



## **The President's Monthly Perspective**

August 2007

### **The Year of Good Governance**

When I ask people what good governance means to them, they often use three words—transparency, accountability, and accessibility. These words are cited so often in organizational life that they've become norms. Few leaders or governance systems will claim they are opaque, unaccountable and/or inaccessible. Yet many are! Like many other leaders, I aspire to implement and manage a participatory, versatile, functional, and robust governance system. So I'd like to explain my leadership philosophy in some more detail. My hope is that the Leadership Council shares many aspects of this philosophy and uses it as the basis for good governance.

*Transparency* essentially means that light passes through an object with absolute clarity. A clean window is transparent. You can see through it in two directions. The people see the leaders and the leaders see the people! When this occurs, there is an abiding sense that everyone know what's going on. Too much transparency is not necessarily a good thing. Not everyone can know about all things, all of the time. Transparency matters most when it impacts you! Good governance involves people in decisions that most directly concern them.

*Accountability* implies responsibility. It means that you can trace the flow of a decision, both in terms of who made it and how it was made. The people who make a decision explain their thought process, they discuss the data they use, they discuss the different perspectives that informed their thinking, and they explain the implications of their decision. Most importantly, accountability means that people take responsibility for the decision-making process.

*Accessibility* implies open channels of communication. Everyone is able to speak to someone who is directly involved in making the decision. People know how they can provide information, opinions, and ideas to the decision-makers. The leaders know that it is their responsibility to make themselves available.

These qualities are features of good governance. But they won't work unless there is an effective, functional, clearly delineated system of implementation. Such a system requires good process, structure, and substance.

*Process* refers to how we have conversations, how we speak to each other, how we collaborate, and how we communicate. Good process requires rules of conversation, common sense, courtesy, and civility. The essence of good process is always learning how to balance speaking and listening. It requires respect, open-mindedness, and good will. Good process is fundamental to good governance.

*Structure* refers to how we are organized. This includes the organizational chart, the specific responsibilities of administrators, the functions of working groups and committees, and reporting lines. Who is responsible to whom? Who does what around here? An efficient structure helps you know where to go when need to accomplish something, it reduces redundancy, and it delineates responsibility. An effective structure is essential to shared governance.

*Substance* describes what we actually speak about, what we make policy about. What are the subjects of our meetings? How are those subjects determined? Are they crucial to the mission of the institution? Are they sequenced well? Do they reflect the most important concerns of the people? Do they reflect a good mix of short and long-term thinking?

Process, structure, and substance are three equally vital pillars. You can have great conversations about the wrong things! Or have a terrific governance structure without good conversations. The Leadership Council aspires to implement all of these qualities and to reflect on their implementation as it proceeds.

I have always been guided by Benjamin Barber's groundbreaking political theory as described in Strong Democracy. Barber critiques liberal, representative democracy as a process in which a few of the people make all of the decisions all of the time. With strong democracy everyone makes some of the decisions some of the time.

Hence the Leadership Council is a circle, around which orbit various committees. The committees are empowered to make decisions reflecting their domains and their expertise. The Leadership Council sets the agenda for the college, but various committees make policy. There is transparency between the Leadership Council and these committees. Other committees work within departments, and have similar working relationships with their constituencies. I like to conceive of this as *inclusive hierarchy*, that is, multiple constituencies have policy-making voices, but there are always clear and clean lines of reporting, responsibility, and authority.

If you've read a little Chinese political philosophy, you'll see a blend of Confucianism and Taoism. I admire Confucian approaches to governance because they emphasize order, respect, protocol, duty, ethics, and responsibility. I admire Taoist approaches because they teach you to go with the flow!

Enough philosophy; on with the details! The remainder of this essay describes how we formulated the Leadership Council; it provides more details as to how we set priorities and how we intend to implement policy for 2007-08. Please note that various charts accompany this essay—a Unity College organizational chart, and several charts depicting how committees are organized. Finally, I've added the agenda for Fall 2007 Leadership Council meetings.

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The Leadership Council met from July 18-20 at the Schoodic Education and Research Center. The members of the council are:

President (Mitchell Thomashow)

Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs (Amy Knisley)

Vice President for Finance and Administration (Roger Jolin)

Vice President for College Advancement (Rob Constantine)

Dean of Student Affairs (Gary Zane)

Chair, Department of Advising and Instruction (John Zavodny)

Director of Human Resources (Kathleen Hale)

Executive Assistant to the President / Secretary to the Board (Chris Melanson)

Faculty Moderator (Lois Ongley)

Registrar / Dean of Enrollment & Retention Services / Director of Institutional Research (Holly Hein)

Staff Planning Committee Co-Chair / Strategic Projects Coordinator (Alisa Gray)

Student Government Association President (Will Hafford)

In the July Monthly Perspectives, I commented on the spirit and philosophy of the retreat. I'll reiterate those key objectives here:

- Build a Leadership Council that operates as an effective team,
- Construct a shared agenda for the coming year and a set of priorities that are based upon the strategic plan and a shared vision for the College's future,
- Agree on how the shared agenda gets turned into a real work plan, who will be involved in moving it forward, and how we will hold each other accountable for achieving the agenda.

I'm pleased to report that we had an engaging, open, and extremely thorough meeting. There was an enormous amount of work to do, sorting through all of the various Unity College committees, reporting lines, projects, initiatives, and agendas. We also had a follow-up meeting in early August, both to finish incomplete work, and to review our decisions and make sure we were still comfortable with them.

