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Research • Planning • Professional Development  
for California Community Colleges

# Foothill College Shared Governance External Evaluation

Preliminary Findings

# Introduction

In 2021, Foothill College contracted with the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (RP Group) to conduct an external evaluation of the college's redesigned shared governance structure. The evaluation activities included an online survey sent to all Foothill College employees and students, as well as in-depth interviews with employees and students who are or have been actively involved within shared governance since its redesign in the 2018-19 academic year. The purpose of this comprehensive evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of this new governance model. In accordance with the [Foothill College Shared Governance Handbook](#), the working definition of effectiveness for this shared governance structure was rooted in the governance council indicators of success (page 3):

- All members have the opportunity to participate in council discussion.
- Council input is used to help shape the direction of college plans.
- A variety of opinions on council agenda topics were welcome.
- The council fosters an environment where discussion topics could be viewed from different perspectives.
- All council members have an opportunity to influence the deliberative process of making a recommendation to the President.
- Sufficient information/documents are shared with council members so as to provide background on discussion topics.

## In This Document

This document simply serves as a vehicle to provide preliminary findings of our external evaluation in order to assist Foothill College as it writes its midterm accreditation report. While we offer some breakdown of the survey and interview participants, this document does not provide an in-depth discussion of the methodology behind the two evaluation activities. The main purpose of this document is to offer preliminary findings in a brief summarized format as discussed with Foothill College. A more thorough description of the methodology as well as any additional context necessary for the findings and recommendations will be provided in the evaluation brief, which will be delivered to Foothill College on May 21, 2021.

This document is organized into three primary sections. First, we provide a brief description of the survey respondents and interview participants. Second, we present our preliminary findings and recommendations emerging from the survey and interview analyses. The findings in this section align with the structure of both the survey instrument and interview questions. Third, we provide the overall themes that emerged across the preliminary findings, as well as overall recommendations. Since this evaluation is from an external observer, it is important to read these findings within the context of the evaluation activities, and review and adapt the provided recommendations based on what is best fitted for Foothill College. Additionally, it is important to recognize that this evaluation serves as information to be used to start a conversation regarding successes and areas of improvement for the shared governance structure and process instead of a conclusion about shared governance.

# Participants

## Student Survey Respondents

A total of 466 Foothill College (Foothill) students completed the online survey. However, only 142 students (30.1%) had ever heard of the four governance councils. Out of these students, only 15 respondents reported that they had participated in shared governance by way of attending at least two council meetings. Background characteristics of the survey participants are included in Appendix A.

For the purposes of this document, the focus will be on responses from the 15 students who participated in one of the shared governance councils. Given the small sample size, findings from the student survey should be read with caution. The evaluation brief will include some findings from all student survey respondents.

Among the 15 students who responded to the survey and had attended at least two council meetings, over half of them mostly attended the Advisory Council (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Active Student Participants by Most Attended Council Meeting*

Most Attended Council	#	%
Advisory Council	8	53.3%
Community & Communication	3	20.0%
Equity & Education	3	20.0%
Revenue & Resources	1	6.7%
Total	15	100.0%

## Employee Survey Respondents

A total of 121 Foothill College employees completed the survey with 63 employees who had not participated in one of the four governance councils and 58 employees who were active on at least one of the councils between the 2018-19 and 2020-21 academic years. For the purposes of this document, the focus will be on responses from the 58 employees who recently participated in one of the shared governance councils. The evaluation brief will include some findings from all employee survey respondents. Background characteristics of the survey participants are included in Appendix A.

The employee survey participants were well-represented for administrators (22.4%), instructional full-time faculty (34.5%), and classified professionals (34.5%). However, a very small proportion of participants represented student services faculty (5.2%) and part-time faculty (only one participant was from instruction and no participants were from student services) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Employee Survey Participants by Position

Position at Foothill College	#	%
Administrator/Manager	13	22.4%
Full-Time Faculty: Instruction	20	34.5%
Full-Time Faculty: Student Services	3	5.2%
Part-Time Faculty: Instruction	1	1.7%
Classified Professionals	20	34.5%
Missing	1	1.7%
Total	58	100.0%

The employee survey participants were well-represented across the four councils, with the most attended council being Revenue & Resources (27.6%), followed by Equity and Education (24.1%), and Advisory Council and Community & Communication (20.7% each) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Employee Survey Participants by Most Attended Council

Most Attended Council	#	%
Advisory Council	12	20.7%
Community & Communication	12	20.7%
Equity & Education	14	24.1%
Revenue & Resources	16	27.6%
Missing	4	6.9%
Total	58	100.0%

## Student and Employee Interviews

Only one student volunteered to be interviewed and was interviewed. Out of 23 employees who volunteered to be interviewed, 18 were interviewed.

Interviewees were chosen to represent a diverse range of positions at Foothill as well as involvement across councils. Similar to survey participants, the interviewees were well-represented for administrators (27.8%), full-time faculty (33.3%), and classified professionals (33.3%). However, no part-time faculty volunteered to be interviewed (see Table 4).

Table 4. Interview Participants by Position

Position at Foothill College	#	%
Administrator	5	27.8%
Full-Time Faculty	6	33.3%
Classified Staff	6	33.3%
Student	1	5.6%
Total	18	100.0%

In regard to council involvement, the interview participants were mostly involved with the Community & Communication (44.4%) and Equity & Education (44.4%) councils. Seven interviewees had been involved with Revenue & Resources (38.9%) and only four interviewees were involved with Advisory Council (22.2%) (see Table 5). Note that these numbers include participants' involvement in different councils over multiple years, as well as some council members (i.e., ex-officio) participation in all the councils during a period of time.

Table 5. Interview Participants by Council Involvement, Service between 2018-19 and 2020-21

Council Involvement	#	%
Advisory Council	4	22.2%
Community & Communication	8	44.4%
Equity & Education	8	44.4%
Revenue & Resources	7	38.9%
Total	18	

Note: The percentages reported here are based on the total number of interviewees though each participant could have reported involvement in more than one council. Therefore, the total percentage will be over 100%.

