# Transcript *Fireside Charla* 009: Shared Governance

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**Adela:** I'm excited to introduce a very special charla focused on the topic of Shared Governance at SDSU. I was thrilled to provide this platform to host a conversation amongst some of our campus Shared Governance advocates while I was at our SDSU Georgia campus. If you don't know what Shared Governance is, you are about to find out. Shared Governance is ultimately about trust, a value central to my leadership and our university. I am a Shared Governance advocate and my hope is that you will be one too. Enjoy the charla!

**Brittany Santos-Derieg:** I want to thank everyone for joining us today. My name is Brittany Santos-Derieg and I'm Adela's Chief of Staff and I am thrilled to be facilitating this conversation. And I want to jump right in. So let's go around the table. Christian, why don't you start us off? Who are you, and why is shared governance important to you?

**Christian Onwuka:** Hello, my name is Christian Onwuka, fifth year Business Finance major here at San Diego State. I'm the A.S. President for this 2019-20 academic year. And when it comes to shared governance, I think it's important that we're including student perspective in the conversations regarding what this university is doing moving forward, especially with the strategic planning, like progressing this next year, being able to sit at the table of administration and be the voice for students and make sure that everything that we're doing, there is a student focus and student input into the decisions that are being made.

I think that's what makes shared governance so unique, especially when it comes to this campus. Because I have friends who are involved in student government at other schools, and they're like, "Oh, well, that's cool. Like,

you know, we do this, we do that." And I'm like, it's a whole different ball game here at San Diego State. And it is a good thing. I think it's, it's good that we're putting this responsibility on our students to make sure that they're able to determine what their experience will look like. And the fact that we have been able to really assimilate student voice and student perspective into a lot of the major decisions regarding this university, is what's going to allow us to continue to progress the way we have been progressing. I'm excited for the future. I'm excited for my brother to get here and you know, have a whole different campus, but also a similar experience where his voice is being heard. I mean, he feels like he's welcomed here on campus. So that's why I feel like shared governance is important.

**Rebecca Lewison:** I'm Rebecca Lewison, I'm a professor in Biology and I was one of the people, but as a number of us were, who were working to initiate and really coalesce the conversations around shared governance in 2017. I think what's exciting about today is this is a really great opportunity to continue those conversations with a wider group of people.

**Stephen Schellenberg:** Hello, my name is Stephen Schellenberg. I'm a professor of Geological Sciences here at SDSU, started in 2002. And for the last about six years have been serving in administration, currently as the Assistant Vice President for Educational Effectiveness. So over the years, I've served as a senator, senator at large, many different roles within formal structure of shared governance with the University Senate.

**Mark Wheeler:** My name is Mark Wheeler. I'm a professor in the Department of Philosophy here at San Diego State. And I've been at San Diego State since 1995. And I've been engaged in shared governance of various sorts since then, through the Senate, through CFA, as chair of the Department of Philosophy, and glad to be here today. I was a part of the shared governance working group over the last year or so and I'm pleased

to see how that's matured and this is one of the fruits of that process, it's great. And glad to be a part of this conversation.

**Bann Attiq:** And my name is Bann. I'm a staff member at San Diego State. I'm an alum, I have my undergraduate from Business. I have been in Senate for almost four years, I'm still a staff senator and I have previously served as an officer the last couple years in Senate. My primary job is I work in the College of Sciences and I'm an appointment analyst. So I take care of all the faculty and staff in the College of Sciences. And I manage the budgets.

**Becca:** Something that you said Christian about- this is something that is not just for students but for all of us. You know, yes, you can serve on Senate or be on Associated Students as an executive, but it's also something that we're asking everyone to do.

**Christian:** I think that's what really makes shared governance, the responsibility, like, factor, heavy and just having to always remember that your decision isn't just affecting your life, it's affecting everybody else that you're going to walk and meet on this campus. Um, so that's where like, you know, the responsibility is really unspoken, but it's huge.

**Brittany:** I think what we're taking away is that shared governance is not new to San Diego State. Listening to the introductions, there is decades and decades of history, folks that are passionate about what shared governance means. I think it's been a part of the work that each of you have done in your role as faculty, staff, as alums, as students. And what we're, what's been accomplished this year, is crystallizing that into principles.

