

Toward a Shared Understanding of Shared Governance

Working Group on Shared Governance
College of Arts and Sciences
University of Washington
April 2026

Context and Process

In the wake of announcements, meetings, and plans regarding major budget cuts in Spring 2025, the elected faculty council of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)—most commonly called the College Council—established our ad hoc working group to review how shared governance is interpreted and practiced at the University of Washington (UW) and to make recommendations on how the Dean’s Office, the College Council, and the CAS faculty could work toward a shared understanding of shared governance.

The College Council solicited volunteers from the College Council and the CAS faculty at large in Summer 2025 to form our working group. We are:

Emily Carrington, Professor of Biology and former chair of the College Council
Shannon Dudley, Professor of Music and current member of the College Council*
Moon-Ho Jung (Chair), Professor of History and current member of the College Council
Matthew Powers, Professor of Communication
Josephine Walwema, Teaching Professor of English and current advisory member of the College Council

We began our work in Autumn 2025 by compiling a bibliography of studies on shared governance (with the help of librarian Aubrey Williams), reading a selection of those studies, studying various official documents, especially the UW Faculty Code and Governance, and meeting with Dean Dianne Harris and a series of faculty, particularly those in leadership positions. We also participated in a listening session with CAS faculty on December 5, 2025. In Winter 2026, we met with Gautham Reddy, Secretary of the Faculty, some chairs of elected faculty councils from other UW colleges and schools, and current and recent chairs of the College Council to gather additional perspectives on shared governance.

What Shared Governance Is (and What It Is Not)

Shared governance should *not* be framed or approached as a form of democracy at work. Under laws of the state of Washington, the Board of Regents, a body appointed by the state’s governor and confirmed by its senate, holds “[all the powers and authority to govern and set policy for the University of Washington](#).” The governor is required to appoint a member of the UW faculty to the Board of Regents, but “[the Faculty Regent serves the people of Washington and does not represent the faculty or the Faculty Senate](#).”

[The Board of Regents, in turn, delegates to the UW President the authority](#) “to act for the Board of Regents in formulating, prescribing and issuing rules, regulations, and executive orders not

*For medical reasons, Shannon Dudley had to withdraw from the working group in February 2026.

inconsistent with the Bylaws, Standing Orders, Regent Policies, and other orders of the Board and applicable state law for the immediate government of the University.” As the appointed head of university governance, “the President or the President’s designee shall consult the University faculty and may delegate in whole or in part the responsibility for formulating such rules, regulations, and executive orders to said faculty.” But such consultation or delegation explicitly does not remove or reduce the authority of the President or the President’s designee (most notably the Provost), as vested by the Board of Regents.

In 1956, the President, who is also a member of the UW faculty, approved the [Faculty Code](#) that the UW faculty had voted to adopt. The Faculty Code put into writing the principle of shared governance at UW, spelling out in detail how the faculty would fulfill its role as a consulting and delegated body, as conferred by the President and the Board of Regents. Although the Faculty Code does not alter the structure of authority at UW—the Board of Regents and, by extension and delegation, the President retain ultimate authority—it serves as a binding guide that the President and the Provost must follow in governing the university. The Faculty Senate, the representative and legislative body of the faculty, has the authority to pass legislation to amend the Scholastic Regulations and Student Policies, subject to the President’s approval, and to propose amendments to the Faculty Code, subject to the approval of the faculty at large and the President.

In addition to legislative proposals to amend the Faculty Code through the Faculty Senate, the Faculty Code identifies two other institutional channels through which the UW faculty can advise the President, the Provost, and their designees (most notably the Deans). The Faculty Senate appoints Standing Committees of the University Faculty (known widely as [Faculty Councils](#)) to deliberate on matters of university policy and planning and to advise the Senate Executive Committee, the Faculty Senate, and the Provost. At the college level, the faculty vote for an [elected faculty council](#) that “*shall* advise the dean on matters of faculty promotion and tenure, and advise the dean on matters involving academic policy, including priorities, resource and salary allocation, and budgets” (emphasis added).

Shared governance at UW, in short, operates through a hierarchical structure of appointees, who serve at the pleasure of those above them, as well as through elected representative bodies, whose role is primarily advisory to those in appointed positions of authority. The appearance of representative democracy—the Faculty Senate and the College Council—can lead many members of the faculty to believe that they have the ultimate authority to make or overturn decisions. In general, they do not.¹ They, however, do have the authority to *advise* the President, the Provost, and the Dean, within and through the structures and procedures laid out in the Faculty Code. A similar structure exists at the department level, where the Chair, who is appointed by the Dean, solicits advice from the department faculty. Ultimately, the Board of Regents has the final say in all decisions related to governance at UW.

