end up as a college student and hopefully get a good degree and a good education.” While the board was deeply uncomfortable with taking on debt, this plan solved another problem that had been plaguing them for years: What was Athletic college known for? Drake summed it up, saying, “There's got to be a reason for kids to want to come to [Athletic] College and right now none of us know what that is!” This plan provided a solution.

Accounts differ about how much of this plan Doc shared with the search committee at various points in the search. Drake insists that even though Doc didn't have a lot of details about the college at this time, he essentially laid out the plan during the search process. The board understood that by hiring him, they were committing to the plan. Drake's recollection is that:

when I took his candidacy to the full board for approval, I told them quite honestly. I said, “You know, think about your own financial situation. If this is going to work, and if you vote for [Doc], you have to be prepared to make the largest contribution to [Athletic] College you've ever made.”

According to Drake, the faculty understood as well. He instructed Doc to really lay out his ideas for the faculty so they understood, because “we don't want a surprise that they didn't get what they thought they were getting.”

Doc Hudson himself refutes the narrative that he laid this whole plan out during the search process; he claims that while he felt confident in doing so, he “didn't want to be too

aggressive or radical with my words until I secured the job. In other words, I was being political.” One faculty member who had been at the college at the time of Doc’s hiring confirmed Doc’s account, saying he did an open forum as part of his hiring process, and faculty members returned from that session and “they were just very very optimistic ... there was something about him, and they thought he would be a good new face for the college and that he would be the type of person that would be good at fundraising.” However, she confirmed, growing enrollment through athletics was not mentioned to the faculty until Doc was firmly in office.

Drake claims that of the 80–90 applicants for the position of president, he knew just from the applications that Doc was the only one he was interested in. The committee interviewed Doc in the first day of airport interviews and after conferring with the search committee, Drake followed him out of the room:

I think we just interviewed our president, and I want him to know how much we want him before he gets on a plane ... And I made him [Doc] promise ... I said, “You are going to be our candidate” and he was interviewing at other colleges, and I said please commit to me that you won’t take anything else without checking back with us.

Doc’s background is a bit meandering for a liberal arts college president. He attended and graduated from the seminary before deciding to shift course and pursue a PhD in social ethics. While doing his degree, he worked in student affairs and continued down that path even after getting his doctorate. Before taking the job at Athletic, he served as the dean of students at a similarly sized institution. Doc has a passion for sports and has been a coach several times but never a full-time faculty member. After 50 years on the board and 14 as chair, Drake declares hiring Doc Hudson to be “my proudest contribution to [Athletic] college.” According to Drake, 100% of the board supported Doc’s candidacy; there were no naysayers about him or the plan

because “we knew it had to be different. We couldn’t go back to the same old way, so 100% bought in with the understanding that they were going to have to make the biggest gift they were capable of.”

Putting the Plan into Action

Doc took office in July 2005 and brought with him Craig Richards, who had served as the athletic director at their previous institution. Growing enrollment through athletics was originally Craig’s model, and he had instituted it in modest ways at his previous two institutions. He came to Athletic as Doc’s executive vice president (EVP) to really put it into action. Doc originally planned to wait a year to take in the landscape and build relationships before pitching this idea in earnest, but within weeks of his arrival, it was clear to him he needed to act fast. Athletic had an operational spending deficit of \$1.3M per year on a \$51M budget, and the idea of waiting a year and increasing the deficit when he knew now what needed to be done did not sit well with Doc. He promoted assistant athletic director Don Michaels to be the athletic director and Don, Craig Richards, and Doc started working in earnest on a plan to present to the board. At the board’s first meeting in October, they presented a bold and ambitious plan to increase enrollment at Athletic college by dramatically investing in athletics.

Faculty Reaction

The narrative from members of the board and athletic administration about the faculty’s reaction to growing enrollment through athletics is that it was highly negative. Drake shared that upon the rollout of this plan, “the faculty screamed bloody murder. You know, ‘we’re turning this into a jock school; we’re going to be teaching a bunch of dumb jocks.’” Head Football Coach and Athletic Director Don Michaels agreed that faculty were not on board, saying that:

his [Doc's] biggest stumbling block was to get by the faculty. Faculty don't do anything quickly, and we had a union. Our faculty were in a union so that made it even that much harder. And, you know, you want your faculty support.

However, at least one faculty member, who had been at the college since 1995, refuted this characterization. She agreed that there were individual members of the faculty that were hotly against this idea, but that most faculty were open-minded and receptive and that "most of them seemed willing or open to these ideas that were being shared because many of us realized that the enrollment was so low that the institution might possibly close within the next few years."

Doc invited all faculty and staff to a retreat off campus where he and Craig Richards, EVP, explained the model and laid out the plan for enrollment growth. Members of the board were in attendance, but this meeting was really about getting the faculty and the campus community on board. Craig says that shared governance was always at the top of Doc's mind, and he recalls how effectively Doc handled that meeting. Just as he had with the board of trustees, Doc's pitch was:

this is a model. There are other models out there. I think this model will work at [Athletic]; we have the data to back that up. If you have a better model than this model and you can prove to me that it's going to do what this does, I'll junk this model and put yours in place. Nobody ever spoke up.

In addition to these large, public meetings, Doc met with union leadership. He had casual meetings with influential faculty. He was on a public relations campaign every minute of the day and "he did a skillful job of the political part of trying to sell the model," said Craig.

Moving the Ball Down the Field

To launch Doc's plan, the board needed \$30M. Gordy Richards serves as the current chair of the finance committee and was a member of the committee when Doc was hired. He articulated what a huge decision this was for the board:

We had always been proud of the fact that we didn't have any debt to speak of, but the fact of the matter is that we saw that plan and we saw that in order to do the plan we had to change our ways. And we did.

The board also stood by the commitments they had made to Drake during the search process; \$15M came from the board as gifts for the first phase of the plan, which was named "Renaissance I." Gordy characterized this move, saying, "We borrowed a bundle of money and built a performance stadium and brought football back to our campus."

The first step to the plan was to build a new athletic stadium to house not only football but other sports as well. This plan gained traction with the board quickly, but the plan for the hockey rink received more skepticism. According to Drake, before going to one board meeting to discuss the plan, he shared his concerns with Doc:

I said, you know, a football or sports stadium I can understand, but I'm not sure I buy the ice. So he says okay and grabs an envelope out of his coat pocket and starts writing on the back and says, "Do you know how many high schools in [] play hockey?" and of course I didn't, but he did, and he writes that down and he says, "Do you know how many kids that represents?" and he knew. "And do you know how many of those kids are good enough to get a Division I scholarship?" and of course I didn't. And then, "Do you know how many Division III schools in the state of [] have hockey teams?" And of course I didn't. There was one. So he put it all together, and he says, "Within 3 or 4 years, I can have 250 students at [Athletic] College just because of that sheet of ice."

The sheet of ice only cost \$6.5M at that time. Net tuition averages \$20,000 per student per year. This sheet of ice has turned out to be the best investment Athletic made during this transformational period.

Doc hired a lot of new coaches right away. Most sports, from the beginning, had a head coach and an assistant coach with the assistant coach's primary task being recruitment. To hire these assistants, the college bought some apartment houses around town for assistant coaches. They paid them \$12,000/year, gave them an apartment, medical insurance, a rental car, a college credit card for their travel, and let them eat in the dining halls. The board expressed skepticism

about why anyone would come coach full-time for such a salary but according to Drake, Doc was adamant that “there’s thousands of kids that want to get into college coaching. They won’t stay long, but they’ll come.”

According to Gordy, the decision to bring on each sport was systematic. With the administration, the board reviewed each proposed sport, looking at the start-up cost of hiring a coach, readying facilities, and recruiting a first class. They considered the ongoing operational costs of travel, uniforms, and coaching staff. These costs were then weighed against the expected tuition revenue of the additional students. Former Athletic Director Don Michaels concurs with this assessment, describing their approach that “we’re not going to leave any sport off the docket. We’re gonna list them all, and we’re going to figure out which ones we’re going to go with.” Each sport had a target to reach their roster goals within a few years. As Drake shared, “Coaches have a quota that they have to bring in. If they can’t bring them in, they won’t stick around.”

Before borrowing \$15M, the board wanted a comprehensive plan, and:

we were given a very very definite, complete plan on how to grow the enrollment, and who was responsible for recruiting. And our bankers were excited to buy into the same plan and so it was not difficult to move forward with it,

said Gordy Richards, chair of the finance committee.

Doc kept them all regularly apprised of what was going on and made sure the board remained supportive as change progressed. Originally, they had some special board meetings in addition to their regular three, including board meetings in Florida to make sure that:

people were a lot closer to the situation. But, frankly, once they brought that first bigger class in, everybody has trusted him since. For a first few years, we still had that little bit of doubt like “geez, I hope he can make this work,” but once he proved that he could, everybody relaxed about it,

said Drake.

Faculty Governance

Unusual for a small, private liberal arts college, faculty at Athletic College are in a union. The union negotiates a contract every 4 years, which covers labor issues like leave, student contact hours, number of classes taught, wage increase structures, and healthcare costs. Faculty governance exists separately from the union and operates through monthly faculty meetings in which all 82 faculty members have a vote on all topics brought to the floor. This faculty governance structure is akin to many small, private liberal arts colleges with faculty members being nominated and voted onto committees that oversee particular areas of interest and then report to the full faculty at meetings and for votes. Like most small, private colleges, the purview of faculty governance is directed at academic freedom and autonomy over the curriculum. To this end, curricular changes start at the department level and, if approved, move to one of four college colloquia, which operate like academic schools. After passing this level, the proposal goes to the curriculum committee of the faculty and then to a full faculty meeting for approval. The union, whose purview is labor management, has no role in any of these curricular proceedings.

This system is complicated, however, by the fact that the half dozen union leaders have historically also led faculty governance, often sitting on the faculty executive committee or even serving as the faculty president. Indeed, several participants who were longstanding members of the faculty could not distinguish between faculty governance and the faculty union, and several understood them to be literally, not figuratively, the same entity. In part due to Athletic's small size, leadership overlaps mean that in practice the priorities and purview of the union can bleed into curricular matters. For example, the promotion and tenure committee is not conducted

through faculty governance but is instead a committee run by the union. As such, membership on the committee requires that the faculty member be both tenured and a member of the union. This “peer review committee” is structured the same way all the other faculty governance committees are with representation from each of the four colloquia and then one member from the faculty as a whole, but all members must be in the union and the proceedings are managed by the union.

According to the current faculty president, this committee is responsible for writing a letter to the vice president for academic affairs “either recommending promotion and tenure or not recommending.” The problem with this system, according to the faculty president, is that “I’ve never seen a letter that has anything negative in it at all from the union in the 12 years I’ve been here, and there have been faculty members that have been abysmal ... that have gotten excellent letters.” The union’s objective is for every faculty member to achieve tenure or promotion; the faculty’s objective is to have good colleagues. It is the opinion of the faculty president, and several other faculty members interviewed, that this tension creates a situation where “the union doesn’t represent us at all. It represents the three or four people on the executive board.” To combat this problem, a parallel process has developed in which all members of the department write their own letters to the vice president for academic affairs (VPAA, titled dean at Athletic) recommending or not recommending tenure for their department colleague. The dean then reviews the applicant’s materials, visits their class, looks at their student reviews, and considers the letters from their department colleagues before recommending or not recommending tenure to the board.

All five faculty participants shared severe criticism of the union, which they say has dramatically lost membership in recent years. Previous deans had communicated and negotiated with the union in lieu of faculty governance, often to negative effects. The current dean, Maria

Adler, came to Athletic in 2009 as a faculty member in the teacher education department. She served as the director for one of Athletic's 10 institutes before taking on the role of the director of graduate studies; she has been the dean since 2017. Adler emphasized the priority both she and Doc place on communicating effectively with the faculty. According to her, Doc sets the vision and then "my role is to work with the faculty on how we can make it happen as a community." It is critical that the faculty "have their voice heard, their ideas heard, and not just heard but implemented if it makes sense," said Adler. To this end, she puts out a biweekly email communication to all faculty with updates, events, and any changes. If something more substantive is taking place, Doc Hudson will hold an open forum and invite all impacted constituencies. Adler attends all faculty meetings, and she also meets twice per month with the union president. She sponsors department chair meetings every month and will attend any department meeting she is invited to. Every month there are directorship meetings for directors of each of the 10 institutes and also academic area directors. Adler shared that:

we have a lot of meetings, regular meetings, and I attend them all. It's a rare time that I send one of my deans on my behalf ... and I always tell people my office door is philosophically and literally open all the time."

Adler also convenes a biweekly meeting of her senior staff, which includes the faculty president as well as the administrative deans, assistant deans, registrar, and information technology. The faculty president lauded this system, saying that "a lot of information gets communicated to me, and then I will distribute it via email when I can. And there's some things that are said in that meeting that are confidential, and they stay confidential." In addition to this biweekly senior staff meeting, the faculty president has a monthly individual meeting with the dean; either can schedule an additional meeting if they deem it necessary. The faculty president shared that this good communication was not the case when previous faculty presidents were

executive committee members of the union. The presence of the union is a complicating factor when looking for faculty support, and it was certainly top of mind for Doc Hudson as he looked to roll out his enrollment growth plans.

Critical to achieving faculty support—or at least not inciting faculty revolt—was the fact that Doc’s proposed Renaissance I, characterized by growth in enrollment through athletics, would be followed immediately by Renaissance II, and Renaissance II was all about academics. Doc made the faculty two promises when he rolled out this plan, which all understood: The first was that far from students getting worse academically, the students that would be enrolled through the athletics model would be far more prepared than the students currently in their classrooms, that “once this thing gets moving you are going to have the best students you’ve ever had in your classes—which they reluctantly later admitted was true,” said Drake. The second promise was that “once the big push on the athletic facilities were built, then we will put money into the academic side,” said Drake. Doc confirmed that he was keen to get that first academic building project started once the main athletic facilities were complete. He knew that he had a window with the faculty where they would see enrollment growth and athletic facilities being erected and be expecting physical plant improvements to academic buildings. By 2011, the main athletic facilities were complete, and work had commenced on substantive academic renovations, including the science building. The plan delivered on both promises and to date every academic building on Athletic’s campus is either new since 2005 or has been remodeled, so the general consensus, articulated by one board member, is that Doc “met his commitments to them [the faculty].”

Athletic College Post Renaissance I & II

All participants agreed that while the coaching staff were the most immediate beneficiaries of the college's transformation, the life of the faculty was improved significantly as well. Dean Maria Adler assessed that the "biggest adjustment for faculty was the paradigm shift in their mindset on how to symbiotically work with students who are athletes." Once this was accomplished, the faculty reaction to having classrooms full of motivated students and a campus buzzing with constructive growth was generally positive. Now, faculty cannot remember a time when their campus was not a small Olympic village, with 68% of students competing in athletics and many others participating and using the athletic facilities through intramurals. At Athletic, everything is geared around athletics, including the rhythm of the campus and class scheduling. Hockey players do not have classes on Friday because that's when they travel.

Everything associated with Athletic College has grown exponentially during Doc Hudson's presidency. In 2010, the cost of attending Athletic including room and board was \$32,000; in 2023 it was \$52,000. In that same time, the college's budget has gone from \$51M to \$91M. Net revenue has grown from \$26M to \$55M, and assets have increased from \$63M to \$114M. The endowment, despite much of the college's fundraising during this time being focused on capital projects, has impressively grown from \$19M to \$79M today. While the increased and improved athletic offerings at the college have attracted students, the physical transformation of the campus is also credited for this change. Gordy Richards, finance chair, feels that:

the [athletic] model worked well to start building a student population. But in my mind, the transformation of the school physically, physically good classrooms, good dorms, an impeccable looking campus—it's the best. When they see the campus, that curb appeal, I think that really helps.

Board Chair Drake concurs, saying, “With [Doc], everything he does is done first class and its kept up.” The physical improvements to campus ensured that the gains made through athletics can be sustained in other areas of the college and that students are excited to apply and attend Athletic.

The board remains conservative when it comes to borrowing money, often opting for a fixed rate instead of variable at times when the variable turned out to have been more advantageous. Gordy credits Athletic’s CFO, Winston Jones, both for his management of the college’s finances but also for his work with Doc. According to Gordy, Winston has been:

very creative and very helpful, and he also needs to point out when there is a risk and he’s just done a wonderful job of that, and he has the ear of our dear president which is awfully useful as well.

Maria Adler shared how fortunate the Athletic administrators feel to have their board because:

our board is extraordinarily forward thinking and respectful of our expertise and ideas, and they support each other and respect each other and they support the administration and respect the administration. And that is a game changer in what you can get accomplished in an institution.

According to Drake and other members of the board, there are three key components that made Athletic’s transformation possible. The first was very low interest rates; one of their colleagues tried the plan at another institution several years later, and they think it failed because interest rates had gone up too much by then. The second was significant philanthropic investment, especially from the board. When the plan requires really ambitious fundraising totals and then this doesn’t materialize, this can sink the plan. In this case, the board prepared to make the investment no matter what but also invested heavily in the fundraising. The third was having the right people in charge of the plan. In thinking back on the previous presidents he had worked

with, Drake reflected that:

there wasn't one of them that could have come close to doing this. And they were more of the traditional people that colleges choose these days, so I would think that most of them that have come up through the college ranks would have a hard time making that successful.

Economic Downturn and Adoption of LIFT

For a number of years, Athletic College thrived. Enrollment grew through the athletic model, and this had allowed Doc Hudson to fulfill his promise to the faculty, renovating nearly every academic building on campus and building several new buildings. In 2015, Doc wrote a book explaining the model and encouraging other small colleges to try it. But by 2019, the college was again facing financial challenges, largely driven by external political factors regarding state grants to colleges. This state political battle took \$2M from the college's operating budget, which, as Maria Adler shared, for Athletic "was real money." This, combined with rising costs and pressure to keep tuition stable had meant that expenses had begun to exceed revenue. In the Fall 2019, Doc Hudson invited faculty, staff, students, and community members to an open forum where he talked about this budget issue and said there would be "budget management initiatives," said Adler. These problems were not unlike the pressures being faced by other small colleges at that time, and Athletic took steps proactively to address them. It was time to transform again.

In 2019, Doc Hudson convinced two recent graduates living in New York City (NYC) to come live in Athletic for a year and incubate an online learning company, what is known as LIFT. Adler articulated the main concerns faculty voiced at the notion of adopting online course sharing: "We're turning into an online school, we're going to lose our jobs, that type of thing." Maria lauds LIFT's success, saying, "It started out initially with little old Athletics College, and now it's a national program ... and it's been wildly successful for many institutions, and I think

it's been a game saver for many institutions.” Maria and Doc knew that this was going to be a difficult transition for the faculty, and they met with every department they thought might offer classes with the program. The first programs they adopted were supply chain management and then public health.

