Operating Model for COA Governance

Introduction

One of the core elements of College of the Atlantic (COA) as an educational institution is its commitment to a collaborative decision-making process that involves and invests students deeply in the institution. Indeed, the college community as a whole maintains a strong commitment to broad participatory governance that values diverse opinions and the process of dialogue and negotiation. While the By-Laws of the Board of Trustees clearly designate the final authority to the Board and President for the College’s overall governance and management, respectively, most constituents of the College expect that the vast majority of the decisions that broadly affect the daily operation of the College will be made collaboratively via the All College Meeting and its committee structure.

On campus, participatory rather than representative, democracy is currently both the philosophic ideal and the practical political model for COA. Since changes in policies, programs, and institutional directions often have broad consequences for the lives of students, staff, and faculty, the system is organized so that all individuals have an opportunity to contribute opinions and recommendations prior to the adoption of policy changes and initiatives.

Participation in the college’s governance activities is an integral part of COA’s educational experience. Because the college is small and dynamic, we have a special opportunity to learn from and educate through our active involvement and experimentation in governance and to exercise responsibility. While there are existing governance and management structures and processes in place, the tradition at COA encourages openness to flexibility and innovation.

The College’s current campus and trustee policies and the procedures used to implement these policies are found in the Academic Policies and Community Policies sections of the Handbook, the COA Personnel Manuals, and the By-Laws of the Board of Trustees. Copies are archived in the Thorndike Library.

All College Meeting and Its Standing Committees

The All College Meeting (ACM) including its standing committees (see below for details about each committee) provide a forum in which campus constituents can participate in decision-making that substantially affects the college’s ability to carry out its mission, such as in its academic programs, budget development, campus plan, and student life (e.g., budget priorities, degree requirements, faculty searches, student housing). There are no issues that cannot be considered by the ACM. Decisions made in the ACM are subject to veto by the President or Board. ACM decisions constitute campus policy unless modified, suspended, or overruled by the President (as provided below). In addition to providing a process for getting institutional work done, the ACM provides a forum for discussion of campus, community, and world events. ACM and its committee structure fosters informed responsibility, develops collaborative skills, and serves as a laboratory for participatory decision-making.
College policies are routinely administered by the standing committees, their subcommittees, and their members. Unless indicated otherwise in their charters, committee chairpersons are appointed by the President, and are responsible for administrative actions between meetings. As much as possible, committees and their members must remember that their administrative actions should not be considered final until reported to and approved by the ACM. Committees or administrators desiring to change the policies that they administer must submit proposals to ACM to that effect. On questions concerning the administrative decisions of individual staff members, appeal should first be taken to that individual, then to the appropriate committee or supervisor. Through the policy proposal and minutes procedures below, final appeal to ACM is possible.

**Operating Procedures for the All College Meeting (ACM) for Governance, Dialogues, and Community Forums**

The ACM is modeled loosely on the New England Town Meeting. These sessions for the entire College community rotate through a Wednesday time slot and are moderated by a student facilitator chosen each term by Steering Committee. A Monday time slot is also reserved for extra governance sessions, as needed, and for events of all-college interest. In collaboration with other community members, Steering Committee sets the agenda for and guides the process of each ACM. Generally, the minutes of all standing committees are read, evaluated, and approved; proposals are introduced or voted on; and any announcements are heard. Issues considered by this plenary body may come via a number of routes, including committee recommendations, individual proposals, and questions arising from community members in general. Outcomes of discussions depend on the type of policy being generated; appropriate action may be a recommendation to the President and Trustees, or referral to a committee or office.

**All College Meeting for Governance**

The purpose of the All College Meeting is manifold. The following is a list of its primary functions.

1. Policy making;
2. Consultation;
3. Community building;
4. Education; and
5. Communication

**Dialogues**

Dialogues are scheduled by Steering Committee for the purpose of a plenary discussion of topics concerning the business of the college. They provide a formal interim discussion of proposals that arise in the ACM, if so needed, and more generally address community concerns that are continually important or arise during the course of the year.

**Community Forums**
The Community Forum was created to address concerns beyond the immediate affairs of the college. The Community Forum focuses on issues that benefit from an interdisciplinary discussion and illuminate the diversity of perspectives existing in the community.

