

Shared Governance at SUNY Geneseo

Dr. James McLean, Professor of Physics & Astronomy

Presiding Officer of the Faculty (aka College Senate Chair) 2013–2017

Shared Governance at SUNY Geneseo is highly collaborative and intersectional, both in defined structure and in everyday practice. There are four principal bodies, as publicly shared at <https://www.geneseo.edu/governance>: the Geneseo College Council, the College Administration, the Faculty of the college (primarily represented by the Geneseo College Senate), and the Undergraduate Student Association.

The Policies of the SUNY Board of Trustees allow local flexibility in who comprises the Faculty, controlled by the Faculty itself. At Geneseo, the [Faculty Constitution](#) defines voting faculty to include all of the professional staff, with both academic and non-academic job titles. Five Committees of the Faculty focus on specific, primarily academic subjects. The lion's share of faculty business, however, is conducted by the Geneseo College Senate. Despite being the “representative governing body of the faculty” (Constitution Article II.3), the College Senate includes as full members undergraduate students selected by the Student Association (17% of the body), graduate students (3%), and administration officers (8%), with the President and Provost as non-voting members. The faculty members of the College Senate include the elected faculty officers (8%), non-academic senators (9%), and both departmental and at-large academic senators (45%).

The business of the faculty and of the College Senate are guided by an Executive Committee. Along with the six faculty officers and the faculty chairs of the five standing Committees of the Senate, this also includes as full members the Vice President of the Student Association, and the President and Provost of the College.

The College Council performs narrow but crucial advisory and advocacy roles. It is defined by law to include the president of the Student Association as a full member. The Presiding Officer of the Faculty, the College President, and the Vice Presidents are included in all meetings with full participation.

The college administration is led by the College President and a cabinet of five Vice Presidents and three other officers. Matters of broad policy are guided by six Committees of the College. Although these committees are defined by the College President, their structure and function are made part of the Faculty Constitution through special Article X. They include meaningful representation of faculty and students, selected by the corresponding governance bodies. It is standard practice at Geneseo to similarly include faculty and student representation in all administratively created task forces. For example, in search committees for positions at all levels, procedures have been agreed to by the administration and the faculty. These are enshrined in Article V of the Faculty Bylaws (separate from the Faculty Constitution).

The Student Association primarily operates through its Executive Committee of students, comprising the President, Vice President, and seven Directors, each chairing a committee. To increase engagement and communication with the student body, a Student Senate of up to 40 students was established in 2016, creating a platform for students to voice concerns.

The defined structure of shared governance at SUNY Geneseo thus ensures that multiple constituencies are both heard and informed by all the others. The following case studies detail how this has played out in a variety of situations. Each one is written by a member of the Shared Governance Award Committee who is familiar with that specific case.

Excellence Committee Operations

Dr. Kurt Fletcher, Distinguished Teaching Professor of Physics & Astronomy

Vice Chair of Faculty 2019–2020

Shared governance is central to SUNY Geneseo's process for recommending candidates for the SUNY Chancellor's Awards and the Distinguished Ranks. Each year, the elected Vice Chair of the Faculty

works closely with the President's Office to implement a fair, thorough process. They jointly handle obtaining nominations from the entire college community, ensuring that nominees are eligible, gathering materials for review, and forming the Excellence Committee of past recipients to review applications. Selection subcommittees (including faculty, students, and, when appropriate, professionals) meet to discuss the qualifications of the candidates and make recommendations. Starting from the committee's summary documents, the President's Office prepares submissions to SUNY. The process is transparent and inclusive, even as the specific deliberations are strictly confidential. Throughout the process, the Vice Chair (acting on behalf of faculty governance) and the President's Office communicate regularly to ensure that the process is equitable and that necessary deadlines are met.

