

Statement on Shared Governance

Adopted by the Board of Trustees—April 8, 2020

In Spring 2019, the Board of Trustees asked the Interim President and Interim Provost to form a Task Force to review, clarify, align, and make readily visible its system of Shared Governance. The Task Force reviewed many related resources which are now accessible from a central [Web Repository](#) for Shared Governance at Otis. A [Visual Guide](#) accompanying this Statement includes an overview of the system’s working elements, and how they interrelate. This statement helps the College ensure effective shared governance and needed ongoing conferral on behalf of well-informed institutional decision-making and fitting transparency.

Otis College of Art and Design is committed to shared governance as being inextricably linked and fundamental to achieving the college’s mission.

What is Shared Governance, and Why is it Important?

Shared governance is the process by which various constituents contribute to decision-making related to college policy and direction. Effective shared governance enhances an institution’s ability to achieve its mission and strategic goals by strengthening the quality of leadership through deeply informed institutional decision-making. Effective shared governance also engenders an institutional mission-driven culture and collective contributions to the institution’s present and future.

Major Tenets of Shared Governance

Each group or body (faculty, administration, staff, trustees, etc.) within the College community has a defined role and set of responsibilities intended to effectively support the institution’s mission and to ensure its fiscal health and sustainability. Shared governance is achieved when these responsibilities are carried out in a manner consistent with four major tenets:

- mutual respect, which can foster trust;
- recognition that groups’ areas of responsibility and/or authority are clearly defined, yet interrelated;
- clear ongoing and timely communication with each other and with the larger campus community to close loops and share the basis for decisions; and
- making readily visible relevant institutional priorities, policies, and procedures.

The Importance of Clear, Ongoing Communication

The College’s **Academic** branch (Academic Leaders, Academic Assembly, and Faculty Senate) and

Institutional Management branch (Senior Leadership) regularly confer with standing Conferral Groups/Committees (Students' Union, Diversity/Equity/Inclusion Council, etc.) to inform institutional decisions. The President and Senior Leadership regularly confer with the College's **Fiduciary** branch (Board of Trustees) for input, and vice versa. The goal of conferral is to synthesize (thoughtful consideration and analysis) input toward sound decisions for the College's future and direction (consistent with its strategic plan), and clearly communicate with the campus community to ensure both well-informed institutional decision-making and fitting transparency for an aligned, productive community.

With the tenets in place and fitting transparency at work, trust can evolve and propel even better decision-making and alignment within the campus community and with the Board.

Three Distinctions that are Helpful to Remember

It is helpful to remember three key *distinctions* when operating under the shared governance system at Otis. They are the distinctions between:

- 1) *A situation* and a *system*: a situation can elicit feelings of systemic failure, yet may be an event or moment and not necessarily indicative of the effectiveness of the entire system. A system of shared governance, like Otis's, apart from a situation, can be bolstered by new alignment, thoughtful articulation, and central, ready visibility.
- 2) *Advisory* roles and *Institutional Decision-Making* ones: those in Advisory roles provide expertise to properly inform institutional decision-making. Those in Decision-Making roles are responsible for gathering input as well as the additional steps to make properly informed institutional decisions, and then communicating the basis for those decisions to inform the community.
- 3) *Governance* and *management*: governance determines the "what," the strategic task of setting the organization's goals, direction, limitations and accountability frameworks. Management determines the "how," the ways the institution will reach its goals and aspirations.

Three Kinds of Engagement Support Shared Governance

Shared governance can best be exercised when three different kinds of engagement are clearly understood. **Input** is the exchange of ideas and perspectives, responses to inquiry, or specific expertise sought and received from many to inform a topic. Various individuals are charged with the **responsibility** of analyzing input from the conferral process and making decisions. **Institutional decision-making** follows due conferral and synthesis of broad and/or pointed input. The three main branches of shared governance make institutional decisions and share these and their basis with the community.

Understanding the differences between these kinds of engagement, along with earned trust in each, are required for shared governance to function effectively and serve the community as

intended.