**ACM Membership**

It is expected that only current and/or matriculated students and COA faculty and staff are voting members of the ACM. Alumni and trustees are non-voting members of the ACM. With the consent of and at the discretion of the ACM moderator, visitors non-voting members may make announcements and express views and concerns pertinent to dialogue topics. Certain dialogues are closed to visitors (e.g., go-rounds on search candidates).

**Policies and Administrative Actions in Governance**

While it is often difficult to distinguish policies from their implementation, the difference is important. Policies are broad-ranging and general goals, guidelines, and instructions. For example, it is a COA community policy that “the farms the College purchases from will have humane, free-range animal facilities and will refrain from the use of hormones, antibiotics, and protein feed.” The purchasing department in Food Services implements this policy.

There are two primary categories of governance decisions covered by this operating model:

1.) administrative actions; and 2.) policy decisions.

**Administrative Actions**

Administrative actions fall into three categories: those that are within the job description of an administrator or staff member; those in which a standing committee is giving guidance to an administrator in performing his/her job; and those where the standing committee itself is engaging in administrative or quasi-administrative work. Actions that fall within the administrator’s job description would not routinely be addressed by a standing committee or reported in committee minutes. Administrative actions reviewed by a standing committee or taken by a committee must be reported in minutes to the ACM. Decisions made by a standing committee which are of limited scope and duration but are more than ministerial actions or the execution of job description responsibilities are quasi-administrative actions. Criteria and examples should be set out in a committee’s charter. Generally quasi-administrative actions are exclusively within the jurisdiction of the committee and have a limited impact on the college community as a whole. These actions, however, must be reported in minutes to the ACM.

**Campus Policies**

Although the Board of Trustees has the ultimate authority over college policy pursuant to the College By-Laws and Maine law, in the on-campus development of policy certain procedures have been developed to ensure broad participation, thoughtful decision-making, equity, fairness, and effectiveness.
As used in this Operating Model, “campus policy” is defined to include all on-campus decisions which significantly affect a large portion of the community or which have long-term impacts on the community. For example, any major change to the campus landscape would be considered significantly affecting a large portion of the community. These decisions require additional community input and approval through the ACM.

It is impossible to precisely define what constitutes a policy under all circumstances, but the scope and severity of impact are strong indicators of a policy. In the first instance, committee charters should expressly define criteria for what constitutes a policy from that the committee that requires ACM approval within the scope of their work and give illustrative examples. Although not definitive, the use of the term “policy” creates a rebuttable presumption that a so-named action by a committee or administrator is a policy within the scope of this definition. All policies must be brought to the ACM through the procedure spelled out in this Operating Model.

Reporting, Approving, and Challenging of Minutes

All standing committees of the college are required to record minutes of their meetings and to report these minutes to the ACM on a regular basis. Minutes of each committee shall be sent to the Moderator prior to the Monday preceding the ACM for which they are to be approved. The Moderator will distribute the minutes along with the ACM agenda for the week. Minutes pending committee approval may be sent to the Moderator the Monday before the ACM but changes made before the reporting of minutes to the ACM must be noted when the minutes are reported. Until the committee’s minutes have been reported to and approved by the ACM, they are not ratified and actions specified therein are not binding on community members, and the committee cannot proceed with the action.

In reporting their minutes, each committee shall list: 1) all decisions made and actions undertaken by the committee; 2) the issues still under discussion and those that will be discussed before the next ACM. At the end of each committee's report, questions and comments are solicited from the meeting to be directed to the committee. Information on any particular decision or issue will be given upon request, and comments will be noted. Any decision or action taken by a committee (unless specifically delegated to the committee as part of its autonomous purview by ACM through the committee's charter) may be challenged by any member of the ACM. If a challenge is seconded, 5 to 10 minutes will be allowed to discuss the action, with a vote following to determine if further review is warranted. If the majority favor no further review, the committee action stands as reported. If a simple majority of those voting favor further review, the action is returned to the committee for reconsideration and possible revision. In the vote, abstentions are recorded but not counted in the vote against the challenge. If the committee recommends...

Challenging Minutes

Any decision made or action taken by a committee unless specifically delegated to the committee as part of its autonomous purview by the ACM through the committee’s charter may be challenged by any member of the ACM. If a challenge is seconded, 5 to 10 minutes will be
allowed to discuss the action, with a simple majority vote (excluding abstentions) following to determine if further review is warranted.

