University of North Carolina Board of Governors

Survey Results
February 2016

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Introduction

The University of North Carolina Board of Governors has recently found itself at the center of controversy in the media. The transitions occurring within the Board and the on-boarding of a new President represent an opportunity for the Board to re-examine how it functions as a collective in service of the UNC system, its faculty and staff, and its students. The Board is currently at a critical inflection point.

"We are at a turning point with the potential to be a national leader and presence in the future of higher education, not only in the state of North Carolina, but across the country. This is only possible if we determine to work appropriately and effectively with our new President."

Board Member

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), with input from the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, created and administered an online survey to gather input into a two-day retreat focusing on becoming a high performance board. The survey gathered ratings and open-ended responses across four areas including: Roles & Responsibilities, Strategic Priorities, Board Operations, and Board Dynamics. All ratings were made using a four-point agreement scale with response options including: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). Two open-ended questions asked what the Board is doing well as well as what the Board is not doing well. The final survey question was intended to gather information about any areas Board members deemed important, but that may not have directly been asked about in other survey sections. This question simply asked, "Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the Board and its functioning?" This report provides an overview of survey data.

Twenty-nine of the 33 Board members invited to participate in the survey completed the survey for a resulting response rate of 88%. The figure below indicates the number of respondents at each level of Board tenure. As illustrated, the majority of respondents (52%) have served on the Board between 1 and 3 years.

■ Less than a year
■ 1-3 years
■ 4 or more years
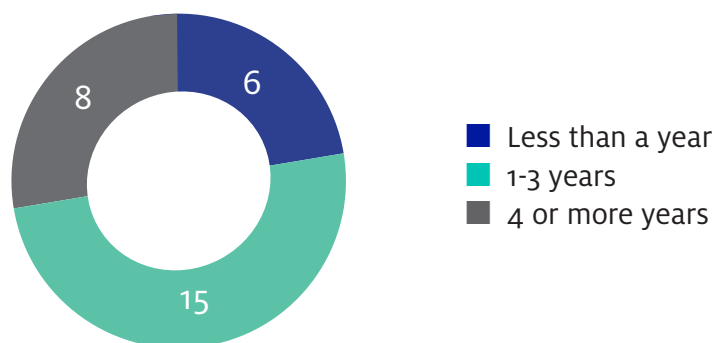
Findings

To provide a "big picture" perspective of ratings across survey sections, items within each section were averaged into scale scores. Average scale ratings are presented as Figure 2 and ranged from 2.47 to 2.65. Board Operations was the highest rated area and Roles & Responsibilities was the lowest rated area; though with only a 0.18 difference between the highest and lowest rated sections it is not likely to be a perceptible difference. Item-level data provide a more nuanced perspective and indicate that while there are quite a few areas where disagreement is expressed, there are also many areas of agreement to build from.
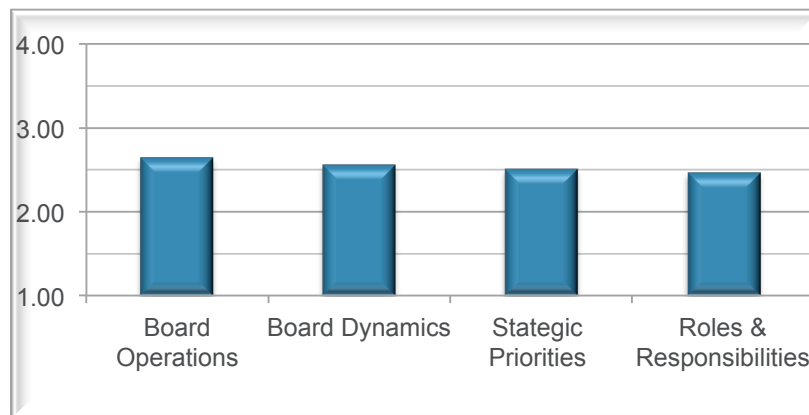

Figure 2. Scale Means (n=29)

Item-level data are organized and presented by each of the four survey sections. Shades of red are used to reflect disagreement with the item indicated, while shades of green reflect agreement with the item. Not all percentages add up to 100 percent due to rounding error.

Items where six or more members expressed strong agreement or strong disagreement are noted. Interestingly, there are only 4 items where that is the case; 2 areas of strong agreement and 2 areas of strong disagreement.