And so let's talk a little bit about what those principles are. Becca?

**Becca:** Yeah, I think that's a really good point that this isn't something new. I think what I've mentioned started in 2017, was a really more of a reignition of that commitment that has been a part of San Diego State and and an affirmation and maybe even a recognition that without shared governance, this campus can't achieve its ambitious and important goals in any domain, whether it's as educators or as a research institution. And I think that- so I think your point is a really good one that this has always been a part of the bedrock of San Diego State and what we've been able to do, and many other people have joined the conversation is to just recommit and really understand not just what we want shared governance to be at San Diego State, but how we want it to, what we want it to look like how, as you said, operationalize, how do we make this just a part of our fabric?

**Brittany:** I don't think that we've defined shared governance yet. So what are we talking about? Stephen?

**Stephen:** I would say it's sharing governance, which is really a short restatement of the question for a definition. But in a way, it really is. I mean, we're a very complex organization. We know who we serve, both in terms of our students, and the broader community. But we have to work effectively through those things. And, and part of the spark for the conversation about some principles is that in our current university policy file we refer to, we will perform and our educational structure is guided by the principles of shared governance, but there are no actual principles laid out. So I think part of this is developing some of those and proposing them to the University Senate and also broadcasting them across the campus for input and feedback. And it was what a lot of this past year was about. And they really boiled down in my mind to the three, the three terms that we sort of identified as key, which is really respect, communication, and responsibility.

And so that place that you hear about shared governance, other than universities, oftentimes in the health care and hospitals, because there's a

coordinated care. So we're here sort of serving our students and we really have to coordinate across that. And coordination requires really those three things, those principles.

**Becca:** One of the things I think that's so important, as we think about what this is, is sometimes to think what it's not. One of the concerns people raise is well, "I have an opinion, or I'm really invested. And so I express that opinion. And so ultimately, a decision is made that maybe doesn't reflect the contribution that I might have made." It doesn't mean that shared governance doesn't happen, right? It means that many voices were heard, you know, there were a lot of stakeholders, and people, you know, community members engaged and ultimately, a decision had to be made. And as long as we're able to hear those voices, respect the voices, communicate about decisions, and take responsibility for those decisions, that is shared governance.

**Mark:** Yeah, and I think the main concept, the concept of trust is truly fundamental, creating a culture, a climate of trust. You know, shared governance, can be contrasted with the abuse of power, right? So if we think about sharing power, and empowering members of our community, to engage and collaborate and build towards a healthy community, the alternative would be an abuse of power where someone is subjected, oppressed, or otherwise put to the task without having a chance to put in their voice.

**Bann:** So from a practical standpoint, the way I look at shared governance and try to live shared governance is through collaboration, collaborating with my colleagues across campus and sharing common practices. Could be simple common practices, it could be about policy, serving on committees so staff can have a voice in a process or a policy from the beginning, but also following through. So collaboration, for me is key to having shared governance.

**Mark:** And the Senate, I think, is one of the best long-standing living examples of an effort on the part of this community to share governance. And one way to embody the spirit of shared governance is to participate in the Senate. And there's nothing so exciting as coming to a Senate meeting, meeting the new senators, and engaging in a time-honored process of parliamentary discussion about what's most important in the general welfare of the university. Because that's the Senate's mandate, to consider the general welfare of our community, and then deliberate and formulate policy and make council.

**Bann:** So one of the things that we did last year in Senate is we held lunches, several lunches, and we invited members of the community from faculty and staff, from our auxiliaries, different units, and it was small groups of 20 to 25 people, it was a great way to engage a lot of different people that would not have an opportunity to connect, because they work across campus and different divisions and generally would not work together. So it was, it was a great collaborative effort. And one way that, I think, was a shared governance win.

**Becca:** I think it's a great point, because it's really pointing to this, that shared governance is a *process*. It's not just a thing, you don't just do it once. And what you were just saying is that, and it builds on Mark's point as well, we have a fantastic University Senate. And that's what's so important, I think, is that it represents students and staff, faculty and administrators. And as important as the Senate is, it doesn't mean that shared governance stops outside of the Senate.

