

n the Richards Hall assembly room the faculty of Columbia

By Elisabeth Wear

Union College in Takoma Park, Maryland, listened with hopeful anticipation as President N. Clifford Sorensen inaugurated the 1990-1991 school year. New leadership brings some uncertainties. Would we be motivated to flight, fight, or fervor as we approached the tasks of a coming year?

"It is necessary to develop, through a shared and cooperative process, guidelines and policies through which change may occur and the business of the college be conducted," Sorensen told the faculty, a group noted for caution and resistance to change. In the past, efforts to relocate the college were thwarted in part by faculty concern about the college's future.

Later, when the school added a department of adult education (an idea that brought financial strength to the college), the faculty faced the shift in mission with customary reluctance.

"I am suggesting that together we develop a shared process for change," the president added. "A policy document needs to be set forth that defines the work of the faculty and administrators in a predictable, participatory relationship."

These were new words: *participation, change, shared governance*.

The president offered this suggestion: "A committee voted by the faculty should prepare a flow chart of how academic policy should be developed at Columbia Union College and how faculty can become partners in the process."

Informal campus dialogues provided a wider opportunity for faculty and staff to review the proposed models prior to presentation at faculty meetings.

Change cannot be accomplished unless top administrators as well as faculty and staff are convinced that change is necessary. Groups must be convinced rather than coerced.

Guarded optimism greeted the president's words. Shared governance had a compelling ring. The loss of domain, which

might result if the president became overly involved in faculty issues, was offset by the input that the faculty might

gain in the overall administration of the college.

Shortly thereafter, the committee, called the Task Force for Institutional Governance, convened for the first time. The president outlined its purpose—to prepare a flow chart summarizing the way business should be transacted at Columbia Union College and to describe faculty function and participation. A chairperson (myself) and a secretary (a teaching colleague) were elected. The president would join us as an observer and participant.

As we sat around the president's desk in comfortable chairs, amidst high ceilings and watercolor paintings, the task seemed simple. Blissfully ignorant of the amount of time and energy required, I naively declared that any committee involved with change must keep faculty informed and involved, and that decision making could more effectively be done through collective thought and participation than through individual mandate.

Keeping faculty informed of the task force's progress and soliciting suggestions and advice produced the first positive outcome—improved faculty attitudes. It also created a challenge: As the task force responded to faculty requests, the faculty's opinions began to change. This increased the time required to assess the suggested changes and incorporate them into a governance document.

Effective change must simultaneously take a top-down (administration level), middle-out (committee level), and bottom-up (faculty level) approach. The benefits of change must be evident and outweigh possible disadvantages.

The task force initially included five full professors, an associate professor, and an assistant professor. All agreed that current perceptions needed to be assessed, especially the following: (1) What's going well with faculty involvement in governance? and (2) What could be improved?

Only 20 of 60 faculty responded to the first survey. It hardly offered a mandate for change, but the committee, pleased with the thoughtful answers, studied every comment.

The first question was quickly answered. The responses were blank—except for one faculty member who wrote, "Not aware of any faculty involvement in CUC's governance structure." Three proposed a senate in answer to the second question, while the other respondents focused on details for improv-

Change and the College

ing communication at various levels.

We debated whether a faculty senate would change things for the better. However, CUC already had the rough equivalent of a senate. It included only faculty, no college staff. This group, the Educational Policies Committee, dealt with broad academic issues, which it referred to the faculty assembly. Reports on matters such as faculty pay, student affairs, parking policies, athletics programs, tuition and fees were reported to faculty by various vice-presidents. The faculty, as a group, rarely discussed these types of issues. Perhaps a new body with a new title could look at campuswide issues. We decided to find out.

A second survey asked if our campus should have a faculty senate and if so, which of the following topics would be appropriate for senate action: academics, finance, college advancement, student life, athletics, faculty discipline, grievances, and/or plant services? What should be the authority of the senate? The membership? The size? The composition?

Faculty response, although weak (24 out of 60), indicated the need for input on a wide variety of issues. This provided the starting point for a proposal.

Effective change must include a combination of informal and formal communication.

Advice began arriving from all sides. Informal conversations suggested that the faculty wanted more opportunities to discuss issues and to have their views heard. In fact, they seemed to consider this a higher priority than evaluating whatever recommendations the task force might make.

Faculty thought leaders encouraged development of the vision. Discussions with administration and teachers made the task force optimistic that a senate could provide a mechanism for campus-wide discussion and participation.

Concern was also expressed. The senate would need a strong chairperson, lest it become an oratorical body with only symbolic function. A senior faculty member's letter to the task force said that

even with a senate we would still need time to discuss issues as a faculty body.

It seemed appropriate to investigate what forms of governance other colleges used. Faculty handbooks from 15 colleges were selected for analysis: eight Adventist colleges and universities and seven state or private schools. The task force wanted to propose a form of governance that was not too different from

what we already had, but that ensured better communication among administration, faculty, and staff.

The review of policy handbooks produced three potential models for governance: one with a combined faculty/staff senate deliberating on wide issues but legislating only on academic matters; one with a senate deliberating and legislating on purely academic issues; and one with only the faculty assembly deliberating and legislating (no senate). In all three models, recommendations would be referred to administration for approval prior to implementation.

