

2020

Shared Decision Making Best Practices

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SHARED DECISION-MAKING BEST PRACTICES

WHICH FACULTY DECISIONS ARE SHARED?

There are many potential topics for shared decision-making in departments. Some of the most common, and most challenging, include:

- Recommending faculty hires to Dean
- Suggesting Chair appointments to Dean
- Adopting/amending bylaws
- Tenure and promotion deliberation process
- Electing faculty to committees
- Changing curricula
- Recommending office space/lab allocations
- Merit deliberations

Faculty can be involved in many other different kinds of decisions, such as identifying speakers to invite to campus, student awards, ensuring faculty and student success, and other activities.

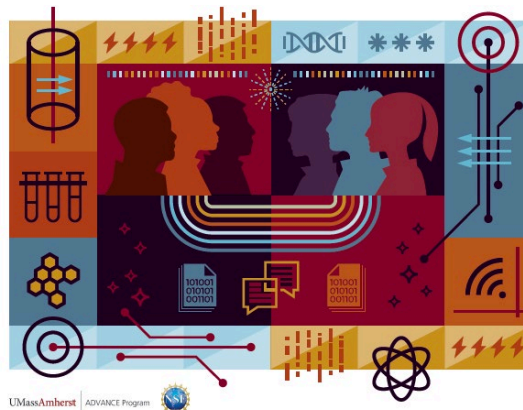
WHAT PROBLEM DO WE WANT TO SOLVE?

In many departments, faculty actively discuss and make decisions together through voting or consensus. But decision-making can be fraught, and many departments continue to use decision-making models premised on less diverse faculty bodies.

Members of groups that are underrepresented in the field – by gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, first-generation status, religion, ability status, etc. – often have less influence in decision-making, even in consensus models. Speaking up publicly can be difficult, especially when rank plays into decision-making. For example, Professors may have greater influence in decision-making; tenure track faculty may also have greater influence or voting privileges than non-tenure track faculty. Yet, hiring decisions may matter a great deal to more junior faculty who may be living with a new colleague for more years.

The goal of shared decision-making is for faculty to trust one another and work together to make decisions. Consensus, trust, and communication are key.

This resource is based on presentations made by James Allan, Itai Sher, and Eve Weinbaum.



WHAT DOES THE MSP CONTRACT REQUIRE?

- Units should follow departmental bylaws for decision-making and votes; bylaws must be voted on by faculty members in the unit.
- Some votes (such as appointing a new [Chair/Head](#)) are advisory to the Dean, but the faculty must approve the search committee's recommendation.
- Only bargaining unit faculty (in MSP) can deliberate and vote on personnel decisions such as tenure and promotion; Chairs/Heads weigh in separately.

WHAT OTHER PRINCIPLES DOES MSP RECOMMEND?

- All faculty with 50% or greater appointments should be eligible for committee service, invited to faculty meetings, and given full voting rights as defined in bylaws (e.g. "at rank and above").
- Departmental PCs ideally will be informed by input from the greater faculty. DPC of the whole (e.g. DPC made up of all faculty or all tenured faculty) might require attendance (e.g. eligible voters must have reviewed the materials and participated in the discussion to vote).
- Any important votes – hiring, chair selection, etc., should be conducted through secret ballot.
- Bylaws should be adopted or amended through 2/3rds or greater votes.
- Faculty retain voting rights while on leave, but are not required to attend meetings or vote when on leave.
- Remote participation (such as Zoom) should be allowed in meetings and voting.

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HOW DO MODIFIED CONSENSUS MODELS WORK?

There are many different strategies. The College of Information and Computer Sciences at UMass Amherst, a unit with around 70 faculty members, follows these strategies:

- Most decisions are made by the faculty as a whole under the assumption of collegiality and the ability to come to some consensus.
- Consensus is operationalized as a 2/3rds vote in favor of any proposal (formally making this a supermajority rather than consensus model).
- The department uses anonymous iClickers (checked out from the library) to record votes.
- Some decisions require weekly or biweekly meetings.
- Decisions may be piloted through an elected “executive committee.”
- Committee appointments reflect faculty preferences, except elected Executive and Personnel committees.

HOW SHOULD FACULTY HIRING DECISIONS BE STRUCTURED?

- Faculty should vote on recommended fields for hires; recruitment committees should be diverse by rank and other factors, but include faculty members with relevant expertise.
- Recruitment committee should be responsible for reading files and selecting a long short-list; in some departments, faculty members are allowed to weigh in on those top candidates.
- When short-list candidates are brought to campus, all faculty members should be allowed to view job talk, review materials, meet candidates, and engage in deliberations about which candidates should be hired.
- Allowing faculty to discuss and vote on their top candidates can help guarantee that they have wide support. Only faculty who engage in the hiring process should vote.

WHEN SHOULD DEPARTMENTS USE MAJORITY VOTING?

If there are two choices – Yes and No – or Candidate A or B – majority voting works well. Some departments expect 50% for hiring NTT or untenured faculty, and 66% for hiring tenured faculty.

WHEN SHOULD DEPARTMENTS USE OTHER APPROACHES?

If there are multiple choices, e.g. four job candidates, majority voting can be less effective at identifying those with the most support. Ranked-choice voting or Condorcet voting take into account the full complexity of how multiple candidates are ranked, and only require one ballot to do so.

Ranked-choice voting models use ranked lists to determine who has the most support. If there are candidates A, B, C, and D:

- Ask faculty members to rank A, B, C, and D, as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th choice (faculty can leave out any candidates that are not acceptable).
- If any candidate wins a majority of votes, that candidate is the top choice. If not, eliminate the candidate with fewest first choice votes, e.g. for all ballots that voted for B first, apportion their second-choice votes to A, C, and D. If any candidate wins a majority of the votes, that candidate is the top choice.
- If still no winner, eliminate candidate with next fewest first choice votes, e.g. if C had the next fewest votes, take all ballots that voted for C first and apportion their second or third choice votes to A and D.
- Winner receives majority of votes. This can be used to identify the order for cascading offers.

Condorcet voting models use ranked lists to run head-to-head votes for each candidate against each candidate. If there are candidates A, B, C, and D:

- Ask faculty members to rank A, B, C, and D, as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th choice (faculty can leave out any candidates that are not acceptable)
- Use ballots to run vote for A against B; A against C; A against D. (We can tell who a voter prefers in a head-to-head election from their ranking.)
- Use ballots to run vote B against C; B against D.
- Use ballots to run vote C against D.
- If a candidate wins all matches, they are the winner. If not, use another method (such as ranked choice).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

[MSP](#), [Fairvote](#), [UMass ADVANCE](#)

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