

the **TRUTH**
about **UNIONS**
and
SHARED GOVERNANCE

A joint publication of the
American Federation of Teachers
and the National Education Association

MYTHS

about

Unions

and

Shared


Governance

“Unions destroy collegiality and create an adversarial relationship with administrators.”

“Unions bring in outsiders who aren't part of the institution.”

“The presence of a union weakens the faculty senate.”

“Unions undermine traditional shared governance.”



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Shared governance is the bedrock of higher education in the United States. It is the process that ensures that faculty, staff and administrators all have an equal opportunity to participate in decision-making. Today, shared governance is being challenged—and in some cases, dismantled—at colleges and universities nationwide. The result is that the voice of faculty and staff in decision-making is being bypassed and the integrity of key education and research functions performed by faculty and staff is threatened.

Faculty and staff continue to turn to collective bargaining and union representation as a way to ensure that they have a voice in the development of policies that affect the work they perform and the quality of their institutions. This joint publication of the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association dispels the myths about the role of unions in institutions of higher education.

MYTH:

Unions destroy collegiality and create an adversarial relationship with administrators.

THE TRUTH:

College faculty and professional staff place great value on collegiality—the principle of faculty, staff and administrators working together as professionals to set policy on curriculum, teaching and personnel issues. Sometimes, managers try to influence workers by saying that if a union is installed, this process will be substituted by a rule-laden, mechanistic decision-making process.

The truth is otherwise. What unions do is ensure that faculty and staff can work with managers backed by a legally enforceable contract that guarantees their rights. It does not destroy collegiality; it sets the rules that make collegiality possible.

Around the country, higher education unions negotiate contracts that include provisions protecting academic freedom and intellectual property rights, as well as guaranteeing faculty and staff – and the elected bodies that represent them – a role in developing policy and curriculum.

The truth is, unions create a more level playing field for faculty and staff by providing them with influence and a voice to advocate for quality education.

MYTH:

Unions bring in outsiders who aren't part of the institution.

THE TRUTH:

Union leaders and representatives are faculty and staff members chosen, through democratic elections, by their colleagues. Further, unionization and union membership are basic rights of all employees.

Union representation is possible only when a clear majority of faculty and staff choose it. Higher education unions, once elected, provide all employees in the union with legitimate representation.

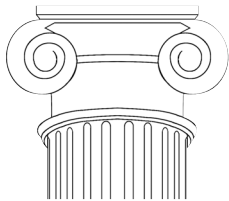
MYTH:

The presence of a union weakens the faculty senate.

THE TRUTH:

Unions, faculty senates and other representative assemblies all can have significant roles in shared governance. At colleges and universities around the country, unions and faculty senates work cooperatively to improve their institutions.

Unions and collective bargaining do not and should not replace effective shared governance structures. When faculty and staff choose unions, they do so because a



clear majority of faculty and staff believe the existing structure fails to guarantee shared governance.

AFT and NEA believe that unions and other representative governing bodies complement, rather than compete with, each other. The truth is unions can provide a framework for other shared governance bodies to operate successfully and without administrative interference.

There is no set structure for cooperative relationships between unions and other shared governance bodies. Structural differences at various institutions are based on federal, state and local legal mandates, as well as institutional traditions and applicable labor laws.

It is important, however, that the roles of the union and other shared governance bodies be clearly defined and understood by everyone involved.

CONCLUSION

The assertion that unions undermine shared governance is completely false.

Higher education unions provide employees with a legally protected role in shared governance. Agreements made between institutions and faculty senates or other assemblies seldom are legally binding, and the fate of employees is left to the discretion of administrators to alter at will.

The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association support the expansion of shared governance. Faculty and staff should have a leading role in developing academic standards and curriculum.

A well-functioning college or university recognizes the need for an employee voice and ensures that faculty and staff have a say in the decisions that affect the mission, operation and quality of the institution. Without the voice and influence of faculty and staff, higher education institutions and their students suffer.

AFT and NEA believe that the most effective shared governance systems are based on sound collective bargaining contracts that clearly define and guarantee an active role for faculty and staff.



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