



THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Public Policy Center

**Governance is Not a Thing:
Boundaries and Everyday Boundary Work
in the Governing of U.S. Colleges & Universities**



Monday, November 7, 2016

1:30 - 3:00 pm

W113 Seashore Hall

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Using data from in-depth interviews with members of governing boards (N=44) of U.S. colleges and universities and informed by content and thematic analysis of 70 years of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges' (AGB) trade magazine publication, I examine trustees' first-hand accounts and perspectives of what it means to govern in the present day context of higher education. Specifically, I examine board members' perceptions of their work, perspectives on matters of interest to higher education decision makers generally and their governing boards specifically, how and in what ways boards and individual members make contributions in and through governance, and perceptions of and perspectives on the complexity of higher education authority structures. While boards perform specified tasks, some of which vary across types of institutions and based on specific institutional cultures, interestingly, interviewees consistently describe and situate their work and duties in terms of dominant modes of governing. Rather than the work of governing being defined by a set of variable tasks or things that boards do, I argue that governing is more aptly conceptualized as a performance of multiple everyday modes or orientations toward work. Interviewees suggest that individual members and boards collectively adopt each of four modes of governing at different times and in different contexts. I provide evidence outlining four dimensions on which these modes of governing vary. Observed in how trustees situate their work in talk and experiential accounts, a hallmark of these differentiating dimensions is an ever-present mindfulness of boundaries in governance work. These modes of governing—supporting, overseeing, advising, and directing—reflect varied conceptualizations of relational boundaries between governance and management, governing and managing, and most prominently, in the relationship between governing boards and presidents and their executive administrative teams. I discuss implications of these findings for understanding governance in the current higher educational context and how these insights into governing make contributions to theory at the nexus between organizational and higher education scholarship.

This talk is part of the **Inequality Seminar** which is a seminar and speaker series that provides a forum on campus for faculty and graduate students who are interested in inequality broadly defined. It is an opportunity for faculty and graduate students to present their research and to hear about other inequality-related work from researchers on the off-campus. These talks are free and open to the public. For more information about the Inequality Seminar, contact Professor Sarah Bruch at sarah-bruch@uiowa.edu.

Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to attend all University of Iowa-sponsored events. If you are a person with a disability who requires an accommodation, in order to participate in this program, please contact the Department of Sociology in advance at 335-2502.