The largest proportion of council roles that interviewees had served on across time were as members (61.1%), with the second largest proportion being as a tri-chair (55.6%). However, all council roles were represented: ex-officio (16.7%), recorders (16.7%), and facilitators (11.1%) (see Table 6). Note that these numbers include participants who may have served in different roles over time.

Table 6. Interview Participants by Council Role, Service between 2018-19 and 2020-21

Council Role	#	%
Ex-Officio	3	16.7%
Facilitator	2	11.1%
Member	11	61.1%
Recorder	3	16.7%
Tri-Chair	10	55.6%
Total	18	

Note: The percentages reported here are based on the total number of interviewees though each participant could have reported serving on different roles across time. Therefore, the total percentage will be over 100%.

## Emerging Preliminary Findings

The findings are categorized into four main sections: Communication & Collaboration, Agenda Topics, Member Engagement & Value, and Decision-Making & Effectiveness. Within each of these four primary sections, there are three sets of findings accompanied by recommendations: one from the student survey respondents, one from the employee survey respondents, and one from the interview responses. The survey findings discussed here are from the items that were provided to respondents who had participated in one of the four shared governance councils. Frequency tables of additional student survey items are available in Appendix B, and Appendix C provides frequency tables of additional employee survey items. All the recommendations made throughout the report are listed together in Appendix D.

### Communication & Collaboration

This first section focuses on the communication and collaboration within and across councils.

#### Student Survey Findings

Across survey items relating to communication and collaboration within and across the four governance councils, students participating in shared governance agreed or were neutral in regards to their understanding of the council charges, clarity of topic jurisdiction, and how the councils communicated and worked together (see Table 7). However, it is worth noting that no student survey participant reported being in strong agreement with any of the statements. The highest level of agreement among student survey respondents was that they “Agree” knowing and understanding the charges of the councils they participate in (64.3%), while the majority of respondents were “Neutral” in how they felt that governance councils work well together (57.1%) or that there is good communication across councils (57.1%).

Table 7. Student Perspective on Communication & Collaboration across the Four Governance Councils

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
I know and understand all the charges for the council(s) I regularly participate in	0	0.0%	9	64.3%	2	14.3%	2	14.3%	1	7.1%	14	100.0%
It is clear whether topic falls under jurisdiction of particular council	0	0.0%	5	35.7%	5	35.7%	3	21.4%	1	7.1%	14	100.0%
The governance councils work well together	0	0.0%	6	42.9%	8	57.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
There is good communication across councils	0	0.0%	6	42.9%	8	57.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
There is no overlap in jurisdiction across councils	0	0.0%	7	50.0%	6	42.9%	1	7.1%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%

## Employee Survey Findings

While the largest proportion of survey respondents, which also reflected the highest level of agreement (42.1% agreement), reported **understanding the charges for their councils**, it was **not clear to them whether their council had jurisdiction over certain topics** (66.6% disagreement). Survey respondents also reported that the governance **councils do not work well together** (56.9% disagreement), that there is a **lack of effective communication across the councils** (43.1% disagreement), and that there is **overlap in jurisdiction across councils** (59.6% disagreement). Lastly, similar to the student survey responses, employee respondents were “Neutral” as to whether governance councils work well together (20.7%) or that there is good communication across councils (37.9%). There were also a large proportion of “Neutral” responses regarding the overlap of jurisdiction across councils (32.8%). See Table 8 for the distribution of responses.

Table 8. Employee Perspective on Communication & Collaboration across the Four Governance Councils

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
I know and understand all the charges for the council(s) I regularly participate in	4	7.0%	20	35.1%	14	24.6%	12	21.1%	7	12.3%	57	100.0%
It is clear whether topic falls under jurisdiction of particular council	1	1.8%	4	7.0%	14	24.6%	21	36.8%	17	29.8%	57	100.0%
The governance councils work well together	1	1.7%	12	20.7%	22	20.7%	12	37.9%	11	19.0%	58	100.0%
There is good communication across councils	0	0.0%	11	19.0%	22	37.9%	12	20.7%	13	22.4%	58	100.0%
There is no overlap in jurisdiction across councils	2	3.4%	3	5.2%	19	32.8%	20	34.5%	14	24.1%	58	100.0%

## Interview Findings

Similar to the survey findings, results from the interviews revealed a **lack of clarity around the processes in and around shared governance**, which also related to a **lack of clarity on who has jurisdiction to discuss and provide recommendation on specific topics**.

Also emerging from the interview findings was a desire for additional marketing and recruitment to increase participation. Generally, **Foothill employees learned about shared governance opportunities through informal communication lines (e.g., speaking with colleagues), being appointed by supervisors, or through their Senates**. Therefore, there seems to be a missed opportunity to include more personnel who may not be currently involved in shared governance or constituency groups on campus but who would add a critical perspective. Furthermore, among employees who felt that they were more appointed or “voluntold,” there is a natural feeling of resentment for adding more work to their plates.

**Students, moreover, are not actively recruited to participate in shared governance**. The one student interviewee mentioned only hearing about shared governance – and that students have a role within it – via their Associated Students of Foothill College (ASFC) meetings. This student also commented that there is a **lack of adequate information shared with the ASFC regarding what students’ role within shared governance looks like**.

Taken altogether, these findings are further supported by the interviewees relaying a **need for more in-depth orientation and training to help clarify some of these roles and processes**. In general,



respondents essentially mentioned having to learn on the ground and through their colleagues (who were also still learning). Moreover, interviewees mentioned not being provided with help or answers when asking for clarification specifically around council charges or processes.