**Bann:** Absolutely.

It has to be everywhere, right? The other example that that really jumps out at me is just all the listening tours that, again, were led by the Senate before we even hired President de la Torre about what we wanted as a president. Like that's shared governance, right? That's the process of how

do we engage a community, whether you're senator, whether you've never been to Senate, or you don't even know your senator is like, you're a part. And you have a responsibility.

**Brittany:** So, we talked earlier that the other major area that practices shared governance, are hospitals and health clinics, because patient outcomes are so integral to the work that they do. Why do you think it is that universities are the other major environment where shared governance is so important?

**Stephen:** Well, I would say that there's some similarities, some parallels, obviously, oftentimes even in terms of the student journey, I mean, we're a very complex organization, we have to have a lot of interactions and conversations. So whether you're a faculty member, or a staff member, and Student Affairs are over in Business and Financial Administration, that, that we all have this shared understanding of what we're trying to accomplish. And that really requires communication because we all live in our own little ecosystems. And we all have our direct responsibilities.

**Brittany:** How do we bring this from the abstract to the concrete? What does that actually look like for the administrator who's listening for the director, for the faculty member, who wants to practice shared governance? How do they do that?

**Becca:** Well, I think it's a, it's certainly a commitment to- it is a commitment to live this process, it's a commitment to recognizing that there are diverse opinions, that there are diverse experiences, and as whether you're an administrator, or a student, or a director, that to be- to achieve student outcomes and student success, and I would even say university success, it requires a commitment to a process, and it's a process that's slow. You cannot rush it, or it can be slow, certainly. And I think that also requires, maybe one of the other pillars should have been patience. Because I think, you know, we can't, there's no instant recipe. And, and I think Mark made

this point earlier that what ultimately, the enabling condition for communication and respect and responsibility is trust. And the only way you can build trust is through this process.

**Stephen:** Part of my responsibility or so that I got involved with just from interest in student success more broadly, is we have a university seminar for first-semester students, especially commuter students, and that involved bringing in lots of other people. So we had faculty that we drew in, we had Student Affairs experts, staff coming in across divisions, to sort of share this, share this information to the students and engage those students in their own learning from the very beginning. That was something that took a lot of sharing.

So a one-unit course 50 minutes a week, who could we bring in to talk with those students, whether they're faculty, staff, administrators. We have some for how to approach professors, because it can be intimidating right? So we have a faculty member, Lisa Gates, who comes in, and other faculty have done this as well, and talks about sort of professors, you know, don't bite- or most don't. We're kidding around, we've gotten rid of most of them.

**Christian:** When it comes to faculty, I felt like, it was important for me my freshman year, it was stressed that I'm an adult, and that transition from high school to college, it's like, "Oh, I'm still a kid, and I can't really speak my mind." But in college, it's like, "No, you can say what you feel is right. And you can argue your opinion, you can present your, your perspective in a very respectful way, and your professors or your, you know, lecturers, whatever, they will, they can, they can hear you. And then you can have that conversation." Office hours was big. I mean, I think students are so scared to go talk to their professors, especially at a bigger university where you could be in a 500 person lecture hall, and they don't feel like they have that quote, unquote, "connection." But that's what office hours are for. So being able to stress that especially for the first year students, so that way their third and fourth years they're not just now getting to talk to a professor.

**Mark:** What's been wonderful this past year, as we've been having this conversation about shared governance, is I think there's broad recognition that as we share in our cooperative effort to educate students, and to be the best researchers and teachers and staff persons that we can be, it's okay if we make mistakes because we're all working together and we'll catch each other, we can trust that someone has our back. The more that becomes a conversation as we have meetings with various stakeholders in a given unit, the better.

The concrete example that comes to mind is the Student Grievance Committee on campus. So there is a unique factor in our community, where students can come together with staff, administrators, faculty, and they can address their concerns. And there are many moving parts just on that. And everybody who comes together has to have confidence that no one's going to speak out of turn, no one's going to share information that's confidential, that students are going to be respected just as much as faculty, no one has a prerogative to trump somebody else and override them. And I've been a part of that for a number of years. And I'm amazed at the quality of those conversations, even when there is a bad actor on the stage. Everybody else just comes together and works through that. "Okay, so we realized that's happening, let's see how we can stay in a shared governance model as we work past that towards justice."

