

Discussion piece

Reimagining the culture of academic administration

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Photo courtesy fresnobee.com

Former CSU Chancellor Joseph I. Castro

The Problem

With the events leading to the chancellor's resignation, CSU breached its trust with the public and its employees and revealed a culture of arrogance and entitlement among its highest administrators. While tightening procedures, strengthening training, and limiting retreat rights are all good steps toward addressing the Title IX problems, fully addressing them requires **changing the administrative culture** at their root -- piercing the bubble of arrogance that surrounds those who lack any meaningful accountability toward their employees and subordinates, that creates a sense of entitlement among them, and that conditions a belief that they can act with impunity.

We see this **sense of entitlement** operating all the time in more mundane, less dramatic, but still quite common and problematic ways. An administrator blindsides faculty with an announcement, reaching a decision without input. Or input is given, but not acknowledged. Or it's acknowledged, but rejected without explanation and has no influence on the outcome. Or it's manufactured with hand-picked advisory committees. Procedures are ignored, rigged, circumvented, improvised. Authority is asserted, claimed,

usurped, wielded without showing its source. When frictions reach their boiling point, things turn ugly. Faculty rebel using the only tools they have. They sabotage administrative careers, finding where administrators are interviewing for their next leap up the ladder, then sending incriminating information to the institution. In more dire cases, they resort to the ultimate public humiliation ritual -- the vote of no confidence -- at least five times in the last five years alone in the CSU.

If **entitlement begins where accountability ends**, then the way to shrink the expansive sense of entitlement that lies at the root of these administrative abuses is to extend the scope of administrators' accountability to their employees and subordinates. Currently, however, a combination of two factors poses a formidable obstacle to doing this. The first is HEERA, which requires only "joint consultation and decision-making" among administrators and faculty on matters affecting educational programs. The second is Article 5.1 of the CBA, which states that the CSU reserves "all powers, rights, authorities, duties, and responsibilities ... not specifically abridged, delegated, or modified" by the agreement. In combination, article 5.1 enables administrators to exploit the inherent vagueness of HEERA's "joint consultation and decision-making" by interpreting it in the weakest possible manner -- favorable to administration, unfavorable to faculty, sustaining the entitlement, feeding the arrogance, and inviting the friction that comprise the culture we must change.

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A Proposal

Restoring a genuine partnership in higher education (as HEERA's drafters must have intended) requires eliminating the inherent vagueness of the phrase "joint consultation and decision-making." Considered on its face the phrase is consistent with a number of legal arrangements. It is consistent (obviously) with the arrangement that administrators routinely impose, where faculty need only be ostensibly consulted on certain matters, even if the consultation is advisory (even token), and final decision authority rests ultimately and exclusively with the president (or delegate). However, it is also consistent (less obviously) with the exact opposite arrangement, where faculty possess ultimate and exclusive final decision authority -- a robust form of worker democracy. Between these two poles, we can imagine a spectrum of arrangements, some granting more, others less, final decision authority to faculty.

Our proposal is to enact language that codifies an intermediate position. For purposes of illustration, we describe one such position below. The aim is not to be prescriptive but to make discussion less abstract. We also introduce and define some terms. Again, the aim is not to be pedantic but to provide sufficient clarity and precision at the outset to facilitate profitable further discussion. We expect and welcome changes as we **build broad support for a position that is both viable and attractive.**

We'll say that an agent possesses *final decision authority* if that agent has the legal right to make a binding decision within the organization that no other agent within that organization can override. For our purposes, we can assume that there are just two agents, *administration* and *faculty*. Final decision authority can be *exclusive* or *partial*. It is exclusive when possessed entirely by a single agent, partial when possessed by multiple agents. Partial final decision authority, moreover, may be *separate* or *joint*. It is separate when each agent's approval is necessary to make a binding decision, joint when some mix of representatives of each agent belongs to a body (or committee) whose approval is necessary to make a binding decision. It's possible for agents to possess final decision authority over some matters, but not others. Finally, we are concerned with legal forms, not practices.