## Communication & Collaboration Recommendations

- **Generate a marketing and recruitment strategy** to assure any and all students, classified professionals, faculty, and administrators who want to participate in shared governance know the steps to get involved, what is expected of them, and what they can expect from their engagement.
- **Invest in additional formal orientation and training** to help ensure members feel comfortable with and confident in their charge and the shared governance process, with the following considerations:
  - Require participation in the orientation and training
  - Generate ways to refresh the information for continuing members
  - Craft a process of orienting and training new members who join after the academic year has begun
- **Refresh the orientation binders and shared governance handbook to provide additional clarity on the councils, their charges and roles, and the shared governance process by:**
  - Improving and/or providing more detail in the map/flowchart of the shared governance process from formation of charges to the President's decision-making; and
  - Providing additional context within the larger campus in order to illustrate how shared governance fits with other groups (e.g., Senates) and operational departments (e.g., Office of Equity).

## Agenda Topics

In this section, we evaluate the effectiveness of how agenda topics are set and the extent to which participants feel the topics align with the college's goals and priorities.

## Student Survey Findings

Across the two survey items relating to council agendas, students participating in shared governance agreed that a variety of opinions are welcome and that councils have the power to drive their own agendas (see Table 9). However, it is worth noting that there was disagreement in the former survey item, with two students reporting that not all opinions on council agenda topics are welcome.

Table 9. Student Perspective on Council Agendas

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Variety of opinions on council agenda topics are welcome	1	7.1%	8	57.1%	3	21.4%	2	14.3%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
Councils have power to drive own agendas	1	7.1%	8	57.1%	5	35.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%

## Employee Survey Findings

Half of survey respondents reported feeling that a variety of opinions on the council agenda topics are welcome (50%); however, 29.3% disagreed, with 20.7% being neutral. Equal proportions of participants agree that councils have the power to drive their own agendas or were neutral (36.2%); 27.7% did not agree (see Table 10). Observing these responses within a greater context, it may be that the former finding aligns with members feeling engaged and valued in the council (see Council Member Engagement & Value section below) and the latter finding aligns with some of the confusion around the councils’ roles and jurisdiction (see Communication & Collaboration section above).

Table 10. Employee Perspective on Council Agendas

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Variety of opinions on council agenda topics are welcome	7	12.1%	22	37.9%	12	20.7%	12	20.7%	5	8.6%	58	100.0%
Councils have power to drive own agendas	6	10.3%	15	25.9%	21	36.2%	7	12.1%	9	15.5%	58	100.0%

## Interview Findings

First and foremost, **when asked whether the agenda topics discussed in council meetings aligned with college plans and priorities, every respondent described strong alignment.** However, they perceived the **largest challenge to be having enough time and information to discuss each topic thoroughly.** While agenda topics are set annually in the form of questions posed from the President and charged to each council, the council tri-chairs prioritize those charges and set their meeting agendas around those items. Along with these agenda topics, other items find their way onto council agendas throughout the year that typically have specific timelines attached to them and as a result take priority in council discussions. Therefore, council meeting discussions include high-level items from the President that are typically large in scope as well as urgent items that require a governance recommendation in short order.

Lastly, during the interviews, our conversations around agenda topics led to discussions around control. Namely, interviewees mentioned that **whoever controls the agenda controls the direction of the council**. Therefore, constituency representatives who may feel like they hold a “lower” or non-expert position may not feel as confident to set agendas. Further, students are not represented in any of the tri-chair positions that set agendas.

## Agenda Topics Recommendations

- Interviewees recognize that that governance work is time-consuming and tough to balance with a full-time work week, but also feel like there is not enough time in meetings (one two-hour meeting a month) to provide each agenda topic a thorough discussion. Recommendations to help with this challenge may be to:
  - **Breakdown the high-level agenda topics from the President into smaller tasks tied to specific outcomes.**
  - **Design agendas to include time for topics related to the President’s annual questions as well as emerging topics from the campus.**
  - Along with agenda topics, **create a timeline to help prioritize topics and keep track on when recommendations are needed.**
  - Review agenda topics to assure that they are indeed necessary items to discuss in shared governance.
- To further capture student engagement, **consider a student quad-chair position to ensure students have a seat at the table to set council agendas.**

## Council Member Engagement & Value

This section examines the participants’ engagement within the governance councils and the extent to which they feel different perspectives are welcomed.

### Student Survey Findings

The highest level of agreement among student survey respondents was that they “Agree” the councils foster an environment where discussion topics can be viewed from diverse perspectives (71.1%), while a large majority agreed (21.4% Strongly Agree, 42.9% Agree) that all members can influence the deliberative process of making a recommendation to the President. Also worth noting is that with the exception of the former item, there is a substantial number of respondents who indicated feeling “Neutral” to the other four survey items relating to how students can participate in council discussions (35.7%), influence the deliberative process of making recommendations (35.7%), feel participation is welcome across member roles (42.9%), and heard in meetings (38.5%) (see Table 11).

Table 11. Student Council Member Engagement

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
All members can participate in council discussions	2	14.3%	6	42.9%	5	35.7%	1	7.1%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
All members can influence the deliberative process of making a recommendation to the President	3	21.4%	6	42.9%	5	35.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
The councils foster an environment where discussion topics can be viewed from diverse perspectives	0	0.0%	10	71.4%	3	21.4%	1	7.1%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
Participation is equally welcome from voting members, ex-officio members, and guests	1	7.1%	7	50.0%	6	42.9%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
I feel heard in governance council meetings	2	15.4%	5	38.5%	5	38.5%	0	0.0%	1	7.7%	13	100.0%

## Employee Survey Findings

Responses to the survey overwhelmingly pointed to **participants feeling that their participation is welcomed within shared governance council discussions**, respondents reported feeling that all members can participate in council discussions (69.0% agreement) and influence the deliberative process of making a recommendation (51.7% agreement), the councils foster an environment where discussion topics can be viewed from different perspectives (55.1% agreement), that participation is equally welcome (58.6% agreement), and they feel heard in meetings (49.1% agreement).