**Brittany:** So pass that example, what is the future of shared governance at San Diego State? What are some of the things and the changes that are on the horizon now that we have this document which sets out all of these principles and practices that we've come to understand is what shared governance is? Now what's next?

**Christian:** It's kind of hard to predict, because you have to be flexible, and you have to adapt to the time. How, you know, institutions can kind of get out of date is when they are so set in rules that they've made maybe 10 or

15 years prior, and they don't, you know, update these rules and update the connections or the conversations that should be happening. And that's where you get, you know, new people coming in and having, you know, some animosity toward how things are done or procedures and policies. So I'd say just the future shared governance, it's so flexible, and it's so I want to say, sensitive, but it's not going to be set in stone. I think the way that we've been doing it, especially, you know, in my years of being involved has been really good. And us continuing to make sure that different stakeholders are being heard and their issues are being addressed and their concerns are being brought to the table. And then we also come up with a way to fix those concerns. I think that's the best way.

But as you know, as the years go on, if we identify a new group, making sure that they're, you know, that they are representative at the table. If there's an issue that is transcendent amongst different departments, addressing those issues when they happen and not letting it kind of fester and, and gain momentum, to where it can be a problem for many more departments or different parts of campus. So I'd say that's where shared government is looking, I feel like we're doing a good job, just want to make sure we keep on doing that.

And then just making sure that the people coming in after, well on an A.S. level, after, you know, this year, they understand their responsibility. And we are, you know, as executive officers, train them to let them know, "You cannot be scared in this role. You can't hold your tongue and hope that you don't step on somebody's toes. No, you were elected in this position to do this job. So do it with a great intention and great seriousness and understand the impact that you're having not only on yourself, not only on your team, but the 37,000 students that go to this campus, and call this university home."

**Becca:** It's a great way to think about it because I think it really is about affirming this part of who we are and what we do. And our expectation that

whether you're a new student, or you're a new staff member, or a new faculty member, or you're a new administrator, and even with our new president that, like, this is our code of conduct.

**Bann:** So one of the things that I've done in my regular job as an appointment analyst is I review all the open positions, staff positions in the College of Sciences, and help write the position descriptions, and also the interview questions and a lot of the different things that go through the recruitment process. And so one of the things that I've added to our interview questions for new staff positions is: What is your experience with shared governance? Can you give an example?

**Becca:** And I think another part also, Bann, that you've been really integral in is thinking forward, like how do we not just put this in our job descriptions, but in our expectations for our leaders across different levels?

**Bann:** Exactly. Things like, "Well, did you practice your governance? How did you practice your governance? What is shared governance look like in your department, in your division?" So those are all different types of questions that could be incorporated in performance reviews for everyone across campus.

**Stephen:** I think a great thing about that is that it requires a broader conversation about a shared understanding of shared governance, right? And that part of this, it requires the individual, every individual, to sort of reflect on what they've been doing and how they've been doing it. So we talked a little bit about gathering- if you're a decision maker, every one that's going to be affected by that decision should feel that they've been heard about the concerns plus or minus. There's also the backside of it after the decision has been made, that communicating why that decision was made, and understanding the consequences and then facilitating the successful implementation of whatever it might be, right? But that, that

communication isn't just, you know, between individuals, but it's also through time.

**Mark:** And this is a pivotal point, as we move into a strategic planning process, to bring these principles of shared governance forward in that discussion, at every, every step. And I think it's also wonderful that it dovetails with the emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Because one of the most important imperatives with shared governance anywhere is that the most vulnerable and the least well respected historically, are raised up, are brought into the conversation. Those who've been forced to be quiet or left aside are brought in and brought in, up and then given the voice that they've always deserved. And especially in the strategic planning process, we can really rethink "Well, how is our community reacting and responding to the needs of the most vulnerable? And how can that make the future of San Diego State University more inclusive, and more respectful, and allowing for more communication all around?"

