Academic Governance at Macquarie: Challenges and Opportunities

Probably not an approach to academic governance that we wish to practice at Macquarie.

But we might pause and ask if there are some aspects of our current approach to governance which amount to this kind of victimisation.

What is Academic Governance?

“Academic governance is a subset of the overall governance of an educational organisation, and deals with the framework that regulates academic decisions and academic quality assurance within the organisation. Academic governance includes the policies, processes, definitions of roles, relationships, systems, strategies and resources that ensure academic standards and continuous improvement in academic activities, and is concerned with the integrity and quality of the core higher education activities of teaching, research and scholarship.”

TEQSA Regulatory Risk Framework 2012

The definition of Academic Governance from the TEQSA regulatory risk framework. This framework is a key component of the regulation that governs our registration as a Higher Education provider.

This should be read in concert with the Higher Education Standards Panel’s draft standards on Corporate and Academic Governance, which have been circulated in your papers.
The university council, which is typically responsible for overall institutional strategy, risk management and financial oversight;

The executive management (Vice Chancellor and other senior academic leaders and managers), who are responsible for the allocation and management of resources to meet the university’s mission;

The academic board, which is typically responsible for academic values, standards, policies and quality assurance, and serves as a forum for debating academic and strategic issues. These roles are often specified in the relevant University Act, related by-laws and rules.

In Macquarie’s case, its Academic Senate is enshrined, in its establishment Act of the NSW parliament, as the highest academic decision making body in the University. A more precise account of its role and responsibilities is given in the Academic Senate rule of University Council.

TEQSA Risk Factors:
C1 Weak academic governance structure

A clear academic governance structure plays a key role in protecting the integrity of the provider’s core activities of teaching and research. Considerations would include whether academic governance arrangements provide a clear separation between corporate and academic governance (including a properly constituted academic board and course advisory committees), support the maintenance of academic standards, and whether independent student organisations are incorporated into processes.
The Board is the principal policy-making and advisory body on all matters relating to and affecting a university's teaching, research and educational programs. It is also responsible for assuring academic quality including academic freedom, academic integrity, assessment, admissions, and research conduct. The Board model of academic governance is founded upon consultation, collegiality and broad-based representation, and had its origins in the historical tradition of a university as a community of scholars.

National Conference of Chairs of Academic Boards 2005

Paul Wormell - Chair, UWS "In the new regulatory scheme Academic Boards and their committees are required to play substantial and distinctive roles in the management of academic aspects of regulatory risk, and institutional monitoring and assurance of academic standards, policy, quality and excellence" and "the Higher Education Threshold Standards emphasise the Boards' legislated and traditional roles and accountabilities, echoing earlier forthright advice from AUQA", so that "in these circumstances Boards must think clearly about their distinctive character and contributions, and their internal and external collaborations."

Of Course
Academic Governance
is all about
Authority
Oversight and Influence

Ruminate on the old APC model. APC actually scrutinised Faculty strategy and budgets. Star Chamber. In retrospect it went too far!

However, have we swung too far in the other direction. We are careful never to mention resources, Senate rarely asks the question "can this activity be adequately resourced to meet its stated academic goal?".

Can we provide adequate oversight with this hand tied behind our backs.
10. General functions of Academic Senate

(1) Advise the Council and the Vice-Chancellor on:
   (a) academic matters and related activities of the University;
   (b) measures to safeguard the academic freedom of the University;
   (c) academic standards and quality, and on teaching effectiveness at the University; and
   (d) academic priorities of the University.

(2) Provide a forum to facilitate information flow and debate within the University and between the senior executive officers of the University and the wider academic community.

(3) Consider and report on matters referred to it by the Council or by the Vice-Chancellor.

(4) Undertake such other functions as specified in Council resolutions.

11. Specific functions of Academic Senate

(1) Approve policies on academic matters.

(2) Approve the establishment, dis-establishment or changes to a degree, diploma, certificate or other award course, including programs of study, majors and award Rules and academic requirements to be offered by the University or through a third party provider.

(3) Request, consider and take action on reports from Faculties, the MGSM and organisational units engaged in supporting the academic activities of the University.

(4) Perform the duties of a Faculty for all units not relating to any Faculty or the MGSM.