If the majority favor no further review, the committee action stands as reported. If a simple majority of those voting favor a further review of the action, it is returned to the committee for reconsideration and possible revision. In this vote, abstentions are recorded but not counted in the vote against the challenge. If the action entails the creation, alteration, or elimination of policy, the action is brought back to the ACM as a formal proposal. In any case, the committee is expected to respond to the ACM's concerns and to consider them in its future actions. Absence of a challenge implies acceptance of committee actions.

Proposals

A proposal may be formulated to create, alter, or eliminate a campus policy or to state a formal position of the community. All proposals must be submitted to the Steering Committee for review prior to consideration by the ACM.

Crafting A Proposal

A proposal may come from either of two sources: a standing or ad hoc committee of the college or an individual or group of individuals in the community.

In the case of a committee endorsed proposal, the chair of the respective committee should forward the policy proposal to the chair of Steering along with information detailing when the committee endorsed the proposal and whether such endorsement was unanimous or not.

In the case of a proposal originating from an individual or group of individuals outside of the committee structure, the proposal should be accompanied by petition requesting that ACM consider the proposal signed by at least 35 members of the campus community.

Regardless of its source, each proposal should include: 1) a clear and direct statement of the policy and 2) a rationale including the origin, purpose, and, when appropriate, means of implementation of the proposal.

Steering’s Role

Steering will evaluate the proposal for clarity and appropriate format. It will give suggestions to assist further development and processing of the proposal. To better anticipate questions that proposals may raise, Steering may require proposal submitters to obtain critiques of their proposals from key administrators or other relevant parties before moving forward.

If there is an appropriate committee which exists to address the issue raised by the proposal, Steering will direct the proposal to that committee for development and review. This committee can then bring the proposal back to Steering with its endorsement. If the original proponents disagree with the committee's suggestions, if the committee refuses to endorse the policy, or if
the committee fails to act in a reasonable period of time, Steering may move forward with placing the policy on the agenda of the ACM.

*The Initial Reading & Community Discussion Phase*

Once Steering is convinced that a proposal is well thought through, it will then schedule an "initial reading" at ACM and will distribute a copy of the proposal with that ACM’s agenda.

The process for an initial reading of a policy at ACM is as follows:

1. The Moderator will read the text of the proposed policy and post it for the audience to examine. In the case of proposals that amend an existing policy, steering may require only the reading of those sections of policy that are being amended.
2. The Moderator will then ask the proponents to make a statement describing and giving the reasons/rationale for the proposal. (5 minutes)
3. The Moderator will then open the floor for the purposes of clarifying questions and community discussion. (maximum of 25 minutes)
4. Two recorders who have been previously selected by Steering will then summarize the pros and cons of the policy as they have been articulated during the previous discussion and based on other information they may have gathered from community constituents not present at the reading. (5 minutes each)

Total time (not including the reading): 35 minutes

Based on the feedback from this initial reading, as well as other channels of community input, Steering will then determine if the policy is ready to move forward for a vote. If Steering determines that additional discussion time is necessary for the purposes such as building broader community consensus, providing relevant information necessary for informed decision making, or clarifying unclear elements of the policy, it will then schedule an interim dialogue prior to moving forward with a vote.

*Changes to the Proposal*

It is expected that the discussion and dialogue process that occurs prior to a final vote will result in changes to the original text of the policy as presented at the Initial Reading ACM. Often these changes will be technical in nature and will not substantially impact the purpose of the policy, its functioning, or its impact on the community. However, if Steering determines that substantive revisions to the policy have been made during this process, it can require that the proposal go through another Initial Reading phase prior to moving forward for a final vote. In the case of committee endorsed policies, Steering can also choose to consult with the originating committee to determine if these revisions would alter the original status of their endorsement.

*The Vote*

Once Steering is satisfied that no further dialogue is necessary, it will schedule the vote on the proposal at a future ACM. Steering will also determine who will speak for and against the
proposal. This formal vote must take place during the academic term in which the Initial Reading took place. The text of the final proposal must be published via email by the Monday before the ACM meeting in which the vote will occur.

The process for voting on the proposal at ACM is as follows:

1. The Moderator will read the text of the proposed policy and post it for the audience to examine.
2. An advocate will speak on behalf of the proposal (5 minutes).
3. An advocate will speak against the proposal (5 minutes)

With no further discussion, a vote is taken.