After Doc and Maria met with every department individually and then held open faculty forums, the first set of LIFT courses were voted on by the full faculty in Spring 2020. Maria shared that each course had to be approved first by the departments, and then each colloquia, and then the curriculum committee and then to the full faculty for a vote. She was emphatic that this process was followed meticulously even though much of it was taking place in Spring 2020 when faculty were off campus and teaching remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each program was approved individually, and at each vote, the majority of faculty were in support. A typical vote was 90 for, 3 abstaining, and 2 against, demonstrating, as Maria shared, that “all the courses passed through our governance system with flying colors as far as the votes.”

At first, it might seem odd that a college that had staked its future on athletics, on having the most stereotypical residential college experience, would opt for online course sharing as its evolutionary move. Drake and the board acknowledged that on its surface this might seem counterintuitive but argued that a traditional liberal arts college does not have the same appeal to students that it had years ago. The board agreed with Doc that to attract students you have to have the majors these students are looking for, otherwise they are not going to come to your college, even for athletics. The board was involved in the adoption of the platform from the start. Adler applauds the board as “risk takers, calculated risk of course, and they gave full support for this model moving forward from day one. Before, during, and after the no confidence component.”

The first official classes associated with the online platform were offered in Fall 2020. At first, only a handful of students took online courses, but now nearly 800 students enroll in at least one course online. Since adopting the LIFT platform, Athletics now offers twice as many majors and minors as they did previously, offering students exponentially more academic options. Doc and Maria insisted to the faculty that the platform would not take away faculty jobs or impact the current academic structure. This promise has largely been kept, although Athletic did have to consolidate a number of departments into a department of humanities.

Throughout their discussions of LIFT, participants tied the platform and the purpose of this platform back to athletics. They acknowledged the seeming incongruence of a college that had built its reputation on athletic involvement suddenly offering online courses. Adler was quick to confirm that the platform was never set up for students to live remotely or take all their classes online; the platform allows students options and additional offerings. Both Adler and Drake emphasized how this platform was meant specifically for the athletes. Drake shared that:

sports teams travel a lot and can miss classes. But the way it is set up on our campus is that any student can attend their class pretty much wherever they're at. They can do it from their dorms, they can do it from the bus, they can do it from the hotel in Po Dunk, Wisconsin, where they're there for the hockey team.

Adler shared that most students are taking three to five classes online total in their college career so "the vast majority of coursework is in person, on campus. And we still have a requirement for students to live on campus for their first 3 years." The platform only shares courses with accredited institutions, and the faculty have to approve each new program so they know the quality of the courses being offered.

The LIFT platform remains controversial on campus and Adler's characterization of the platform is disputed by some members of the faculty. These faculty members described many

entry-level courses being offered only online in certain semesters, creating problems for first- and second-year students who are not yet equipped for success in online learning. One faculty member shared her initial enthusiasm for the platform, saying:

We've got to be open to new things. We can't stay the same as we've always been, and so I voted ok, yes, let's go ahead. But it was my understanding that it would be used for specialty courses at the 300 and 400 level.

Faculty support for the platform was also predicated on an original cap of 20% placed on the total number of courses a student could take on the platform. The same faculty member shared that this cap was important because “we wanted these students to primarily be educated face-to-face by [Athletic] College professors.” The cap has now been lifted and several faculty members shared discomfort with the notion that students may increasingly be educated online while living at Athletic and playing their sport.

Vote of No Confidence

In the Fall of 2020, the faculty, led by a handful of union leaders, held a successful vote of no confidence against the president and the vice president for academic affairs. Accounts about what grievances led to this vote are disparate and conflicting. Maria Adler attributes the vote of no confidence to faculty anxiety over the “perfect storm” of budget cuts, COVID, and the new LIFT platform. She shared that “there was a lot of anxiety with people during that time.” The current faculty president insists that the vote was “a direct result ... pretty much of the [LIFT] stuff coming through, and it was again led by members of the union.” Athletic also made the controversial decision to be truly open in the Fall of 2020 with nearly all classes and activities taking place in person. Doc Hudson attributes the vote of no confidence almost entirely to the decision to stay open amidst faculty complaints insisting that he was not considering their safety. His perspective was that he saw colleges staying closed, or only partly opening, and it

seemed bad for the students who did not appear to be at great risk if they contracted COVID. He wanted Athletic to be open and the students seem to agree since, as he shared, “virtually every student returned to campus.” Even in the Spring of 2020, classes went online, but some students stayed on campus, and the campus stayed open, including food services.

The vote was far from unanimous,¹ and many were surprised both when the resolution was shared and that it passed. One faculty member expressed how shortsighted this move was since:

many colleges were struggling or starting to struggle, so I wasn't convinced that eliminating the leadership at the top was the best thing because, remember, I go back to 1995, and I do know that many of the ideas that President [Hudson] had early on did, in fact, save the college.

Cam Trident was the faculty president at the time of the vote. He says he was given no notice that the resolution was being drafted, and so “it was very challenging ... I had no idea it was coming, and then I had to present in front of the faculty for a vote cause, you know, there's formal resolutions.” In retrospect, the consensus among the faculty is that a small number of union leaders were able to use the uncertainty of the college's circumstances and disjointed communication, largely due to the pandemic, to rally the votes for an ill-conceived and not very well understood vote of no confidence. The faculty seemed eager to move past this episode with the current faculty president sharing that:

it became pretty obvious for most of the faculty who the people were that were causing most of the trouble and the rest of us ... it might not be perfect but we're able to do our jobs. We're supported to the extent that our financial situation allows us to be supported. And you have to work with the administration, and that kind of split between that and a lot of the people that were in that group that were causing all the issues.

The faculty were universally insistent that they had been against the vote. One mentioned they

¹ All five faculty interviewed for this study shared their opposition to the vote.

didn't even know anyone who had voted in favor; since the vote was done by secret ballot this is, theoretically, possible.

All accounts indicate that this vote had no impact on the board or its belief in and support for the president. They were made aware of the vote right away and Finance Chair Gordy Richards shared that:

our response as a whole was that we were 100% confident in our leader and that we showed it 100%. There wasn't any dissenting vote on that. And I think that a very few number of faculty and retired faculty members were able to orchestrate a lot of noise and cause a lot of nonsense to occur and at the same time there were a number of faculty members that are no longer members of that union and don't agree with that kind of thing. I think it was a low point to do that. Terrible.

Faculty participants confirmed that those who had led the vote were upset that it had no material impact. The rest of the faculty seemed prepared to just move on and chalk this up to an unfortunate episode. None indicated that it was important or that it had an impact on the faculty's long-term relationship with the president or administration. Cam Trident, faculty president at the time of the vote, shared his impression that Doc:

put his head down ... kept doing his job, right? He still met with trustees. He met with donors, you know, he was the same person on graduation. He still tried to be innovative. I think, you know, it was business as usual for him. Did it affect the relationship a little bit? Yeah, there was some sense where faculty weren't happy that they had voted one way and then the president was still here. But I think we're past all that now.

Doc Hudson's Leadership

Like many participants, Finance Chair Gordy Richardson credits Doc Hudson for Athletic's transformation, though he does not use the same savior language shared by many others. He characterizes Doc as:

a great leader and a great motivator, and yet he listens to his senior staff and makes decisions collaboratively about what's next and what can we afford to do and how can we fix this and how can we do this and how can we do that. He does a very nice job of leadership.

Both trustee participants shared their satisfaction and relief about the outcome of the search for Doc in 2005. Gordy acknowledged that “when you go to search for a leader, I think it’s a pretty easy thing to get it wrong, and I think there’s a certain amount of luck in it. And we got the right person.”

When rolling out Renaissance I, Drake says they assumed the faculty would push back on the plan, in fact, they assumed Doc would receive more resistance than he did. The board was not concerned about this because:

by that time we certainly had enough confidence in [Doc], and we thought he was a strong enough individual to push this through. If you were talking about bringing in a president that wasn’t strong enough to face people face-to-face and make the tough decisions and withstand all the crap you’re going to get for it, you wouldn’t do this ... But the part about [Doc] is, he’s strong enough to stand up to the crap, and not that many are anymore.

Doc’s leadership is universally described as strong, decisive, bold, and innovative. No one described it as communal. Doc himself acknowledged that:

what is very fashionable right now is sort of leadership from the middle, or leadership by committee or whatever. And as you probably have figured out here, it’s really not. I try to take people’s opinions and advice.... We do take input. But the buck stops here, and for better or worse we live or die sort of on a lot of those decisions that I make.

Quite famously at Athletic, there are suggestion boxes around the campus where anyone can share an idea for improvement. Once a year a committee reviews the entries, ranks the top six, and the winners are shared by Doc at the state of the college address. The college commits to implementing the top idea and tries to implement all six. The committee is made up of faculty, including the director of the creativity institute, but Doc serves as an ex-officio member, and according to one past member, “he didn’t really have a vote, but he had the final say if he didn’t like what the committee had come up with and he liked something different on the list.” There is no ambiguity about who makes decisions at Athletic College. Participants were comfortable with

this dynamic. Their president makes plans, accepts feedback, and then makes decisions. He accepts responsibility for those decisions. This appears to suit most people. As Gordy Richards shared, “There can be constituencies that aren’t totally happy or they’re looking for something to be wrong, but that’s a very very small number.”

According to Drake, one of the reasons Athletic College has been able to keep Doc Hudson for nearly 20 years is the unequivocal support of the board. They come through for him financially when fundraising is needed. They don’t bat an eye when 60% of the faculty vote no confidence in him. Drake assured Doc at the start of his tenure that:

we have a board that fully supports you. [Doc] has his hands in everything, and I assured him that “you don’t have any politics on the board.” And so when people started poaching him, I said, “Hey, recognize who you are. You could go to a bigger school, but we’re paying you better than what most presidents get at a school like this by quite some. You’re successful, you like it here, your wife likes it here, your kids like it here. You can go to a bigger school and get into a political mess and not have nearly the fun, and other places you’re not going to have the control of things that you have here.” And I think that basically that’s the attitude that’s kept him here.

Drake is clear-eyed about his president. He recruited Doc and they’ve worked together for nearly 20 years. He knows what motivates Doc and what he cares about. He also knows his limitations and names them, sharing that “Doc would get killed in a bigger institution where there’s a lot of politics, and in most of them there are ... a lot of politics.”

One day, Doc Hudson will retire, and the trustees shared a sense of unease about how he will be replaced. Doc’s strong personality and autocratic leadership style have been largely accepted because there is broad agreement that he saved the college. The Athletic community has grown accustomed to strong, singular leadership in their president, but those same personality traits in a successor might be roundly rejected by the same people. Further, the college is not looking for a change agent in its next president. They are committed to the model

of athletic enrollment management they have invested in and do not want to hire a president who wants to take the college in a new direction. Board member Gordy Richards says that for their next leader, hiring an internal candidate next is “almost mandatory ... because we need to follow the format that we’ve built and move forward with it.” The board that was so keen to try something, anything, new 20 years ago is now insistent on sticking with what they know. Gordy has a vision for the future of the college and its next president, saying:

I think knowledgeable people being promoted from within can make a huge difference. There’s a certain amount of luck when you recruit somebody, you don’t always know what you’re getting, and I think that’s not true when you promote from within when you can.

CHAPTER 6: VERITAS UNIVERSITY

Veritas, located in the mid-Atlantic, is one of the oldest academic institutions in the United States and has embraced a mission of inclusivity and access since its founding close to 200 years ago. It was among the first co-ed institutions in the country and prides itself on its strong liberal arts curriculum that prepares students for service in their community. Like many institutions founded in this period, it was chartered by a church and while the institution retains historical and cultural ties to the church, it is open to students of all faiths. Unusually, the institution is also home to a seminary for that founding church, and the governance model for the seminary and the institution are connected. Each entity has an individual board and some members of each come together as a combined board to make organizational decisions. The two organizations are singly accredited. As of Fall 2023, the university enrolls approximately 2,800 students, 30% of whom are in graduate programs, while the seminary has enrolled an average of 62 students per year since 2017.

Veritas is located in a highly competitive market nearby many elite colleges. It struggled with enrollment declines beginning in the early 2000s. Enrollment hovered around 2,000 students throughout the 2000s but by 2012 had dropped below 1,100. The two presidents between 1997–2013 prioritized the institution becoming academically elite, focusing on the traditional liberal arts, and increasing national rankings. This led to faculty recruitment efforts that focused on faculty scholarship and recruiting and retaining faculty that wanted to teach academically gifted students in traditional liberal arts subjects. Otis Barnes, university board chair, shared that the previous president’s “idea of transformation was to shrink the size of the college and kind of go backwards.” By the late 2000s, it was evident that far from shrinking the college “we needed to diversify revenue streams, that we needed to get into adult education, that

we needed to create graduate programs,” shared Linda North, executive vice president and chief operating officer. Linda has been at Veritas since 2008 and worked her way up the college ranks through Student Affairs. She now serves as the college’s executive vice president, chief operating officer, and the president’s second-in-command. She had served under the previous president but in a lower administrative role.

By 2012, enrollment had been dropping for a decade and the college was in a financial crisis. According to Board Chair Otis Barnes, Veritas in 2012 was “a sleepy, small, really really old liberal arts college ... the college was stagnant.” The 2008 financial crisis and ensuing Great Recession had impacted families’ ability to pay for college, especially in the geographic region around Veritas. Despite the efforts of two presidents over 15 years, the college had not developed a strong national reputation, and so it continued to serve the same local students it always had. Linda shared that the college:

has always been, since our founding, more connected to the local community—working class, middle class. And so as a result of the economy that began to shift in 2008 with the decline, it was impacting our students and their families and their ability to pay. And so not only were we getting fewer [students] but they could pay less.

In August 2012, Linda took on the vice president for student affairs role just as this crisis was becoming evident. Several participants spoke kindly about the president at that time, but as Linda emphasized, he wasn’t “somebody who had the experience or the passion for this kind of more forward thinking, risk, engaging leadership. His acknowledgment of that actually made it a little easier because he wasn’t fighting. He was like ‘yeah, this isn’t me.’” That president announced that summer that the 2012–2013 academic year would be his last. In Fall 2012, once the discouraging student census numbers were in, the college made a 10% cut to the operating budget; this was accomplished mainly through attrition for staff members and retirement

incentives for faculty. Though Linda did not have to terminate anyone at that time, she lost and did not replace nearly half of her eight-person staff. Even these drastic measures were not sufficient, and so the college enacted a second round of cuts in Spring 2013. This was, according to Linda, “the hardest financial position the college had been in in decades.” The objective of the cuts was for a new president to be able to come in with a balanced operating budget and be able to move forward with new initiatives without having to make more cuts. Of a \$35M operating budget, \$5M was cut that year.

Hiring Greg Bryant

Dr. Greg Bryant is a Veritas alumnus, and by both his own account and others’, it has always been his dream to be the president of his alma mater. He had applied for the position nearly a decade before in a search process that resulted in hiring another candidate. When the position again became available, Greg was all in. The search coincided with changes on the board in which the top board positions shifted from seminary representatives to university board members. This leadership change brought Otis onto the board and installed a new chairman; these new members were focused on the future and the bottom line. According to Linda, in this search the board was “looking for someone who could bring new vision, who would think outside of the box ... they really wanted a strategic thinker who was not afraid of risk. I’ve never met a president who is less risk averse.”

President Bryant took office on July 1, 2013. In his inaugural address in April 2014 he laid out his plan for the future of the college, a sustainable liberal arts college for the 21st century. His remarks articulated a vision for a “liberal arts college that balances the theoretical with the practical, that helps students to learn by doing, and that prepares students for both satisfying lives and worthwhile careers” (Greg Bryant, inaugural address). Greg didn’t want to

abandon the college's liberal arts background, but he did see an urgent need to update it to meet the demands of students, parents, and industry. His plan called for a dramatic increase in technology in the classroom, embracing professional studies, and centering the existing liberal arts curriculum on community service and global citizenship. The liberal arts had to become both practical and applicable; students needed to be career-ready at graduation.

Initially, many of these changes were operational, and it was not difficult to garner the support necessary for implementation. Greg had the support of the board, and these improvements were not academic and did not require input from the faculty. One of Greg's first acts as president was to announce that the college would become a Mac campus and an Apple Distinguished School. Every student would be issued both a MacBook and an iPad, and every faculty member would have the same technology as their students. Having the same equipment would eliminate inequality between students in access to technology and enable students to complete their work from any location. Having the faculty on the same platforms created practical advantages, allowed the college to upgrade their network, and proved crucial in Spring 2020 when all classes went remote due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This decision was grounded in logistics and ethics, and a bit of marketing, ensuring that "students graduate with the technology tools they will see in their chosen careers and that they are consummate and creative producers of new work" (Greg Bryant, inaugural address). One administrator explained that the change was more significant than moving from using a PC to a Mac. Chief of Staff Rebecca Deming explained that at the time, many faculty didn't have a Veritas-issued laptop, they relied on desktops, and only a local server was available, so people were emailing themselves documents when off campus. Document sharing was highly uncommon. This move was not just about selecting technology, it was about "making the most

of your time,” said Rebecca. Sentiments from the faculty about these early changes were generally positive, which was heartening to many faculty and administrators since, by the end of his tenure, the faculty had rejected even modest suggestions from the previous president. One faculty member explained why the faculty did not fight these initial changes:

He [Greg] did a really good job of explaining the “why”; he did a really good job of giving the context, as an alum, of how this all tied back to our mission. And so again in trust building, he helped people to understand his intentions.

Another faculty attributed this initial acceptance of change to the fact that:

the old president was not inspiring confidence ... and we were sort of cautiously optimistic that the new president might be able to help out and, you know, help navigate these choppy economic waters.

Greg Bryant brought with him an attitude that anything was possible, and he made it a priority for the rest of the cabinet to take this approach as well. Linda North recounted how Greg pushed her to “find ways to say yes” especially when it came to student interests. Linda is widely considered one of Greg’s closest confidantes and supporters, but even for her, “my first year was tough with him. I liked the direction he was going in, but that’s not the world I was trained in, and it was very uncomfortable.” She was short-staffed from the 2012 hiring freezes, and the new president was insistent that she at least try to say yes to all student requests, including one to install an above-ground pool in the backyard of some college-owned student housing. She was trained to mitigate risk at all costs; he was unfazed by risk and saw everything as possible, even when those changes were in many directions and lacked obvious synergy. The president brought cultural change that shook everyone off their moorings and into something new.