While overall it appears survey participants feel welcomed in council discussions, it is worth noting that the highest level of disagreement was when asked whether they agreed that the council environment is one where topics can be viewed from diverse perspectives (55.1% agreement, 27.6% disagreement, 17.2% neutral). Interestingly, students were at the highest level of agreement on this item (71.4% agreement). Also important to note is that a substantial proportion of respondents reported “Neutral” as to whether they felt all members can influence the process of making recommendations (31.0%) and whether they feel heard in council meetings (31.6%). These responses are interesting given these items would be expected to elicit a positive or negative response among individuals participating in shared governance. See Table 12 for distribution of responses.

Table 12. Employee Council Member Engagement

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
All members can participate in council discussions	15	25.9%	25	43.1%	11	19.0%	5	8.6%	2	3.4%	58	100.0%
All members can influence the deliberative process of making a recommendation to the President	10	17.2%	20	34.5%	18	31.0%	8	13.8%	2	3.4%	58	100.0%
The councils foster an environment where discussion topics can be viewed from diverse perspectives	6	10.3%	26	44.8%	10	17.2%	13	22.4%	3	5.2%	58	100.0%
Participation is equally welcome from voting members, ex-officio members, and guests	14	24.1%	20	34.5%	14	24.1%	8	13.8%	2	3.4%	58	100.0%
I feel heard in governance council meetings	10	17.5%	18	31.6%	18	31.6%	7	12.3%	4	7.0%	57	100.0%

In the following tables (Tables 13a and 13b), we observe how participants’ perceptions related to whether certain constituency groups are heard from in the shared governance council meetings. As a secondary level of analysis, we looked at whether the responses from the entire participant pool aligned with how participants from those constituency groups rated being heard in the councils. **Among all participants and across all constituency groups, it appears that council members feel that governance does a good job of hearing from each of them.** However, some discrepancies did emerge.

The majority of survey respondents reported that the governance councils do a good job hearing from administrators (69.0%) and full-time faculty (72.4%), and similarly the administrators (61.6%) and full-time faculty (60.9%) reported that their constituency groups are heard within governance council. Interestingly, full-time faculty also had the highest proportion of disagreement that their constituency group is heard within shared governance (21.7%).

Responses were split on whether governance does a good job hearing from classified professionals (46.5% Agree, 31.1% Disagree, 22.4% Neutral), while over half (55.0%) of the classified professionals reported their constituency group is heard in governance. The majority of survey participants responded that governance does a good job hearing from students (63.8% agreement), and similarly students reported feeling that their constituency group is heard (53.9% agreement). Also worth noting, is that the

largest proportion of students felt “Neutral” (46.2%). Lastly, the survey respondents were the most disbursed in their responses to whether part-time faculty were heard in shared governance (44.8% Agree, 31.1% Disagree, 22.4% Neutral), and though only one part-time faculty member completed the survey, the respondent agreed that constituency group feels heard.

Table 13a. Governance Does a Good Job Hearing from *this* Constituency Group

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Hear from Administrators	15	25.9%	25	43.1%	15	25.9%	2	3.4%	1	1.7%	58	100.0%
Hear from Full-Time Faculty	13	22.4%	29	50.0%	10	17.2%	5	8.6%	1	1.7%	58	100.0%
Hear from Part-Time Faculty	8	13.8%	18	31.0%	16	27.6%	13	22.4%	3	5.2%	58	100.0%
Hear from Classified Professionals	6	10.3%	21	36.2%	13	22.4%	15	25.9%	3	5.2%	58	100.0%
Hear from students	14	24.1%	23	39.7%	12	20.7%	8	13.8%	1	1.7%	58	100.0%

Table 13b. Governance Does a Good Job Hearing from *My* Constituency Group

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Responses from Administrators	3	23.1%	5	38.5%	3	23.1%	1	7.7%	1	7.7%	13	100.0%
Responses from Full-Time Faculty	4	17.4%	10	43.5%	4	17.4%	5	21.7%	0	0.0%	23	100.0%
Responses from Part-Time Faculty	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%
Responses from Classified Professionals	1	5.0%	10	50.0%	5	25.0%	2	10.0%	2	10.0%	20	100.0%
Responses from Students	2	15.4%	5	38.5%	6	46.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	13	100.0%

Note: Only one part-time faculty member active in shared governance responded to the survey.

## Interview Findings

In contrast to the survey findings, data gathered from the interviews highlighted that **the redesign of Foothill’s shared governance structure has helped increase engagement among students and classified professionals who described feeling grateful for the opportunity to be invited to the table, while faculty and administrators interviewees who had more experience within shared governance seemed to feel less heard within the redesigned structure.**

However, the large majority of all those interviewed – faculty, classified professionals, students, and administrators – mentioned how **positionality truly affected their level of engagement.** Positionality affected council members’ level of engagement and feelings that their perspectives were valued in four ways:

