November 2, 2011

Dear Staff, Administration, and Student Government,

One of the FGCU Faculty Senate Executive Leadership Initiatives for the year includes a collaborative campus conversation through which FGCU formally articulates what shared governance means on campus. Accordingly, the Faculty Senate proposes a cooperative effort by the key partners in the shared governance process at FGCU to define and institutionalize a common understanding of our united obligations in the accomplishment of our University’s mission. We believe this initiative is in the very spirit of the process and document we are about to consider.

Attached please find a copy of the Academic Council of Faculty Senates “Statement of Shared Governance” unanimously adopted by that body at the beginning of October. The ACFS membership is composed of Faculty Senate leaders from the SUS institutions. All member institutions are required to meet the same institutional accreditation standards from Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), whose accreditation standard 3.7.5 requires that “The institution publishes policies on the responsibility and authority of faculty in academic and governance matters.” After more than a year of deliberating amongst itself and within its member institutions, the ACFS adopted the attached statement as a foundation for each member university to more clearly define the mutual accountability and responsibility that defines the basis of effective shared governance.

The ACFS statement reflects the collective experiences of SUS institutions – those with rich and long histories including University of Florida and Florida State University, and some newer institutions such as the University of North Florida – and so provides an effective foundation of sound principles for us to build upon and modify. Because we have a well-developed starting point, based on core ideals from institutions with diverse histories and missions that reflect years of best practices within our state and nationwide, we anticipate that an efficient process can produce a mutually agreed policy document for consideration at the next FGCU Board of Trustees meeting in January of 2012.

Specifically, we invite each central partner in shared governance – the administration, the staff and the faculty – to work independently within their own deliberative structures and processes to produce their own modified versions of the ACFS statement. Before the end of the calendar year, representatives of these partners would share their proposed changes, and in the first week of January we would meet at a Shared Governance Summit, together with representatives of the Student Government, to craft a single consolidated consensus statement of shared governance at FGCU. After ratification by each group, this final document would be available for the University President to include in the Board of Trustees agenda for consideration and potential adoption at the January 17, 2012 meeting.
The steps outlined here are in keeping with the required timelines in University Policy 1.001 for policy development, comment by University community, and approval by the cabinet and General Counsel. Moreover, this approach models a process that is broadly shared and supported by all key partners in the community, and therefore instantiates the practices of shared governance that we seek to define. Working from the basis of the ACFS document and through collective, cooperative action to modify that document in a way that clearly establishes our University’s unique identity and traditions, FGCU can be an exemplar in the definition and adoption of a model of shared governance.

Finally, the broader debates going on within and beyond the state about the future of higher education reinforce the timeliness and importance of an institutionally uniting process and product that clearly establishes – both for ourselves and for those outside the University – how we put into practice the values that bind us together as an institution.

We in the Faculty Senate look forward to working with all our partners toward the fulfillment of our University mission.

Douglas Harrison
Faculty Senate President

Howard Smith
Faculty Senate Vice-President
Shared Governance Initiative Coordinator

Maddy Issacs
Faculty Senate Secretary

Arie van Duijn
Faculty Senate Parliamentarian