If a policy has previously been endorsed by the unanimous vote of an ACM standing committee, then a simple majority vote is necessary to approve the policy at ACM. If a policy is not recommended unanimously by a standing committee, then the policy must pass by two-thirds of votes cast (ayes and nays). All changes to the Operating Model, regardless of their endorsement by a standing committee, must pass by two-thirds of votes cast (ayes and nays). In all votes, abstentions are recorded but are not counted into the vote against the proposal.

Suspension of the Rules

If a motion by any community member is seconded, a vote may be taken to temporarily suspend the rules of this operating model for a specified procedure. The motion to suspend must clearly articulate what rule is being suspended, for what length of time, and the justification for its suspension. Suspension of the rules requires a two-thirds majority vote.

President’s Role

The President has 10 days from the receipt of the adopted policy to veto it and return it to the ACM. If the President elects to veto a policy adopted by the ACM, he must return to the next scheduled ACM to explain his decision or communicate in writing to the Chair of Steering Committee his decision and his reasons for rejecting the ACM decision. The Chair of Steering will read this explanation to the ACM. The President does not need to take any affirmative action with regard to an ACM policy decision for it to become campus policy. However, at the end of every term, the President is required expected to report back to the ACM how policies adopted by the ACM that term have or will be implemented.

Immediately upon the approval of a policy by a vote of the ACM, the Chair of Steering will forward a copy of the adopted policy to the President for his review. In the unusual event that the President elects to modify, suspend, or overrule a policy adopted by the ACM, he/she must return to the next scheduled ACM to explain his/her decision or communicate in writing to the Chair of Steering Committee his/her decision and his/her reasons for rejecting the ACM decision. The Chair of Steering will read this explanation to the ACM.
Proposals brought through the ACM and voted in the affirmative (which are not vetoed by the President) are binding on the actions of the various offices, personnel, community members, and committees of the college unless overturned, modified, suspended, or overruled by the President.

New problems and items not on the agenda may be voiced at the end of the All College Meeting, before or during announcements, but not raised for discussion unless previously arranged with the Moderator. If the matter cannot be delegated to a committee, it may go to dialogue at another meeting, and a proposal could be prepared for Steering based on consensus reached at that meeting.

Committees of the ACM

The number or existence of committees is not sacrosanct at COA. We do speak of "standing committees," but these "stand" largely because their functions have been recognized as essential for a long time. Committees come into being as needs arise that cannot be dealt with by any existing committee. When necessary, subcommittees or ad hoc work groups are formed to deal with specific issues. The President, the Trustees, or the ACM have all suggested the formation of various committees in the past, and will probably continue to do so in the future. However, standing committees of the ACM can only be created by the ACM through the proposal process.

It is both customary and politic to include members from all campus constituencies when a new committee is formed. For purposes of the All College Meeting and its standing committees, a COA community member is defined as currently employed faculty and staff members and matriculated students. Each committee decides its own size and membership requirements. Normally, committees are reconstituted each fall; a system of rotating membership balances broad representation with continuity.

The various standing committees, taskforces, and workgroups are scheduled throughout the school week, with flexibility to allow for the changing schedules of the student members. Meetings are usually open, and community members are encouraged to observe and participate. The locations and times of meetings can be found on the master academic schedule. A listing of the chairs of committees is available in the President’s office.

Committees of the All College Meeting

The following is a listing of the standing committees and their areas of jurisdiction. These committees’ descriptions are not part of the Operating Model itself but are included for reference.

The Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) is charged with overseeing all aspects of the academic program. This includes approving all new courses, new faculty positions, arranging for classes to be taught by visiting faculty, major changes in academic direction and programs, and academic policies and procedures. The committee also serves an important advisory role to the Academic Deans with regard to administrative procedures within their areas of administrative responsibility, and to the President and Development Office with regard to establishing and communicating priorities for fundraising and gifts. Its subcommittees include:
The Educational Studies Committee (ESC) has the responsibility of reviewing the academic programs of education students according to the requirements set out in the Education Program Self Study and is authorized to recommend students for certification to the State Department of Education. The committee reviews and evaluates the Teacher Education program, supports its development, and works with Permanent Advising Teams to inform and support students wishing to become teachers.

