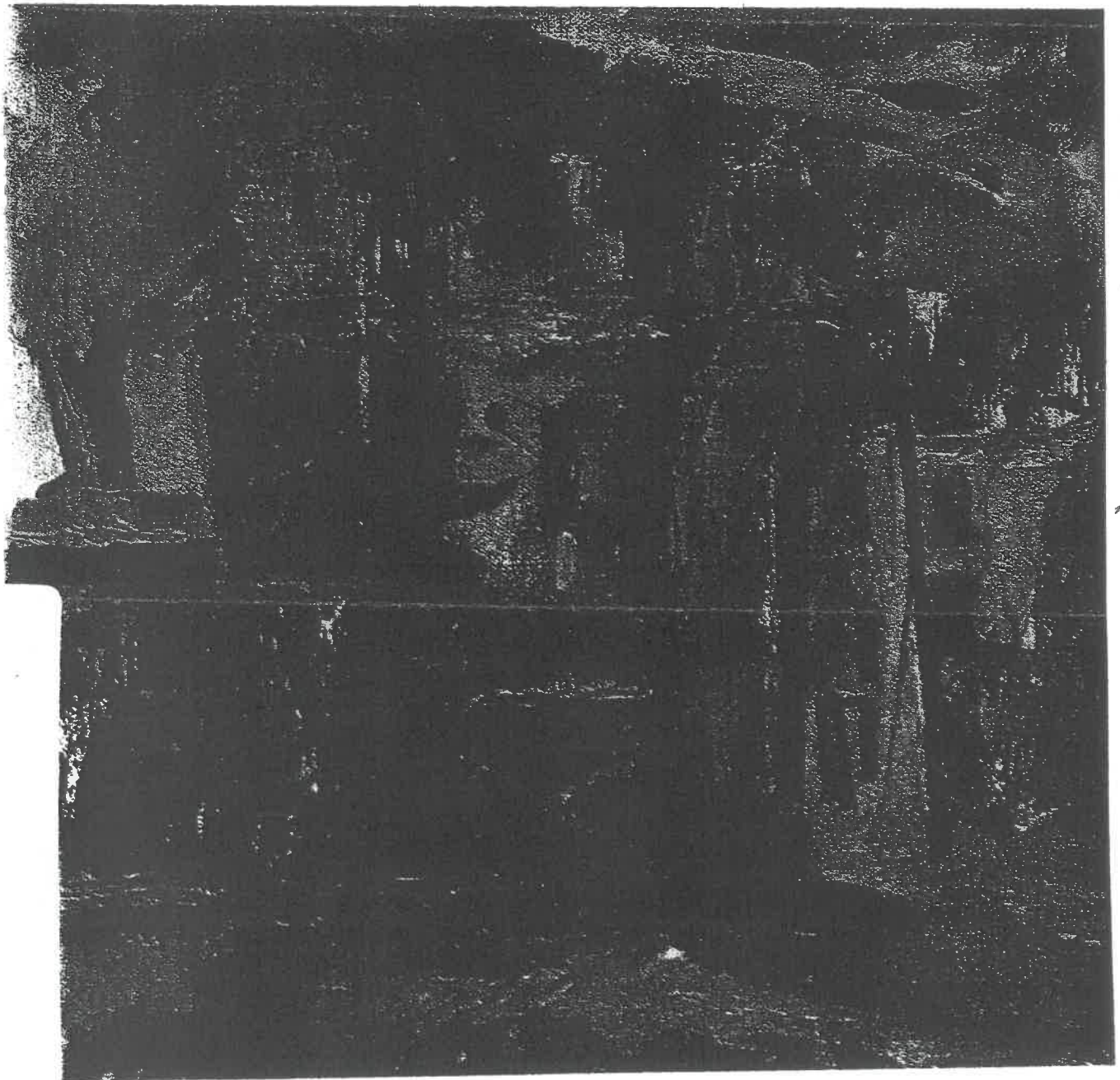


B R O O K D A L E

# PODIUM

A FORUM OF INQUIRY 1994



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## ON GOVERNANCE

**T**he 1989 Middle States Evaluation Report criticized Brookdale Community

College's governance structure for its limited role and for its lack of representation from the various constituencies of the college. In 1993 the Evaluation Team praised the College for its efforts to reform the governance system at the College. The report noted "that over an eighteen-month period, with significant input from the overall college community, a Governance Steering Committee developed a comprehensive system of participatory governance" (Report to Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students of Brookdale Community College, July 29, 1993). The Middle States Evaluation Team has recognized what has been an exhausting, but exhilarating, undertaking for those who participated in the reorganization of the governance system at the College.