There was not a statistically significant (p<0.01) difference between means or item-level ratings based on Board tenure, with one exception. Board members with less than a year of experience on the Board tended to agree more with the following item than members with longer Board tenure; "The Board agrees on the appropriate balance between its role to set policy and provide oversight, and the role of the President to manage the University and speak on its behalf as the chief executive and administrative office."

Themes of comments to open-ended items are presented within the appropriate section with sample quotes used to convey meaning. The number of comments expressing sentiments captured by the theme is indicated in parentheses after the theme.

4

Roles and Responsibilities

This scale contains 4 items and focuses on the roles and responsibilities of the Board. Scale reliability (calculated using Cronbach's alpha) was 0.61, which is lower than ideal, but acceptable. Two items on this scale evoked strong responses. Six Board members (21% of respondents) strongly disagreed with the statement "The Board agrees on the appropriate balance between its role to set policy and provide oversight, and the role of the President to manage the University and speak on its behalf as the chief executive and administrative office." Seven Board members (24% of respondents) strongly agreed with the statement "The Board has adequate policies for addressing ethics concerns and conflicts of interest."

| | 0% | 20% | 40% | 60% | 80% | 100% |

The Board agrees on the appropriate balance between its role to set policy and provide oversight, and the role of the President to manage the University and speak on its behalf as the chief executive and administrative officer.
21 | 55 | 21 | 3

The Board maintains an appropriate balance between advocating for the support needed to further the University educational mission, and accountability to all of North Carolina's citizens.
3 | 38 | 59

The Board has a clear understanding of the process for addressing high-level emergencies, opportunities, and threats that can impact how and whether the University meets its mission and strategic goals.
7 | 69 | 21 | 3

The Board has adequate policies for addressing ethics concerns and conflicts of interest.
3 | 14 | 59 | 24

May not sum to 100% due to rounding.

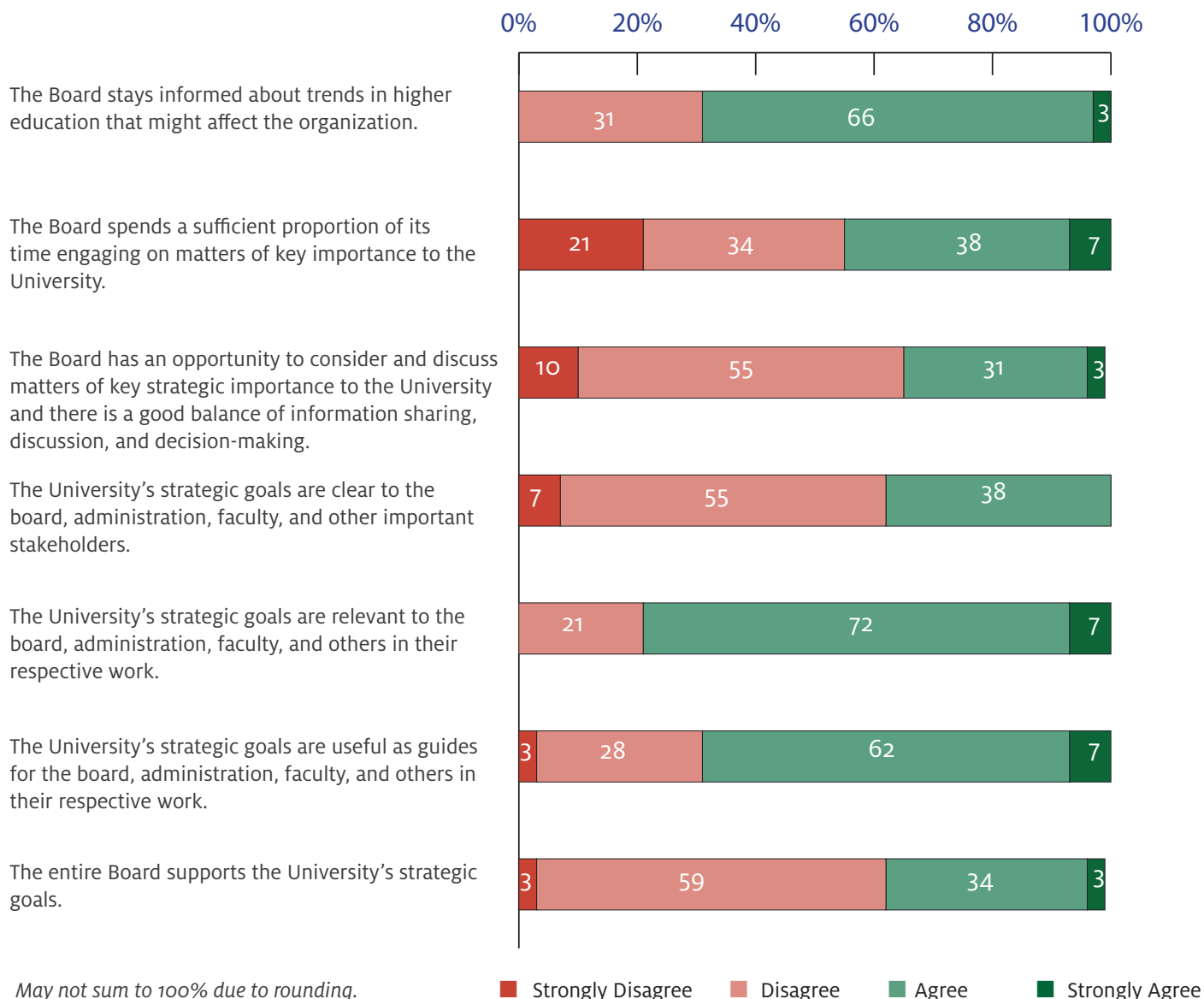■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