- **Different personalities making up the councils and the inherit privilege driving those personalities.** In general, when interviewees were asked why they felt comfortable engaging in council discussions, a large majority attributed it to their personalities and not being someone who is “afraid to speak their mind.”
- **Members feeling like they “know more” or “know less” than others on specific agenda topics.** Some members who are newer to shared governance and to Foothill College feel like they know less than other members, and therefore feel intimidated in sharing their perspectives on particular topics. While other members feel like they know more given their area of expertise, role of campus, or time on shared governance. Though documents are shared before each meeting to help council members educate themselves on upcoming agenda topics, interviewees mentioned these materials are typically not adequate or they are not sent enough in advance to have time to read through them before the council meeting.
- **Councils serving as a microcosm of campus hierarchy.** As evidenced by the first two points, positions on campus have a way of skewing how welcoming members feel within the council meetings. This point is especially relevant when the President is present at council meetings. Given the President’s position on campus, interviewees felt her mere presence at a council meeting inherently skews conversations and can easily leave members feeling like their voice is not as meaningful. Additionally, interviewees reported the perception of a hierarchy where administrators and full-time faculty are elevated above classified professionals. While there are various roles on campus, the shared governance structure posits itself as a place where all perspectives are equally welcomed. Yet, some council logistics seem to reinforce this hierarchy (e.g., scheduling meetings that benefit one constituency group over another).
- **Valuing all council members’ time.** Interviewees noted how involvement in shared governance is a time burden; however, this time burden affects different constituency groups differently. There is a perspective among interviewees that governance involvement may be a part of administrators’ job responsibilities or perhaps full-time faculty have reassigned time for their involvement. While part-time faculty have recently been provided with compensation for their time on shared governance, the remaining constituency groups are not: classified professionals and students. Inherently, there is a certain message being sent in terms of how certain constituency groups’ time is valued. Especially in the case of classified professionals, who may be unique in the positions they hold that require a 40-hour work week; any time they volunteer to governance (e.g., attending meetings, reading documents prior to meetings) is uncompensated time away from their desk that becomes work they have to make-up. As a result, this time burden may be preventing some classified professionals from volunteering or truly engaging in shared governance.

## Council Member Engagement & Value Recommendations

- **Recognize how positionality affects open discussion by training council members -- particularly facilitators -- to approach meetings and policies with that understanding.**
  - Though interviewees mentioned that members who have not provided their perspective may be “called on,” it is much different to be called on than it is to feel free to express their voice. Also recognize that a supervisor asking you to participate may feel different than a peer inviting you to express your thoughts.
- **Review the council composition and identify relationships that may suppress voices.**
  - Perhaps the President does not attend council meetings and supervisors do not serve on the same committees as their direct reports.

- **Craft different ways to allow employees and students who may have constraints on their time to contribute their perspectives that still values their voices.**
- For future research conducted on the effectiveness of shared governance, **consider changing the Likert-like anchors on the survey items to remove the “Neutral” option.** The substantial number of “Neutral” responses posed difficulty in interpretation. Future iterations may also consider use of an “I’m not sure” or “I don’t know” option.

## Decision-Making & Effectiveness

This last section of findings focuses on how participants view the council’s decision-making process and its effectiveness in informing Foothill College’s plans.

### Student Survey Findings

Students participating in shared governance reported that there is sufficient information shared (64.3% agreement), and that council input shapes college plans (64.3% agreement) and the President’s decisions (71.4% agreement). Moreover, the majority of respondents also reported feeling that they were making a difference (64.3% agreement). Though student participants provided overall positive responses on the governance council’s decision-making and effectiveness, the lowest level of agreement is with whether the decision-making process is effective; though half of the participants agreed that it is effective, the other half were “Neutral” (see Table 14).

Table 14. Student Perspective on Governance Council Decision-Making and Effectiveness

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Sufficient information is shared to discuss agenda topics	0	0.0%	9	64.3%	3	21.4%	2	14.3%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
Decision-making process is effective	1	7.1%	6	42.9%	7	50.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
Council input shapes college plans	2	14.3%	7	50.0%	3	21.4%	2	14.3%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
Power to affect decisions made by President	3	21.4%	7	50.0%	4	28.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	14	100.0%
I am making a difference	2	14.3%	7	50.0%	3	21.4%	1	7.1%	1	7.1%	14	100.0%

### Employee Survey Findings

Compared to the survey findings above, the items related to the governance councils’ decision-making and effectiveness were the most varied (see Table 15). While **41.4% of respondents agreed that**



sufficient information is shared to discuss agenda topics, 50.0% of participants disagreed that the decision-making process within governance is effective. Survey respondents also seemed very split between how they felt council input impacts the direction of the college and similarly decisions made by the President. While 41.4% agreed that council input is used to help shape the direction of college plans, 38.6% disagreed that governance has the power to affect decisions made by the President. Lastly, the largest proportion of respondents were neutral when asked if they are making a difference.

Table 15. Employee Perspective on Governance Council Decision-Making and Effectiveness

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Sufficient information is shared to discuss agenda topics	4	6.9%	20	34.5%	19	32.8%	11	19.0%	4	6.9%	58	100.0%
Decision-making process is effective	0	0.0%	9	15.5%	20	34.5%	15	25.9%	14	24.1%	58	100.0%
Council input shapes college plans	4	6.9%	20	34.5%	16	27.6%	15	25.9%	3	5.2%	58	100.0%
Power to affect decisions made by President	5	8.8%	14	24.6%	16	28.1%	15	26.3%	7	12.3%	57	100.0%
I am making a difference	4	6.9%	15	25.9%	22	37.9%	11	19.0%	6	10.3%	58	100.0%

## Interview Findings

Though the interviews revealed the issue of positionality in affecting council members’ engagement and perceived value, they noted that this challenge is clear when members are asked to vote on an issue. **Given the number of individuals representing their constituency groups, the group (rather than individual) voice can be elevated when voting on an issue.** For example, faculty, administrators, and classified professionals vote one way on an issue, yet all the students vote another way, therein lies a place for checks and balances to assure that all constituency groups’ perspectives are valued.

However, interviewees also highlighted cases in which council members may be uninformed when casting their votes. As mentioned above (see Council Member & Engagement section), some members as well as some constituency groups feel like they “know less” than other council members and constituency groups. Further, there may be cases in which there are no voting members who have sufficient knowledge or expertise on items to which they are voting. In these cases, **votes may be uninformed.**

Lastly, interviewees consistently mentioned that most of the time **they feel that the President has already made a decision on a topic**, therefore each of their recommendations can feel like a “rubber-stamp” of approval, or irrelevant because the President has already arrived at a decision. In either case,

there is a level of disengagement among council members and distrust with the process when they expend a lot of time and energy to reach a recommendation only to feel like it is not being respected and that their voices do not matter. While the President makes the final decision, **without effective communication back to the council members on how or why that decision was made** – especially when decisions move in a different direction than council’s recommendations – it can leave the council members confused and frustrated. Note that this finding was based on data gathered prior to participants’ receiving governance memos that the President was in the process of completing. Therefore, this finding and accompanied recommendations below may be read as currently in the process of being addressed.