The idea for a new governance system at Brookdale originated in the spring of 1989 when three faculty members discussed the need for a forum at which academic matters at the College could be examined and debated by the faculty as a whole. In pursuit of this objective, a brief meeting was held after a Faculty Association meeting in early April and it was decided to hold a formal meeting on April 11. The meeting was held to a standing-room-only

crowd, with a few members of the Middle States Association Evaluation Team present. A fourteen-member steering committee was unanimously recommended to form a faculty governance body. The Middle States team went on to make the formation of such a body one of its strongest recommendations. On April 19, then-President of the College Joshua Smith, was requested to obtain the approval of the Board of Trustees for the formation of a faculty governance commission which would include the original fourteen-member steering committee and three additional members appointed by the president.

While awaiting a presidential mandate, the original fourteen-member group met throughout late April, May and early June and proposed a regularly constituted faculty senate the objectives of which would be to improve faculty morale, give the faculty a more unified control over the academic agenda of the College and change the College community's perception of the role of the faculty.

During these meetings it was concluded that an exclusive faculty body would merely perpetuate the already existing faculty-administration tension and that such a body would be unworkable without the support of all segments of the College community. Discussion therefore focused on how to more fully integrate constituencies of the College in a broader plan for governance. Several models at various colleges (such as Essex County College, Ocean County College, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Shippensburg [Pennsylvania] State University and SUNY Stony Brook [New York]) were then examined. The steering committee then went on to tentatively devise a representative Faculty Governance Council consisting of thirty faculty and fifteen administrators within which there would be an executive committee of six (four faculty and two administrators) which would preside over thirteen standing committees.

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ANTHONY SNYDER,  
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY



RONALD SOPENOFF,  
PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY

While the committee was working on this structure, it became aware of the work being done on governance at Raritan Community College. Professor Jere Jones, who was chairing the Raritan Task Force, was contacted and he revealed that their task force had researched governance for two years before proposing their own system. Hoping to benefit from their extensive work, the committee spent two hours with Professor Jones discussing the factors that led to their choice of a "participatory" model and the details of their committee structure and voting procedures. Professor Jones suggested that a representative style of governance would perpetuate conflicts between faculty and administration and that a participatory model could best overcome this. The entire committee was very impressed with Raritan's efforts and at the last meeting in the spring began considering a governance structure that approximated Raritan's but was adapted to the Brookdale situation. One of the most attractive aspects of the model was the creation of a college-wide steering committee. It seemed to those of us who were working to reform governance at Brookdale that a steering committee would operate to bring efficiency and order to the governance structure. Such a committee, operating as a centralized manager of the system, would link a small number of

standing committees to a college-wide agenda which could be debated in an open forum.

On June 22, 1989, President Smith formally invited the members of the steering committee and six others to serve on a Governance Commission with the charge of creating a structure that would enhance the role of the faculty in College operations, maximize cooperation of faculty and administrators in academic matters and examine the part that students might play in College governance. Eventually, a March 1, 1990 deadline was requested for the Commission to have most of its work completed. Unfortunately, due to the animosity created by contract negotiations, no meetings were held during the Fall 1989 semester. On December 19, 1989, the Governance Commission met to evaluate its progress and plan a schedule of meetings to resume work. Since there was a March 1 deadline for a preliminary report the College could forward to the Middle States Team, it was decided to meet every week after the start of the semester. In order to broaden participation, the president recommended that four non-academic staff members and two students join the Commission, bringing membership to twenty-four in all. Three subcommittees were formed to draw up various parts of the proposed structure: one for the standing committees, one

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for a Forum and Steering Committee and one for elections. After additional work in March and April, the existing College Senate provided time for the Commission to inform the College community of its progress on a new structure for overall governance at Brookdale.

