Faculty Worry That Their Influence Is Waning, a New Book Says

By Robin Wilson

As universities hire more administrators from outside the faculty ranks, the gulf between those officials and the faculty widens and professors feel less influence on university governance, says a new book on conflict in higher education.

The book, *The Still Divided Academy: How Competing Visions of Power, Politics, and Diversity Complicate the Mission of Higher Education*, relied on surveys of about 4,060 administrators, faculty members, and students at four-year institutions. Like *The Chronicle*’s own reporting, the surveys found that confidence in the impact of faculty governance is low. Only 17 percent of faculty members felt they had a "great deal" of say in how their institutions operate. That proportion slipped to just 4 percent among professors who said they regularly disagreed with administrators on their campuses.

Given the long-held tradition of faculty governance in academe, says the book, "the fact that so many professors characterize the influence of the professoriate as weak may demonstrate an institutional failure."

The book says the gap between professors and administrators is only likely to grow if, as the authors predict, the number of administrators who come either from outside academe or from nonacademic positions within universities rises. According to the survey, only 54 percent of administrators who came from outside the faculty ranks said they "usually" agreed with the views of professors, compared with 74 percent of academic leaders who at one time held academic positions. "We find that administrators with no prior teaching or research experience have less collegial relationships with the faculty," says the book. "Challenges to shared governance are ... likely to increase as more administrators are hired from outside the academy."

B. Robert Kreiser, an associate secretary of the American Association of University Professors, says the book's analysis rings
true. "The growing number of high-level administrators who come from nonacademic backgrounds are not familiar with principles of shared governance and do not understand that faculty are primarily responsible for some major decisions, including curriculum and faculty personnel issues," said Mr. Kreiser.

The book, published by Rowman & Littlefield and available now, relies on data collected in 1999—but was given a fresh analysis by two researchers who helped write the book. Matthew C. Woessner and April C. Kelly-Woessner, husband-and-wife professors who have performed influential research on politics within the professoriate (she is a liberal, he is more conservative), worked with Stanley Rothman, a professor emeritus at Smith College, who collected the data 11 years ago. Mr. Woessner is an associate professor of political science and public policy at Pennsylvania State University's Harrisburg campus, while Ms. Kelly-Woessner is chair of the department of political science at Elizabethtown College. The Woessners say that while the research findings may be 11 years old, they wrote only about data supported by surveys conducted more recently by other researchers.

The book says that the number of campuses where administrators and professors clash is on the rise, and that those campuses are likely to see an increase in collective bargaining. Younger professors, who came into the academy at a time when the power of the faculty was on the decline, are more likely to support collective bargaining than are their older colleagues. This, say the authors, "is something of an ominous sign for administrators, who tend to oppose unionization efforts."

More Say at B.A. Institutions

The Woessners’ book says professors at bachelor's-degree-granting institutions are more likely to report that they have a "great deal" of say over institutional matters—39 percent of them did so in the survey—than are professors at doctoral-granting institutions, where only 13 percent said they have a great deal of influence.

"When you ask faculty about why they went into the professoriate, the No. 1 reason is autonomy," says Ms. Kelly-Woessner. "So, as autonomy erodes, it is going to have some pretty profound effects on the number and types of people who choose to enter academia."

Administrators and faculty members also clash when it comes to views of academic freedom and tenure, the survey found. Among faculty members who feel there is a threat to academic freedom, the largest proportion—35 percent—blamed university administrators. Among administrators who feel academic freedom
is under threat, the largest proportion—44 percent—said either the government or the public were responsible. In addition, 68 percent of professors said tenure was an essential or very important component of higher education, compared with only 48 percent of administrators. But the survey also found that support for tenure among the professoriate is fading. ”Those who have entered the academic profession most recently believe that tenure is less important than do their more-experienced colleagues,” says the book.

The book reports on several other findings from the survey:

- Administrators are more confident than either students or faculty members about how well their institutions are educating students. Fifty-two percent of university leaders said their universities do an “excellent” job of educating, compared with 34 percent of students and only 26 percent of faculty members who feel that way.
- Thirty-six percent of administrators and 28 percent of faculty members said the most pressing problem in higher education is the need for more resources, while students said the biggest problem is the cost of tuition.
- While critics have charged liberal professors with “indoctrinating” students, the survey found that on some issues, such as the government’s responsibility for providing jobs or reducing inequality, students tend to come to college already holding liberal views. On some of those same issues, the survey found, college seniors as a group are actually somewhat more conservative than are college freshmen. “Students move very little in terms of party affiliation” during their college education, says the book. That finding casts doubt on the idea that liberal professors are responsible for persuading students to move sharply to the left.
- In academic disciplines in which political, social, and moral issues are most likely to be discussed—the social sciences and the humanities—the faculty is the most politically unbalanced, with about 60 percent of professors in those fields identifying themselves as Democrats. Meanwhile, the book says, professors who identify themselves as Republicans are more concentrated in fields that are the least likely to include discussions about political matters.

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<tr>
<th>How Much Say Do Faculty Members Think They Have in College Governance?</th>
<th>Baccalaureate</th>
<th>Master's</th>
<th>Doctoral/research</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal of say</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>41%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
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