For example, presidents and their designees (administrators) typically possess final decision authority over a vast range of matters at their universities. This is true even if, in certain areas, as a matter of practice, they habitually heed faculty input. The faculty input is merely advisory and not binding on the president. Once the president approves, however, it becomes binding upon the university (the organization). By contrast, when presidential searches occur, typically a presidential search advisory committee is formed that includes some elected faculty representatives. Such committees, though, do not confer upon faculty

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any final decision authority at all (not even partial, joint authority), because they lack the legal right to make a binding decision within the organization. They merely issue recommendations, which other agents within the organization can override. However, faculty do possess final decision authority over curricular matters, although it is typically partial and separate, as administration must also give its approval before a decision becomes binding upon the university.

The point of emphasizing legal forms and legal rights is to move us away from proposing ever more elaborate forms of internal consultation, which merely postpone the day of reckoning when administrators get to exercise their final and exclusive decision authority. Our proposal is not to mandate more gabbing with administrators, but to shift more authority to faculty.

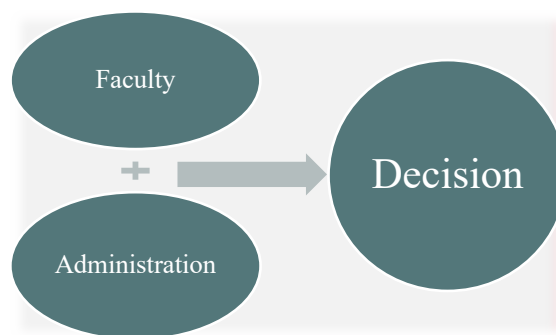
Preliminaries aside, the proposal is to identify certain *areas of jurisdiction* over which faculty would have decision authority superior to administrators (outside of which, it would leave administrative decision authority intact). As a starting point for discussion, we begin with areas of jurisdiction where faculty are usually acknowledged as rightly holding central roles.

- Faculty hiring. Faculty are to possess exclusive final decision authority when hiring colleagues in their own departments and when selecting department chairs.
- Faculty evaluation. Faculty are to possess exclusive final decision authority when evaluating colleagues in their own departments and when evaluating department chairs.
- Curriculum. Faculty are to possess exclusive final decision authority on the structure and content of majors, minors, and general education, and the mode of instruction.

Next, we address jurisdiction over the division of academic affairs.

- Hiring academic affairs administrators. Faculty are to possess decision authority superior to administrators when campuses hire academic affairs administrators, including presidents, provosts, and deans. Depending on the position, superior decision authority may take the form of exclusive final decision authority, partial and separate final decision authority, or partial and joint final decision authority, where elected faculty comprise at least 50% of the hiring committee.
- Evaluating academic affairs administrators. Faculty are to possess decision authority superior to administrators when evaluating academic affairs administrators, including presidents, provosts, and deans. Depending on the position, superior decision authority may take the form of exclusive final decision authority, partial and separate final decision authority, or partial and joint final decision authority, where elected faculty comprise at least 50% of the evaluating committee.

Finally, we address jurisdiction over administrators outside the division of academic affairs. Faculty should possess either partial and separate, or partial and joint, final decision authority for hiring and evaluating chief administrators outside academic affairs at the system and campus levels, and over budget allocations. If partial and joint, elected faculty should comprise at least 40% of the hiring, evaluating, or budget committee.



Partial and separate final decision authority

It is worth noting that, even if faculty possess decision authority superior to administrators, in certain areas, on this proposal, this is consistent with the legislature possessing decision authority superior to faculty. So the current proposal in no way diminishes legislative authority over the area of jurisdiction involved. (The same holds true in areas where administration would continue to possess its traditional decision authority.)

Through this amendment to HEERA, we hope to **change the incentives** (and deliberations) of those who exercise administrative responsibilities and those who seek administrative positions -- from seeing their subordinates as those who can be steamrolled to viewing them as persons who must be persuaded -- and in the process **rid ourselves of the entitlement, the arrogance, and the friction, and change the culture, of administration.**

CFA Leadership

Given the novel approach taken by this proposal, which gives faculty workers a degree of worker control, it is continuous with **CFA's tradition of taking leadership roles** in public policy and may even serve as a progressive model for workers in other sectors and states.