CSU-Pueblo president: Shared governance

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By JONATHAN REES | COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY-PUEBLO |

On Jan. 25, The Pueblo Chieftain published an article about a meeting between the Colorado State University-Pueblo faculty and the Board of Governors' search committee regarding the selection of a new president for our university. The article was a good summary of the sentiments in the room. The faculty would like the next president of CSU-Pueblo to have academic experience.

Your Jan. 27 editorial referred to shared governance, one of the reasons we faculty want a president with academic experience, as "code for going back to the previous model where the professors call the shots. It's a cozy relationship where there is little accountability and plenty of sinecures." As I am the only faculty member quoted in that first article as supporting shared governance (although more than a few of us mentioned it), I thought I'd take this opportunity to better explain this time-honored principle of academic life.

If anyone from the editorial board had been at the meeting, they would have heard both me and others explicitly reject the notion that the faculty wants to "call the shots" on campus. Since the president serves as the representative of our Board of Governors (who in turn represent the people of Colorado), it is his or her right to decide what all campus policies will ultimately be. Shared governance means governance is shared. Otherwise we'd call it "faculty governance." That's why so many of us faculty care so deeply about who will lead us after interim President Julio Leon's term expires. We want the best partner available.

Shared governance is not "code" for anything, particularly anything having to do with sinecures. It simply means that the faculty should play an active role in the administration of any university since they are the ones who perform the institution's core function, namely teaching students.

Due to the current economic climate, our next president will be asked to make critical decisions about what university expenses to cut moving forward. Since those cuts
will undoubtedly include expenses related to instruction, shared governance would mean that faculty members would have input as to where those cuts would fall. After all, do we really want to balance the budget in a way that prevents the university from performing its core function effectively? The faculty are in the best position to judge whether that's happening as we perform that function every day.

The American Association of University Professors' 1966 "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities," which was formulated in cooperation with the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, makes specific mention of the presidential selection process. "Joint effort of a most critical kind must be taken when an institution chooses a new president," it reads. "The selection of a chief administrative officer should follow upon a cooperative search by the governing board and the faculty, taking into consideration the opinions of others who are appropriately interested. The president should be equally qualified to serve as both the executive officer of the governing board and as the chief academic officer of the institution and the faculty. The president's dual role requires an ability to interpret to board and faculty the educational views and concepts of institutional government of the other. The president should have the confidence of the board and faculty."

There is no question that our local newspaper has an appropriate interest in who the next president of CSU-Pueblo will be. Going forward, I simply ask you to remember that your community leader is going to be our boss. If the notion that an employer of labor should understand precisely what his employees do semester after semester is reason to "pass the buggy whips," then call me old-fashioned. I believe our university will function better if its chief administrator and its faculty share classroom experience and a common conception of academic excellence.

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