

Executive Chair's Report

Just about two years ago my office phone rang, nothing good ever comes via the telephone anymore, and, well, Bill Powell was on the line telling me that I was a write in choice for Executive Chair and he wanted to know if I would take it. I was a bit stunned, yes, I'd been on the Executive Committee for the last three years but I was a nobody, knew nothing about running faculty governance, in fact I really didn't know what it was! So my first thought was, boy do I have enemies! Bill told me to think about it but his very sage advice was, "if I were you, I wouldn't take it". After serious deliberation, some frantic emails and more than a few "what are you crazy's" from several of my department colleagues, I went with my instincts and against the advice of those smarter than I and accepted my single vote/nomination.

Today, I would say I feel more like the new arrival in dusty western town who fell asleep in the saloon and woke up with a star pinned to her chest. The only indication of what was going on; a note next to my empty bottle says, "Clanton brothers arriving on the 3 PM train, good luck!"

In my first year, it quickly became obvious that there are few rules at ESF and rather little enforcement of those that do exist, deadlines are optional and "seeking forgiveness not permission" an accepted and encouraged practice. There was a weak job description for the position I had just accepted and while previous chairs were and are, very, very helpful they always seemed to have a funny little smile when they said "good luck". A conversation with an ex-department chair just last week explained the smile, it's the "been there, done that, glad to not be doing it anymore" sympathy smile.

It was a conversation with this same ex-department chair last week about summer session that made me realize that some aspects of ESF really are the Wild, Wild West or perhaps seeing things from an even larger perspective, we are reminiscent of the United States during Westward Expansion, after all, the campus **is** expanding westward. The US Presidents of those years would have had the well-established domesticated east coast states, California's respectable cowboys and then the "mavericks" in the middle of the country.

At ESF there are departments that could be considered the established and staid East Coast, and there are departments reminiscent of California where freedom and weirdness is prized, but where laws and governance are equally respected, and then there are the "dodge city" or "Yukon" departments where anything goes. Listening to the issues surrounding summer session, something mostly directed by each department individually, this was brought home to me with a crushing amount of email and discussion.

So two years ago, I was introduced as the new Executive Chair, innocent and young. I stand before you today, with the hang over that goes with this position and a few more grey hairs, but stronger and smarter than I was. I need to thank those who have worked so hard by my side these past two years, my deputies so to speak, and for Bill Powell for not deciding for me that a green assistant professor should not even be given the chance to do this job. In reflecting on what has and has not been accomplished and where we are and where we were, I think we've done a few good things.

Today, we have new bylaws, a College Hour, and a choice for electronic or paper course evaluations. We've made significant in-roads in how policy and procedures are developed,

vetted and ratified, and we are moving toward better communication between faculty, students and administration.

In the early days, the Executive Committee was lucky to find enough to fill an hour meeting, now they have to figure out what is important, when to present it and what can wait until the next meeting. Committees are charged with reporting to the full-body annually, with providing minutes of their meetings and publishing an annual written report.

The Undergraduate Student Association is also taking interest in Governance, they were present in December to lend their voices to the debate on the College Hour, they wrote a resolution for the End-of-Course Evaluations and were here today with a second resolution to lobby in support of the W Grade. In addition, several members of the Graduate Student Association and USA have participated as members of different committees.

We are starting to embrace the principle tenets of shared governance; important decisions are made with the advice of the key constituents, then key stakeholders are working to make the decisions into reality and communication between all parties continues to improve. This past year alone we have had more than 75 people involved in College Governance through participation on committees. The year before we might have had 25.

We have a long way to go, next year the Executive Committee needs to revisit the by-laws once again to see what is working, what's not and what new adjustments we need to make. They need to look at the charges of the committees, we need to make sure that committees are doing meaningful work and not busy work and we need to really look at our definition of "faculty governance" and make it what it really should be, which is true shared governance, where all parties on campus work together to make our quality of work-life exceptional. Again, I'm the newcomer to campus so I don't know what it was like before, I can only ask the question, what do I want it to be like while I'm here. I want us protected in the future, I want a consultation policy for the dissolution of programs, I want to know that when our present administration leaves, that if we get a "maverick" that we have strong leadership to get us through the lean times. I want to know that the next Executive Chair has a procedure for making things happen and for listening to all the voices that need to be heard in an environment of truly Shared Governance.

And since I've been cautioned about using the word I and making this personal, I will say, it is personal, I'm about to be granted tenure, I personally want ESF to be a place that when the next E. Chair goes to the CGL meetings, that we continue to be the envy of other campuses; that our biggest issues are leaking roofs and parking spaces and not administrators who hijack our curriculum, a part time President or CFO and where we are forced to research the environmental longevity of bubble gum.

Perhaps, some will see me as being glib, but honestly, ESF is a great community and policies and procedures and guidance will only make it stronger. They will make our department chair's jobs easier and perhaps make leadership turnover less frightening, for both those taking over and those being taken over. The United States has withstood good presidents and bad presidents because of its Constitution; ESF now needs a shared governance structure as strong so that for years to come, we can withstand ***The Good, the Bad and the Ugly!***

With that please join me in thanking those that have made the work that has been accomplished to date possible. The list is long so I would ask them to stand and remain standing and to hold your applause until the end.

Present members of the E. Comm.

Neil Murphy – Chair of the Faculty

Robert Meyer – Sergeant-at-arms

Stephen Weiter – Parliamentarian and SU Senator

Stephen Teale – Secretary

John Hassett – Chair COC

Jennifer Smith – Chair COR

Jack Manno – Chair Awards

Melissa Fierke – Chair COPSO

Paul Crovella – Chair IQAS

Greg McGee – Chair of Student Life

George Kyanka – Chair P&T

Klaus Doelle – SUNY Senator

Lisa Campagna – SUNY Senator Alternate

Bruce Bongarten – Ex-officio representative of Administration (non-voting)

Past Member of the E. Comm

Ruth Yanai, Jacqui Friar, Bill Smith, Peter Black, Larry Abrahamson, Bill Powell

Listed behind me are the dates for the meetings for next year, they are all now, no excuse meetings. Come have your voice heard and take part in the democracy that makes ESF such a great place to live and work.

And finally two disclaimers – (a) I'm not a fan of Westerns but I did fall in love with Montana when I was 9 and (b) I use the word "maverick" as it might have been used in the 1800's not as an intentional slur/reference/support of any particular past Presidential or Vice Presidential Candidate.