## Decision-Making & Effectiveness Recommendations

- When discussing topics, especially when a vote or recommendation is required, **invite experts to present on topic** rather than simply relying on shared documents or perhaps limited discussion within council meetings.
- **Research ways to allay some of the influence occurring while members vote**, perhaps through ballots or even physical meeting environment.
- In formal communications from the President’s Office back to the councils, **demonstrate that the council’s opinions are taken into consideration when decisions are being made** by including an explanation as to why a decision has been made, especially when the decision may be counter to a council’s recommendation.

## Overarching Findings and Recommendation

The Foothill Shared Governance Structure’s primary success is that it invited a more diverse group of perspectives to the table. Primarily, classified professionals and students expressed gratitude for being included in the process.

Across all the findings emerging across the various categories, the main underlying challenge has been a lack of clarity around all stages of the shared governance process. This need for greater clarity falls into three areas and needs to address the following questions:

- Not clearly understanding their charges, purpose, and purview:
  - *What is under the purview of one council versus the others?*
  - *Should this agenda topic be in shared governance or in an operational department on campus?*
  - *Is this topic under the purview of Academic, Classified, or Student Senate?*
- Not having confidence in their understanding of an agenda topic prior to voting:
  - *How am I supposed to learn enough about the topic to vote on it?*
  - *If I’m not the expert on this subject, who can I ask for more information?*
- Not understanding what happens with the recommendations made in shared governance:

- *What happens after the council makes its recommendation?*
- *Why did the President decide one way when we recommended another way?*
- *Who is tasked with following up on the recommendation?*

Much of this lack of clarity is likely due to the absence of formal and effective communication lines. Council members feel confused and in the dark and that the administration is not clearly communicating the intent or purpose of some of its charges. Naturally, when the administration moves in a direction other than what a council recommends without clear communicating why that decision was made, distrust and disengagement with the process emerges.

## Overarching Recommendation

### Advisory Council Serving as Centralized Governance Council

From the composition of the Advisory Council to its charges and respondents' understanding of the council being aligned with the former Planning & Resource Council (PaRC), it appears that the Advisory Council serves as the council that takes more of a leadership role in college planning. Taking all the above findings together, we recommend that:

- The Advisory Council is structurally placed above the other three councils and serves as a centralized governance council to help clarify the shared governance process from start to finish.
  - Specifically collaborating with the President to help set agenda topics and distribute charges to appropriate councils.
  - Receiving recommendations from councils and making final recommendations to the President.
  - Understanding and communicating to the other councils the President's decisions, including how it was arrived at and what happens next.
- The Advisory Council includes representatives from the other councils to ensure there is no knowledge gap between the councils.
  - These council representatives would be responsible for sharing information with and from their council and the Advisory Council.
- The Advisory Council tri-chairs are representatives from the constituency groups to prevent knowledge gaps.
  - The tri-chairs would be responsible for sharing information with and from their Senates and the Advisory Council.

The primary intention of these recommendations is to help Foothill formalize communication lines across councils and constituency groups, with the overall goal of increasing collaboration that would result in greater clarity, ownership, and trust.

# Appendix A: Survey Participants

## Student Survey Participants

Race/Ethnicity	#	%
Asian	104	22.3%
Black	13	2.8%
Filipinx	7	1.5%
Latinx	100	21.5%
Native American	1	0.2%
Pacific Islander	5	1.1%
White	133	28.5%
Two or more races	61	13.1%
Other	9	1.9%
Decline to state	33	7.1%
Total	466	100.0%

Gender	#	%
Female	306	64.8%
Male	146	30.9%
Non-binary	7	1.5%
Decline to state	13	2.8%
Grand Total	472	100.0%

## Employee Survey Participants

Race/Ethnicity	#	%
Asian	13	10.7%
Black	4	3.3%
Filipinx	3	2.5%
Latinx	14	11.6%
Pacific Islander	2	1.7%
White	55	45.5%
Two or more races	13	10.7%
Other	3	2.5%
Decline to state	13	10.7%
Missing	1	0.8%
Total	121	100.0%

Gender	#	%
Female	75	62.0%
Male	36	29.8%
Non-binary	1	0.8%
Other	1	0.8%
Decline to state	7	5.8%
Missing	1	0.8%
Total	121	100.0%

Position	#	%
Administrator	13	10.7%
Classified professional	32	26.4%
FT faculty: instruction	41	33.9%
FT faculty: student services	11	9.1%
PT faculty: instruction	23	19.0%
Missing	1	0.8%
Total	121	100.0%

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## Appendix B: Student Survey Items

How familiar are you with Foothill's current governance structure?

	Heard of Shared Governance, Do Not Participate		Participate in Shared Governance	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Very familiar</b>	4	3.2%	4	26.7%
<b>Familiar</b>	10	7.9%	4	26.7%
<b>Slightly familiar</b>	60	47.6%	5	33.3%
<b>Not familiar</b>	52	41.3%	2	13.3%
<b>Total</b>	126	100.0%	15	100.0%

Which best describes the way our four governance councils and our President work together when making important institutional decisions?

	Heard of Shared Governance, Do Not Participate		Participate in Shared Governance	
	#	%	#	%
<b>The four governance councils have the opportunity to weigh in on important institutional decisions before the final decision is made by the President.</b>	24	18.9%	8	53.3%
<b>The four governance councils share equal responsibility with the President to make important institutional decisions.</b>	14	11.0%	3	20.0%
<b>The President has the opportunity to weigh in on important institutional decisions before the final decision is made by our four governance councils.</b>	4	3.1%	1	6.7%
<b>I'm not sure.</b>	85	66.9%	3	20.0%
<b>Total</b>	127	100.0%	15	100.0%

Can you name at least one person from your constituency who is on the councils this year?