**Brittany:** As we wrap up, it's important to come back together to say that this has been an incredible achievement, that in the past year, you've taken decades of history at San Diego State that has been in practice but in pockets, and articulated it into a shared document that was collaboratively developed, with students, with faculty, with lecturers, with staff at all levels that have been here six minutes and 60 years, around principles that we can now hold leaders accountable to, that we can open committees with, that we can include in our searches to ensure that the new leaders, the new staff and faculty that we bring onto campus are open and excited about shared governance and as excited as we are. And that as we move forward into strategic planning, as we move forward into what the Associated Students, what the Senate, what San Diego's idea for the next 121 years looks like, we do so together.

So are there any other closing comments about just what this means to you, in the moment what this feels like?

**Mark:** Well, I have a big mouth. So I'll start it out. I've been here since 1995. This is my first and maybe, in the end, my only job. And I would never have predicted that. But I fell in love with this place because the people I got to work with were already committed to shared governance way back in '95, which seems a long time ago now. And the fact that we as a community are being intentional now about shaping ourselves even more forthrightly with respect to shared governance just makes me even more interested in the future of this institution and my time here, it's just wonderful.

**Christian:** I'll come in from a student perspective. I'm excited to see the name of SDSU improve. And when I say that- when it comes to shared governance and having students have the experience of being able to facilitate these conversations and be a part of them, not only are we allowing them to have their voices be heard, but we're preparing them to do that in the next stage. And when you look at like, quote, unquote, "top universities" like Harvard, Yale, what makes them so prestigious is that their alumni have done things, like, to change the world. And the fact that we're giving students the opportunity to work on that now so that way, when they get into this next stage, and they change the world in their own way, it only makes San Diego State look that much better.

Because we're saying, "Yeah, we were training our students to consider all different perspectives and all people involved." And that's why I'm excited to see you know, the shared governance continue to develop and continue to really thrive because it's only going to make our students better, which in turn makes San Diego State look better.

**Bann:** One of the exciting things that we worked on last year is we had multiple open forums for Mission Valley. And it was exciting to see all the different people that came to the forum somewhere from on campus, somewhere off campus, community members, students, undergrad and grad students. And we had the opportunity to attend multiple sessions, and

every one of them was just a little different, and more ideas, newer ideas, different ideas, emerged from every one of those open forums. So that was very exciting. And having the opportunity to engage the general public, that was exciting as well, because San Diego State isn't just for the faculty, the staff, and the students. San Diego State is for San Diego. And it's always been for San Diego. So the community members are part of our fabric too.

**Becca:** I see this as a real important step in this next phase of the university and what the participation and being able to guide some of the shared governance sort of evolution is that I feel that, as a community, that we are empowered, like we have the ability to do things that, as you said, it was in pockets, and that with this sort of more full embrace of shared governance, just the possibilities of what we can achieve as a campus I see as just exponentially larger.

**Brittany:** I want to thank everybody here for joining us. I also want to thank President de la Torre for giving us this platform for talking about shared governance. And truly this is just the beginning and as we go forward and we go forward together. Thank you everyone.

**Narrator:** *Fireside Charla* is recorded at KPBS studios. Our Senior Producer and Managing Editor is Maria Keckler, our Operations Manager is Lisa Morrisette, original music and editing is by SDSU student Kevin Krick. And for their help and creative input we give special thanks to: Tom Karlo, John Decker, Perette Godwin, Brittany Santos-Derieg, Luis Murillo, La Monica Everett-Haynes, Joyce Gattas, Michele LaGrandeur, Kelly Woodhouse, Jeff Ernst, Scott Hargrove, Sean Hawes, Ethan Garcia, Dan Montoya, Travis McCauley, Luke Wood, Coleen Geraghty, James Tarbox, James Frazee, Cory Marshall, Kao Saechao, Rudy Arias, Uriel Avila Zuniga, Katie May, Angela Odis Brawner, Seth Mallios, and to you for listening and sharing this podcast with others. Join the conversation at sdsu.edu/firesidecharla and be sure to connect with President de la Torre on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram.