

CIC NEW CAO WORKSHOP
November 2025

Case Study 1: Shared Governance

At Spiritus College, newly-appointed CAO Goodfellow has joined the College at a challenging moment, with shortfalls in enrollment over the past two years resulting in a decrease in revenue of over 15%. The trustees have mandated that Spiritus maintain a balanced budget, which will necessitate a reduction in expenses. Some staff positions were already eliminated the previous year (before Goodfellow's arrival) and there is a general hiring freeze beyond essential positions. The President has informed Goodfellow that academic programs must be reviewed for efficiency and sustainability, with reductions in instructional costs of at least \$1 million identified.

The Spiritus *Faculty Handbook* states that the faculty, through the Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) and the Faculty Curriculum Committee, is "responsible for" multiple areas, including "the content of the curriculum." The document also states that this responsibility is part of "shared governance" that includes the administration, with trustee oversight. The FEC, aware of the overall budgetary challenge and concerned that lower-enrolled programs may be targeted for closure, issues a statement regarding the role of the faculty in decisions regarding the curriculum. The FEC asserts that the faculty, through the Curriculum Committee, must approve all changes to the curriculum, including any decision to eliminate programs or reduce faculty positions. The *Faculty Handbook* stipulates that faculty members in tenured positions can be dismissed only for cause, due to program elimination, or in cases of declared financial exigency.

The President informs Goodfellow that the FEC's interpretation of shared governance is incorrect and that the administration, and ultimately the trustees, make decisions about the addition or elimination of academic programs.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is Goodfellow's best approach in addressing this disconnect between the President/Board and the faculty? What are crucial steps in this process?
2. What does Goodfellow need to know before taking any action? How and where can Goodfellow look for this information and for support? What are crucial pitfalls to avoid?
3. How can Goodfellow navigate this early challenge in a way that establishes/reinforces the confidence of both the President and the faculty?
4. Beyond questions of process, at a philosophical level, what is – or should be – the balance between faculty and administration/Board in making decisions about curricular direction? To what extent are curricular decisions similar to and different than other budget-related matters?

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Case Study 2: Personnel Challenges

Pat Prudent is Provost at Madison-Monroe College. The College is proud of its 200-year-plus history and the faculty is accustomed to a great deal of autonomy.

Dr. Prudent is feeling pretty good about how the first semester at MMC is going and has been, among other activities, visiting the offices of all full-time faculty. Most of the meetings have been lovely, with Prudent learning all about the interesting and varied work of an accomplished faculty.

However, in a meeting with a newly-tenured faculty member, Dr. Youngstar, the Provost hears a startling story about years-long bullying and harassment by a senior colleague, Dr. Longtimer. Evidently, Youngstar has been waiting eagerly for a new provost and reports with bitterness that concerns have been “swept under the rug” and that no one in the department is willing to object to abusive behavior. Youngstar provides Prudent with a folder of emails that are full of screeds against Youngstar’s scholarly approach as well as *ad hominem* attacks, sometimes laden with foul language. Prudent is shocked by these communications and immediately schedules a meeting with the department chair. Much to Prudent’s surprise, the department chair laughs off the concern, saying that Prudent has to understand that Dr. Longtimer has “strong opinions” with a style “you just have to get used to.” When asked about how junior faculty members are protected from Longtimer’s vitriol, the chair shrugs and says new people have to get used to the way things are done here.

In further review of the written materials, Prudent sees multiple possible violations of published college policy. At the same time, Youngstar did receive tenure and promotion, so Longtimer doesn’t appear to have done material harm. There are two untenured faculty members in the department who seem notably reticent in both public and private settings.

Discussion Questions:

1. Does Provost Prudent need to do something? If so what?
2. What are the dangers and benefits of taking action versus declining to take action?
3. With whom should Prudent consult?
4. What background information does Prudent need in order to approach this situation effectively?

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Case Study 3: The Pressures of the Moment

Dr. Scholastic has recently been promoted to the role of CAO after moving through the ranks from junior professor to tenured professor to dean. Scholastic has served Collegium University for fifteen years and has always felt confident about how the University operates.

However, this fall is Scholastic's first time serving on the Cabinet and the nature of some conversations are unsettling. For instance, there has been general discussion about whether and to what extent faculty members should be prohibited from joining students in protests and/or from posting potentially inflammatory messaging on their office doors. The VP for Advancement has lectured Scholastic (or that's how it feels) about the fact that donors are sensitive to any indications that the faculty are engaging in politics, which Scholastic reads, correctly, as meaning political positions contrary to the donors' views. The Enrollment Management VP pressures Scholastic to make sure that faculty don't say anything in classes prospective students visit that might upset their parents. It feels to Scholastic that other senior leaders are trying to interfere in the academic operations of the institution.

Scholastic speaks with the President about the dynamics of Cabinet meetings, but the President just sighs and says, "it's a new day, new rules." When Scholastic asks what, exactly, are the new rules, the answer is vague: the President alludes to the need to be aware of the external environment and sensitive to risk management.

Meanwhile, junior faculty teaching controversial topics have come to Scholastic with worries about whether the current environment puts their jobs at risk and whether Scholastic will fully support them if students secretly record classes or otherwise publicly disseminate material from their courses. At first Scholastic was broadly reassuring – after all Collegium is a private institution and has clear academic freedom policies – but that answer is beginning to seem facile.

As a new CAO, Scholastic is unsure to what extent the pressures are part of operating at a different level and seeing more clearly how external considerations put pressure on campus leaders, or whether they are tied to what everyone is describing as an unprecedented attack on higher education. Whatever the cause, Scholastic feels a bit under siege and is unsure about how to fulfill the fundamental responsibility of ensuring the strength of the academic program.

Discussion Questions:

1. What sources of support should Scholastic seek out to deal with these challenges?
2. How should Scholastic approach working with Cabinet colleagues?
3. How can Scholastic best support the faculty under these circumstances?
4. What strategies might Scholastic employ to avoid becoming disillusioned or overwhelmed?