College of Marin Campus Community
Experience and Evaluation of Participatory Governance
May 6, 2015

As part of the Governance Review Council's evaluation of the Participatory Governance System (PGS) this year, the office of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness surveyed all employees on the COMAll email list (N= 800) to learn about their experience and observations while participating on PGS committees and reasons why employees have not participated. In addition, we asked about suggestions for improving the PGS.

The survey did not ask about the Senates, but focused on College Council, Governance Review Council (GRC), Planning and Resource Allocation Committee (PRAC), Educational Planning Committee (EPC), Facilities Planning Committee (FPC), Instructional Equipment Committee (IEC), Professional Development Committee (PDC), Student Access and Success Committee (SAS), and the Technology Planning Committee (TPC). Each of these committees was represented among the survey respondents. Further, each employee type (faculty, staff and managers) responded from each committee.

Overall, the survey yielded 157 responses (43% faculty, 44% classified staff, 13% managers). Seventy-eight percent of respondents were employed full-time; 65% were female; 74% were White, 8% Asian, 6% Black or African American, 4% Hispanic and 8% multi-racial. By race/ethnicity and gender, females and employees who identified as multi-racial responded at rates that were somewhat higher than in the composition of COM employees. Part-time employees responded at lower rates. Since part-time employees are primarily faculty, this resulted in a lower response rate among faculty and somewhat higher rates of classified staff and managers than their proportion among COM employees.

This report includes descriptive findings from all questions in the survey except those in which names were requested. In order to protect the confidentiality of respondents, survey comments are paraphrased or combined and categorized. In addition, comments about specific committees will be provided only to the GRC and that committee through its chairs.

Findings

Employee Participation

One of the primary suggestions for improving the PGS is to broaden involvement. In this survey, about half of respondents (N=80) have never served on a PGS committee. Classified staff were substantially less likely to have served (63%) in PGS than faculty (47%) or managers (28%). Part-time employees were far less likely to have served (79%) than full-time employees (44%).

When employees were asked why they have not served, the largest percentage said they have never been asked (39%). The second most common reason was insufficient time (35%). The next most common reasons were not knowing enough about the committees (30%) or the topics the committees address (24%). Classified staff members were the most likely employee group to cite lack of time as the reason for not participating.

Among employees who have never participated in PGS and answered the question about whether they would participate, 80% said they may if asked. Twelve employees said they would and provided their names in order to be contacted to join a PGS committee. Four of these twelve employees are part-time. Of the 49 employees who said they might participate, their decision would be influenced by factors such as the meeting schedule, available time and other commitments, interest in and knowledge of committees' area of focus, committees' accomplishments, if their time commitment was

worthwhile, if the committee makes a difference, management support, if they felt all voices would be heard, and monetary compensation. The reasons stated did not differ by full-time or part-time status. The most common responses were available time and scheduling.

In order to know more about COM employees who have never served, we asked which parts of the college most interest them. The highest percentages of responses were student success (56%) and academic issues (50%) then professional development (38%), diversity and inclusion (37%) and facilities (33%). See Table below for detail.

Areas of College Interest		
Interest Areas	%	N
Student Success	56%	29
Academic Issues (e.g., Curriculum, Instructional Equipment, General Education, Distance Education, Student Learning Outcomes)	50%	26
Professional Development	39%	20
Diversity and Inclusion	37%	19
Facilities	33%	17
Budget/Financial	25%	13
Information Technology	23%	12
Planning	15%	8
Program Review	12%	6
Governance System	8%	4

Of the 77 respondents who have served on PGS committees, 28 are not currently serving. By far, the most common reason they are no longer serving is lack of time or scheduling conflicts. Some are serving on other types of committees (e.g., Senates, departmental) and that utilizes their available time. Among a few, health problems were mentioned as was discontent with some aspects of the PGS.

Why Serve on PGS Committees?

Most respondents who answered the question about motivation offered multiple reasons for serving. The majority of all staff, faculty and manager respondents want to participate in campus decisions, support shared governance and be able to make a difference. Among the other reasons for serving that were asked, a higher proportion of managers (77%) than faculty (39%) and classified staff (14%) said serving is part of their job duties and/or a contractual obligation. Faculty (42%) and classified staff (35%) were more likely than managers (15%) to say their constituency might not be represented if they do not serve.

When asked about the benefits of participating in PGS committees, a few respondents said they received little or no benefit, but by far, most cited learning, contributing and becoming part of the COM community as benefits.

Learning: PGS participants said they learned about how the college works, its needs, and issues that impact it and how decisions are made. Personal and professional development were benefits as well, such as improving communication and learning to compromise, listening to varying opinions and perspectives of people from different backgrounds and the importance of bringing people together.

Contributing: Participants said benefits include providing input into decisions, shaping policy and outcomes, seeing changes being made, representing their constituency, sharing expertise and information, deliberating and coming up with solutions, and making a difference.

Community: These benefits cited were getting to know people they do not usually work with, gaining a broader view of the college than their own department, feeling a sense of teamwork and belonging to the College, becoming part of the COM community, and making the College more of a community.

Participants' Experience

Employees who have participated in PGS were asked to describe their experience. Of the 57 who responded, a little more than half (N= 31) described their experience as positive, using terms such as satisfying, worthwhile, fun, educational, helpful, useful, valuable, and good. The rest described their experience as negative or mixed. Those whose experience was only negative (N= 8) used terms such as waste of time, time-consuming with little results, frustrating and too detail-oriented.