Honorary Degree & Speaker Committee

Dr. David Levy, Associate Professor and Chair of Philosophy
Chair of the Honorary Degree & Speaker Committee 2015–2017

Until 2015, the selection of honorary degree recipients, commencement speakers, and speakers in major lecture series was a decentralized and *ad hoc* process. President Battles saw this opportunity to reflect the value of shared governance throughout these selection procedures. Working in consultation with the Executive Committee, she created the Honorary Degree & Speaker Committee as a Committee of the College.

Membership of the committee includes representatives from each Division of the college (Academic Affairs, Administration & Finance, College Advancement, Enrollment Management, and Student & Campus Life) and from the Student Association. Most representatives are directly appointed by the Vice President for that area. Academic Affairs representatives are selected by the Provost from a slate provided by the Executive Committee, with a majority being academics.

The Committee actively solicits nominations from the entire college community (including alumni and emeriti faculty), and also considers nominations from the local village. In the case of lectureships in diversity and in sustainability, the committee consults with the President's Commissions in these areas, which are themselves broadly representative. After vetting nominees, the committee forwards a list of recommendations (three for each speaker, up to five for honorary degree recipients) to the President and Cabinet, who ultimately make the decisions. Throughout the entire process, the Committee (through its chair) works closely with the President's Chief of Staff to ensure that relevant SUNY guidelines and procedures are followed.

Reform of Student Opinion of Instruction Process

Wes Kennison, Lecturer & Fellow in International Programs
Chair of Faculty Affairs Committee 2019–present

For decades, the Provost's office has administered the Student Opinion of Faculty Instruction (SOFI) survey to every student in every course, with results to serve as feedback to instructors, as one source in personnel evaluations, and as information to students for course selection. In spring 2020, the College Senate passed a resolution recommending a major revision and restructuring to the survey and its implementation procedures, with an outline of plans for pursuing that revision.

The impetus for this revision came during the previous summer, when the Provost, responding to longstanding concerns raised by the faculty, asked the Senate Chair to take up the question of SOFI reform. The Chair brought the question to the Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC) of the Senate. During AY 2019-20, the FAC twice visited the Undergraduate Student Senate and began reading from the national debate regarding best practices. The FAC concluded that the current SOFI questionnaire was outdated and fraught with the potential for bias that could be misleading in personnel decisions, especially with regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The FAC also determined that the process by which the SOFI had been administered was burdened with too many competing objectives, leading to a low response rate that rendered SOFI results unreliable.

The FAC brought a resolution for SOFI reform to the floor of the Senate where, after a vigorous and very collegial discussion, it passed unanimously. The substantive contributions from student government were critical to the success of the resolution. Following its outline, the Provost's office immediately took up the resolution by appointing a Learning Community to complete research and data collection. Pilots of a revised survey have been trialed, and the final version of the new policy is currently under review by United University Professions.

Calendar Redesign to Revitalize Intersession

Dr. James McLean, Professor of Physics & Astronomy
Past Presiding Officer of the Faculty 2017–2019

In 2004, SUNY Geneseo ceased offering courses between the fall and spring semesters. Recently both administration and faculty became interested, for various reasons, in reinstating and reinvigorating an Intersession. President Battles convened a Working Group in spring 2017 to study the idea. Although the group did include faculty representation (3 of 9 members) and a student, they were selected based on interest rather than through a shared governance process.

The shared governance spirit entered when it became clear that a successful Intersession would require modifications to the rest of the academic calendar. Geneseo has not had a standing Calendar Committee for over two decades, operating instead on “calendar principles” established through shared governance long ago. President Battles in fall 2017 asked that an *ad hoc* Calendar Committee be formed by the Executive Committee, which in turn delegated selection of the Calendar Committee members to the Presiding Officer of the Faculty.

After this *ad hoc* committee reported with its recommendations, the matter required additional modifications from the Executive Committee, and one straw poll and two full debates in the College Senate. But by the end of that academic year, a resolution passed the College Senate recommending to the President a new set of calendar principles, which ensured adequate Intersession days while minimizing disruption to the fall and spring semesters, regardless of calendar year. This has determined the academic calendar since, and our Intersession is growing.