The International Studies Committee works to develop and coordinate curriculum and college programs dealing with programs abroad, international studies on campus, language studies, and related initiatives.

The Internship Committee reviews and approves internships for academic credit, noncredit, or prior fulfillment and considers questions of internship policy.

The Library Committee advises the Director of the Library on policies and procedures, program planning, and the identification of issues relating to library operation.

The Museum Committee works to coordinate the College's Natural History Museum and its relationship to the academic program as well as its public outreach efforts.

The Review and Appeals Board (RAB) considers student proposals for independent studies, final projects, and Residency; petitions for exceptions to requirements; and unusual requests for credit. This subcommittee also receives and reviews appeals for reconsideration of any other decisions regarding a student's academic work.

The Campus Planning and Building Committee (CPBC), advisory to the Director of Buildings and Grounds, coordinates community input on campus planning and development; revises and updates the campus Master Plan; considers all physical changes to grounds and buildings; allocates space and construction priorities; and establishes policies for the regulation of grounds use, housekeeping, maintenance, traffic and parking, energy use, and storage. Subcommittees of the CPBC include:

The Campus Committee for Sustainability (CCS) is primarily responsible for assessing all aspects of existing and planned campus conditions to determine the most efficient and effective ways to develop a more sustainable campus. CCS also coordinates the planning of Earth Day.

The Landscape Subcommittee oversees the Campus Landscape plan, which includes the grounds, plantings, tree removal, and gardens.

The Faculty Meeting is primarily a deliberative body -- the faculty meets regularly to discuss teaching, ideas, and issues that relate broadly to the mission and interests of the college. In areas related to academic standards, the faculty has a special role in the College; in other areas the Faculty Meeting works collaboratively with committees, administrators, and other entities. The Faculty Meeting also provides a mechanism for the faculty to speak collectively and in a coordinated way on matters of importance to the college as a whole.
The Personnel Committee, working with Administrative Dean and the President, reviews and develops policies regarding employment at the College; it oversees the search and hiring process for new faculty and staff as well as the performance review process for them; it develops policy on conditions of employment, which are published in the Personnel Manual and helps to determine personnel priorities in consultation with other appropriate bodies.

The Faculty Personnel Subcommittee coordinates contract reviews of all members of the faculty and is chaired by the Associate Dean of Faculty.

The Publication and Communications Committee establishes policy and provides critique for campus publications including *The Insider, Edge of Eden, Collaborative Portraits*, and the Human Ecology Essay compilation.

The Steering Committee is charged with promoting and overseeing governance at COA. The Committee serves as a liaison between the various entities of COA governance and its administration. In this role, it endeavors to facilitate and coordinate the work of other committees, groups, and individuals in the COA community, at all times respecting the different and interdependent roles that each of these entities has in self-governance. The committee coordinates the ACM, sets agendas and schedules ACMs, Dialogues, and Forums, makes available adequate background information for these meetings, chooses and trains moderators, evaluates the governance system on a regular basis, and serves as an educational forum for community members with special interests in organizational decision-making.

The Student Life Committee is charged with ensuring the quality of student life and recommending policies or services to meet student needs. In this role, it serves as an advocacy point for students. While the Committee might act as a liaison between the student body and the academic program, its primary area of purview is the non-academic realm: residential life, student activities, orientation, student judicial policies, as examples. The Committee also serves an important advisory role to the Dean of Student Life with regard to administrative procedures within her/his area of administrative responsibility. Its The Subcommittees include:

The International Students of College of the Atlantic (ISCOA) is the subcommittee of Student Life that serves as the gathering point for domestic and international students interested in expanding and improving the international student experience at COA. The committee is co-chaired by an elected student and the International Student Advisor.

The Student Activities Committee is charged with the allocation and distribution of the Student Activities Community Fund generated by the revenue from the student activities fees raised each term. The Community Fund supports ongoing classes, e.g. yoga, one-time events such as performers or film festivals, and student clubs and organizations. The SAC is charged with enriching cultural life on-campus in ways that encourage the community to come together and share those experiences in ways that are inclusive, educational, legal, and with an appropriate eye on risk-management.

The Student Meeting coordinates communication between students and other COA decision-making bodies, such as ACM, the committees of ACM, the President, the Board of Trustees, and
trustee committees. The Student Meeting will be co-chaired by the Dean of Student Life and an elected student.