¹ There are exceptions to the general rule. The voting members of the Undergraduate General Education Committee and the University Committee on Curriculum Administration, for example, are all faculty.

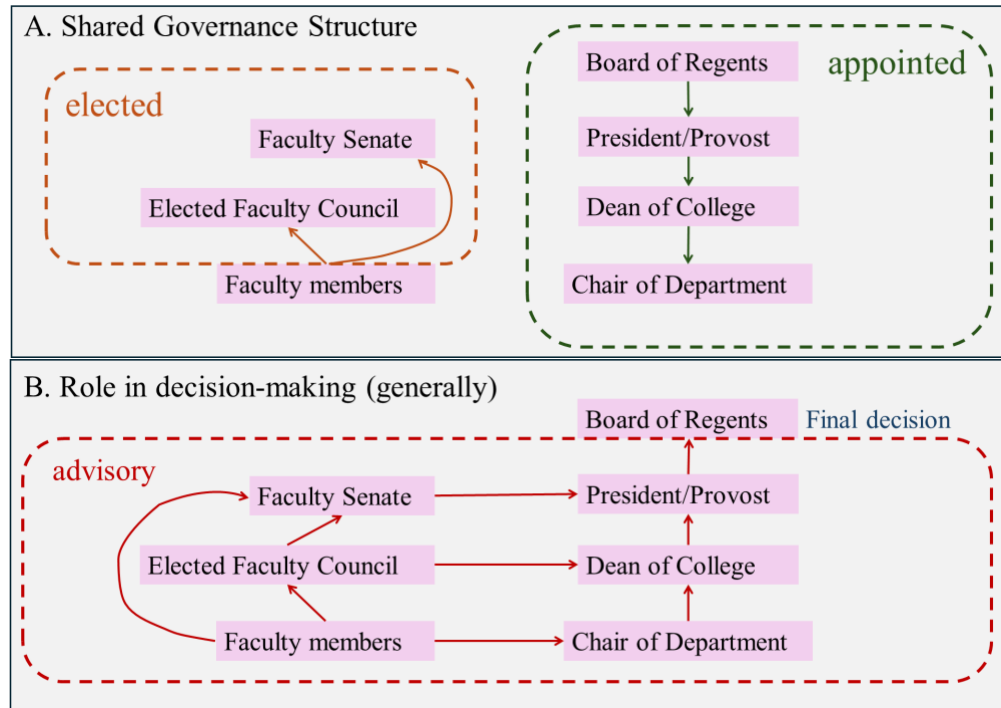


Figure 1. Shared Governance at the University of Washington. A. Generalized hierarchical structure, with the mechanism for selection: faculty bodies are elected by constituents (orange arrows) while administrative officials are appointed (green arrows). B. Role in decision making, with arrows indicating advisory roles. Note that the Board of Regents may delegate decision-making authority to the President or their designee. The diagrams here do not include the Faculty Councils or the Senate Committee on Planning and Budgeting (SCPB), which also advises the Provost.

Shared Governance in the College of Arts and Sciences

According to the [College Code of Organization and Procedure](#) (or the College Bylaws), the College Council's role is:

1. To review and make recommendations on faculty personnel actions for tenure, promotion, and new appointments at a tenured rank;
2. To advise the Dean on matters of educational policy;
3. To advise the Dean on matters of budget, including budget allocations and faculty salary policy;
4. To advise the Dean on matters of College administrative policy and procedure;
5. To act on behalf of the College faculty in recommending the granting of undergraduate degrees;
6. To appoint standing and special committees of the College faculty; and
7. To interpret the *College Code of Organization and Procedure*.

In terms of promotion and tenure, the first function listed in the College Bylaws, the College Council plays a critical and active role shaped by a tradition of shared expectations and clear procedures. The Dean's Office shares with members of the College Council the complete files of every promotion case. After reviewing and discussing each case, the College Council provides a written summary and takes a vote on its recommendation. The written summary and the vote's results, which serve as advice to the CAS Dean, are then included in the promotion file. Although the Dean does not have to agree with the College Council's recommendation, the Dean's own recommendation to the Provost would presumably have to address any discrepancies in the review process.

Though formally not the final decision-making body in promotion and tenure, the College Council, as the only elected representative body of the CAS faculty, provides an independent and final faculty review before a promotion case moves through the Dean's Office, the Provost's Office, and then the Board of Regents. Based on our findings, shared governance works effectively in promotion and tenure because of a combination of factors. First, the Dean's Office willingly shares all relevant information with the College Council. Second, all CAS faculty and the Dean recognize and respect that the College Council's review marks an essential step in the process toward promotion and tenure. Third, there is a written record of the College Council's recommendation and deliberation.