By his own assessment, the most significant change Greg brought to the college wasn’t one particular change, rather it was a set of beliefs and priorities. “We got back to our roots. [Veritas] has always been about access and about educating those that others often overlook.” He

understood why past presidents had wanted to become an elite liberal arts college but, as Linda shared, this strategy “is never who we really were and frankly it failed miserably.” Greg’s assessment, like Linda’s, is that prior leaderships’ attempts were a fool’s errand both because they had little chance of success and because they went against the core values of the institution. When Greg considers his early change strategies and what was most significant, he is emphatic that “for me, the biggest shift was away from that prestigious liberal arts model.”

The Honeymoon Is Brief

Greg’s shift away from being an aspiring elite traditional liberal arts college quickly put him at odds with some of the faculty. Peter Jenkins, a faculty member in the humanities since 2005, shared that faculty saw the financial crisis as an excuse to change course and that they “are very concerned that the recession would be used to fundamentally change the nature of the college and that’s ultimately what happened.” Jenkins insists that there is nuance to the complaint, that it was not just the abandonment of prestige that was objectionable to the faculty but the abandonment of the identity of the college as a traditional, residential liberal arts campus. He shared that “there was a concern for moving away from the liberal arts generally ... and that has been borne out by the direction that the university has taken.”

The next phase in Greg’s plan was the expansion of academic programs toward professional ones, for which faculty support and leadership was necessary. This took significant time, as the provost when Greg arrived was a traditional liberal arts provost who was not prepared to oversee an expansion of professional programs. The provost hired to replace him was much keener on the plan, but according to Linda North “was very much not able to have the hard conversations with faculty and influence them, so we didn’t make a whole lot of progress.” This person was replaced by the current provost who is an alumna of the college and has spent

her entire academic career at Veritas, and, as Linda shared, “holds a whole lot of institutional memory.”

There are different perspectives about how much faculty resistance there was to the expansion of professional programs. There is consensus that the resistance was led primarily by the faculty hired under the previous two administrations under the banner of becoming a nationally recognized liberal arts college. These faculty now numbered in the single digits, but they held senior positions and were influential among the faculty. They were clear that they had not signed up to work at a college with professional and graduate programs that would be offered online or hybrid and to adult and non-traditional learners. Linda North pointed out that there is some degree of hypocrisy in this position since the college had had nursing, education, and business programs for decades prior to Greg’s arrival. To this, one faculty member retorted to the president in a meeting “yes, but those faculty knew their place.”

The objectionable behavior seems to be that Greg wanted to expand these programs, taking them off the periphery and placing them at the center of the institution. He came in with a goal to “maximize the infrastructure of the residential campus,” and this necessitated growing enrollment and investing in programs that could attract students to ensure future growth. Jenkins acknowledges that faculty held a variety of opinions on expanding curricular offerings, and that some faculty were supportive of the president’s plans, feeling that:

we just need to put ourselves on a sound financial footing, and whatever it takes to do that is a good move, so I think that there was within the faculty some division about what they wanted the university to do.

A small minority of faculty were vocal about their opposition to any move away from the traditional liberal arts as the core of the institution. Many other faculty had concerns about this, but they were outweighed by their concerns about economic viability, about the return of

retirement matches, about assurances that they would keep their jobs. Agnes Singer, a business faculty member turned dean, articulated this sentiment, saying that “while there were worries of keeping academic integrity and the soul of the academy intact, we thought it was really important that we face the growing headwinds that were coming up in higher education.”

Greg’s vision for the college focused on growing both graduate and adult programs in professional studies as ways to implement his access agenda and expand revenue from these programs. His strategy focused on educating students to meet the needs of their community, and, as he shared, “the easiest low-hanging fruit was our expertise in healthcare, so that’s where we got started.” The first graduate programs proposed were in occupational therapy, physical therapy, athletic training, and speech language pathology. Linda was proud that “we’ve been very attentive to the needs of society in building those graduate programs, and that’s why they’ve been successful, because it’s what people need and want.” Many participants pointed out how these new academic programs sailed through the faculty review process with little objection. Because of the faculty governance model at Veritas, program approval was slow, but it was not particularly contentious. Agnes Singer summed up the sentiments of many faculty, saying:

We’re going to be less of a liberal arts college. But we’re going to be open, and we’re going to continue to serve the students that come through our doors, who are often first-generation students. They don’t know what they’re capable of until they are. They transform when they have the ability to spend time with us. So I think that’s what feels more compelling to our faculty body. How do we continue to do what we do best?

This mentality led to the slow but steady growth of graduate degree programs until, in 2021 Greg proposed the college become a university. The college was trying to attract international students as well as larger competitive grants. One faculty member shared that “we had grown, we needed to move ourselves out of the Carnegie classification system from

baccalaureate to master's colleges and universities" to be competitive for grants and be classed with the institutions they considered their peers. In July 2021, the board voted unanimously to change the name of the institution from Veritas College to Veritas University to reflect this growth and expansion. Board Chair Otis Barnes acknowledged that this was a unilateral decision, and "we did not consult them [the faculty] when we switched from a college to university." Faculty participants shared that they opposed the lack of consultation but that the move itself was not seen as particularly controversial.

Throughout this time, Veritas adhered to a traditional model of shared governance for a liberal arts college, in which faculty have jurisdiction over the curriculum. It was generally accepted that while Greg and the administration managed the operations of the college, and Greg and the board set the vision and direction of the institution, the faculty had ultimate authority over the academic enterprise. The faculty decided which new programs would be adopted, which classes would be taught, and what the curriculum would entail. The administration could make requests or work with faculty directly to propose certain programs, but the faculty operated as a self-directed governing body and made the final decisions on curricular matters, and they did so at their own pace. This pace frustrated the board and put Greg in the unenviable position of regularly having to report on stalled or stilted curricular progress to the board, but this frustration remained secondary to the sanctity of the faculty jurisdiction over the curriculum.

Otis Barnes shared that until now the board has allowed "the faculty to approve new curriculum. That is one of the things that the board has delegated to the faculty." However, he was emphatic that faculty control over the curriculum exists solely at the discretion of the board. The faculty, he shared, "have no rights through the bylaws. The only way they get any rights is by the board granting them to them, generally through the faculty handbook."

Greg has been warning the Veritas community about the demographic cliff since he arrived as president in 2013, and all his strategies are meant to stave off financial disaster from declining enrollment in the coming years. After maximizing the infrastructure of the residential campus, he has always been clear that his top priorities are bringing new programs to market and diversifying revenue. Progress on these priorities has been hindered by the pace of program development and curriculum approval by the faculty. “Right now in higher education, adaptability is pretty important. You can’t just continue doing something for another 4 years until you decide it’s not working,” shared Otis. “You’ll be bankrupt.” After years of trying to add programs and make curricular changes slowly and arduously through the current system of faculty governance, recently the president and the board have taken a different tactic.

Faculty Governance

Faculty governance at Veritas is a “faculty by the whole” model where every faculty member attends monthly faculty meetings and votes on every matter that comes to the floor. There are currently 170 full-time faculty. This governance model is the source of immense frustration for the president and the board, and even faculty participants agreed that they had outgrown this style of governance, which as one faculty member shared, “had just become really unruly.” There was consensus among faculty participants that faculty governance should move to a senate model in which each constituency is represented by an individual or set of individuals who will meet every other week, and this representative body will move business along swiftly and effectively. This discussion, and the agreement about the senate model, has been in progress for years but has yet to take effect. As Greg shared, “The board has been waiting for the faculty to pick a governance model and bring that forward ... 3 years into it we have a chart of the three possible models. That is all we have.”

Veritas hired a well-respected consultant on shared governance to work with both the faculty and the board on improving both their respective governance structures and to help them better define their relationship to one another. Several faculty participants shared that they had successfully voted in Fall 2023 at a faculty meeting to adopt a senate model, which would take effect next year, but then added the caveat, “I would say we’re still trying to figure out what the best model for us is, and this is what the consultant is helping us with.” The provost also expressed relief that the faculty had finally voted to move to a senate model but acknowledged that “we haven’t created any governance documents, so I think it probably will not be implemented until the Fall of 2025.” This painstaking progress has left some administrators feeling pessimistic about the potential of faculty governance to meet the needs of the university, especially when it comes to timely program approval. One senior administrator lamented that “on the faculty governance side, that’s just a disaster. Any place that has a committee on committees demonstrates how it’s just a nightmare.”

Greg shared additional frustration at his limited options for communicating with the faculty. He attends faculty meetings but finds this to be an ineffective format for sharing information since in recent years:

I was moved to the back of the agenda ... probably 50% of the time I get bumped because there’s no time left for me to speak, and now the complaint is they don’t know what’s going on at the university.

When he does get time to address the faculty body, Greg might come to the faculty meeting with three points, but “there’s five different agendas that the faculty have that they want to bring up that you [he, Greg] have no data on or are ready to even talk about. You’re just getting hit with these things. I mean, it’s horrible.” He sends emails but finds this method lacking as a one-way form of communication. Communication with the staff is smoother; at the beginning of each

semester, there is an all-staff meeting with administrative updates on budget, enrollments, and the strategic plan. There is also a staff council that meets monthly and provides reports and updates on all non-academic departments. Monthly faculty meetings are supposed to be the format for analogous communication with faculty, but this is not the outcome under the current structure.

To address the unwieldy nature of faculty governance, the faculty handbook prescribes a workaround, a committee called the Faculty Advocacy Council, which represents the faculty and “takes the broad concerns of the faculty ... to cabinet,” said Agnes Singer. In the absence of a more effective faculty governance model, the administration relies on this five-member Faculty Advocacy Council to represent the faculty. The five members are chosen from the faculty with one tenured member from each of the three schools, one at-large member, and one at-large untenured member. No two members can be from the same department. Both Greg and Agnes remarked that this council operates like a senate model would, with a very small group representing the faculty and addressing matters of import with the administration, but Agnes caveated its effectiveness, saying that “the structure of the committee is not empowered the way that the Faculty Senate would be.”

Cumbersome faculty governance has led to myriad challenges in recent years, most notably in passing a faculty handbook and in revising the general education curriculum. In 2015, the board and faculty agreed to a faculty handbook rewrite process managed by the faculty. The faculty’s progress was so slow that they submitted their approved draft a year and a half late and only after the board had become so impatient that they threatened to approve a handbook without faculty input. Otis recounted that “it took them 7 years to make changes to the faculty handbook

because the process was not very good.” Greg shared that under duress, the faculty submitted their document, but when general counsel reviewed it, they discovered that:

there’s things in here you can’t have, and changed it, and the board voted it through, and then the faculty got upset because that wasn’t what they voted on. But they don’t vote—they make a recommendation—and if they had done it to the timeline the board had wanted, there would have been plenty of time of give and take. And the board gave them plenty of time. I mean it wasn’t like a business turnaround in a month, and we want to see this. But every board meeting I’d go back and stay they’re still not there; they’re still not there. And so the board said, “By this date, or we do it.” And so they [the faculty] got it in, but we weren’t able to get the feedback that we needed.

Otis acknowledged that these delays work against the faculty’s interests, further justifying unilateral decision-making by the board, saying, “To be honest, we’ve been able to use the fact that they don’t have a good governance structure against them.” For their part, faculty expressed frustration at the president’s and board’s lack of patience and respect for their process.

This same tension resurfaced again during the revision of general education requirements. The revision process, which has taken several years, is now in its final steps but has hit a logistical stalemate; the faculty-approved curriculum requires that certain general education courses are taught by humanities faculty and the course registration system can’t accommodate that logic. As a result, the provost is preparing to present the board with a final plan that is not approved by the faculty. She acknowledges that this is an extreme step since as Greg shared several times, “the board generally feels the faculty has the undergraduate curriculum.” The caveat to this jurisdictional latitude is time, and so the provost and president are prepared with a backup plan if the board wants to move forward and the faculty governance process has not produced a result in the allotted span of time. If the faculty do not provide results in a timely manner, Greg said that “the board will finally get impatient and they will issue an

impatience order.” These tensions are exacerbated by the board’s own unique structure and dynamics.

Board Governance

Veritas’s complicated history as both a seminary and a college, separate but joined, means that it has developed a complex board governance structure. The model includes an individual board for each institution (the university and the seminary) and then a joint board that brings together the leadership of both boards to make decisions that impact the entire institution. The university board and seminary board each handle the operations of their individual institutions. The joint board is made up of the committee chairs and leadership of the two other boards and is primarily focused on finances; this supra board only addresses operational decisions if these decisions impact the finances of the institution. Greg illustrated the distinction with an example about tenure, saying, “If the university wanted another tenure line, that has to come from the joint board, but who gets that tenure line is the university [board’s] job.” The leaders of each board sit not only on the joint board but also serve as ex-officio members on the other entity’s board. As a result, Linda North said of board meetings, “For the staff it feels like Groundhog Day, because we do the same thing in a variety of meetings again” for all three boards, three days in a row, and most of the people in the room are the same.

Each individual board has elected faculty trustees and elected student trustees; two respectively for the university board and one each for the seminary board. At the joint board, there is one faculty vote and one student vote; trustees rotate based on seniority being the voting student or faculty member and are expected to confer with their fellow representative trustees before votes. Nearly all participants cited these elected faculty trustees as evidence of the institution’s commitment to shared governance and faculty involvement in decision-making.

Perspectives differed, however, about how much weight faculty trustees really carry on either board. The current faculty trustee shared that faculty trustees “typically do not speak up as much at board meetings in the past, it was my understanding.” Recent events have peaked tensions between the faculty and the board, and so the faculty trustee shared that:

I think there’s been a really big change in the way that faculty voice is represented at the board. The faculty trustees are typically not on the agenda, but during this last meeting we were not on the agenda, but I asked to take the floor, and the board spent more than an hour talking about the issues that were important to faculty.

This characterization of the role of the faculty trustee sits in contrast to the experience of Peter Jenkins who previously served as a faculty trustee and said that “there was a relatively small group who had a disproportional amount of power” on the board, and that “it felt to me like there was sort of a clique at the middle of it all ... and then there was everyone else who mostly just went along with what the key players wanted to do.” This dynamic did not give much weight or space to the faculty trustees, and “I learned partway through my tenure that the board meetings are not places to raise hard questions or to challenge anything.” After raising a faculty concern in the meeting, Jenkins and his fellow faculty trustee were taken aside by two board members and instructed to direct their questions or concerns to the appropriate college vice president, not the board. Peter’s perspective of the board’s attitude toward faculty trustees was that “you’re just faculty members, and you don’t understand the full scope and ramifications of what’s going on.”

The consensus among faculty participants was that they are meant to be grateful for their participation, at any level, in board proceedings. Nearly all participants shared how unique it is to even have faculty trustees and felt that there is value in knowing what is going on and being able to develop relationships with the people who make decisions for their institution. Peter

acknowledged that “it would be silly to think that we influence anything that goes on in those board meetings,” but he still felt it was valuable to have representation from the faculty in the governing body.

The board governance structure is further complicated by the radically different cultures of the university and seminary boards. The university board is made up primarily of business people who tend to be fiscally conservative and focused on the financial bottom line. The seminary board is religiously oriented, focused on academics and social justice, and is primarily concerned with constituents’ well-being and how a given decision will be received by each constituent group. Greg shared that the seminary board members “are more caring; they are more sensitive to the other side. They ask way more questions about human beings and how someone will feel about this than the business side of the house.” Former faculty trustee Peter Jenkins agreed that “it’s really interesting to watch the dynamics between these folks.”

Opinions differed about whether or not this dynamic is productive; Greg acknowledged that the two boards “do drive each other up a wall” and one university board member referred to the seminary board as “a necessary evil.” However, Greg also insisted that “both [boards] are useful to me” with the university board crunching numbers and ensuring financial success and the seminary board focusing on “the culture and the people, and that we don’t run over them.” The seminary board chair, Benjamin Davis, previously served as the university chaplain, and so he has longstanding relationships with many faculty and staff at Veritas. He argued that this perspective is an asset as he’s able to share “where faculty are going to feel on this and help the trustees stay in touch with those sorts of concerns.” Davis did not see a conflict between the boards, instead emphasizing their symbiosis as:

messaging is what seminary folks do, and so helping the board in messaging and continuing to say “we have to do this carefully, and we have to do this sensitively” helped the joint board be stronger as you had these very exemplary business minds moving curriculum forward in new ways. That joining together of those two strengths, I think, helped the institution move forward.

The university board chair did not share this characterization, instead expressing frustration at the board model awarding what he considered disproportionate representation to the seminary based on student enrollment. Even after acquiring another seminary several years ago, there are only 30 students at the seminary currently compared to Veritas’s total student population of nearly 2,800.

Board and Faculty Tensions

The structure and culture of both board and faculty governance at Veritas provide ample fodder for challenges within each group, but they also set up a dynamic for power struggles between the faculty and the board. One of Greg’s frustrations with faculty is that “every single faculty member thinks they should have weigh-in on things here.” Faculty member Peter Jenkins confirmed that the faculty do feel they should be broadly involved and are frustrated that decisions are being made without them. He shared that:

people [the faculty] go away for the summer and think “Ok, what’s going to happen in the summer? Since we’re all gone, they’re going to make a lot of changes.” And then you come back in August and it’s like “Ok what happened?”

The greatest source of faculty tension today is the School of Professional Studies, which was created in the Summer of 2023 without input from faculty governance. Jenkins explained that the faculty were told when they returned in the fall that this was allowable because the school is just an administrative structure, no curriculum was approved, just a framework to house programs and courses that either already exist or will be approved by faculty governance in the future. This

was poorly received and all faculty participants noted that it had caused distrust among the faculty for the administration and the board.

President Bryant shared the context for the creation of the School of Professional Studies and the most recent development that has incensed faculty. Greg's original strategy for creating online, executive-style graduate programs was to identify a faculty member in that discipline to adapt the existing curriculum into an executive format, specifically tailored to the learning needs of adults. Speaking specifically about the MBA program, he shared that while he originally felt strongly that this model would work:

after 11 years, I no longer believe that ... I've had four attempted starts at this and all four have failed. So the board voted last Friday to sever the [School of Professional Studies] into its own governance structure that basically handles responding to market need, building quickly and turning it around quickly ... it doesn't go through the traditional approval structure. We can no longer wait. We now have \$1.5M shortfall in the Business School because the programs aren't built to the market needs.