	Heard of Shared Governance, Do Not Participate		Participate in Shared Governance	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Yes, for all four councils</b>	11	8.8%	6	40.0%
<b>For some of the councils but not all of them</b>	14	11.2%	5	33.3%
<b>No, I can't name any of them</b>	100	80.0%	4	26.7%
<b>Total</b>	125	100.0%	15	100.0%

Heard of Shared Governance, Do Not Participate	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Good communication about what is happening in governance	2	3.2%	17	27.0%	25	39.7%	12	19.0%	7	11.1%	63	100.0%
Know where to find info about governance	2	3.2%	22	34.9%	16	25.4%	15	23.8%	8	12.7%	63	100.0%
Understand role of governance within college decision-making	4	6.5%	24	38.7%	12	19.4%	13	21.0%	9	14.5%	62	100.0%
Know how to get involved in governance	7	11.1%	26	41.3%	16	25.4%	8	12.7%	6	9.5%	63	100.0%

Participate in Shared Governance	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Good communication about what is happening in governance	4	6.9%	15	25.9%	15	25.9%	15	25.9%	9	15.5%	58	100.0%
Know where to find info about governance	14	24.1%	21	36.2%	13	22.4%	7	12.1%	3	5.2%	58	100.0%
Understand role of governance within college decision-making	11	19.0%	17	29.3%	12	20.7%	9	15.5%	9	15.5%	58	100.0%
Know how to get involved in governance	19	32.8%	23	39.7%	10	17.2%	1	1.7%	5	8.6%	58	100.0%

## Appendix C: Employee Survey Items

How familiar are you with Foothill's current governance structure?

	Do Not Participate in Shared Governance		Participate in Shared Governance	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Very familiar</b>	2	3.2%	25	43.1%
<b>Familiar</b>	19	30.2%	25	43.1%
<b>Slightly familiar</b>	30	47.6%	8	13.8%
<b>Not familiar</b>	12	19.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	63	100.0%	58	100.0%

Which best describes the way our four governance councils and our President work together when making important institutional decisions?

	Do Not Participate in Shared Governance		Participate in Shared Governance	
	#	%	#	%
<b>The four governance councils have the opportunity to weigh in on important institutional decisions before the final decision is made by the President.</b>	25	41.0%	43	75.4%
<b>The four governance councils share equal responsibility with the President to make important institutional decisions.</b>	5	8.2%	5	8.8%
<b>The President has the opportunity to weigh in on important institutional decisions before the final decision is made by our four governance councils.</b>	1	1.6%	6	10.5%
<b>I'm not sure.</b>	30	49.2%	3	5.3%
<b>Total</b>	63	100.0%	58	100.0%

How often do you read Foothill College's "Parliament" newsletter?

	Do Not Participate in Shared Governance		Participate in Shared Governance	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Every time it comes out</b>	23	36.5%	32	55.2%
<b>Sometimes</b>	28	44.4%	21	36.2%
<b>Rarely</b>	8	12.7%	4	6.9%
<b>Never</b>	2	3.2%	1	1.7%
<b>I'm not sure what the "Parliament" newsletter is</b>	2	3.2%	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	63	100.0%	58	100.0%



Can you name at least one person from your constituency who is on the councils this year?

	Do Not Participate in Shared Governance		Participate in Shared Governance	
	#	%	#	%
Yes, for all four councils	5	7.9%	29	50.0%
For some of the councils but not all of them	36	57.1%	28	48.3%
No, I can't name any of them	22	34.9%	1	1.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

I understand the purpose and role of this council...

Do Not Participate in Shared Governance	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Advisory Council	2	3.2%	17	27.0%	22	34.9%	13	20.6%	9	14.3%	63	100.0%
Community & Communication	1	1.6%	21	33.3%	12	19.0%	20	31.7%	9	14.3%	63	100.0%
Equity & Education	4	6.3%	36	57.1%	12	19.0%	5	7.9%	6	9.5%	63	100.0%
Revenue & Resources	4	6.6%	26	42.6%	15	24.6%	9	14.8%	7	11.5%	61	100.0%

Participate in Shared Governance	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Advisory Council	9	15.8%	27	47.4%	6	10.5%	11	19.3%	4	7.0%	57	100.0%
Community & Communication	12	20.7%	17	29.3%	14	24.1%	10	17.2%	5	8.6%	58	100.0%
Equity & Education	14	25.0%	28	50.0%	6	10.7%	4	7.1%	4	7.1%	56	100.0%
Revenue & Resources	14	24.6%	26	45.6%	6	10.5%	7	12.3%	4	7.0%	57	100.0%

Do Not Participate in Shared Governance	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Good communication about what is happening in governance	2	3.2%	17	27.0%	25	39.7%	12	19.0%	7	11.1%	63	100.0%
Know where to find info about governance	2	3.2%	22	34.9%	16	25.4%	15	23.8%	8	12.7%	63	100.0%
Understand role of governance within college decision-making	4	6.5%	24	38.7%	12	19.4%	13	21.0%	9	14.5%	62	100.0%
Understand the different role play by four governance councils vs. other bodies on campus (i.e., Academic Senate, Classified Senate)	3	4.8%	20	32.3%	13	21.0%	12	19.4%	14	22.6%	62	100.0%
Know how to get involved in governance	7	11.1%	26	41.3%	16	25.4%	8	12.7%	6	9.5%	63	100.0%
Governance is helping our college make effective decisions	3	4.8%	20	32.3%	29	46.8%	7	11.3%	3	4.8%	62	100.0%

Participate in Shared Governance	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Good communication about what is happening in governance	4	6.9%	15	25.9%	15	25.9%	15	25.9%	9	15.5%	58	100.0%
Know where to find info about governance	14	24.1%	21	36.2%	13	22.4%	7	12.1%	3	5.2%	58	100.0%
Understand role of governance within college decision-making	11	19.0%	17	29.3%	12	20.7%	9	15.5%	9	15.5%	58	100.0%
Understand the different role play by four governance councils vs. other bodies on campus (i.e., Academic Senate, Classified Senate)	12	20.7%	15	25.9%	10	17.2%	13	22.4%	8	13.8%	58	100.0%
Know how to get involved in governance	19	32.8%	23	39.7%	10	17.2%	1	1.7%	5	8.6%	58	100.0%
Governance is helping our college make effective decisions	4	7.0%	15	26.3%	16	28.1%	11	19.3%	11	19.3%	57	100.0%

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What is your current level of involvement in Foothill’s governance structure?