Open-ended comments for this section focused on the following two themes:

- **The Board does not have a clear or shared understanding of the role of the Board and how much oversight the Board should have** (8 comments). A sample comment illustrating this theme is: *"The Board's appropriate role in governance versus management is not clearly understood by all members. Hopefully the retreat will be an appropriate venue for members to discuss and gain an understanding of this distinction."* Another member indicated *"We need to much better define and get on the same page on the degree of oversight given to issues, what types of issues require more oversight by the BOG than others and the varying degrees of oversight that are appropriate, the expectations of the BOG on the degree of review of proposals from constituent institutions and the degree of oversight expected of the boards of trustees of those institutions."*

- **The Board is too focused on managing, rather than governing** (6 comments). A sample comment illustrating this theme is: *"Our board, made up of successful individuals, does entirely too much day to day management and not enough oversight."*

Some members indicated that the Board should be more involved in management and oversight, while others indicate there should be less involvement. Other comments suggest that some members *"do not fully understand, respect and adhere to the committee structure which is the mechanism used for moving business forward."* This comment is particularly interesting given the overwhelming support for committees as an appropriate mechanism for moving the substantive work of the Board forward.

Strategic Priorities

This scale contains seven items focused on the strategic priorities of the Board. Scale reliability (calculated using Cronbach's alpha) was 0.72, which is lower than ideal, but acceptable. One item on this scale evoked strong responses. Six Board members (21% of respondents) strongly disagreed with the statement *"The Board spends a sufficient proportion of its time engaging on matters of key importance to the University."*
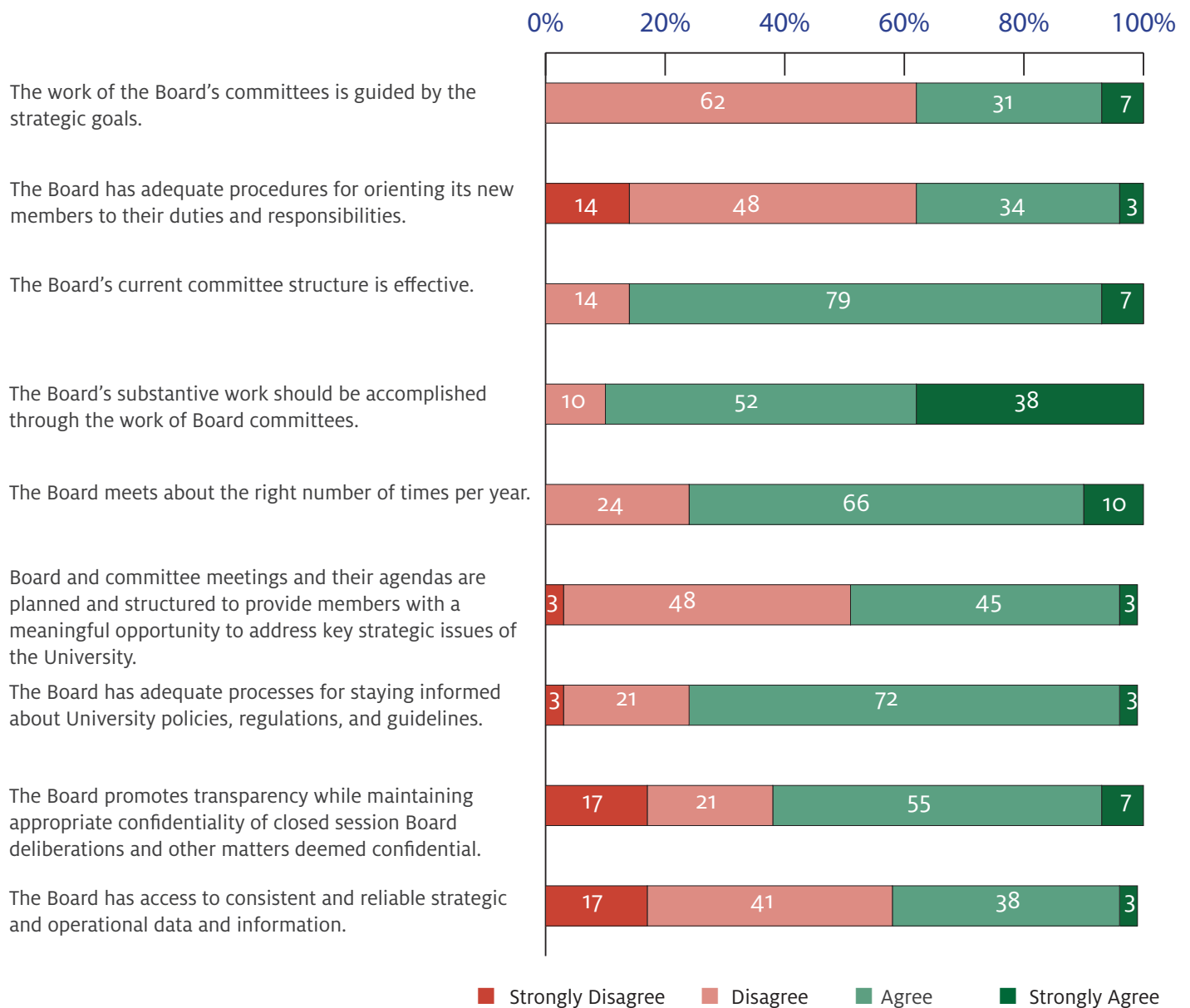
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Board stays informed about trends in higher education that might affect the organization.		31	66	3
The Board spends a sufficient proportion of its time engaging on matters of key importance to the University.	21	34	38	7