The structure that the Commission devised was based on the following basic principles:

1. PARTICIPATION — a decision-making process in which those affected by a College policy and related procedures participate in the making of the policies and procedures;
2. RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY — those who are directly affected by or responsible for implementing policy are involved in the formulation of policy from beginning to end; and
3. COMMUNICATION — open and honest communication between and among the members and constituen-

cies of the College community; policy-making outside of the governance structure will be eliminated.

The Commission was determined that the adversarial and isolated nature of decision making, which was much too common in the past, would be replaced by a system where each constituency at the College (faculty, administration, staff and students) would have the opportunity as well as the responsibility to play a key role in cooperatively recommending College-wide policies and procedures which affect them. In particular, each constituency was to have a relevant and meaningful place in the process of governance where appropriate, and truly important issues, rather than marginal or trivial ones, would be brought before the various segments of the system. In addition, some way needed to be found to enhance communication between the various constituencies and between

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***Success will depend on the hard work of those of us who continue to be involved in the effort to make Brookdale Community College succeed in its goals.***

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them and the president of the College. Too often in the past it was possible for administrators, the president and the numerous committees to work in isolation and to propose policies which were unknown to other parts of the College community and about which there was little, if any, meaningful discussion or debate. Persons who were responsible for implementing policies rarely reported to or were held accountable by the College community in the discharge of their duties.

In order to achieve the various objectives the Commission had in mind, the following structure was recommended to the College community and to the president in the summer of 1990:

**1. COLLEGE FORUM:** Open to all members of the college community, the Chair of the Forum, in consultation with the Steering Committee, will set the agenda for each meeting and will determine which constituencies may vote on which issues. Open debate and discussion on any issue of College-wide concern is encouraged. Persons and committees responsible for creating and implementing policies are accountable

before the Forum. There would be a monthly newsletter to inform the College community of the activity of the Forum and the Standing Committees. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Forum will meet with the president of the College once each month for communication and planning purposes.

**2. THE STEERING COMMITTEE:** This nine-member committee, with representatives from the faculty, administration, staff and students, will not make policy, but will direct the day-to-day operation of the governance structure. It will decide which issues are sent to which parties or committees and will set time frames for deliberation and decision. It may establish *ad hoc* committees for those matters which do not fall under the jurisdiction of one of the existing standing committees. One of its chief goals is to maintain communication between the various parts of the governance structure and the College community as a whole. After the three-year trial period, it shall recommend to the president any changes to the structure.

**3. THE STANDING COMMITTEES:** In order to

keep the number of committees to a minimum and thereby speed deliberation, decision and communication, there shall be only six standing committees. They shall be the Academic Council, Academic Standards, Institutional Planning, Professional Development, Student Development and College Life committees. All other existing committees are either to be subsumed by these committees or are to be subcommittees of them. The subcommittees will do regular housekeeping work related to their area of expertise, but changes to the policies they work under can only be made by the standing committees and the Forum.

**4. RECOMMENDATION STATUS:** The governance system does not make final policy, but rather recommends to the president of the College who, with the Board of Trustees' approval, implements those policies. It is desirable that the president use the governance system to aid in the formulation and dissemination of college-wide policies that originate from his or the Board's office in keeping with the spirit of participatory governance.

The new governance structure was approved for a three-year trial period. At the end of this period, in the Spring of 1994, all members of the Forum voting constituencies will vote to approve or reject the governance system. It is hoped that the College community will recollect some of the successes of the system

noted in the 1993 Periodic Review Report. The authors of this document pointed out that "the keys to its [the governance system's] success relate to its involvement in the key educational decisions of the College" (*Periodic Review Report*, May 28, 1993). The Report goes on to cite examples of debates and decisions on such issues as grading policy (specifically the "D" grade), the creation of a smoke-free environment on campus and a proposal for a credit-by-examination regulation. The Report concludes by expressing its belief that the provisional, participatory governance system is "... structured to cope with the major issues facing the College."

Any governance structure, regardless of how participatory or inclusive it may be, is successful because of the efforts of the individuals involved. Over the past three years George Abel, Maris Lown and Carl Calendar have provided outstanding leadership as Chairpersons of the Steering Committee and Forum. Their efforts and those of the chairs and members of the standing committees are responsible for whatever successes the new participatory governance system has achieved. The continuing success of the system will depend on the hard work of those of us who continue to be involved in the effort to make Brookdale Community College succeed in its goals.