Among respondents who described their experience both positively and negatively (N=18), participation was sometimes beneficial and at other times frustrating. Their experience may have changed in either direction over time. Also, there were differences in committees. Some functioned better than others. Where time consumption was noted, the issue was less about workload than the sense that little was accomplished for the time spent. Examples of dysfunction cited were extended discussion without results, too much detail-orientation, contentious relationships, lack of clear structure or focus, committees operating outside of their charge, lack of attendance and lack of member preparation for meetings.

Seat Vacancies and Participation

Overall, among current and past participants, 70% said vacant positions existed on their committee. Student vacancies were noted by most respondents. Classified staff vacancies were mentioned as well. 80% said members attended regularly such that quorums were met.

Among current PGS participants only, results were similar. 72% said not all positions were filled while 78% said quorum was regularly met. By and large, these issues involve classified staff and students. There was a single mention each of faculty and administrative lack of attendance.

Committees Focus on Policy and Details

When asked whether PGS committees primarily spent their time on policy or operational details, the majority of respondents endorsed both options. This judgment differs substantially among employee types. The majority of faculty and staff said they discuss both policy and operational details, depending on circumstances and the particular committee, but a little more on details. Managers overwhelmingly said committee time is spent in details rather than policy. (See table on right.)

COM's participatory, advisory system of governance includes a commitment to participation from all segments of the college community in making recommendations for the policies and procedures that govern the college. Did the committee on which you served primarily discuss policy or operational details?

	%	N
Policy	60%	34
Faculty	75%	18
Staff	65%	13
Managers	23%	3
Details	81%	46
Faculty	79%	19
Staff	75%	15
Managers	92%	12

Effective/Ineffective in Meeting Charge

Participants who judged committees as effective in meeting their charge said what worked well was accomplishing specific tasks (e.g., tech plan, making recommendations, professional development offerings), holding each other accountable, regular attendance, arriving on time, following the agenda, mutual courtesy and respect, sharing the workload, clear goals and timelines, disseminating information broadly to constituents, good communication, chairs that cooperate and keep the committee on task and administrator support.

The reasons participants gave for ineffectiveness in meeting their charge were too much talk and minutiae, unfocused and off-topic discussions, not managing time, reviewing material previously covered, lack of quorum, lack of co-chair communication, lack of transparency within the committee, lack of accurate and timely information, questionable administrative commitment and cooperation, being too detail-oriented rather than seeing the big picture, not sharing information with the broader college community, duplicated committee roles, going beyond their charge into management responsibility and diffuse and unwieldy charge.

Recommended Improvements
Of the 36 respondents who offered feedback for improvement, one stated the PGS is working and nothing should be changed. The suggestions for improvement include:

Visibility
- Make each committee's charge known to the campus community
- Provide information about how to join and groups that need new members
- Make a list of committee members readily available

Communication and Currency
- Maintain up-to-date PGS documents and calendars
- Improve content management system for posting web documents
- Provide relevant, accurate and current data and information to all committees as needed

Efficiency & Effectiveness
- Adhere to clearly stated and maintained goals and timelines for all committees
- Communicate input electronically to move committee tasks along
- Assure all committees have a staff support person taking notes, sending reminders, etc.
- Offer training and support
- Provide mentorship to new members

Flexibility
- Hold some meetings at IVC
- Hold chairs and members to term limits; possibly extend term from 2 to 3 years
- Have open selection of members; invite new people in and actively engage them

Participation
- Incentivize student participation; actively recruit students
- Involve COM's new employees from all constituencies
- Encourage broad-based participation, request participation from those who have never participated or not participated recently
- Allow employees time to participate and flexibility in schedule; incentivize participation

- Remind members of importance of attendance
- Uphold expectations of member participation on each committee
- Respect all groups' participation; recognize and eliminate disrespect
- Hold regular meeting times
- Take workload into account as it has increased.

Committees
- Reduce meeting frequency
- Reduce the number of committees
- Reassess time, commitment and value of each committee
- Review all committees' charges and come to shared understanding of what it means to meet the charge
- Reconsider committee processes, procedures and membership
- All respect the spirit of shared governance

Summary and Conclusion

Overall, widespread involvement in participatory governance is valued and most participants experience positive benefits, including a sense of engagement, teamwork, community and learning. Even so, a substantial portion of employees report mixed or negative experiences with the PGS. Many COM employees are willing to serve if particular conditions are met. These conditions vary by individual, but available time and scheduling are common factors inhibiting participation, especially for classified staff and part-time employees. PGS position vacancies and lack of attendance are mostly among classified staff and students.

Survey respondents described numerous characteristics of effective committees as well as ineffective committees. These can be discussed and utilized to improve the PGS. However, the extent to which committees focus on policy or details, the differences in perception between faculty and staff and administrators, as well as the circumstances and committees in which either or both foci occur, require further investigation to understand and evaluate in terms of PGS functioning and effectiveness.

Through this survey, a variety of concerns have been raised and improvements suggested. Some may require additional discussion, feedback and examination to determine the extent and severity of the reported problem and the need for and feasibility of recommended improvements. Since its inception in 2005, the PGS has been modified multiple times, most recently in 2012. These survey results suggest that additional modifications may be warranted to assure the continuing effectiveness of the COM participatory governance system, its value to the College and the benefits it brings for most participants.