Although faculty may disagree about individual cases, we believe that there is a general consensus in CAS that faculty have a real voice in the process of promotion and tenure. Through independent reviews and votes at the department level and through the College Council, CAS faculty know that the Dean seeks and receives substantive advice from faculty bodies. There is a sustaining culture of shared governance in promotion and tenure, nurtured by a shared commitment to transparency and accountability.

Such shared expectations and concrete procedures currently do not exist for the other six functions of the College Council.

Guiding Principles Toward Shared Governance

We believe a shared commitment to the following principles would advance shared governance beyond promotion and tenure in CAS.

Transparency

The sharing of information is foundational to shared governance. Without access to relevant information, the College Council and other faculty bodies cannot provide meaningful advice to the Dean. The Faculty Code ([Section 23-46H](#)), for instance, states: "Upon request, chancellors, deans, or chairs shall provide a member of their own faculty with information concerning salaries, teaching schedules, salary and operations budget requests, appropriations, allotments, disbursements, and similar data pertaining to the relevant campus, college, school, or department." Particularly as a public university, UW should encourage those in appointed positions of authority to share information as much as possible.

Independence

As the only elected faculty body representing the CAS faculty, the College Council is an independent body, separate from the Dean's Office. The CAS Dean is a non-voting member of the College Council, but all CAS faculty should realize that the elected members of the College Council do not answer to the Dean but to the CAS faculty. That necessary degree of separation and independence ensures integrity in the process of shared governance.

Accountability

The advisory role of the College Council is a part of the structure of shared governance at UW. As a formal body mandated by the Faculty Code and the College Bylaws, the College Council does *not* serve at the pleasure of the Dean. As such, we believe the Dean's advisory consultations with the College Council should follow agreed upon procedures and be documented formally, as in cases for promotion and tenure. The Dean, of course, can disagree with the College Council's advice, but that disagreement and the reasons for the disagreement—along with agreements—should be recorded in writing and shared widely with the CAS faculty.

Recommendations

Toward building a culture of shared governance that supports all of the College Council's required functions, we recommend the following:

1. The CAS budget is immense and complex. To help the CAS faculty understand and interpret the budget, and the ongoing budget cuts, the College Council established in Summer 2025 the Budget Committee, made up of current members of the College Council and voluntary members from the CAS faculty. We strongly recommend that the College Council make the Budget Committee a standing committee for the long term and that the Dean's Office work closely with the Budget Committee, including providing access to all necessary and relevant information, to solicit faculty advice on budget matters and to include the committee's advice in decision-making meetings.
2. The massive reorganization of the CAS staff toward shared environments is having a huge impact on the College's educational and research mission. To date, the Dean's Office has administered that transition with little to no input from the College Council or the CAS faculty, even though the mass layoffs and hiring plans could be interpreted reasonably as "educational policy" and "administrative policy and procedure." We encourage the Dean's Office to seek the advice of the College Council and the CAS faculty *before* implementing changes that will have lasting consequences on the working lives of CAS faculty. Bypassing the mandated structures and procedures of shared governance can have the adverse effect of sowing mistrust, suspicion, and apathy.
3. In recent years, the College Council has recognized the need to address the concerns of teaching-track faculty, most recently by proposing to amend the College Bylaws to expand the College Council to include the election of Teaching Professors. We recommend that the College Council work with the Faculty Senate and the Dean's Office to allow for elected faculty councils to play a role in cases of faculty reappointment in addition to promotion and tenure. For faculty without tenure, the relative lack of transparency and accountability around the reappointment process is a major source of concern.

4. The College Council has historically devoted almost all of its time to reviewing cases for promotion and tenure. Other colleges and schools, such as the School of Medicine and the Foster School of Business, have established multiple elected faculty councils or other faculty committees to allow their elected faculty bodies to devote more time to matters beyond promotion and tenure. We recommend that the College Council investigate different options to set aside more time for other matters. Some options include: reserving one meeting per month to discuss issues outside of promotion and tenure; streamlining the review of cases for promotion and tenure so that not all members of the College Council are expected to read all cases in advance; holding quarterly listening sessions with the CAS faculty and the Divisional Deans to become better aware of issues affecting the faculty that they are elected to represent.

5. In recent years, the College Council has taken steps to assert its status as an independent body representing the CAS faculty, such as gaining the technical capacity to send email messages directly to the entire CAS faculty. We encourage the Dean's Office to continue to recognize the College Council as an independent body. As such, the College Council should not have to seek permission from the Dean's Office to oversee the election of its members, to organize and schedule meetings, to send communications to the CAS faculty, to maintain and update a website on the College Council's activities, or to establish standing and special committees.

6. To encourage faculty input and involvement, we recommend that all new CAS faculty be required to attend a workshop on shared governance and administrative procedures at UW. The Dean's Office and the College Council should work together to organize and coordinate the workshop.

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