As of Spring 2024, the new School of Professional Studies will operate like a for-profit college, owned by Veritas. Indeed, the board's original plan was to acquire a for-profit college, but when that fell through, they investigated the possibility of building a similar structure in-house and deemed it possible. The primary goal of the school is to deliver programs that are demanded by the market and to do so in a speedy and efficient manner. This will be done by hiring a small number of full-time faculty who will create curricula, which will be approved by an associate provost. New courses and programs will be shared as a point of information with the associate provosts of the two other schools at the same time it goes to the provost who will recommend it to the president who will then bring it to the board for approval. Courses will be proposed, designed, approved, and marketed to the public in the space of a few months. Otis Barnes articulated an even more heroic timeline, saying:

We're talking about programs that we want to put together basically in two weeks. We can put the program together and sketch it out in two weeks, get a curriculum together probably in another two weeks. So that's the kind of thing we've got to be able to do if this school is going to be successful.

Because of interview timing, faculty participants did not share their sentiments about this new development directly, but Greg confirmed that they are not pleased. In explaining why such a dramatic move was necessary, Greg complimented the faculty curriculum committee on its improved operations in recent years but insisted that the School of Professional Studies has to have a different system for program approval. He shared that on the curriculum committee:

one of the faculty members said "I don't understand this speed thing. We got a new program up and running and it only took 3 years." And the chairman of the board was like, "Could you say that again? It only took 3 YEARS." And so, they're at a glacial [pace].

Both Greg and the board have articulated that there will be an opportunity in the future to reunite the governance of the new school with the rest of faculty governance, but that will require evidence of change and efficiency. Otis reiterated both this possibility and also his concerns, saying:

The way it is right now, the fact that they can't get out of their own way makes it difficult for them to be helpful in governance and actually have a genuine say, because they can't come to consensus fast enough to make a decision.

This approach might appear heavy handed, but it lines up with another shift Veritas is making in the way they think about governance. With the guidance of their governance consultant, Veritas is adjusting the use of the term "shared governance" to "delegated governance." As Greg explained, delegated governance moves away from the erroneous notion that power is divided in thirds between the board, the president, and the faculty because "that's not true. The board has all of it [authority], and they delegate responsibility to individuals or groups to do things." Otis emphasized the importance of this distinction, saying, "There is no

shared governance, just so you know. It's delegated. Delegated governance is what there is. There's no shared governance. If you look at the bylaws of [Veritas] College, it doesn't mention the faculty one time." By this logic, the decision to create a new school and then remove it from traditional faculty governance is perfectly sensible. As Greg explained, in the case of the new school, the board has "delegated to you [the faculty] the running of the undergraduate residential college and they have just delegated to [Greg] the running of the School of Professional Studies ... they are free to do that."

This decision highlights an important dynamic not only between the board and the faculty but also between the board and the president. Otis shared that he recently insisted on having a meeting directly with members of the Faculty Advocacy Council. While he has hosted social faculty lunches before, he acknowledged that this was the "first time I imposed my will and said, 'I'm going to see the faculty.'" The purpose of the meeting was to explain to the faculty about how decisions are made at Veritas because:

I don't think that they really understand that the decisions that are coming down are not those of the president. He may make recommendations, but he doesn't have the ability to do a whole lot when it comes to major decisions.

When pressed about whether this stance is to provide the president some cover so that Greg can have a better relationship with the faculty, Otis was immediately dismissive, insisting:

No. Because he [Greg] makes recommendations all the time that we tell him no. The board is not a rubber stamp for him for cover ... So no. I don't see it that way. Now, are they his [Greg's] ideas? Most of the time, yes. Could he have done it without getting the board's approval? Absolutely not. I think he would tell you that he is challenged on all of these decisions by not just one person on the board but by numerous people on the board.

The Future of Veritas

When Greg Bryant came to Veritas, the college had just under 1,100 undergraduates. Now the university enrolls 2,800 students and 30% of them are in graduate programs. Eighty

full-time faculty have grown to 170, and the \$35M operating budget that was cut to \$30M during 2012 now sits at \$72M. This transformation is perceived wildly differently by various constituent groups. Greg and his administrators described these changes as constant, incremental progress and growth that has enabled the college to evolve to this position. The faculty described this time differently, citing the relentless pace of innovation and change. Agnes Singer, faculty member turned dean, described the never-ending waves of change that the faculty have had to adapt to and “because things have been changing so much, we have been tasked with an inordinate amount of things we have to flex to.”

It is not entirely clear which changes the faculty have found difficult to adapt to. Some seem to perceive each additional academic program as a new change rather than the natural growth that the board and administration are trying to foster. Other actions that received faculty objection seemed minor. For example, some faculty took exception to Greg’s decision to join the New American Colleges & Universities consortium, an organization “dedicated to the purposeful integration of liberal education, professional studies, and civic engagement.” These faculty, who were largely hired in the days of the previous presidents, were vocal in their concern that joining would make the college less prestigious by so publicly announcing its dedication to professional studies.

Some amount of faculty fatigue is simply due to whiplash from what they perceive as constant change and the sense that they cannot get their bearings before more change is rolled out. From their perspective, they had no sooner adopted new technology and integrated it into their coursework before they were being asked to also adapt their liberal arts curriculum to make it more practical and career oriented. The price of not doing so was students choosing to major in one of the new professional programs the college was adopting at the same time. The pace of

faculty governance was expected to pick up rapidly while they were also welcoming new colleagues, doubling their number in a decade. Some of their new faculty colleagues have dual appointments and oversee offices like corporate partnerships, adult learning, graduate certificates, and other innovative initiatives. Some of the negative sentiment around this growth seems to stem from the multiple fronts on which the change occurs—the innovations implemented today might have nothing to do with the ones that rolled out 6 months ago. Developing corporate partnerships to render the liberal arts more practical feels disconnected from developing executive-format graduate certificates. Rolling out an MBA seems unrelated to broadening graduate offerings in allied health fields. The university's growth lacks a central, unifying message tying these strategies together. Faculty can't understand the end game, and so they can't recognize how these changes are getting them there.

For their part, the board and administration point to these faculty objections as being out of touch with the direction of the university. To them, it demonstrates that the faculty are unwilling to accept growth and progress as a means of securing the university's future. They recognize and acknowledge that "the faculty" are not a monolith, and that 170 individual people hold a wide variety of opinions. Several administrators referred to the faculty hired in the university's prestige-seeking days as those with the most objections but note that this is a tiny minority of faculty. Faculty stress around change clearly extends beyond that cadre and into the faculty mainstream, even to faculty who are supportive of Greg's overall plans for growth and strengthening in the face of demographic declines.

Several participants have dual appointments as faculty members and mid-level administrators, which enabled them to offer a variety of perspectives on faculty adaptation to changes and innovation. One faculty member who also holds a role with corporate partnerships

talked about spending the first 2 years in her administrative job building trust and assuring the faculty that her work would help them and not create more work for them. She realized over time that:

actually, it did unintentionally create some more work for people, and so that's where we had to reign back in to say, "This is not going to work either, right?" If we're coming to people with these opportunities, and it's just piling on, right? So it was about figuring out the infrastructure for partnerships to be successful.

For her part, Agnes Singer applauds the faculty for their continued adaptability:

Most faculty in our organization are embracing these changes. That doesn't mean that we don't have disagreements—we do. And we worry about how what we do in those changes, how the product [education] will maintain its mission. The integrity of that product—we worry about that. But the majority of this faculty body has been flexible in response to the change. There have been a lot of changes that have been thrown at this faculty, and they've been flexible in response.

Greg too feels the pressure of change, but from the opposite direction. Greg seems to worry endlessly about the demographic cliff; all participants mentioned the cliff as something covered regularly by the president. Greg talked about the relentless pace of change and progress he has taken the college on to try to prepare and strengthen the institution for this impending event. He feels the weight of the future of the college on his shoulders. He worries that "the kinds of colleges most at risk are the ones under the top 100 liberal arts colleges who have enough money that they're not hungry, but not enough money to eat well. And that's Veritas." When Greg came to Veritas, the endowment sat at \$80M, now it is \$146M. As he shared "it's in the top 25% of endowments ... so there are groups of faculty that want to believe that they can be Williams or Haverford or someone and they can't." He's kept up this energy, this constant drive for growth for more than 10 years, but:

the board asks me all the time, and faculty ask me all the time ... "Is it [the changes we've made] big enough to make it through?" How the hell do I know? Like I don't

know if the ark is big enough. God didn't come to me and tell me it's got to be 40 cubits by 40 cubits.

Asked about his plans for the future, Greg shared that "I know why presidents leave after 10 years, because they become like Charlie Brown's teacher." He talked about a presidential colleague who had retired recently and said that "what drove him out was that everybody knew what he was going to say, so they never even asked him the question." After some period of time, "you're a known entity. And it gets harder to manage change, I think, as a known entity." Greg knows that the faculty ask regularly about when all this change will stop or at least slow down. He reiterates constantly to himself, the board, and the faculty that:

this is a marathon that's like a relay race—there is no stopping. Faculty think "Oh at some point if we get by this, you know, Eden will open up." And they don't realize ... it's got to keep going ... because if it goes backwards, it's bad.

CHAPTER 7: IN-CASE ANALYSIS

This chapter analyzes each of the three cases separately to address the three research questions of the study:

1. How do presidents of tuition-dependent, private colleges lead financial turnarounds in a context of shared governance?
2. In what ways do presidents engage key shared governance stakeholders—faculty and boards—in implementing financial turnaround processes? How do they interact with faculty in general and formal faculty shared governance? How do they interact with the board?
3. In what ways do presidents leverage hard or soft power in working within the framework of shared governance?

Questions one and two are addressed jointly, while the question of hard and soft power is addressed separately. This in-case analysis is a helpful precursor to analyzing the cases together as a whole.

Idyllic University

Financial Turnaround in Shared Governance

At Idyllic, the changes that were most pressing to improve the college's finances were operational. Correcting the annual deficit was accomplished by cutting personnel, freezing retirement contributions, and restricting all other discretionary spending. The long-term problem of debt was addressed by finding a new lender and refinancing the college's debt. These changes required the sign-off of the board, but they did not involve faculty governance.

That said, upon his arrival, President Brown invested heavily in developing social capital broadly across multiple stakeholder groups. He prioritized getting to know and understand both

his board members and the college's faculty and staff, but he made a distinction between these individuals and their collective governing bodies. For instance, he paid significant attention to individual faculty and staff members. He did this on two levels. He individually met with each person during his first month as president, investing a significant amount of limited time to build personal relationships. He also worked hard at engaging the campus community broadly by establishing regular patterns of written communication and holding regular open forums to update the entire community on progress.

However, he did very little with the formal faculty government. He quickly identified that this body was neither high functioning nor particularly influential with the faculty. It also did not represent the staff, whose cooperation he urgently needed to address these structural deficits. Had he focused on faculty governance as his method of connecting with the faculty, an immediate stalemate might have been likely as his proposal was firing 14 of their colleagues and ceasing contributions to employees' retirement accounts. Instead, his approach to management prized building personal relationships that provided the foundation for him to communicate both the situation and options to move forward. He regularly engaged his cabinet and members of the faculty and staff in thinking through options for financing, cost-cutting, and increasing efficiency. He built a personal foundation of trust by regularly visiting departments and hearing faculty concerns and feedback. He involved the faculty and staff in being part of the solution by empowering them to propose new programs and ideas to generate revenue and strengthen the college.

President Brown's choice not to engage faculty governance early in his presidency allowed him to sidestep a bureaucratic and political morass and instead identify individual people who could assist him in managing the financial turnaround. Once the immediate financial

crisis was over, Brown turned his attention back to faculty governance and worked with Dr. Warner to engage the faculty, whose trust he had already earned, to create a new structure that would suit Idyllic's specific governance needs. This resulting Faculty Council and Faculty Leadership Council are organized specifically to bolster one of Idyllic's greatest academic strengths—speed to market. Both bodies are designed to empower the faculty, who truly do control both academic offerings and course curriculum, while also ensuring that the university can conceive of a program, approve it, market it, and offer it all in less than one calendar year.

In contrast to his individualized approach to the faculty and staff, President Brown focused on the board as a governing body. He recognized early on that he needed assistance in addressing the underlying structural problems that had led to board members' lack of information and communication. The board, in its current form, did not have the context to make sound decisions. Like its faculty counterpart, this body was not working, but unlike faculty governance, its effectiveness mattered, and he needed to develop its organizational capacity. His decision to ask Dr. Warner, chair of Idyllic's accrediting body, to serve as an internal consultant and advise the board on governance best practices illustrates the importance he placed on this improvement. Brown believed it was critical to address the "muddying of roles" regarding the board and administration. Focusing the board on governance also allowed Brown to work with his faculty and staff without board interference. The board also needed a clear understanding of the college's finances to be able to carry out their fiduciary roles and support his stability plans. The result of these board-level interventions was a more engaged and informed board with a clear and collective understanding of their role as a governing body.

One of the most profound changes for the Idyllic board was in recognizing President Brown as the conduit of information between the board and the faculty. Whereas under prior

administrations, board members reached out to faculty directly to ask questions, solve problems, and develop plans, Brown insisted that board members not work with faculty directly. While board members may contact senior administrators directly for information, the president is copied. This separation solidified his role as the operational manager of the college and ensured that he was aware of these interactions. Critically, this process ensures that all members of the board and faculty have equal amounts of information. Brown believed that direct interaction between individual board members and faculty both confused the president's role and created a disparity of information that he felt was not conducive to good governance.

However, President Brown also engaged at an individual level with board members. He worked to get to know each member of the board as individuals, learn about their backgrounds, experiences, and strengths, and build the rapport and trust that would give him the buy-in to make transformational change at the college. Board Chair Caroline Davis believed that Idyllic's success and the rate of growth and change were in part due to the superb relationship and trust between her and the president. Other board members felt similarly about their close and trusting relationship with David. They attributed the quality of these relationships to David's open and clear communication, his transparency in interpreting the information he was sharing with them, and his demonstrated ability and willingness to make difficult and unpopular decisions. President Brown's engagement with the board, both as individuals and as a governing body, rendered the board a tremendous asset in driving financial turnaround.

President Brown's strategic approach to faculty and board interactions allowed him to undertake meaningful change quickly. These first change actions built trust and gave him immediate political capital to take further actions. The initial actions required for turnaround were operational, and for this he needed board approval and a critical mass of support from

individual faculty and staff members. He needed enough cooperation and constituent feedback to be a subject matter expert and be able to credibly offer proposed solutions. To achieve this, he needed a functioning board and to have a good relationship with individual board members, some faculty members, and key members of staff. He did not need the approval or consent of faculty governance. Once turnaround activities had reached a stage where formal faculty buy-in through a governance structure was needed, he invested significant time and attention in that arena. President Brown's interactions with faculty and board governance are examples of triaging priorities. He engaged with individuals and groups as needed to affect the most critical changes necessary and then adjusted that engagement as priorities evolved and shifted.

Leadership in Shared Governance: Hard or Soft Power

When presidents use hard power, they call on the authority of their role to assert decision-making power. When they employ soft power, they rely on their ability to influence others and bring constituents together to achieve consensus. President Brown drew people in with his authenticity and genuine earnestness, soft power skills. He is not charismatic in the traditional sense, and his personality and leadership style are best described as compelling. Every participant found these traits notable and provided multiple illustrative examples, such as the story about him meeting with every member of the faculty and staff in his first month. He earned the trust of his constituents, both employees and board members, by being so thorough and diligent that no one questioned either his accuracy or his motives. The board member who shared that there was “not one rock that went unturned” in Brown's early days articulated a sentiment shared by many.

The president's dedication and hard work earned him the trust and respect of many faculty and staff members who otherwise would have reason to distrust or dislike him—he was

cutting their benefits, instituting a hiring freeze, and laying off their colleagues after all.

President Brown himself expressed surprise that he had survived the turnaround, pointing out the much more likely outcome that once on solid financial ground, the faculty and staff would want a leader who had not overseen such draconian measures to land them on that solid footing.

President Brown's characteristics of coalition building, consultation, and listening are all activities associated with soft power, of influencing others without having to rely on the authority of a person's position. However, this case also offers examples of President Brown firmly taking action legitimized by his position—evidence of his use of hard power. He was firm with the board early on about the ways they would and would not interact and even converse with faculty and staff. He followed through on his proposal to reduce the workforce within only 7 months of taking office despite a tremendous public outcry, negative press, and a lawsuit that went on for 3 years. As Board Chair Caroline Davis said, "He doesn't put up with foolishness." President Brown's typical leadership style of consultation and consensus building may be what makes his occasional exercise of hard power so effective. Because he listens and takes the time to gather feedback, educate the key players, and work together to solve problems, his occasional autocratic decision-making is both accepted and respected. President Brown's soft power has built an arsenal of goodwill that he can be confident he can tap into when the need arises.

The key to President Brown's success may well be his punctuated approach of using soft power most of the time and hard power occasionally when needed. Administrators, faculty, and board members commented on what is almost a compulsion to listen to as many people and perspectives as exist on a given issue. He is not interested in understanding a problem from one or two perspectives; he wants to talk with everyone, hear every fact, and consider the issue from every angle. He goes beyond listening and carefully weighs the suggestions and feedback of his

constituents; faculty and administrators spoke about feeling empowered to make decisions and being confident that their actions and feedback mattered. Faculty and staff see themselves in the changes and growth made at Idyllic.

Brown's natural leadership skills tend toward soft power. He is soft spoken, doesn't take credit for the incredible success he has overseen at the university, and is quick to offer credit to others, especially the faculty and members of his cabinet. However, his ability to be a dynamic leader, to leverage hard power without hesitation with either the faculty or the board when he has deemed it necessary has strengthened his effectiveness. His ability to adeptly move across the power spectrum allows him to tap into multiple sources of authority, which have served both him and the university well over his tenure.

Athletic College

Financial Turnaround in Shared Governance

When Doc Hudson became the president of Athletic College, he had a clear picture of the college's challenging financial situation, and he arrived with both the plan and the personnel to address it. While he still had to be cognizant of and adapt to the realities on the ground, he and Craig Richards, EVP, had the gameplan in hand and were prepared to implement it. Critically, Doc had the support of the board both for him as the leader and for his plan to grow enrollment through athletics. The board voted for him unanimously and as Board Chair Drake shared, "100% [of the board] bought in with the understanding that they were going to have to make the biggest gift they were capable of." The board also expected the faculty to push back, so when this proved true, the only surprise from the board was that their pushback was not more severe.

