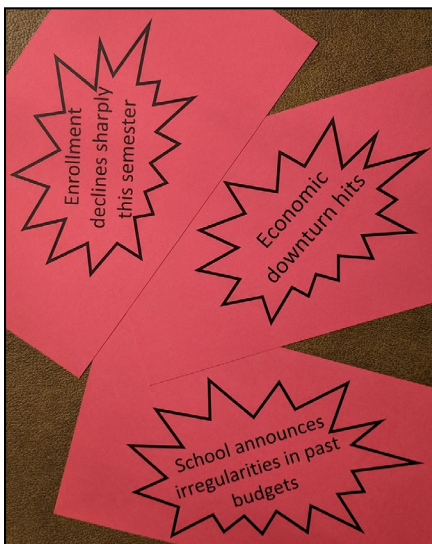


Preconference on institutional decision making set the stage for midcareer faculty seminar

BY LISA KERN

Preconference participants divided into discussion groups and were given a curriculum redevelopment case study regarding an imaginary school and hypothetical ideas proposed by the administration of that imaginary school. Each group member chose to play a different governance role—faculty, board member, president, student, etc.—identifying the processes that would need to happen and engaging in dialogue that their “characters” might bring to the table in that scenario.

Nearly 40 ATS midcareer faculty, nominated by their deans, gathered in Orlando earlier this month for the 2018 Roundtable Seminar for Midcareer Faculty—the seminar opened with this interactive preconference



on institutional decision making and shared governance.

Discussion groups were disrupted midstream by interruptions that mirror real-life concerns—*economic downturn hits, academic dean leaves suddenly,*



Participants roleplay in small groups during the preconference to the Roundtable Seminar for Midcareer Faculty.

school announces irregularities in past budgets—and group representatives reported on how the disruptions were handled during the large group debrief at the end of the session.

"... I LOVED the small groups, as they really helped us to delve deeply in some issues and to hear different perspectives that, while different than ours, caused us to have a more nuanced view of the issue. I developed several friendships from this piece that I expect to carry forward," said one attendee.

According to Debbie Gin, ATS director, research and faculty development, faculty have expressed an interest in engaging conversation around shared governance, as evidenced by evaluation responses from ATS events received over the past several years.

"Faculty know that curriculum is an area that they're basically in charge of, so they tend to be quite invested in the topic," said Gin. "I want midcareer faculty to recognize

how much power they have and to claim agency in helping their schools move into the futures they will encounter.”

The goal of the preconference was for midcareer faculty to learn more about discerning a calling to leadership in the governance of the educational missions of their schools. Participants were sent reading materials ahead of time—ranging from changes in faculty work, to insights about faculty development in theological education, to the roles faculty may play in shared governance—to provide background and help them prepare for discussion.

Debbie Creamer, ATS director, accreditation and institutional evaluation, spoke about the ways in which the ATS accrediting standards are structured and how they discuss governance.

“It can be really helpful as you’re looking through the governance section of the standards not only to look at what your own responsibility as faculty is but to look at the named responsibilities of others as part of the interdependence of keeping others engaged,” said Creamer. “Sometimes it’s helpful to know what others’ responsibilities are to give you a clearer understanding of what’s expected of you.”

David Tiede, president emeritus of Luther Seminary and Christensen Chair of Augsburg College, shared his thoughts on governance in disruptive times.

“One of the things you learn after you’ve been around this work for a long time is that the residual center of the school is the faculty,” said Tiede. “Shared governance is just kind of a tug and pull unless you have some sense of

collective vocation . . . If the powers are just jousting with each other for control, it’s so self-defeating . . . the question is alignment, or power systems that work together in congruence—that’s shared governance.”

The preconference ended with lunch and the larger seminar began later that afternoon. Several senior faculty members were invited to reflect on post-tenure adjustments. W. Anne Joh, professor of theology and culture and director, Asian American Ministry Center at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and Richard B. Steele,

professor of moral and historical theology at Seattle Pacific Seminary of Seattle Pacific University, spoke about the integration of faculty roles. Fernando F. Segovia, Oberlin graduate professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, spoke about scholarship for broader publics.

“I think I am leaving the event with a greater appreciation and a need to help spur on innovation and creative thinking at my institution,” said another attendee.



David Tiede speaks about shared governance to midcareer faculty.

When asked why the topic of shared governance was chosen for this seminar, Gin explained that the faculty development research study ATS did a couple years ago showed that the greatest gaps between how important the work is and how well their doctoral program prepared them was found in doing administrative work and student formation.

“I see this topic of governance as falling within the faculty member’s role of doing administrative work . . . of being a leader,” said Gin.



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