Our approach was to (1) thoroughly review the strategic plan and to do in such a way that we could make a list of priorities for the coming year (2) to review the organizational chart with an emphasis on committee structure and reporting lines (3) to review the Unity College Committee Chart and decide on the reporting structure, viability, and composition of the various committees, and (4) to develop an agenda for the Fall and Spring Semester of 2007-08.

We have prepared some visual representations of the Unity College governance structure. There is a new organizational chart for 2007-08, which will be distributed to the campus. Additionally there are three committee charts, Committee Orbit I which identifies the Leadership Council members, the committees which report directly to the Council and the reporting committee liaisons; Committee

Orbit II which outlines the administrative department committees and Committee Orbit III which outlines the academic committees.

Rather than reproduce all of the notes from the retreat, and to list all of the objectives for 2007-08, I think it makes more sense to reflect on the conceptual highlights. I'd like you to understand our thought process so that our prioritization choices make sense. First, we reviewed the priority categories of the strategic plan. Then we linked those priorities to our assessment of the most pressing issues. Finally, we made a list of priorities for 2007-08, assigned them to the purview of different members of the Leadership Council, with the understanding that they will involve their constituencies in policy-oriented conversations in each case.

For example, the Strategic Plan suggests that **Academic Quality and Review** is a major objective for Unity College. At the retreat, we reviewed the most important criteria in that category, and developed a list of pressing issues. These include raising the expectations for teaching and learning, resolving the "show promise" issue, reorganizing the curriculum to reflect the future of environmental studies, establishing uniformity in standards for grading and course level descriptions, enhancing elective course offerings, and insuring that we provide our students with an appropriate level of challenge. The role of the Leadership Council is to affirm that these are good priorities for the College. But the implementation of these priorities falls on the faculty and the Department of Advising and Instruction (DIAS), under the purview of the relevant members of the Leadership Council (Amy Knisley, John Zavodny, and Lois Ongley). In conjunction with the faculty, they develop a series of committee charges, review the work of standing committees, and develop an agenda for faculty and department meetings.

For **Diversity and Campus Culture**, the Leadership Council agreed that we place a high priority on providing opportunities to attract women and minorities (for students, staff and faculty), developing partnerships and travel opportunities, improving the campus environment so that it is more supportive of diversity initiatives, and developing support services for our students. We also agreed on the importance of limiting our scope so that we can realistically accomplish our objectives. For 2007-08, we agreed on the importance of reviving our diversity committee, supporting our Passamaquoddy initiatives, working to establish secure funding for WE Lead, exploring and developing other partnerships, and considering a general education requirement to promote diversity awareness. We also emphasized the importance of implementing wellness objectives throughout all facets of Unity College community life.

The Strategic Plan lists **Identity, Communication, and Diversity of Environmental Opinion** as a priority. We interpreted this to mean our continued engagement with clearly identifying our marketing niche, understanding our identity as an environmental college, coordinating our publications and website, implementing our "branding" strategy, and ensuring that our programs and enrollment reflect a coherent identity and mission. Of course, these concerns are at the heart of all that we do at Unity College and are the foundation of all of our committees. But for 2007-08, we agreed it's crucial for us to continue to implement our branding strategy and to improve our marketing initiatives and efforts. This will be a priority for the Marketing Committee, under the auspices of College Advancement.

The fourth Strategic Plan priority is **Diversification of the Financial Base and Quality Enrollment Growth**. This includes developing a comprehensive resource development plan, creating a brand for fundraising and the capital campaign, explore what potential academic centers might have

for fundraising, developing a suite of first-rate summer programs, using the capacity study to plan growth strategies, and completing a pricing study in our continued discussion of tuition and discounting. These challenges will be organized under the purview of the President's Office, Academic Affairs, College Advancement, and the Enrollment Management Committee.

This isn't a comprehensive list, and there are other priorities, too, such as the importance of our sustainability initiatives, integrating a comprehensive wellness plan, developing plans for the Unity Centre for the Performing Arts and the Field of Dreams, and coordinating the forthcoming Master Planning Process.

Again, the role of the Leadership Council is to organize the priorities, assign them to committees and departments, develop lines of authority and accountability, and to ensure multiple voices in setting policy for all of these issues. To that end, some committees report to departments, others report directly to the Leadership Council. These relationships are illustrated in the appended charts.

The Leadership Council will meet for two hours on a weekly basis throughout the semester. Each meeting will devote an hour and a half to the main agenda item and half an hour for other business. Our means for dealing with each agenda item is essentially to organize information about the issue, to assess priorities, to develop implementation guidelines, and then to assign the task of implementation to the relevant committee or department.

The Fall 2007 agenda is as follows:

September 10	Budget Process/Equity
September 17	Summer Programs
September 24	UCPA/Field of Dreams
October 1	Selectivity and Enrollment
October 8	Safety/Wellness
October 22	Master Planning
October 29	Center for Sustainability
November 5	Marketing
November 12	Diversity
November 19	Capacity Study
November 26	Governance and Communication
December 3	Budget Process
December 10	Selectivity and Enrollment

Possible Spring agenda items: Capital Campaign, Academic program "centers"

Mitchell Thomashow  
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