The board's nonchalance about faculty opinion reflected a long-standing dynamic where having faculty on board was preferred but was not essential. Formal faculty approval for

Athletic's investment in athletics was never a key priority. This is not to downplay Doc's commitment to having Athletic's community on board. He invested significant time and effort in bringing both faculty and the rest of the campus community along with him as evidenced by the off-campus faculty and staff retreat where Doc explained the model and asked for alternative ideas. Indeed, as Craig Richards, EVP and co-creator of the enrollment model, shared, Doc was on a constant on-campus public relations campaign, meeting with union representatives, faculty groups, and individual constituents. Doc wanted the campus community to be behind this plan, and participants shared how deftly he rolled out information to accomplish this goal. He was looking for individual allies, and he found many of them, but he was not concerned about winning over every faculty and staff member, and he neither asked for nor needed approval for his plan from faculty governance or the faculty union.

In contrast, Doc needed not only the formal support of the board, but their financial investment. He needed them to personally believe that this plan would work and that it was worthy of their own personal philanthropy to make it happen. He needed them to bet the financial future of the college they loved on this plan by providing \$30M in gifts and loans to bring it to fruition. It makes sense then that he prioritized his relationship with the board. When members expressed concern, he explained his reasoning and, like the example of the ice rink, he did so in such illustrative detail that nearly 20 years later they still remember it. He provided specifics, he brought the right people to the board meeting to back up the plan, and each element of the plan stated who was accountable for achieving the promised results. He addressed every concern or question of the bankers and the board until each was satisfied both individually and as a governing body.

Doc bet that as enrollment results improved, so too would support and confidence for his enrollment plan. This held true both for the board and employees. While at the beginning of Doc's tenure, there were extra board meetings and constant communication with the board, as Drake shared:

Frankly, once they brought that first bigger class in, everybody has trusted him since. For the first few years we still had that little bit of doubt like "geez, I hope he can make this work" but once he proved that he could, everybody relaxed about it.

Similarly, the faculty who had been up in arms about having to teach "a bunch of dumb jocks" were pleased to see the GPAs and ACT scores of their students rise steadily along with the engagement of their competitive, athletic students. Doc didn't seek or need a faculty vote to transform the college, he just needed to gain their trust long enough to show them the plan would work, and then he had to fulfill the promises he had made to them. He did this, and one faculty member echoed the sentiments of many in saying, "I do know that many of the ideas that President [Hudson] had early on did, in fact, save the college."

While Doc has never counted formal faculty approval as his top priority, the 2020 vote of no confidence negatively impacted his interaction and commitment to engaging with the faculty. While this vote was led by members of the union, it was formally brought to a vote by the faculty governance body. The vote did not disrupt the college's change agenda, but it did impact Doc's interactions with the faculty and commitment to collaboration. His language around decision-making after that incident shifted, now saying, "We do take input. But the buck stops here." This language and tone are different from the leader who brought the entire faculty and staff to an off-campus retreat to share a model with them, invited their questions, and agreed to consider alternatives. Post vote, Doc's understanding of his social contract with the faculty is to fulfill commitments he makes to them and continue making wise decisions to keep the college

not only surviving but thriving. The faculty have a role to play, but it is teaching students, not weighing in on management decisions. This is not to say that Doc does not care about faculty opinions or confer with them on matters of import, but he generally does this individually and with specific people whose opinions he values. Doc's feedback loop with the faculty generally is more indirect, either through the annual suggestion box competition or via Maria Adler's seemingly infinite calendar of committee meetings.

Leadership in Shared Governance: Hard or Soft Power

It is easy to characterize Doc Hudson as a hard power president, but this oversimplification would be an injustice. From early on, even before Doc was president at Athletic College, he inspired a search committee, a board of trustees, and a faculty to believe in a bright future for a college that was objectively failing. In that pre-hiring phase, he did not have access to the levers of hard power. Doc's energy and enthusiasm for Athletic College are both palpable and contagious. He motivated board members to contribute \$15M with no proof of concept, just an ambitious vision. He convinced two guys in NYC to move to a post-industrial midwestern town to incubate an online learning platform that now boasts participation from more than 85 colleges across the country. He avoided an uproar from faculty when announcing that all available resources for several years would be directed toward athletics, not academics, despite recognizing their struggle to teach 21st century science in a 1950s building.

Doc Hudson is adept at utilizing soft power to influence, persuade, and inspire people to collective action. However, by his own admission, that is not the tactic he has followed to lead Athletic College, especially in recent years. He acknowledges this when saying, "What is very fashionable right now is sort of leadership from the middle, or leadership by committee or whatever. And as you probably have figured out here, it's really not." It is possible that

consensus building and empowering groups with real authority is simply incongruous with Doc's leadership style, but it is also possible that Doc has adapted his leadership style to meet the needs, expectations, and capabilities of the community he serves.

Based on the accounts of faculty participants, faculty governance at Athletic has been decimated by the influence of the faculty union. The outsized power of the union has left formal faculty governance diluted, hollowed-out and confusing, has dampened faculty's enthusiasm in participating, and has left the faculty body without clearly defined leadership. In the absence of effective faculty governance, workarounds have been implemented, such as installing the faculty president on the VPAA's leadership team to ensure that faculty feedback is considered when making decisions related to the faculty. If Doc wanted to cultivate leadership based on consensus building and empowering others, it is unclear who he would confer with or empower.

The board acknowledged the weakness of the faculty's organizational power when they hired Doc. From the beginning, they accepted that faculty would object to the enrollment growth plan and were not concerned by this. They did not expect their new president to be deterred by disagreement and instead valued that Doc would, as Drake articulated, "face people face-to-face and make the tough decisions and withstand all the crap you're going to get for it." They were not looking for a consensus-based leader and Doc met their expectations. Their dismissal of faculty authority was reinforced in their reaction to the 2020 vote of no confidence, which was to immediately disregard the vote and inform the faculty it would have no effect. From the start of Doc's tenure, the premise was that faculty governance did not exist in any meaningful or effective way, and the board's expectation was that he would manage the faculty, not defer to them. Doc has executed a leadership strategy that is congruous with that premise.

Even decisions that ostensibly require faculty support are perceived by the faculty to be a forced choice. When faculty spoke about the adoption of the LIFT platform, they expressed their acceptance of the situation and tentative support, all in the context that if they did not move in this direction, Doc warned the college might not survive. The approval of LIFT courses by the faculty, which Maria Alder, vice president for academic affairs, pointed out was nearly unanimous, was taken alongside budget-cutting measures, which demonstrated to the faculty that acquiescence was the only real option. This frustration resulted in 60% approval for a vote of no confidence, which was immediately seen as irrelevant by the board.

The faculty at Athletics have been shown repeatedly that they do not have a role in governing the college. The board has delegated nearly complete authority to the president and many faculty accept this decision because he has demonstrated he can achieve good results. For his part, Doc is filling a void of leadership created by a disorganized and divided system of faculty governance. Both perspectives are valid, but like the chicken and the egg, it is challenging to determine which created the other and what would have to change to alter this dynamic.

Veritas University

Financial Turnaround in Shared Governance

When Greg Bryant arrived at Veritas, he was clear about his mission, saying, “We got back to our roots. [Veritas] has always been about educating those that others often overlook.” By playing to the institution’s strengths, they would carve out their niche in the market. They would compete with other colleges by doing what they do best. Though it seems counterintuitive, they would solve their financial problems by appealing to students who required financial assistance and then scaling their programs large enough to make this model

financially sustainable for the institution. This central logic has led Greg to propose and enact many innovations that may appear to be unrelated to one another. The theme of progress at Veritas is essentially “do what we do, just better.” As a result, the college’s transformation, which is indisputable looking at the university’s enrollment and finances, has felt to many faculty to be disconnected and incongruous.

Greg’s early initiatives around technology were largely successful and implemented smoothly because they did not require the approval of formal faculty governance or even the buy-in of the faculty. Greg is known at Veritas as the idea guy. He laid out a plan to make the liberal arts practical in his inaugural address, and he and his executive leadership team went about operationalizing this plan. He communicated with the board and secured their approval for each of his many ideas. He kept the faculty and staff informed and despite the opposition of a vocal minority of faculty, most went along with the changes. Faculty governance did not play into the turnaround strategy until it came time to adopt new programs, and by this time the majority of faculty had acquiesced to what they considered necessary and inevitable, if not desirable, changes. The sentiment of the faculty community was articulated by faculty member Peter Jenkins, saying that “we just need to put ourselves on a sound financial footing and whatever it takes to do that is a good move.” The quiet majority of faculty may have had doubts about the new direction of the college, but they wanted the college to be viable, and this appeared to be the only path on offer.

Greg is caught in the middle, trapped between a board chair that wants to conceive, develop, and offer new programs in a four-week time frame and a faculty who have taken 3 years to discuss, but not decide upon, a new model for faculty governance. By his own declaration, Greg’s intention is to make many different improvements that he hopes in the

aggregate will be sufficient to weather the demographic cliff. However, without an excellent messaging campaign tying all these changes together, many faculty have experienced this strategy as throwing spaghetti at the wall or change for its own sake and lost enthusiasm for the turnaround initiatives. They can't see the whole picture because it doesn't have a frame. The faculty, even those who have adopted administrative roles like Agnes Singer, regularly mentioned the amount of change they have had to adapt to and how challenging the pace of that change has been.

The case illustrates that Veritas has undergone a transformation, largely through the adoption of new programs and technologies and the growth of the student body. However, the case does not provide a clear picture of why the faculty feel this change is both so drastic and difficult to adapt to. Existing programs have largely been kept intact, the calendar has not changed, faculty teaching load has remained similar. The faculty adopted MacBooks in 2013 and have been pushed to adapt their faculty governance model to one that is more appropriate to their new size. There are no obvious or glaring individual changes that have negatively impacted faculty; this sentiment appears to be a reaction to accumulated change in aggregate.

The board's recent decision to develop a workaround to faculty governance by creating the School of Professional Studies and then severing this school from the university's faculty governance model was not a reaction to true faculty opposition but rather to bureaucratic gridlock. The faculty did not reject or vote against the graduate programs and certificates requested by the board; there was no stalemate between faculty governance and the administration. The faculty simply conducted their business so slowly that, as board chair Otis Barnes shared, "they can't come to consensus fast enough to make a decision" within the necessary timeline. Their inability to govern effectively resulted in the board's decision to

delegate authority over not only the management but also the curriculum of the School of Professional Studies to Greg and the administration.

The primary stumbling block to improved faculty governance appears to be a lack of clarity about where specific issues belong and what comes next. All faculty participants agreed that they and their colleagues are ready to move forward with a senate model where senators will be elected and will represent their various constituent groups, will meet every two weeks, and will be able to approve business efficiently and effectively. However, no one was entirely certain about what next steps would be required to enact the model and the board is frustrated with the lack of progress. Faculty like Peter Jenkins expressed their frustration that they don't get enough information from the administration about matters they feel pertain to them directly. The president expressed feeling trapped by the methods of communication available to him, such as presenting unsuccessfully at faculty staff meetings. He also expressed frustration about faculty demanding both information and a say on matters like mergers and acquisitions, which are confidential, time sensitive, and not up for faculty debate.

The case demonstrates the challenge of engagement between the president and the faculty. The avenues for collaboration exist at Veritas, but both sides are frustrated by the ineffectiveness of their current approach. Greg makes himself available to communicate with his constituents; he attends faculty meetings, provides written updates, and meets with the board frequently. However, there is no evidence that he executed a strategic messaging campaign or a plan for winning over individual followers and fostering loyalty and enthusiasm for his vision for the university. This suggests that it might not be structure of governance that matters as much as having a framework for action. For the faculty, there is little they can get their teeth into. They lack both the authority and the tools to be involved in change in a meaningful and productive

way. Greg has a lot of ideas, and he has been successful in implementing many of them, but they lack a unifying narrative lens. Participants all explained Veritas's transformation differently—there was no universal origin story, no Book of Genesis, no elevator pitch for where Veritas is going or how it got where it is today. It may not be the case that the faculty are living through continuous drastic change, but rather that they are experiencing changes that in their separateness feel continuously new.

Leadership in Shared Governance: Hard or Soft Power

Greg has been successful in overseeing transformative change at Veritas utilizing the authority of the board's hard power rather than his own hard power as president. The newly adopted nomenclature at Veritas of "delegated" rather than "shared" governance is an appropriate example of the university board's conception of leadership and the fact that it resides entirely with them. While this notion and the language associated with it emanates from the board chair, there is no indication that the president has objected, pushed back, or offered alternatives. Otis Barnes's comment that "if you look at the bylaws of [Veritas] College, it doesn't mention the faculty one time" frames the board's position on power and authority. The board holds nearly total decision-making control at Veritas and has not demonstrated an interest in empowering the faculty, even over curricular matters, which are traditionally their purview.

Greg Bryant is a man who is full of ideas, energy, and enthusiasm, but the environment and culture at Veritas make it difficult for him to genuinely express a leadership style. He is a thoughtful, careful man, but the only people who seem inspired by him are his closest administrative colleagues. No other participants spoke about him personally; they talked about his ideas but did not express an emotional connection to him or his vision for the future. As president, Greg did not take the traditional soft power steps to win the faculty over by cultivating

friendships, investing in individual relationships, or embarking on initiatives to influence the faculty both individually and as a body. This may have been because of his own personality or leadership style, but it may also reflect the board's dismissal of the faculty as an important player in governance. The board's framing of delegated governance diminishes the decision-making authority of the faculty and as a result disincentivizes the president from finding ways to work with them more collaboratively.

Based on the board's attitude toward the faculty, it is not a stretch that they feel similarly about the president's authority, emphasizing that "the decisions that are coming down are not those of the president," as Otis shared. "He may make recommendations, but he doesn't have the ability to do a whole lot when it comes to major decisions." All participants, including Otis, agree that the ideas for Veritas's change agenda have emanated almost exclusively from Greg. Despite this, the board continues to dismiss the president's authority, which explains why it is the board's and not the president's hard power that has been utilized to oversee transformation at Veritas. It is evident that the board values Greg for his ideas and his innovative spirit; they recognize that the innovations that have made up Veritas's transformation come from his creativity and vision. They similarly appreciate his role leading the cabinet, whom they see as operationalizing these innovations and implementing them on the campus. But none of this changes their conception of power and authority as emanating solely from the board, and this limitation on Greg's authority may have impacted his influence and ability to develop and exert his own leadership style.

Greg Bryant comes across as a smart, thoughtful leader who might be very influential one-on-one but is not particularly convincing to a crowd. Despite the many innovations and growth he has undertaken at Veritas, he seems to worry a lot about what will come next and

speaks about the future in terms of caution and preparedness instead of optimism and excitement. It is hard to know if the board's heavy-handed stance on power and decision-making is a reaction to Greg's personality or if they would have been equally domineering if he had exerted more definitive leadership in his role. Greg has navigated Veritas to impressive results in circumstances that are far from ideal, especially from the perspective of shared governance.

CHAPTER 8: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

The three institutions in this study exhibit certain broad similarities in their transformational changes: each were spurred on by a financial crisis combined with the hiring of a new president, and in each case the board had an appetite for change when they hired the president and prioritized evolution and progress when searching for their leader. However, the nuances of the cases reveal how remarkably different the details of each case are from one another. The context of each institution required entirely different strategies to execute a financial turnaround. The turnaround methods utilized at one institution would almost certainly have failed at either of the others. Similarly, the strategies undertaken by the college's leadership differed dramatically based on the culture of the campus, the expectations of the board, and the personal style and convictions of the president. These similarities and differences allow us to draw comparisons between the cases that provide broader implications for other organizations undergoing significant change.

Engage the Faculty

In each of these cases, it is evident that engaging the faculty and gaining their involvement and buy-in with the change process was an entirely different proposition than formalizing the role of faculty governance in the college's transformation. The traditional assumption is that involving the faculty means including faculty governance in the change process; that is not what happened in the cases in this study. In each of these cases, involving individual members of the faculty and engaging with the faculty as a stakeholder group proved effective and fruitful. However, engaging faculty is not the same as engaging faculty governance. Engaging the faculty governance structure and providing this body a formal role in

the transformation was not part of two cases, and it was unsuccessful at Veritas where it was tried.

In two of the three cases, Idyllic and Athletic, the president skirted faculty governance in their change process from the start. At Idyllic, David Brown quickly recognized that formal faculty governance did not function effectively enough to assist him in taking the urgent and critical steps needed to put the college on firm financial footing. Instead, individual relationships with faculty mattered most. At Athletic, the presence of a faculty union muddied the role and authority faculty governance might have had and decreased the influence of that body. In addition, the board prepared Doc Hudson for the faculty objections they thought were a likely response to his plan to grow enrollment through athletics. They pledged their support for the plan despite that pushback and created an environment where faculty support was not required for the plan to be successful.

Instead, both presidents focused significant energy on building relationships with individual faculty members and gaining buy-in and engagement from those faculty in the change process. They managed to ignore faculty governance while paying great attention to the faculty themselves. David Brown spent an entire month meeting with each faculty and staff member individually to understand their role, their perspective, and their value to the college. When he needed support for his drastic austerity measures, he knew whom he could call upon and who could lend what resources to the cause. Doc Hudson engaged in a never-ending public relations campaign, talking with individual faculty and staff members about his plans, meeting with them in groups, and winning over supporters one conversation at a time. Both presidents effectively engaged the faculty to great success. Their engagement was strategic, planned, and formal in its approach, but it did not include the involvement of the formal faculty governance body.

However, the vote of no confidence at Athletic demonstrates that faculty governance as a body can impact the interpersonal relationships between the president and individual faculty. Because faculty governance is made up of individual faculty members, the president's perception of the vote was that individual people, with whom he had personal relationships, had voted to have him removed. This event negatively impacted his enthusiasm and willingness to engage faculty in interpersonal relationships. It changed the dynamic of consultation and open communication that had been a hallmark of Doc Hudson's faculty interaction until that point.

In contrast to the strategies employed by David Brown and Doc Hudson, faculty engagement at Veritas seemed to be less thoughtfully planned and also less effective. Greg Bryant defaulted to engaging with the faculty through formal faculty governance and saw many of his initiatives wither or stall because of the extraordinarily slow process undertaken by that body. His communication with faculty was stymied by his placement at the end of the faculty meeting agenda, resulting in him regularly getting bumped due to time. His ability to direct faculty sentiment or even effectively share information was hindered by the faculty control over even his portion of the agenda, where, as he shared, "there's five different agendas that the faculty have that they want to bring up that you have no data on or are ready to even talk about."

In instances where Greg was able to avoid faculty governance and work with an individual faculty member or group, the initiatives worked smoothly. For example, he appointed a faculty member to also lead corporate partnerships for the university, and this office has been remarkably productive. He has promoted faculty members to dean and other middle management positions, which has improved his ability to effectively communicate with the faculty and effect change. He received broad support for his initiatives to integrate technology into the curriculum to make the liberal arts both practical and accessible, a move that was widely credited for

enabling the university to move to an online format without any hassle or hiccups in Spring 2020.

