Hartnell College Governance

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Healthy vs. dysfunctional governance: A study

What does healthy and effective governance look like?

"A culture of healthy communication, with open, transparent, and respectful agreement or disagreement."

"Focusing on the well-being of the collective, rather than the ego of the individual."

"Everyone has equal power in the room to speak and be heard. Decisions are based on wisdom in the room that also includes knowledge from those who may be affected."

"Leave egos and titles at the door, engage in difficult conversations respectfully (instead of avoidance), seek solutions collectively, broad and active representation, mutual interest in doing right for students and the institution."

"The ability to speak/meet/collaborate freely between constituencies."

"It would feel like everyone is valued. Like everyone matters. It would feel like there was a vision that created passion and positive energy.   That leadership was shared and recognized. The power was propelled by like mindedness, collaboration, open communication and shared ideas. It would feel like a place where ideas and thoughts are welcome. It would feel like a place where people matter more than process or product or policy or procedure. It would feel like a place that people want and are proud to be a part of."

What are some signs of dysfunctional governance?

"My best examples of dysfunctional participatory governance are when things are repeatedly handed down from on high."

"Decisions made by people who have no idea how the day to day happenings actually work. Never asking those impacted by the decisions how it's working or what could work better."

"Making up things without input from shared governance bodies that are intended for that purpose."

"Knowing the answer you want to get and arranging the committee to suit that answer."

"Hearing with no intention of listening or utilizing input (could be anyone from any group, not just admin), declarations made without input or no intention of honoring input provided, lack of representative turnover (fresh ideas and perspectives are good), defensiveness, cronyism, open conflict."

"When committees with good representation are scared to make recommendations to executive leadership for fear of retribution."

Qualities of effective governance

Effective governance exists when:

- **Power is shared.** If power is centralized and hoarded, trust collapses, no matter how many councils/committees we have.
- **Voice is authentic.** If voice is symbolic, people disengage.
- **Processes are clear and stable.** If systems don't work, people stop trusting outcomes, even if leaders are well-intentioned.
- **Accountability is mutual.** If standards don't apply to everyone, trust erodes quickly.
- **Culture is respectful and mission-driven.** When people feel like they matter and their work matters, trust is sustained long-term.

How does low institutional trust show up in governance?

1. Governance Creep. "More councils = stronger governance."

- ▶ Intended to increase voice
- ▶ Often decreases effectiveness

2. Unequal Workloads and Participation. "The same people are doing all of the work."

- ▶ Intended to maintain stability
- ▶ Weakens long-term capacity

3. Decision Avoidance & Delay. "Let's push it to a 3rd reading."

- ▶ Intended to avoid conflict
- ▶ Leads to stagnation

4. Cautious Messaging/Self-Censorship. "Watch what you say."

- ▶ Intended to stay safe
- ▶ Reduces true engagement

5. Erosion of Collective Identity. "Us vs. them."

- ▶ Intended to protect groups
- ▶ Weakens institutional cohesion

Do we see any of these things at Hartnell?

Challenges in our current governance structure

Governance capacity

**Our governance councils and
Academic Senate committees require**

107

full-time faculty

65

**administrators
(educational and classified)**

47

classified professionals

**At Hartnell College,
we currently have**

131

full-time faculty

59

**administrators
(educational and classified)**

172

classified professionals

This does not include:

**Swim Digital task forces, implementation teams, and
development teams**

Achieving the Dream action plan teams

Caring Panthers work

Aspen Unlocking Opportunities

Hiring committees and other college service

Governance inefficiency

In the 2024-2025 academic year,

15%

of council meetings
were either cancelled or could not take action
due to lack of quorum.

Of the BPs/APs reviewed by councils,

7

had to be reviewed and approved by

3

separate councils
AND
by the Academic Senate.

Out of all of the actions taken by the
specialized councils,
only

50%

of items
were then brought to Hartnell College
Council for information, discussion, or
action.

Governance effectiveness

Among the people who sit on councils,
91%
understood the role of their governance council.

Across the college,
50%
were satisfied with the effectiveness of the governance structure.

Among people who sit on councils,
91%
were satisfied with the effectiveness of their council.

Across the college,
58%
were familiar with the governance councils and their roles.

Discussion

Options to consider

Option 1: We could keep our governance structure the way it is.

Option 2: We could consider eliminating or combining some councils.

Option 3: We could redesign our structure with one main council (HCC), with committees reporting up to HCC.

Option 4: We could shift to a project team model.

Option 5: We could adopt a constituency-based model (Academic Senate, Classified Senate, Management Senate).

Option 6: We could do something else entirely, or some combination of the above options.