An informal faculty dialogue met to evaluate and modify these models before they were presented at a regularly scheduled faculty meeting. The consensus was to have a senate, but to modify our present governance structure as little as possible while defining clear lines of authority. Faculty participation was considered paramount. The senate should provide input on all substantive issues, not just those academic ones. Most significant: The senate should serve as a clearing house, leaving to the faculty assembly the major decision-making before presidential processing.

Faculty are uncomfortable with changing one part of a structure unless they can see the effects of that change on other elements of the structure.

The next faculty meeting proved somewhat unsettling. In spite of the task force's efforts to communicate, the faculty seemed puzzled about the details. Clearly, they sought a role in student life, campus services, finances, and other topics. However, the proposed document did not show how the senate would involve the entire campus. Faculty asked the task force to find ways to bring staff members into the picture.

New assignments now tested the courage of every committee member. The task force set up a process to (a) keep staff employees informed, (b) solicit staff suggestions, and (c) incorporate these suggestions into task force decision making.

Faculty were assigned to talk to CUC's support staff. Most had never set foot in the offices of ancillary departments, much less brought employees together to talk about governance. The staff seemed only mildly interested in the proposed changes in governance, leaving task force members dubious about the value of these visits.

Based on the faculty's recommendation, the task force developed a diagram for campus decision-making. (See page 17.)

Change in higher education can be realized only if an individual or group is willing to dedicate energy, thought, and time in persistent effort.

Now the task force had to work out the details of the plan. Preparing for task force meetings required cut-and-paste sessions, when participants pieced together everything they thought remotely helpful. Variations on senate composition and proposed terms of service abounded. We rejected, adapted, or plagiarized ideas and wordings with guilt-free abandon from any and all sources.

Often the secretary was heard to say, "Now make up your mind—which way is it going to be?" as the group tried to define the function, composition, selection process, and terms of reference of

such campus entities as the nominating committee, the faculty assembly, a general assembly, and a proposed senate in tandem with the existing educational policies committee.

Freshly spliced document in hand, the task force enthusiastically presented its first draft to the faculty. No one (except the task force) liked the proposal. The faculty felt that the proposed senate did not deal with a wide-enough spectrum of issues and that it overlapped the functions of the the educational policies committee.

Wrestling with proposal revisions, the committee drew diagrams, made speeches, and composed increasingly vague wording during the next four work sessions. Discouragement set in. Task force members had worked hard to incorporate faculty suggestions, but the pieces did not seem to fit together.

After a particularly frustrating session, a committee member suggested that "we take all academic issues out of the senate and place them back with the educational policies committee." This proposal was enthusiastically accepted. One logjam had finally been dismantled, but another would surface at the next session.

Change agents must establish linkage across groups, facilitating open collaboration.

To have a truly broad-issue senate, we needed broad representation. Earlier in the year (at the request of the chairperson), two staff members had been appointed to the current task force by the president. This move met with some criticism. The president was hesitant to move from an academic senate to a campuswide senate dealing with general issues. Two members on the task force shared his reluctance.

Now the issue became even more controversial. If a senate was to deal with campuswide issues, the staff deserved strong representation. With one member advocating 50 percent staff representation and another questioning the very idea of staff representation, the committee (after countless rounds of table-pounding speeches) compromised on a 20-member senate with eight faculty, four staff, two students, and six administrators.

During the next four sessions the task force outlined the purpose, function,

and composition of a new staff assembly and advisory committee. The staff assembly, a counterpart of the faculty assembly, would select the staff advisory committee, which in turn would choose the four staff senators. Key staff members guided and encouraged the task force as it developed new proposals, while administrators worried about how much time the staff would have to devote to their new duties.

At last, after countless hours of work and numerous revisions, we were ready to undertake our original assignment—compiling "a simple organizational chart."

A second draft of the new proposed governance structure now went to the faculty. The proposed standing committee organizational chart included the major campuswide committees, the senate, and a new master-planning committee. But while faculty were generally pleased with the "broad-issue senate," they made numerous suggestions.

The third and final draft of the proposed governance structure was presented at the last working faculty meeting of the year. Faculty were positive but tired. (No important issues should be debated at the end of a semester.) Many questions were remained unanswered, most centering around the senate. Faculty were willing to take on the added burden of participating in a senate provided that (1) discussion centered around other-than-academic topics, and (2) the time commitment resulted in positive and productive change for the campus. Few were willing to vote another layer of bureaucracy until they understood what

was really meant by "shared governance."

Pilot testing may be a safe strategy for testing the effects of change.

The best solution seemed to be to pilot test the model for one year and then evaluate whether the senate provided an effective way for faculty to address multifaceted issues. A motion was made to this effect, and the third draft of the document produced by the faculty and the Task Force for Institutional Governance was recommended to the president. The results would be evaluated by both faculty and administration at the end of the 1991-1992 school year.

Columbia Union College now faces the complicated task of putting this document into action. The nominating committee is preparing ballots for the senate. The first meetings for the senate and the staff assembly have been scheduled. No one is certain whether we will like the new governance structure—or whether it will work. Possibly the greatest benefit has already been realized: faculty, staff, and administration feeling that sense of ownership that comes from participating together in the shaping of change. ⁶⁷

Dr. Elisabeth Wear served as Chair of the Task Force for Institutional Governance at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland, during 1990-1991. A Professor of Education at CUC, she formerly served as Assistant Dean of the Adult Evening Program at the college. Her fellow faculty and staff chose her to chair the new CUC senate for 1991-1992.