The finding from these cases is not that faculty involvement is unimportant—far from it. Faculty engagement and buy-in for the change process appears to have been critical in all three of these cases, but that engagement did not emanate from the formal faculty governance structure. The faculty are individual people first and want to be treated as important stakeholders as individuals, not only a member of a body that may have as many opinions as there are members.

Presidents Use Hard and Soft Power in Counterintuitive Situations

Throughout the cases, there are multiple examples of presidents using hard power when it came to academic issues, matters that would ordinarily be the purview of the faculty, and opting instead for soft power on decisions that clearly belonged to the president. When presidents use hard power, they call on the authority of their role to assert decision-making power. When they employ soft power, they rely on their ability to influence others and bring constituents together to achieve consensus. In all three cases, presidents wielded both hard and soft power at different times to progress their agenda and vision for the institution, but the situations in which they chose to employ hard and soft power were often counterintuitive.

All three presidents tried to rely on soft power whenever possible. At Idyllic, David Brown consulted with every member of faculty and staff to understand their perspective before making decisions about the college's path for change. At Athletic, Doc Hudson went on a permanent public relations campaign to hear feedback and secure buy-in for his plan to grow enrollment through athletics. At Veritas, Greg Bryant worked closely with his administrators and the board to understand the institution's challenges and develop technology solutions that would

improve the working conditions for all constituents. In each of these cases, the changes the presidents planned were operational and could have been made using their own authority without constituent consultation or buy-in. Instead, the presidents chose to methodically build consensus for these changes, leading with soft power through their influence and the coalition of support they built among constituents.

In contrast to their power decisions for operational changes, each president used hard power in at least one instance when addressing academic matters that would traditionally fall under the purview of the faculty. At Idyllic, David Brown unilaterally rejected the faculty handbook proposed by the faculty government, rewrote it himself, and had it approved by legal counsel and the board without faculty approval. He identified a problem that he believed would not be solved by building consensus, and he acted decisively. He used his power as the president to make a decision that would normally be left up to the faculty. At Athletic, Doc Hudson simply rejected the faculty's vote of no confidence of him and the dean, ignoring the will of the faculty and instead relying on his hard power, and that of the board's, to press forward. He kept the college fully open in the Fall of 2020 against the will of the faculty and continued to introduce new academic opportunities through the new LIFT platform.

At Veritas, Greg Bryant has had to wield hard power in multiple faculty matters. When the faculty, through faculty governance, took nearly 7 years to submit a proposed faculty handbook, Greg and the board made edits and approved it without final faculty approval. A lengthy general education revision is currently headed to the board without final faculty approval because of similar timing challenges. Recently, Greg and the board removed the School of Professional Studies from the faculty governance structure altogether, choosing to make both academic and administrative decisions for the school through the president and the board.

When the presidents were making decisions where the authority lay squarely in their purview, they had the luxury of employing soft power to make that decision. They could take their time if needed, gathering feedback and building consensus. It was their decision to make at any time; this flexibility offered them the opportunity to lead with soft power, using their influence to increase participant buy-in. When the president's authority to make the decision was more tenuous, because it was an academic matter, the president had to act decisively, wielding the power of their role and brandishing the backing of the board.

President and Board Dynamics

These cases demonstrate that to effect change, the president needs both support and engagement from the board. In two of the three cases, Idyllic and Athletic, the president enjoyed seemingly complete and unwavering support of the board even before they had proven themselves on the job. This dynamic was much less evident for Greg Bryant at Veritas. At Athletic, Board Chair Harold Drake insisted that he knew even before meeting Doc Hudson that he would be their candidate. Drake followed Doc out of the room after his interview to tell him as much and insist that he not take another position without giving Athletic a chance to make him an offer. He was proud that the board had not only backed Doc's candidacy unanimously but had made huge personal financial investments to ensure he had the tools needed to succeed. At Idyllic, the board was equally confident in their choice of David Brown as president from the start. One board member shared that "he is a very strong leader. He was willing to take risks, and he has a mind for detail." From their first days in office, Doc and David enjoyed the complete confidence of their board.

These presidents also needed action from the board. At Idyllic, when David Brown announced to the faculty and staff that there would be significant cuts in personnel, the board

chair was standing by his side. This brand-new president was not delivering this message alone but was accompanied by the leader of the institution's governing body. At Athletic, Doc Hudson needed \$30M to put his plans into action. The board raised \$15M from among their members almost immediately and authorized the borrowing of another \$15M. When, more than a decade later, the faculty held a vote of no confidence in the president, the board came to his aid vocally and immediately, declining to even hear or consider the faculty's grievances against their leader.

At both Idyllic and Athletic, the presidents achieved early successes that further solidified each board's confidence, giving the presidents the political capital to press on and make additional transformative changes. The boards' decisions to fully empower their presidents provided the leverage needed to achieve further success. This created a cycle of success and confidence between the board and the president. When Idyllic faced the backlash of the press during the faculty lawsuit, Board Chair Caroline Davis's reaction was steadfast support for David's decisions because he had "established himself as somebody who was making sound decisions based on research." His early track record stabilizing the college's finances and keeping them not only open but accredited and fiscally sound gained him immediate credibility in the eyes of the board. They valued his role as a change agent "bringing ethics to this campus, which had been missing" as Caroline shared. Similarly at Athletic, Chair Harold Drake admitted that the board was somewhat nervous about the investment they had made in Doc's plans, but:

once they brought that first bigger class in, everybody has trusted him since. For the first few years we still had that little bit of doubt like "geez, I hope he can make this work," but once he proved that he could, everybody relaxed about it.

While these presidents started with the trust and support of their board, their early track record of success solidified that confidence, empowering the president for whatever came next.

This degree of credibility gave these presidents an incredible amount of latitude to not only make difficult decisions but also to take calculated risks. This enabled Doc Hudson to make the decision to fully open the Athletic campus in Fall 2020, a choice not shared by his peers. It emboldened him to incubate the LIFT platform at Athletic, a move that has been credited with providing a new wave of growth and financial stability to Athletic. Doc Hudson was clearly distressed about the faculty's vote of no confidence—it wounded him personally—but there was no concern about the board being influenced by this move or it impacting their view of him. At Idyllic, David Brown was able to take the previously unimaginable step of making the college co-ed and doing so over the course of one summer. He was able to make the college a university, completely rewrite the faculty handbook, and reimagine the role of both faculty and the board. He created a new faculty governance structure, one that works for Idyllic by empowering the faculty to quickly and efficiently make decisions that they believe in.

In contrast, the board at Veritas speaks about Greg Bryant in tones of warmth and familiarity. They are pleased with his performance as president, but they did not express passion about his leadership or fervor for his vision. They spoke positively about his ideas and the growth he has presided over at Veritas. Indeed, the absence of unwavering, dedicated support for their president is only notable because of the contrast between their language and that of the board members at Idyllic and Athletic. It is not that Greg Bryant does not enjoy the support of his board, but this support is orders of magnitude less than either Doc Hudson or David Brown enjoys from their board. At Veritas, it's the board that runs the show, holds the power, and wields authority. Greg holds whatever authority the board delegates to him, and this allocation is constantly dependent on progress and outcomes. Greg feels the acute pressure of each of his recommendations to achieve their promised results in the time period proposed. He does not

have the breathing room to make risky decisions that might have huge payoffs. His moves are careful and calculated, defensible from all angles, and always have the express sign-off of the board as backing.

This differential authority is noticeable in the presidents' roles managing faculty and board interactions. At Athletic and Idyllic, the presidents serve as a bridge, linking the faculty and the board together and helping them to act in relation to one another. At Idyllic, David Brown felt so strongly about this concept that he used his initial political capital to establish boundaries and norms around how the board and faculty would interact with one another; they would do so through him. At Veritas, Greg is not the bridge holding the board and the faculty together; the board has taken on that job as their own. There is no authority figure that sits between the board and the faculty and manages their interactions. As an example of this, Agnes Singer, faculty member turned dean, serves as a faculty trustee at Veritas and shared that:

the faculty trustees are typically not on the agenda, but during this last meeting we were not on the agenda, but I asked to take the floor, and the board spent more than an hour talking about the issues that were important to faculty.

The board allowed an unplanned, hour-long discussion on faculty grievances at a board meeting; it is unclear where this discussion left the president. This example is illustrative in how the board can undermine a president's formal authority and set the tone for the relationship between the board and the president. Neither Idyllic nor Athletic would have allowed this to happen as the presidents were the primary driver, and both the board and faculty worked to advance the presidents' agendas, not run counter to them.

Ineffective Faculty Governance Decreases Faculty Influence

Throughout the cases, a consistent theme emerged of the faculty working against their long-term best interests and in doing so decreasing their influence over the change process. In

each of the three cases, the presidents opted to first address operational changes that they could make without the direct involvement of the faculty. They wanted to demonstrate early success, and Athletic's Athletic Director Don Michaels articulated a common impression that "faculty don't do anything quickly." But the decision to skirt faculty governance goes beyond problems of timing; each of these faculty governance structures had flaws that prevented their faculty from exerting influence effectively. At Idyllic, the faculty were largely absent and those few who were active had used the occasion of an interim president to rewrite the faculty handbook in a way that usurped the power of the president. At Athletic, the interface between the union and faculty governance confused the role of each, decreasing their power and authority. At Veritas, a small minority of faculty loudly protested the college's change in direction, and their by-the-whole faculty governance model allowed them to stymie the activity and decisions of the faculty body.

Only one of these institutions, Idyllic, managed to change faculty governance into a body that effectively represents the faculty and fulfills the needs of the institution. In the midst of existential financial crisis, David Brown recognized the danger an ineffective governance system posed to him, his agenda, and the future of the college. He sought counsel from Dr. Warner, the chair of Idyllic's accrediting body, who guided the board, the faculty, and the president through the steps of building a new understanding of governance. This was not a democratic process. David rejected the handbook revised by the faculty, worked with legal counsel to make the revisions himself, and presented it to the board for approval. David acknowledges that this "sounds heavy handed ... but people didn't understand their roles and the faculty ... were basically trying to take over the institution." The resulting faculty handbook gives significant authority to the faculty while also entrusting them with significant responsibility for the health of the university. Faculty governance takes responsibility for approving new programs in less than

2 months so that a program can go from concept to offering in under 1 year. The chair of faculty governance is proud of the role faculty play in executing the mission of the institution, and both faculty and administrator participants agreed that shared governance at Idyllic is collaborative, efficient, and systematic.

At Athletic and Veritas, where faculty governance is still challenging, other committees outside of formal faculty governance have been established. These committees represent the faculty and basically serve as a workaround to the formal structures. At Athletic, the faculty president serves on the leadership team of the vice president for academic affairs to ensure that faculty feedback is considered in academic decisions at the college. Since the faculty union controls the official promotion and tenure recommendation process, a parallel process has evolved to allow each member of the department to write their own letter to the dean reviewing their colleague's performance before tenure. At Veritas, an elected Faculty Advocacy Council operates much like a faculty senate would, with this group taking "the broad concerns of the faculty ... to cabinet." While this body has limited formal authority, they are critical in representing faculty interests to the administration and the board, and this is the group called upon when issues arise that require discussion and compromise.

There are multiple examples throughout the cases of faculty action decreasing their credibility with the board, leading to their voices being diminished or ignored. At Athletic, 60% of the faculty voted no confidence in Doc Hudson, which had exactly zero impact on the board and served only to decrease their influence with both the president and the board. At Idyllic, before the improved faculty governance system, the faculty tried to acquire much of the president's power, which resulted in them being cut out of the faculty handbook revision process. At Veritas, the faculty senate's inability to effectively move an agenda forward led to a

7-year revision of the faculty handbook, a stalemate at the final hours of a general education revision, and a 3-years-and-counting timeline to adopt a model for their new faculty senate. In the case of the faculty handbook revision, the final document was passed by the board without faculty approval because the time for negotiations had been eaten up by the faculty's years of internal deliberation. The revised general education curriculum is scheduled to go to the board for a vote without the final approval of the faculty. Faculty governance has been removed entirely from oversight of the curriculum in the School of Professional Studies.

Quality negotiations and compromise are predicated on all parties acting reasonably and in their own best interests. The challenge with faculty governance is that it brings together people with hugely different interests, opinions, and perspectives and demands that they speak with one voice. In the triangle of shared governance, a problematic president can be fired, difficult board members can be countered by their peers or bid farewell at the end of their term, but a few cantankerous faculty can spend a generation or more wreaking havoc on an institution.

The Power of a Cohesive Narrative

These cases illustrate the importance of a cohesive narrative of change if the goal is to ensure participants' satisfaction with and approval for the change process. Each of the three institutions in the study has undergone significant, transformative change in the last decade. In some instances, that change has been deeply painful and included significant budget cuts, layoffs, and extreme austerity measures. The reaction of the participants to change seems less tied to the actual ramifications of the change and more aligned with how they understood the change as fitting into a broader narrative of eventual success for the institution. Essentially, does the action fit the elevator pitch? Each of these institutions has a story of change and growth, of

how they transformed their college. When an individual decision fit that narrative, participants were largely supportive, even when the actual results of that change were not what they desired.

At Athletic, the college's collective narrative is inextricably tied to growing enrollment through athletics. Regardless of the topic of a decision, the narrative that evolves finds a way to tie back to athletics, which in turn is about enrollment. The rationale for the adoption of the LIFT platform was explained by administrators, faculty, and board members as being a solution for athletes who were on the road for competition and missing too much class. No official college literature on the website or elsewhere corroborated this reasoning, but each participant shared it confidently and similarly. Doc himself confirmed that this is not the case; the purpose of the LIFT platform is to increase revenue and sustainability quite apart from athletics. He was amused by how universal this alternate narrative was and couldn't identify its origin.

At Idyllic, something similar emerged with the phrase "to mission." The phrase seems unspecific, but each participant who said the phrase used it in the same way. They understood the college to be both unique and valuable and felt it critical that anyone working there buy into the mission of the university and believe in their individual role in that mission. One long-time administrator expressed this shift in understanding, that before:

people just thought they taught at Idyllic. Now they know they're part of Idyllic, and that being part of Idyllic means you understand the role that you play ... whereas before I think people just saw this ... is what I do.

Every participant was fervent in their dedication to the university's success, and they had written David Brown as the hero of their narrative. The sentiment of Board Chair Caroline Davis that "of course we think we've got the best president ever, so that's wonderful" was carried through by each of the participants, regardless of their position as faculty, administrators, or board members.

As with Athletic, this narrative didn't have a clear origin. There was no evidence that it was a communications strategy or something that had been consciously devised; it had evolved organically and developed its own power as a unifying origin story.

Without this central narrative, this origin story that ties everyone together on one path working toward the same goal, change feels disjointed. It doesn't matter whether it actually is disjointed; if people can't make sense of the story, they can't see their place in it and have confidence in where it is going. Change feels like it is happening to them rather than believing that they have a critical role in the change process that they support. At Veritas, the story of change was told differently by every person. They selected different changes as the most important, told different anecdotes, and lacked both a narrative arc and a hero.

The actual circumstances of the faculty at Veritas are objectively better than those at Athletic or Idyllic. They have more resources, better technology, and a more reasonable teaching load. Their students are better academically prepared for college. The changes the Veritas faculty cited were almost all growth of new programs, faculty, and curricular offerings. From most perspectives, the changes were all positive. And yet, Greg Bryant said of the Veritas faculty that they think "oh, at some point, if we get by this ... Eden will open up." The faculty are trying to understand change and create a narrative that has a happy ending. Instead, Greg keeps trying to show them that "it's got to keep going ... because if it goes backwards, it's bad," but that is not a message people want to hear. When discussing individual decisions made by the president, faculty participants were often supportive or at least understanding. But when talking about the last 10 years collectively, their language changed, instead reflecting the sentiment that "because things have been changing so much, we have been tasked with an inordinate amount of things we have to flex to."

By every objective measure, Greg Bryant's presidency has been wildly successful in growing and strengthening the university. Enrollment has grown by 50%, the endowment has doubled, and 30% of students are enrolled in graduate programs that didn't previously exist. Greg Bryant may not have received arc blueprints from God, but he has built a powerful structure to sustain the university in the years ahead. The last 10 years at Veritas should be a tale of unmitigated success, but there is a palpable tension at the university. The evidence suggests that this tension is the result of a lack of cohesive narrative around the university's change agenda. A cohesive narrative enables participants to understand what is happening to them and their institution as they experience change and to frame this in a way that suits their needs. The narrative creates a hero, or heroes, and shows a story arc that led the institution from where it started to where it is now. It does not require a happy ending, or an ending at all, but it does provide a trajectory that participants can see themselves on and frame the future in a positive light.

Change Is Easier to Enact When the Straits Are Dire

These cases demonstrate that campus communities are more willing to accept change when this change seems necessary for survival. At all three institutions, change was possible in part because campus constituents feared that staying the same would eventually result in the closure of the college. These institutions were at various points in the spectrum of financial distress and their experiences indicate that the more dire the situation, the more change the president can introduce with minimal objection. Of the three colleges, Idyllic found itself in the most precarious position upon David Brown's 2013 arrival. The college had no cash, had stopped paying vendors, was about to miss payroll, and was imminently due for reaccreditation. The severity of the crisis enabled David to take drastic measures, downsizing both faculty and

staff, increasing faculty workload, and introducing widespread austerity measures. These were accepted by the campus community with minimal resistance because the alternative to doing so was clear; the college would close.

At Athletic, the situation was less dire. The college had a significant operating deficit but virtually no debt and some cash reserves. They could have carried on at least for a little while in the same way. However, as one faculty member shared, the faculty took the problem seriously and were willing to trust Doc Hudson's plans "because many of us realized that the enrollment was so low that the institution might possibly close within the next few years." Rather than digging in their heels and hoping the problem would go away, these faculty wanted to embrace a proactive change agenda before it was too late. It is also important that at Athletic, the faculty believed that these changes would serve their interests at least in the medium-term. Their initial concern that recruiting athletes would decrease the academic profile of the student body was almost immediately proven false. Within a few years, the faculty were teaching stronger students, there were more of them, and plans were in motion to build and renovate academic buildings. The initial impetus to accept change was the fear of closure, but continued support for the change agenda was related to the changes' positive outcomes for faculty.