	Do Not Participate in Shared Governance		Participate in Shared Governance	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Very involved</b>	0	0.0%	21	36.2%
<b>Involved</b>	7	11.1%	22	37.9%
<b>Slightly involved</b>	11	17.5%	7	12.1%
<b>Not involved</b>	45	71.4%	8	13.8%
<b>Total</b>	63	100.0%	58	100.0%

Which of the following are reasons why you're not more involved in Foothill's governance?

	Do Not Participate in Shared Governance		Participate in Shared Governance	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Not interested in getting involved in governance</b>	13	20.6%	2	3.4%
<b>Not interested in getting more involved than I already am</b>	6	9.5%	11	19.0%
<b>Don't have enough time</b>	37	58.7%	18	31.0%
<b>Not available when meetings are scheduled</b>	11	17.5%	4	6.9%
<b>Don't have support from my unit</b>	2	3.2%	1	1.7%
<b>Don't feel encouraged to participate</b>	15	23.8%	6	10.3%
<b>Don't understand it well enough to participate</b>	15	23.8%	5	8.6%
<b>Concerned about college politics</b>	14	22.2%	18	31.0%
<b>Total</b>	63	179.4%	58	112.1%

Note: This question asked participants to select all items that apply, however, the total number reported here is based on the total number of survey respondents. Therefore, the total percentage will be over 100%.

# Appendix D: Recommendations

## Communication & Collaboration Recommendations

- **Generate a marketing and recruitment strategy** to assure any and all students, classified professionals, faculty, and administrators who want to participate in shared governance know the steps to get involved, what is expected of them, and what they can expect from their engagement.
- **Invest in additional formal orientation and training** to help ensure members feel comfortable with and confident in their charge and the shared governance process, with the following considerations:
  - Require participation in the orientation and training
  - Generate ways to refresh the information for continuing members
  - Craft process of orienting and training new members who join after the academic year has begun
- **Refresh the orientation binders and shared governance handbook to provide additional clarity on the councils, their charges and roles, and the shared governance process by:**
  - Improving and/or adding more detail to the map/flowchart of the shared governance process from formation of charges to the President's decision-making; and
  - Providing additional context within the larger campus in order to illustrate how shared governance fits with other groups (e.g., Senates) and operational departments (e.g., Office of Equity).

## Agenda Topics Recommendations

- **Breakdown the high-level agenda topics from the President into smaller tasks tied to specific outcomes.**
- **Design agendas to include time for topics related to the President's annual questions as well as emerging topics from the campus.**
- Along with agenda topics, **create a timeline to help prioritize topics and keep track on when recommendations are needed.**
- Review agenda topics to assure that they are indeed necessary items to discuss in shared governance.
- To further capture student engagement, **consider a student quad-chair position to ensure students have a seat at the table to set council agendas.**

## Council Member Engagement & Value Recommendations

- **Recognize how positionality affects open discussion by training council members -- particularly facilitators -- to approach meetings and policies with that understanding.**
- **Review the council composition and identify relationships that may suppress voices.**
  - Perhaps the President does not attend council meetings and supervisors do not serve on the same committees as their direct reports.
- **Craft different ways to allow employees and students who may have constraints on their time to contribute their perspectives that still values their voices.**

- For future research conducted on the effectiveness of shared governance, **consider changing the Likert-like anchors on the survey items to remove the “Neutral” option, and/or adding an “I’m not sure” or “I don’t know” option.**

## Decision-Making & Effectiveness Recommendations

- When discussing topics, especially when a vote or recommendation is required, **invite experts to present on topic** rather than simply relying on shared documents or perhaps limited discussion within council meetings.
- **Research ways to allay some of the influence occurring while members vote**, perhaps through ballots or even physical meeting environment.
  - In formal communications from the President’s Office back to the councils, **demonstrate that the council’s opinions are taken into consideration when decisions are being made** by including any explanation as to why a decision has been made, especially when the decision may be counter to a council’s recommendation.
- 

## Overall Recommendation

- **Structurally place the Advisory Council above the other three councils so it can serve as a centralized governance council** to help clarify the shared governance process from start to finish.
  - Specifically collaborating with the President to help set agenda topics and distribute charges to appropriate councils.
  - Receiving recommendations from councils and making final recommendations to the President.
  - Understanding and communicating to the other councils the President’s decisions, including how it was arrived at and what happens next.
- **Have Advisory Council include representatives from the other councils to ensure there is no knowledge gap between the councils.**
  - These council representatives would be responsible for sharing information with and from their council and the Advisory Council.
- **Have Advisory Council tri-chairs serve as representatives from the constituency groups to prevent knowledge gaps.**
  - The tri-chairs would be responsible for sharing information with and from their Senates and the Advisory Council.

# The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges

The RP Group strengthens the ability of California Community Colleges to discover and undertake high-quality research, planning, and assessments that improve evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and success for all students.

## Project Team

Kristen Fong, PhD

Darla Cooper, EdD

Alyssa Nguyen, MA

[www.rpgroup.org](http://www.rpgroup.org)