Extension of Course Drop Period

Sabrina Schumacher, Junior Mathematics Education major
Student Association Vice President 2020–2021

An especial aspect of SUNY Geneseo's shared governance is the integration of students and faculty. In fall 2019, students felt they would benefit from an extension of the beginning-of-semester period for dropping courses, since a week may not be long enough to know if a class is a good fit. A proposal was passed unanimously by the Student Senate, Geneseo's completely student-run governing body. Since the extension of the drop period required a change in college academic policy, the next step was to put this idea through the College Senate proposal process.

There were many implications of this proposal, requiring a great deal of cooperation. The Student Association (the Student Senate's parent body) collaborated with the Office of Academic Planning (within the Office of the Provost) to bring the proposal to the Student Affairs and Undergraduate Policy Committees of the College Senate. This culminated in successfully passing the policy through the College Senate, and it has now been implemented by the College administration. Adoption of this proposal helped to better the learning experience of our student body and to take some stress off the professors as well. This excellent example of shared governance thus originated in the student body, and worked its way up the ladder through faculty governance and administration, with student input and guidance along the way.

Addressing Student Food Insecurity

Dr. Michael Taberski, Vice President for Student and Campus Life

In this example, the College Senate's Student Affairs Committee assisted the Division of Student and Campus Life in working with student leaders on food insecurity issues within the College's student body.

A group of students (unaffiliated with the Student Association) had approached both the Vice President and the College Senate Chair, looking for support in developing an on-campus food pantry. The Chair then advanced the request to the Senate's Student Affairs Committee for further exploration. The most important aspect of the coordination between administration and governance was in assisting the students through their conception, particularly to keep the project on a realistic track. For example, despite their great intentions, the students had not fully considered the competition or conflict they might create with the local food pantry in the village. Through the shared support of the Student Affairs Committee and the Vice President, such potential issues were resolved, leading to a resolution supported by the entire College Senate. While the resolution was not necessary to gain approval from the College for development of the food pantry, it assisted in spreading awareness and education to campus constituents on such an important topic.

Institution of a Campus-wide Diversity Summit Day

Laura Benjamin, Senior Political Science and History major
Student Association President 2020–2021

The SUNY Geneseo Diversity Summit is a full day of diversity-focused sessions hosted by members of the campus community. Due to the pandemic resulting in spring break being replaced by several, separate "rejuvenation days," the Diversity Summit was held on a day without classes in 2021. For the past few years, student interest had been expressed for having a class-free day for the Diversity Summit and after having that happen in 2021, students wanted to keep this as a permanent change. The Student Association (SA) Executive Committee, namely the SA President, SA Vice President, and the SA Director of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access, began talking to the College Senate about finding a way to do this. From here the Provost's office developed a few possible calendars options to see how this class-free day could fit into the academic calendar over the next decade, which the Senate then considered. Students came to the College Senate meetings to advocate for the class-free day to be in the Spring semester and from there the resolution was passed. As of 2021, following the SUNY President's approval, the Diversity Summit will always be held on a class-free day thanks to the advocacy from student leaders and the support of the College Senate.

Pandemic Response

Dr. Amy Sheldon, Associate Professor of Geological Sciences
Presiding Officer of the Faculty 2019–present

The College's response to the COVID-19 pandemic showcases the reliability and authenticity of Geneseo's long-standing practice of shared governance. From the onset of the pandemic, the frequency of direct communication between the College President, Provost, and Senate Chair escalated, from monthly to bi-weekly meetings with email and phone communication in between. The meetings were used to share information and ideas for addressing the concerns of faculty, students, staff, and administrators, typically centered around the health and safety of the community, the curricular impact, and the fiscal impact on the College.

