Educating Governing Boards

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Board Responsibilities

- Set, clarify, and/or approve institutional mission
- Approve institutional long-range plans
- Approve new, or changes to existing educational programs
- Ensure well-being of faculty, students, and staff
- Hire and evaluate president’s performance and set president’s compensation
- Approve personnel actions as appropriate
- Ensure strong financial management and stewardship
- Assist in fund-raising and development
- Consistently promote university with appropriate publics
- Approve legal actions
- Serve as body of final appeal
Public Institution Trustees

- Colleges and Universities “owned” by public; trustees act on behalf of public.
- Issues for trustees?
  - How to protect mission
  - How to delegate authority, not responsibility
  - How to finance (competing needs, political agenda)
  - Values to be understood by trustees?
    - Academic freedom
    - Institutional independence
    - Consultation
    - Need for Transparency

Independent Institution Boards

- Act on behalf of institutional founders and citizens...uphold tradition, mission and values
- Independent? Yes, but...
  - Direct / Indirect government support?
  - Tax-exempt status?
  - Generally larger boards; self-selecting membership.
Board Members and Student Issues

- Views of students & student issues may be limited by perceptions developed as former students or on hearing anecdotal stories.
- Board members usually graduated over 10, 20, 30 years ago and may not be familiar with student learning theory or importance of a co-curriculum.
- May think they are “natural” experts about students. Board members may not know or appreciate the literature and research specific to holistic student development and learning.
- Often desire to be involved with students for obvious intrinsic rewards; may not understand or be interested in issues such as financial aid, diversity, safety and security, mental health.
- Because of this lack of understanding they may not understand student affairs or consider non-faculty activities as important.

Good Board Members are...

- Asked to make decisions about proposed policies that will affect the student body.
- Interested in students’ experiences, both curricular and co-curricular.
- Concerned about student access and affordability.
- Encouraged to realize that most institutions are judged on admissions, retention, and graduation data.
- Asked to understand the linkage between enrollment and retention and the financial stability of the institution.
Board members can have an impact by…

- Representing students’ needs and interests in policy-making activities
- Ensuring that co-curricular programs have adequate resources
- Staying current with changes in student demographics and student needs, and
- Ensuring inclusiveness and a holistic approach to campus community.

Keys to Helping the Board Fulfill Its Purpose
Key #1: Understand The Mission and Purpose of The Board

Provide Context – Help the Board understand the culture & norms of the institution
• Help Board focus on matters that call for analysis and strategic visioning
• Create opportunities for Board education on critical issues and developments
• Expose Board to different points of view
• Create opportunities for the Board to be with key constituencies
• Alert Board to potential problems so they can act before matters become urgent

Key #2: Understand the Governing Culture that Has Been Created by the Board and Your President

• How is the Board composed? Are internal constituencies represented?
• How long has the president served?
• What is the president’s relationship with the Board’s chair?
• What is the balance between new and long-time Board members?
• What is the state of the Board’s collegiality?
• What are the norms about contact and communication with Board members?
Key #3: Learn to View Your Work through the Board’s Prism

• How many Board members are alumni? From what classes?
• What are their professions?
  • Business Executives, Bankers, Doctors, Investors, Lawyers, Educators, Clergy, Real Estate Developers, Professional Volunteers, etc.
• How many are retired and have a lot of time on their hands?
• Where do they live and work?
• What do they read? [AGB’s Trusteeship magazine]

Key #4: Inform and Engage Board Members on Cutting Edge and Emerging Issues

• Inform Board about Emerging Developments
• Share Benchmark Best Practices
• Provide Context for Controversial Issues
• Engage Board Members
Resources

5. Association of Governing Boards at Universities and Colleges (AGB) www.agb.org
6. Trusteeship Magazine, AGB
7. Hoyle, Cyril, Governing Boards, Jossey Bass