The Importance of Conferral and Regular Conferral Groups

Well-informed institutional decision-making requires much conferral with key campus constituencies to ensure appropriate input and synthesis. Many input gathering mechanisms are used, including ad hoc groups or committees, survey research, reviews of literature (external sources), and regular, standing **Conferral Groups** such as (but not limited to) the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council, Staff Council, Environmental Steering Committee, President's Council, Alumni Council, International Partnerships Committee, and Students' Union. Student voice also manifests in other ways within shared governance; many standing and ad hoc Conferral Groups and processes include students to ensure their input on relevant topics.

The Three Main Branches of Shared Governance

After conferral and/or input gathering, the College relies on three main branches of shared governance: the **Academic** branch (Academic Assembly, Chairs Council, Core Council, Faculty Senate), the **Institutional Management** branch (President, Senior Leaders, and Staff Council, and the **Fiduciary** branch (Board of Trustees).

Academic governance is conducted primarily by the [Academic Assembly](#), consisting of the [Faculty Senate](#) (all Full-time and Adjunct Faculty members), department Chairs, Assistant Chairs, Academic Directors, and the Academic Assembly's Committees. The responsibilities of the Academic Assembly and working structures of its Committees are described in the [Faculty Handbook](#) and include educational program/curriculum development and implementation, methods of instruction, establishment and assessment of student learning outcomes, academic standards, and degree requirements as well as faculty hiring practices, evaluation, academic rank, priority for sabbatical, and promotion. The work of the Academic Assembly is primarily carried out by its Committees: the Executive, Curriculum, Personnel, Rank & Promotion, Faculty Development, Academic Standing, and Assessment Committees. The Assembly also elects representatives to the Board of Trustees, Board of Governors, Institutional Advancement, Finance and Investment, Marketing, Educational Planning, and Campus Life.

Academic governance is important at the Department level, too. Part-time, Adjunct, and Full-time Faculty members contribute directly to course development; clear, sequential syllabi; grading criteria; development, level, and meeting of program and course learning outcomes; curricular innovation; student-responsive pedagogies; teaching methods; current discipline-specific content (remaining relevant to the field(s)); and quality of education delivery (student success, retention, and college reputation/distinction).

Institutional Management is provided by the College's division heads, or [Senior Leadership](#), consisting of the [Provost](#) and Vice Presidents, who confer within and across the Divisions and provide expert consultative Divisional leadership. The [President](#) is responsible for

institutional management, through shared governance, including the achievement of the College mission. The President leads the development of and oversees the College's strategic plan, provides to the Board of Trustees an annual institutional report, maintains the fiscal health of the institution, strengthens the campus community through recognition of achievements and distinctions, and develops and maintains alumni and donor support. The Chief Executive Officer leads institutional management and fully supports, contributes to, visibly participates in, and models the College's commitment to shared governance.

Fiduciary oversight is provided by the [Board of Trustees](#), along with general oversight of the College's governance, fidelity to its mission, and overall affairs. The Board of Trustees, by law the governing body of the institution bound by its California 501(c)(3) corporate by-laws, ensures the soundness of financial, physical, and other resources of the institution; integrates long-range planning into Board and Board Committee processes; and oversees and helps shape the College's strategic plans and broad policies. The Board welcomes an Academic Assembly-elected faculty representative to its meetings, and elected Assembly representatives to many of its Committees. Board membership includes an honorary and an alumni Trustee. The Board of Trustees delegates to the President full responsibility for institutional management; the President, as Chief Executive Officer, also serves as a non-voting Trustee.

What Good Shared Governance Can Do

Shared Governance as outlined here can ensure well-informed decision-making and fitting transparency when those decisions are the result of regular, ongoing, and ad hoc conferral; and the main branches regularly seek input and make decisions accordingly. Its cycles, sequences, steps, and processes include: identification of issues requiring academic, institutional, or fiduciary decision-making; exploration of initial ideas; input gathering; synthesis of input and revision of ideas, and where warranted additional input gathering for further learning and revision; solution-building for a decision; communication of the decision/solution and its basis; and evaluation for continuous improvement.

Otis is committed to and strives to maintain and evolve its system of shared governance so that it remains ongoing, clearly defined, readily visible, and subject to continuous review.