At the far end of the spectrum, Veritas's financial condition was trending downward but not yet in crisis. Prior to Greg Bryant's arrival, the college had cut \$5M of their \$35M expenditures to create a balanced budget. Enrollment had declined sharply, and the budget cuts had underscored for the campus community that this downward trend was dangerous. Like the faculty at Athletics, many faculty at Veritas felt, as one shared, that "we just need to put ourselves on a sound financial footing and whatever it takes to do that is a good move." They were willing to embrace change, not necessarily because they agreed with the change itself, but

because they believed it would have the desired effect of bolstering the college's finances. Unlike the faculty at both Athletic and Idyllic, Veritas has a strong, persistent, and vocal minority of faculty who keep faculty fears about declining academic quality and shifting academic mission alive and well. Their objection to Greg Bryant's change agenda is accompanied by skepticism that the university is really in trouble or needs to make these changes to survive. The university's endowment puts it in the top 25% of endowments in the country. The university's enrollment has doubled in the last 10 years. The faculty struggle to see why any further change would be needed considering this position.

Greg Bryant sums up the problem well, saying that "the kinds of colleges most at risk are the ones under the top 100 liberal arts colleges who have enough money that they're not hungry, but not enough money to eat well. And that's Veritas." For colleges on the brink of collapse, their strategic options for change are limited by their financial circumstances, but their constituents' willingness to accept that change, even when it is drastic and painful, is sharply increased. Idyllic is a terrific example of this. Institutions like Veritas can approach change options much more strategically from their position of relative financial strength, but that same strength may constrain their campus community's willingness to embrace these much-needed changes.

Presidents' Impression of Their Constituents' Opinion of Them Might be Wrong

These cases indicated that there is sometimes a misalignment between how faculty view the president and how the president views themselves in light of the faculty. Every president has their own narrative about what their faculty think of them. In two cases, Veritas and Athletic, the presidents' impression was that their constituents had broadly negative opinions of them and their leadership. This was especially the case at Athletic where Doc Hudson's view of the faculty

is inextricably linked with their 2020 vote of no confidence. His impression is that the faculty disapprove of his leadership and that he is in his role at the request of the board and against the will of the faculty.

That perspective was not shared by the faculty participants in the study who all credit Doc for the college's current position of strength. One faculty member, in voicing her opposition to the 2020 vote, recalled that "I do know that many of the ideas that President [Hudson] had early on did, in fact, save the college." Further, these faculty gave no indication that they were aware of or understood that the 2020 vote may have changed Doc's feelings toward them or toward his role as president. They assumed it had no impact on him. The faculty president in 2020 who had brought the vote of no confidence to the floor shared that afterward, Doc Hudson:

put his head down ... kept doing his job, right? He still met with trustees. He still met with donors, you know, he was the same person on graduation. He still tried to be innovative. I think, you know, it was business as usual for him.

Indeed, the faculty seemed surprised to be asked about the vote or its aftermath, with the same prior faculty president insisting that "I think we're all past that now." Doc's decisions about how he interacts with and engages with the faculty are closely related to his belief that the faculty do not like him or approve of his leadership and decisions. The responses of the faculty participants indicate that this may be a limited, or even just incorrect, understanding of how the faculty view the president and his leadership.

Similarly at Veritas, Greg Bryant operates on the assumption that the faculty are opposed to the agenda of change and therefore opposed to him as the leader of this change. He also assumes there is a personal component to this opposition, based on faculty governance's decision to move him to the end of the faculty meeting agenda. As Greg shared, "Probably 50% of the time I get bumped because there's no time left for me to speak, and now the complaint is they

don't know what's going on at the university." Greg gives the impression of being weary of these faculty interactions, largely because his impression is that the faculty do not approve of him or the progress he has overseen in the last decade.

The faculty at Veritas did express concern about the changing mission and identity of the university, but their responses were largely supportive of Greg, his leadership, and especially of his effort and dedication. Even faculty who strenuously disagreed with some of the choices that have been made about investing in professional and graduate programs, growing enrollment, and focusing on making the liberal arts practical, complimented Greg on his efforts to strengthen the institution. They have no doubt that their president is fully committed to the future of Veritas and will do everything in his power to secure it. They trust his motives. As one faculty member explained:

He [Greg] did a really good job of explaining the "why"; he did a really good job of giving the context, as an alum, of how this all tied back to our mission. And so again in trust building, he helped people to understand his intentions.

Like Doc Hudson at Athletic, Greg Bryant's enthusiasm for faculty engagement is impacted by his impression that the faculty do not approve of him. Faculty participants at Veritas told a different story, one that is more nuanced and complimentary of the president than he would otherwise assume.

Only David Brown at Idyllic appeared to have given relatively little thought to the faculty's opinion of him. All participants at Idyllic, whether faculty, administrators, or the board, gave the impression of one team working together, doing different jobs but all moving in the same direction. David expressed surprise that he had survived those early years of financial turmoil and drastic austerity measures, but now concerns about how the faculty view him seem almost entirely off his radar. He has been pleased with the level of faculty buy-in for his change

agenda, which has led to a strong partnership with the faculty. Unlike his colleagues, David Brown is either secure in the knowledge that he has the approval of his faculty, or he is not curious about their thoughts. Either way, David does not suffer from a mistaken impression of his constituents' thoughts about him or his leadership.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the implications of the study's primary findings. The chapter then goes on to offer advice based on the findings for practitioners, specifically presidents, faculty, and board members. The chapter concludes with possible topics for future research based on the findings of the study.

Implications of the Findings

This study looked to understand presidential leadership and shared governance in small, private institutions facing financial turnaround. It looked to existing literature on presidents and shared governance with a particular lens of hard and soft power. This section focuses on four principal topics: time and length of presidential terms, the role of shared governance in transformational change, the value of interpersonal relationships in change-necessary situations, and the value of a strong narrative for a change agenda.

The Value of Long Presidential Tenures

The three presidents in this study have been in their positions between 11 and 23 years. For each, it is their first presidency and according to them, their last. Birnbaum (1992b) warns about the dangers of presidential tenures that go on too long, arguing that support for the president tends to diminish over time. He demonstrates that counterintuitively, even very successful presidents lose support over the years and have a lower approval rating from their faculty after a decade than they did as a new president. Indeed, because many of these presidents have strong faculty support at the start of their tenure, they do not notice it eroding over time. They have delivered on their promises to faculty and strengthened the institution, and suddenly they find themselves with less faculty support than they enjoyed before these accomplishments.

Birnbaum (1992b) argues that most leaders, regardless of their leadership style, begin their presidency “seeking input from the faculty and supporting faculty participation in governance” (p. 5). This early focus on the faculty gives both the president and the faculty confidence in one another, and they experience a honeymoon period. As a result, the president is “seen as action oriented” and as “supporting and having confidence in their faculties” (Birnbaum, 1992b, p. 5). The president then assumes they understand the needs and desires of their faculty, and over time they back down on this intense level of communication and consultation. Instead, they focus their time and energy on the board, the administrators, and other constituent groups. Eventually, this decrease in two-way communication leads the faculty to feel disenfranchised, which diminishes their support for the leader. It requires an exceptional leader to maintain a high level of faculty support over a period of a decade or more.

Dynamic, interactive engagement between the president and the faculty was especially robust in the cases in this study because these institutions lacked a strong and present provost when the new president arrived. If a strong provost aligned with the president’s goals had been in place, the president might have chosen to lean more heavily on them to act as an ambassador to the faculty. In the absence of such a person, these presidents had no choice but to be the primary conduit of information to both faculty governance and individual faculty members. As the presidents established their team and hired strong provosts aligned with their vision, they gradually delegated responsibility for liaising with faculty governance to their provost. This is especially the case at Athletic and Veritas where the presidents now have much less interaction both with faculty governance and with individual faculty members than they did at the beginning of their tenure.

Only one president in this study, David Brown at Idyllic, appears to have maintained a steady high level of support from both his faculty and the board over his 11-year tenure. This does not mean that the other two presidents became less effective over time, but some of their constituent support has dampened. Participants were unflaggingly enthusiastic about David's leadership, what he has done for the university, and how he has empowered those around him to take a role in its transformation. He himself expressed surprise that he had survived the turmoil at the start of his presidency and was able to recover the faculty's trust and support after imposing such drastic austerity measures. At Athletic, Doc Hudson continues to enjoy enthusiastic support from the board, but he has resigned himself to being unpopular with the faculty. Both he and Greg Bryant at Veritas give the impression of being weary when it comes to their faculty interactions. These leaders who began their tenures enthusiastically gathering the faculty and getting them on board with their vision for the future now rely heavily on other administrators to interface with the faculty on a day-to-day basis. Greg Bryant articulated this inevitability, saying, "I know why presidents leave after 10 years, because they become like Charlie Brown's teacher." Even very successful presidents eventually become a known quantity to their faculty and simply lose the sparkle and shine of newness they enjoyed at the start of their presidency.

Birnbaum warns about faculty disenchantment with the president, saying that "these trajectories, once established, become self-reinforcing and difficult to change" (Birnbaum, 1992b, p. 21). The findings of this study indicate that the same may be true of the president's own feelings of disenchantment. At both Athletic and Veritas, the presidents showed signs of growing disappointment with the faculty, with their own performance, and with their role. Presidents who have been in their position for a long time often have a strong track record of

accomplishments, but these successes ebb and flow. In challenging periods and even after arguably successful runs, presidents doubt their own abilities to effectively engage the faculty.

This mutual disenchantment of the faculty with the president and the president with both the faculty and their own role may be a difficult cycle to break, but one that is well worth the effort. The intervention could come in many forms. The board might choose to get involved, or a new initiative could be launched that stirs enthusiasm on campus and requires the cooperation and collective efforts of the president and faculty. The findings suggest the consequences of not addressing this negative feedback loop of disenchantment is an increasingly tense environment in which both the president and the faculty are dissatisfied. If the notion of recommitting to their relationship with the faculty doesn't appeal to the president, it might be time for the president and the board to consider a transition plan. If the president is not enthused by the prospect of turning around this cycle of disenchantment, they may have served their effective time at that institution.

A lot of words, ink, and airtime have been spent in recent years bemoaning the declining length of the average presidential tenure (American Council on Education, 2023; Jesse, 2023; Moody, 2023). Short presidencies certainly have negative impacts on an institution: opportunity cost in lost time and momentum, a potential financial cost, and the damage to campus morale resulting from presidential agendas' fitful starts and stops. However, presidential tenures that go on too long have benefits but also their own costs. A president who once motivated the faculty and enthusiastically progressed an agenda can become a leader who is disenchanted with their faculty, their role, or even the institution they serve. The president must decide if they can think differently about their work, reengage with their constituents, and find a renewed purpose in leading the institution. They should have this check-in regularly with themselves, the board, and

other trusted advisors to stave off the stagnation of gradual disenchantment. These frank communications will help the president and the board collectively determine the best timing to ensure that the president's legacy is positive and strong and the campus does not suffer from a presidency that is either too short or too long.

Shared Governance Is Not the Only Structure for Change

A critical question that comes out of this study is whether shared governance is a useful structure for effecting change, especially when that change is both significant and critical to the survival of the institution. Birnbaum (1988), Eckel and Kezar (2016), and others laud shared governance for its ability to produce lasting decisions that benefit from multiple viewpoints and careful deliberation; these decisions carry the legitimacy of the democratic process. However, shared governance has also been criticized for being slow and resulting in decisions that offend the least number of people but likely also do not solve the problem (Bowen & Tobin, 2015a; Collis, 2004; Hamilton, 1999; Keller, 2004). Brian Rosenberg's recent book, *Whatever It Is, I'm Against It* is aptly named, and in an interview he argues that "if your goal is to avoid the worst, then shared governance isn't necessarily bad. If your goal is to accomplish the best, then I don't think shared governance is typically a very effective way to get there" (Greenberg, 2023, quoting Rosenberg, 2023).

In this study, shared governance played little to no role in these institutional change agendas. Each president chose to take decisive actions outside the formal bounds of shared governance to create transformative change; shared governance was not the vehicle through which this change was initiated or led. Critics of faculty governance bodies, such as senates, argue that at most institutions these bodies are not equipped to promote or direct urgent, largescale structural changes, which was required at the institutions in this study (Bowen &

Tobin, 2015b). Faculty governance is often a structure rooted in tradition and past practices with a goal of reaching “consensus within a large, heterogeneous group” (Greenberg, 2023, quoting Rosenberg, 2023). Birnbaum (2004) provides a different perspective, asserting that the real value of faculty governance is not only in the decisions it produces but also in its ability to create a sense of community, identity, and role among the faculty.

The underlying question in this study was whether shared governance is an impediment to a president’s change agenda. The findings suggest that it does not have to be. The president can choose to make substantive changes without involving faculty governance. Further, shared governance can be an asset to the change agenda, especially if the president invests time and energy in building personal relationships with individual members of the faculty. The soft power of faculty governance articulated by Birnbaum (2004) benefits the faculty by giving them a sense of identity and community, but it also enables the president to leverage this sense of community with individual faculty members outside of the formal governance structure. The president can take their ideas to individual faculty members who can then help to socialize these ideas with the faculty through the structure of faculty governance. Faculty governance does not have to be a hindrance to change initiated by the president; it can be a place where that change agenda becomes understood, accepted, and even supported.

The findings indicate that financial turnarounds are really a set of changes that occur over time. There are immediate changes that require the decisive action of a leader, usually the president, who must have the hard authority of the board behind them and whose decisions will be strengthened by having faculty support (soft authority), but that support does not require the formal backing of faculty governance. In fact, in this study, none of the presidents engaged faculty through their governance structures to make their initial changes, but they engaged

faculty in other ways. Although formal faculty governance is not relevant to driving transformational change, it can play a critical role in sustaining these changes and offering long-term legitimacy both to the changes and the president behind them. These are the longer-term changes in the suite of changes required for financial turnaround. For this to be possible, the faculty governance structure must evolve to meet and address these new challenges. At Idyllic, faculty governance was bypassed entirely while the college was undergoing a rapid transformation necessitated by financial exigency. However, after the immediate crisis was over, a new faculty governance system was built specifically to meet the new needs of the university. In this case, the creation of a sound and effective system of faculty governance gave this formal body significant power and authority to redefine the university and offer direction to its academic future. However, Athletic and Veritas followed different paths. These two faculty governance systems have not evolved, and as a result faculty governance has been sidelined from having a significant role in the institution's change agenda. At Idyllic, faculty governance is an active participant in change. At Athletic and Veritas, change happens around, and often despite faculty governance. At Veritas, there has been a years' long effort to develop a new shared governance mechanism, but the faculty can't execute its implementation. Here, the faculty governance structure is impeding the faculty's ability to participate meaningfully in the shared governance of the institution.

The role and significance of formal faculty governance at an institution depends on the ability of the governance system to meet the needs of that institution. Birnbaum (1988) defends shared governance for its ability to produce lasting decisions that have legitimacy rooted in consensus and deliberation, but this only works if the body is functioning effectively to meet the college's needs. At Idyllic, the administration and the board have ceded significant authority to

faculty governance to create and implement new academic programs. The university's financial health and future rely on these programs. New programs must meet a market need, be high quality, and be delivered to market on a short timetable. The choice to empower faculty governance in this way is only possible because faculty governance is motivated to operate efficiently and has demonstrated success in meeting the needs of the university. In contrast, Athletic's faculty governance remains anemic, as evidenced by its vote of no confidence in the president that the board and president promptly ignored. This shows that faculty governance did not matter there, and in the longer run it actually impeded the faculty's opportunity to be influential with the president and board. Veritas's faculty governance has been bypassed, relieved entirely of its decision-making powers to the extent that administrators simply created a new School of Professional Studies that usurped academic program decision-making, traditionally the most important domain of faculty governance.

Shared governance is historically rooted in the faculty's desire for academic freedom and the ability to pursue their research without the interference of an institutional or political agenda. This initial concept of faculty participation in governance grew more powerful at points when the faculty held the upper hand in labor negotiations, such as in 1966 when a booming student population meant the faculty were both needed and in demand. In many ways, shared governance is a historical artifact, conceived of in a time when universities could move slowly and deliberately and where such slowness was conscientious rather than inefficient. In Minor's (2004) description of the three general models for shared governance, 48% of survey respondents embraced the "fully collaborative" model defined as "constant consultation between all internal constituencies on all policies and procedure issues" (Minor, 2004, p. 131). It is clear throughout the study that this fully collaborative model was the expectation of the vast majority

of faculty, regardless of their institution, and so it is not surprising that so many faculty feel let down and disenfranchised by their own power in shared governance; their expectations are not aligned with the pressures and needs of a modern-day president in running an institution. Today's presidents are caught between the absolute imperative to move boldly and swiftly to address the needs of students, the board, and external market pressures and the expectation of their faculty to consult with them and find consensus on all matters. This historical framework of shared governance simply will not meet the needs of the modern university.

The findings suggest that if faculty want to have control and influence at the institution, they must take responsibility both for their system of faculty governance and for its outcomes. The faculty must exercise self-governance to be able to speak as a unit and be entrusted to make decisions whose outcomes are important to the institution. Idyllic provides an example of a faculty who assumed a partnership role with the administration and the board and took responsibility for the outcomes of the areas they chose to oversee. In coordination with the president and with the support of the board, they devised a governance system that would allow them to have control and oversight over the academic curriculum while still meeting the business needs of the university. This partnership requires that the faculty be knowledgeable about the broader context of the university's decision-making and finances. It requires consistent and high-quality communication between all parties to ensure that all three criteria—market need, quality, and timeliness—are consistently upheld. It requires trust and confidence from the board and the president in the faculty; a trust that they have earned and maintained over time.

The findings also suggest that the structures of shared governance can be adapted when its participants desire change. Birnbaum (2004) argues that the culture of governance at an individual campus is “organic, not mechanical. It is not designed as much as it evolves” (p. 24),

and it should operate flexibly to meet the needs of the people it serves. Shared governance should not be discounted as irrelevant, but it should be relied upon appropriately, not to make change but to sustain it. Leaders might be wise to reframe when shared governance is working effectively. In these cases it is not to initiate change but to carry forward initiatives that embed the change. Faculty governance can play a valuable role in continuing the changes set in motion by the leader. Faculty are uniquely positioned to embed these changes into the foundation of the institution and give them real staying power that can outlast the initial change period if they choose to do so.

Hard and Soft Power Through Interpersonal Relationships

This study was built around the extent to which presidents would be better advised to use hard or soft power in effecting the transformational changes necessary to accomplish a financial turnaround. When presidents use hard power, they call on the authority of their role to assert decision-making power. When they employ soft power, they rely on their ability to influence others and bring constituents together to achieve consensus. While all three presidents used both hard and soft power to effect change, the findings suggest that they used soft power much more frequently and that their ability to effectively lead through soft power required that they maintain strong interpersonal relationships with constituents. The findings also demonstrate that the president was strategic in choosing which situations and which constituents required hard and soft power and that these choices mattered in their overall success.