(5) Dispense with or suspend any requirements of or prescription of the General Coursework Rules, the Higher Degree Research Rules or the Higher Doctoral Degree Rules in any exceptional student case in which it may deem it appropriate to do so.
Challenge 1: Negotiating the Boundaries

The Academic Senate is the principal academic body in the University

Macquarie University By-law 2005

11. Specific functions of Academic Senate
   (1) Approve policies on academic matters.

Macquarie University Senate Rule 2014

But, for example, where do we draw the dividing line between Academic and Management concerns in Research?
• Approximately 38,000 students.
• Over 3000 units of study – that’s one for every 12.5 students!
• Over 300 Academic programs.
• 60,000 to 70,000 exam sittings a session…. this presents us with a huge and rapidly growing quality assurance challenge.

• Quality assurance processes originally “designed” to suit the needs of a much smaller institution.
• Cycles of refresh and renewal are much tighter – major curriculum renewal is a continual process now.
• Processes excellent at analysing and approving activities, but...
• … they are much less effective when it comes to monitoring how those activities are conducted.
• processes often exist, and are well implemented, but they are often not well documented nor will they always operate in the same way from one part of the institution to another.
• Talk about the role of peer review, benchmarking and professional accreditation.

These details in a fingerprint are called minutiae.

Push or pull – do we simply clear the agenda to pull more important matters onto it, or do we use subcommittee processes to push the less important ones off?

Problems:
*) Bringing complex issues, strategies and policies to the table in a timely fashion
*) Providing adequate briefing to ensure informed debate
*) Avoiding double handling between Senate, its sub-committees, Faculty boards and so forth.
*) Providing frank advice on the academic matters to the VC and Council.
Challenge IV: Building a Systemic Understanding of Governance Responsibility

The academic governance structures of a modern University comprise a complex and deeply interwoven fabric. History of 6502 – Chuck Peddle.

- Delegations.
- Passing more responsibility to faculty boards.
- Renewal and succession.
- Implementing better systems of accountability.

Challenge V: Taking a Risk Based Approach

* identify, evaluate, assess and quantify risks – frequency and impact analysis.
* prioritise mitigation steps – apply necessary measures to bring risk impact / frequency to an acceptable level.
* monitor and review residual risk over time.
One would hope that regulatory changes don’t leave us submerged under half a mile of ice!
But the real issue isn’t the size of regulatory changes, its:
*) their unpredictability
*) they act as a source of randomness in our governance processes
*) they are rarely transparent or well explained (by design)

A compliance based approach won’t help us. Every time someone uses this word my heart sinks –
because it means they’ve misunderstood the role of academic governance.
Instead we need to build our own robust academic governance systems that we believe in and can rely
upon.
The key is robust academic justification and peer review – just like we embrace in our research.
The community we serve, and indeed our regulator, asks us to take a principled and evidence based
approach to setting and implementing our own standards and mechanisms of accountability. Not a box
ticking approach – but reference points.
An Example: Academic Freedom

(1) Advise the Council and the Vice-Chancellor on:
   (b) measures to safeguard the academic freedom of the University;

Macquarie University Senate Rule 2014

But what does this mean in practical terms?

To what extent is academic freedom a personal freedom?

Some Threats to Academic Freedom

- Defense Regulation, examples:
  - The Defense Trades Control Act.
- Sector Regulation - TEQSA, AQF and all that.
- Commercial contractual arrangements.
- The “self-chilling” effect:
  - Self censorship.
  - Responses to political comment.

- Academic freedom is the bedrock of University productivity.
- Often conceived as a personal freedom not a collective responsibility.
Challenge VII: A Balancing Act - Governance by Expertise or Representation?

Sometimes very politically sensitive. This is certainly where the wild things are.

We do a very poor job of consultation. What consultation is and isn’t.

We live in an environment which sensitises everyone to jump at shadows.

Time poverty doesn’t help – mention experience when trying to persuade staff members to nominate for AS election.

Mention 6x6 and Assessment working paper reactions.

We have to be better at articulating what academic governance is and why it is important. Link it to our history, but design it for the future.

Be brave!
Challenge IX: Genuine Student Engagement

Alfred E. Neumann

University of Bath / UK QAA research.

Students should lead rather than follow.
Systemic involvement is vital.
Reward, both academic and financial, is important.
Support and mentor students before, during and after meetings.
Training and preparation absolutely vital.

The Real Challenge for us is Culture Change

Biology versus culture.