On several occasions, the Provost's Office provided draft forms of emergency academic policy proposals, such as amending the Pass/Fail grading policy, to the Chair and/or Executive Committee for feedback. Faculty governance explicitly recognized the Provost's authority to implement temporary changes without the usual lengthy College Senate oversight process. The Provost nevertheless brought them to the College Senate (including in two special meetings during the summer of 2020) for less formal votes of support. As active members of the Senate, the President and Provost could take into account concerns and discussion on the Senate floor.

Having all Vice Presidents as members of the College Senate provided a foundation for communication and transparency. The Vice President of Finance and Administration provided presentations to the College Senate on the financial impact. Multiple open forums were also offered by other Vice Presidents,

publicized through the College Senate, to keep faculty and staff informed of the interrelated impacts on enrollment, student support, and finances.

In response to the fallout from the pandemic, the Strategic Planning Group, a Committee of the College, was tasked with defining a system for program analysis and alignment, to identify cost saving and program enhancement opportunities. To broaden communication, the College President (in consultation with the Senate Chair and Executive Committee) increased the faculty on this Group, so that every academic area would be represented.

The College's response to the pandemic, particularly with regards to curricular and programming matters, was a shared responsibility between the administration and the College Senate. We intentionally leaned into our established protocols to work collectively and respond quickly to the impact of the pandemic on the institution and the people who comprise it.

A Geneseo Education for a Connected World

Dr. Paul Schacht, Professor of English, Interim Provost 2016–2017

Past Presiding Officer of Faculty (by appointment) 2019–present and *ex officio* member of Curriculum Design Working Group

In spring 2021, the College Senate approved a fundamental and far-reaching revision of the Geneseo curriculum. The new curriculum, *A Geneseo Education for a Connected World*, was the outcome of an exemplary shared governance process that ensured a voice for every stakeholder and involved significant collaboration between faculty governance and administration.

The process began in 2011 when then-Provost Carol Long fostered the development of overarching learning outcomes tied to neither a particular academic program nor general education but rather the entire undergraduate experience. The General Education Committee, through study, discussion, and deliberation including many additional faculty members, generated *Geneseo Learning Outcomes for Baccalaureate Education* (GLOBE), which was endorsed by College Senate in 2016 as a framework upon which to construct a new curriculum.

In 2017, President Battles, Interim Provost Schacht, and College Senate Chair McLean designed an *ad hoc* committee, the Curriculum Design Working Group (CDWG). The CDWG was created jointly by the President and the College Senate and charged with designing a new curriculum through which students would fulfill GLOBE. Teaching faculty representatives from all major disciplinary areas were joined by co-curricular professional faculty, the Assistant Provost for Curriculum, and a Student Association officer. From 2017 to 2021, CDWG held discussions, conducted open forums, and engaged with the entire college community. Academic departments across the college produced a course inventory that documented where, and to what degree, students were already meeting GLOBE.

In fall 2019, to maintain flagging momentum, Provost Robertson started regular meetings with chairs of subcommittees, which had formed to focus on different aspects of the issue. These meetings also kept the current College Senate Chair abreast of progress. By late 2020, a draft proposal was available to elicit concrete feedback in forums and through liaisons to every academic department. In spring 2021, and as envisaged by the original CDWG charge, the curriculum proposal followed the standard path for academic policies. It was first taken up by the College Senate Committee on Undergraduate Policy and Core, and then passed through two readings in the full College Senate. After vigorous debate and several amendments, it passed resoundingly.

The new curriculum replaces one that was in use, with only minor changes, for roughly 40 years. Many faculty were deeply attached to the old, even as there was widespread recognition of a need for change. Its fundamentally new shape, focused on topics more than disciplines and foregrounding contemporary concerns such as antiracism and sustainability, will require faculty to teach, and students to learn, in new ways. That Geneseo was able to effect so profound a transformation with such broad buy-in is testimony to the health of its shared governance system.