The institutions in this study are small and decision-making, by anyone, feels personal. David Brown at Idyllic spent his first month on campus meeting with every person individually; he understood that he was joining a college with a deeply ingrained culture whose history was not just institutional but also personal. At these places, relationships matter. How the president

makes their constituents feel matters. What these constituents think about the president personally as well as their plans for the college matters. These interpersonal relationships matter because they impact the president's ability to use soft power and the frequency with which they have to default to hard power.

The findings indicate that hard power can be thought of like a finite pot shared by the board and the president. Either can utilize it when needed, but the quantity is limited, and so this choice should be made carefully. Any time a president can use soft power to generate consensus and enthusiasm, this change can occur without needing to dip into this limited pot of hard power. Having strong relationships and using soft power most of the time enables presidents to use hard power occasionally without losing credibility as a consensus-based leader. The findings demonstrate that presidents most frequently relied on hard power when making a decision that would normally fall into the faculty's purview. This is not what one would expect. President Brown's rejection of and unilateral rewriting of the faculty handbook at Idyllic is a textbook case of hard power. The board supported this bold move because before this, he visited with every faculty and staff member on campus, listened and responded to employees' concerns, and demonstrated his desire to consult and build consensus whenever possible. More impressive, most of the faculty also embraced his decision because they had gained confidence in this person who had listened to them and who they felt was doing everything possible to save their college. In this case, an occasion of hard power was successful because the president utilized soft power most of the time.

Leading through soft power necessitates building strong interpersonal relationships. In each case, the president's vision for change gained momentum because of their personal influence and the relationships they invested in nurturing. Doc Hudson at Athletic gathered the

entire faculty and staff for an off-campus retreat to share his idea for growing enrollment through athletics. He didn't say, "I'm the president, and this is what we're going to do." He said, "This is a model. I think it will work. If you have a better idea, we can try that instead." He won the faculty over to his way of thinking so that in the end it felt like the collective body of the college was making the decision to invest in athletics to grow enrollment, not that the president or the board was forcing this upon them. Birnbaum's assertion that "soft governance rules!" (Birnbaum, 2004, p. 12) rings true through every anecdote and participant example. At Idyllic, David Brown's aggressive austerity measures were not described by the faculty as being thrust on them but rather as being part of their collective action to save the college.

The findings indicate that strong interpersonal relationships enable a leader to lead primarily through soft power. It can be inferred that leaders who lack strong interpersonal relationships may have to resort to hard power more frequently to lead effectively; the Veritas case suggests this is true. This is cause for concern since in this study, presidents resorted to hard power when making decisions that usually fell into the purview of the faculty. If a president is having to repeatedly rely on hard power while interfering in matters the faculty feel ownership over, this may quickly sour the relationship between the faculty and president. Some evidence of this can be seen at Veritas where the president has repeatedly been forced to use hard power to make decisions on faculty matters like the faculty handbook, the general education curriculum, and the academic affairs of the School of Professional Studies.

It is critical that the president foster interpersonal relationships with all key constituents, but the findings suggest that they should approach this differently with the board than with the faculty. The president's most critical relationship with the board is with the board as a unit. Strong relationships with individual board members are helpful, but the crucial relationship is

between the president and the board as a whole. It's a structural relationship. The president's power emanates from this body, and the two share a finite amount of hard power and must collaborate on its use. The board assumes a certain amount of hard power for themselves and enables the president to use the rest to drive the institution. The strength of the relationship between the president and the board directly impacts the president's leverage with all constituents. At Idyllic, where this relationship was strong from the start, the president was able to leverage hard power with the faculty early on and even employ hard power with the board to clarify their role and his in management and governance. At Veritas, the president's positive relationship with the board is critical as he calls on hard power when dealing with faculty matters, but he must also navigate the dynamics of a dominating board. In this case, he must constantly negotiate not only hard and soft power but also balancing between pressing forward and yielding with both the board and faculty.

In contrast to the president's dynamic with the board, the president's most important faculty relationships are with individual faculty members rather than with the body of faculty governance. The faculty are arguably the institution's most rooted constituents; like board members and the alumni their involvement may span multiple decades, but unlike these groups they are on campus every day. The findings suggest that when faculty see themselves as part of the story of change, this change agenda becomes institutional transformation rather than just a list of changes.

There is a stark difference between faculty simply acquiescing to a program of change, as was the case at Veritas, and faculty embracing a new identity for the college as happened at Athletic and Idyllic. Doc Hudson's perpetual public relations campaign for growing enrollment through athletics worked; the faculty bought in and talk about athletics enthusiastically as a core

value of their college. The same is true at Idyllic with the concept of operating “to mission,” an idea that was clearly adopted by the faculty and the campus community. The findings demonstrate a real contrast between change that the faculty have simply accepted and change that they have embraced and carried forward as part of the mission of the institution. The findings suggest that this transformation happens through personal conversations, small group meetings, and interactions where the president wins the faculty’s trust. In these moments, they commit to supporting the president’s ideas.

If personal relationships and the ongoing investment in these relationships are key components to presidential effectiveness, the erosion of this investment over time should be cause for concern. In addressing time earlier in this chapter, even the presidents who are most enthusiastic about building relationships and engaging the faculty at the start of their tenure gradually lose interest and energy for this work as time goes on. They focus elsewhere, they develop points of disagreement with some faculty, they would rather not contend with this on a daily basis, and they allow others like their provosts to take on the task of day-to-day faculty interaction. “Soft governance rules!” (Birnbaum, 2004, p. 12) is not only true at the start of a presidency, and the effectiveness of the leader may wane if they back off their commitment to continuous renewal of these personal relationships. As presidents become more established, leading with hard power may seem more expedient than the more arduous process of consulting with faculty and building consensus. As Birnbaum (1992b) warns when addressing presidential tenure, the established president is at risk of slipping more frequently from soft to hard power. Faculty support can be lost quickly and at any time in a presidential tenure, regardless of the president’s past success (Birnbaum, 1992b). This is a phenomenon that should be watched

carefully and monitored by administrators, the faculty, the president themselves, and the board to whom the leadership of the college ultimately falls.

A Strong Narrative Is Key for Momentum and Change

It is crucial that the president and the board collectively create a coherent theme and narrative of change to secure the long-term buy-in of their constituents, especially the faculty. Narrative theory offers that narrative is “a basic human strategy for coming to terms with fundamental elements of our experience such as time, process, and change” (Project Narrative, n.d., para. 1). A cohesive narrative enables participants to understand what is happening to them and their institution as they experience change and to frame this in a way that suits their needs. The narrative helps participants feel a sense of progress and keeps them focused on the next steps that are needed to strengthen the institution. The narrative makes additional change more acceptable to the campus community and enables the leader to press forward with the change agenda.

The power of a cohesive narrative is especially evident at Athletic college, where the institution’s very identity now centers around sports. In contrast, a change that does not fit into the story the campus is telling about itself feels discordant, no matter how practical and needed the change, as is evident at Veritas. Every change at Veritas feels separate, disconnected, and new, and the president must use additional political capital to sell it. A strong narrative provides cohesion and momentum to the transformation by reinforcing its success. It taps an already accepted and favorably viewed rationale for new changes, enabling the president to keep moving forward without having to stop and conduct a public relations tour for every new initiative. A cohesive narrative enables the campus to make sense of the transformation they are experiencing and allows them to see themselves as important participants in the story. The narrative makes

them a protagonist in a quest for institutional transformation rather than a victim of the president's whims for change. The narrative is crucial, and presidents and the board should invest time and energy in making sure it is both compelling and universal.

For the narrative to be compelling, it must have momentum, or even just the perception of momentum, which gains the president credibility with both the board and the faculty. This credibility, in turn, improves the president's leverage and ability to make larger, more meaningful change. Early success is important, following through on early presidential promises. Then success leads to success, even if the promises being delivered on are routine. At Veritas, Greg Bryant's promise of MacBooks and iPads to all faculty, staff, and students was not particularly challenging to deliver on, but doing so efficiently and with technical support made it a positive experience for the campus. The campus community's takeaway was that this leader gets things done and makes our lives better. The credibility the president gains is increased when the promise is more challenging to fulfill. At Athletic, Doc Hudson promised his faculty that they would have more students and that these students would be stronger academically. This happened, and it happened more quickly than expected. This gained him the credibility and political capital to make new and sometimes more dramatic changes.

Implications for Practice

The study has produced findings that may be of use to practitioners of higher education, specifically for presidents, board members, and faculty. While these cases represent only three specific institutions with situations that are unique to their campuses, the themes and concepts found throughout the cases are applicable to many institutions that find themselves in similar need of transformational change for financial reasons. Considering the state of higher education

finances, the number of institutions that may find this level of change necessary is increasing by the year.

Advice for Presidents

Presidents should spend significant time and energy engaging the faculty both as a new president and throughout their tenure. However, “engaging the faculty” is not the same as engaging faculty governance, and the two should not be conflated. At the start of their tenure, presidents should acknowledge and define the authority of the faculty governance body but should focus their limited time on engaging with individual faculty members outside of the confines of faculty governance.

As the president comes to understand the culture, challenges, and politics of the faculty, they should identify a role faculty governance can play in the vision for the college. If the faculty demonstrate an interest and willingness to adapt faculty governance to fulfill that role, the president should work with them to build this structure and empower the resulting body. If the faculty are unwilling or disinterested in adapting faculty governance, the president should pursue other avenues for progress and sideline the role of the faculty governance body in the change process.

Regardless of the eventual role of faculty governance as a body, the president should seek out and rely on the counsel of individual faculty members both in and outside of formal faculty governance to gain a variety of opinions and perspectives. Building relationships with faculty members allows these often-influential faculty to move others in support of the president’s vision. It also strengthens the vision and the plan to enact it by incorporating these faculty members’ feedback and perspectives.

The president should prioritize their relationship with the board as a whole and ensure that there is agreement about the board and president's respective roles and how they will deploy their collective pot of hard power. While relationships with individual board members are helpful in strengthening the president's overall relationship with the board, they are not sufficient. In contrast to their relationships with faculty, the president must prioritize their structural relationship with the board as a full governing body rather than their relationships with individual board members.

The president and the board should collectively create a coherent theme and narrative of change to secure the long-term buy-in of their constituents, especially the faculty. As the change agenda progresses, these successes should be continuously tied back into this central narrative, which will help campus constituents see themselves in the change and make sense of the trajectory of institutional transformation. It is critical that presidents demonstrate momentum by securing early wins and making promises and delivering on them ahead of schedule. This demonstrated evidence of change will provide momentum, which further strengthens the narrative. Early wins also gain the president credibility and give the campus community confidence in the president's ability to lead the next round of changes.

The president should rely on soft power whenever possible, taking the time to gather opinions and build consensus for a decision. This consistent commitment to soft power enables the president to deploy hard power when it is truly necessary. The president should work to identify the situations where hard power will be required, likely around decisions that traditionally fall into the faculty purview. In these situations, the president should confirm that they have the full support of the board, deploy hard power to make the necessary change, and

then recommit to building change through consensus and influence and involving the campus community in next steps.

Presidents who have been at their posts for some time must recognize that progress will ebb and flow, as may their constituents' opinions of them. It is critical that they maintain enthusiasm both for their own work and for their interpersonal relationships. Presidents should work to recognize their own disenchantment (or have trusted advisors who can assist them in doing so) and consider strategies to combat it. In some cases, it may be a new initiative or challenge is needed to reinvigorate both them and their constituents. Structural changes or a call to action from the board might effectively address the problem. Presidents who find themselves unmotivated to improve their interpersonal relationships or rekindle their own enthusiasm should carefully consider whether their effective tenure has come to an end. In this case, it would be preferable for the president to work with the board on a smooth transition plan rather than waiting for these feelings of disenchantment to worsen.

Advice for Faculty

If faculty members want to be influential in the decision-making at their campus, there are two clear paths: on their own as an individual and collectively through formal shared governance. Like the president, faculty too can wield both hard and soft power. The most effective faculty leaders will pursue both. As an individual, a faculty member has enormous influence via soft power through their personal relationships with the president, administrators, members of their department, and other faculty. Faculty should build and invest in these relationships and make it a practice to share their ideas and feedback through these informal channels. By regularly showing up, engaging constructively, offering solutions, and expressing a

willingness to invest in the implementation of these solutions, a faculty member can have significant influence in the change process by using their soft power.

Faculty members can wield hard power by using their institution's framework of faculty governance to effectively express the will of the faculty to the president and the board. Their ability to utilize hard power will depend on the structure of faculty governance at their campus and on this body's ability to frame a problem, arrive at a consensus-based solution, and articulate their will to the administration. Effectively wielding hard power is also dependent on the faculty governance body holding any structural power or authority on the campus, which varies greatly from one institution to another. If the body of faculty governance has structural authority over decision-making, this may be the most effective way for faculty to wield power. If the faculty governance body lacks structural authority, faculty will need to rely more heavily on soft power and influencing the president and others to effect change.

If they choose to do so, faculty leaders both in and out of the formal faculty governance structure can play an important role in grounding various efforts into the narrative of the college's transformation. This will not be of interest to all faculty, but for those invested in the institution who want to be part of both its legacy and its future, there is ample opportunity for an individual faculty member to play a significant role. These faculty can fit the story of change into the broader context of the institution and its history by establishing the narrative in the reality of the day. In doing so, they give both the narrative and the transformation momentum and staying power.

When effecting change through faculty governance, the faculty should take responsibility for the system of formal faculty governance and also be intentional about self-governance. To be effective, they need to create a structure that advances institutional priorities and contributes to

the overall institutional trajectory. If the current structure of faculty governance does not meet the needs of the institution, the president and the board most likely will gradually (or abruptly!) wrest back the powers of this body. Instead, the faculty should consider the authority they want to wield in the running of the institution and create a system of faculty governance that enables them to effectively execute their responsibility in those arenas. The faculty at Idyllic are a prime example: they wanted to control the academic curriculum, so they worked with the president to build a system where they not only had control but also responsibility for producing these programs and approving them on an agreed-upon timetable. Shared governance is not dead—it remains a valued and respected concept—but the system must work. Faculty should prioritize structures that enable them to arrive at decisions that solve the problem at hand and do so efficiently. Faculties that demonstrate their ability to take responsibility for outcomes and consistently produce strong results are much more likely to keep and even expand their authority in institutional governance.

Advice for the Board

In hiring a new president, boards should be cognizant of the most pressing needs of the institution and thoughtful about what characteristics and skills in a president they must find to address those needs. There is no such thing as a “best candidate,” but there is a best candidate for a specific institution at a specific time. Boards that are unaware of the needs of their institution or are imprecise about articulating them are likely to end up with a president whose skills are misaligned with the most critical priorities of the campus. Boards should take the time and do their due diligence to understand their institution’s needs and agree upon their top priorities. They should be upfront and direct about what they want the candidate to do and how they want them to lead.

Board members should consider and discuss among themselves and with the president how they want to wield hard power when necessary and how they want the president to do so. The board and president's structural authority, or hard power, is combined, and so they effectively share one collective pot of hard power. The board assumes a certain amount of that power and gives the rest to the president to drive the institution. If the board assumes all the power, there is nothing left for the president to run the institution. The way the board chooses to divide this power may depend on several factors, including the needs of the campus and the effectiveness of the president, but it is a decision that should be made thoughtfully and consciously rather than just evolving by default.

Boards should support presidents who are change agents and recognize that faculty and campus support for that president and the change agenda will shift over time. It is the unenviable responsibility of the board to identify and address the problem of presidential disenchantment that appears to arise around the 10-year mark of many presidents' tenures. It is understandable that the board might avoid this responsibility, especially in cases where the president has been successful to this point. Change is hard, and in many cases the president is deeply respected by both the board and the campus community. However, bitterness or disenchantment in the leader should not be ignored, and it is the responsibility of the board either to address this by making changes that rejuvenate the president's enthusiasm or by developing a plan for leadership transition. Even great leaders reach an end of their effective tenure, and it is better for this leadership transition to be mutual, orderly, and at a time when the president is still celebrated. This delicate task falls to the board to lead and direct, and members must assume responsibility for this task.

Questions for Future Study

This study is limited to only three sites with a defined period and set of circumstances. These confines impose significant limitations to its conclusions, but these findings lend themselves to additional questions and topics for future research. Three topics emerged as being both timely and particularly compelling.

First, what is the ideal length of a presidential tenure? There are clearly drawbacks to a presidency that is either too short or too long, but is there a way to identify the ideal term? This will of course vary to some degree based on the institution, the president, and the agenda for change. At what point does presidential disenchantment go beyond being a personal burden and impact the president's ability to effectively lead the institution? How can boards intervene before this tipping point is reached? Is it possible to identify certain factors that indicate that the president's effective term has lapsed before it goes truly downhill?

Second, what is the role of gender in presidential leadership in situations like those in this study? Two of the three presidents in this study were afforded significant latitude by their board to lead transformational change. The board assured these presidents that the board was fully behind them because they trusted their leader; in both cases the president had been there a matter of months. Could a female president have so quickly garnered that same level of trust? Similarly, how does the leader's adoption of a masculine or feminine style of leadership impact their effectiveness? At Idyllic, the president is male but most of the faculty and board are female. With the exception of the president, all the participants in this study from Idyllic were female. Are the cultures of certain institutions more receptive to a more masculine or feminine leadership style and how can boards account for this in the presidential search process?

Third, to what extent do the findings in this study apply to institutions that are either in financial freefall or are in a stronger position than the ones in this study? The three institutions in this study were all operating at a deficit prior to the arrival of the current president, but only Idyllic was in any imminent risk of closure. This study reinforced the idea that it is easier to effect change when the institution is in real trouble, but would these strategies have any impact if closure was imminent or there was no clear pathway to recovery? On the other side, if the financial position of the institution were stronger, would that reduce the enthusiasm or willingness of campus constituents to embrace change, rendering these strategies ineffective?

Conclusion

The headwinds of increasing costs and declining enrollment are going to pose insurmountable challenges for many small, private, tuition-dependent institutions in the coming years. Financial turnaround will not be possible for every college with an operating deficit. The institutions that are successful at transformation will use a host of different strategies to accomplish this goal, but they will all have to make choices about how they approach leadership and shared governance in instituting their proposed changes. These choices will impact not only the immediate effectiveness of their changes but also their long-term staying power. A skilled president who can build relationships and deploy both the authority of their position and the influence of their personal relationships will give these institutions the best chance for success. The interdependence of an institution's board, president, and faculty is never more obvious than when that institution is in distress. Each has an important role to play in the university's success.

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