The Board has an opportunity to consider and discuss matters of key strategic importance to the University and there is a good balance of information sharing, discussion, and decision-making.	10	55	31	3
The University's strategic goals are clear to the board, administration, faculty, and other important stakeholders.	7	55	38	
The University's strategic goals are relevant to the board, administration, faculty, and others in their respective work.		21	72	7
The University's strategic goals are useful as guides for the board, administration, faculty, and others in their respective work.	3	28	62	7
The entire Board supports the University's strategic goals.	3	59	34	3

May not sum to 100% due to rounding.   ■ Strongly Disagree   ■ Disagree   ■ Agree   ■ Strongly Agree

Open-ended comments for this section focused on the following themes:

- **The Board needs to revisit and revise the strategic priorities** (8 comments). A sample comment representing this theme is: *"The Board and higher education are at a critical juncture to re-evaluate and focus on the key priorities going forward. It is critical for the new President and the Board to come to an understanding of what those key priorities are and work effectively together."*

- **There is not enough discussion about strategic priorities and linking those to the work at hand** (5 comments). A sample comment is: *"We never have any time to discuss larger trends, instead we just bounce from "crisis" to "crisis" and continue to get budget and finance info too late and never get reports we need."*

- **The current Board does not fully support the strategic goals** (4 comments). A comment illustrating this theme is: *"The strategic goals of the system are not clearly defined and certainly are not endorsed by all stakeholders."*

Board Operations

This scale contains eight items focused on Board operations. Scale reliability (calculated using Cronbach's alpha) was 0.75, which is acceptable. One item on this scale evoked strong responses. Eleven Board members (38% of respondents) strongly agreed with the statement "The Board's substantive work should be accomplished through the work of Board committees." While the majority of respondents (90%) agreed with the statement, comments suggest that there are barriers for committees to effectively carry out their duties.
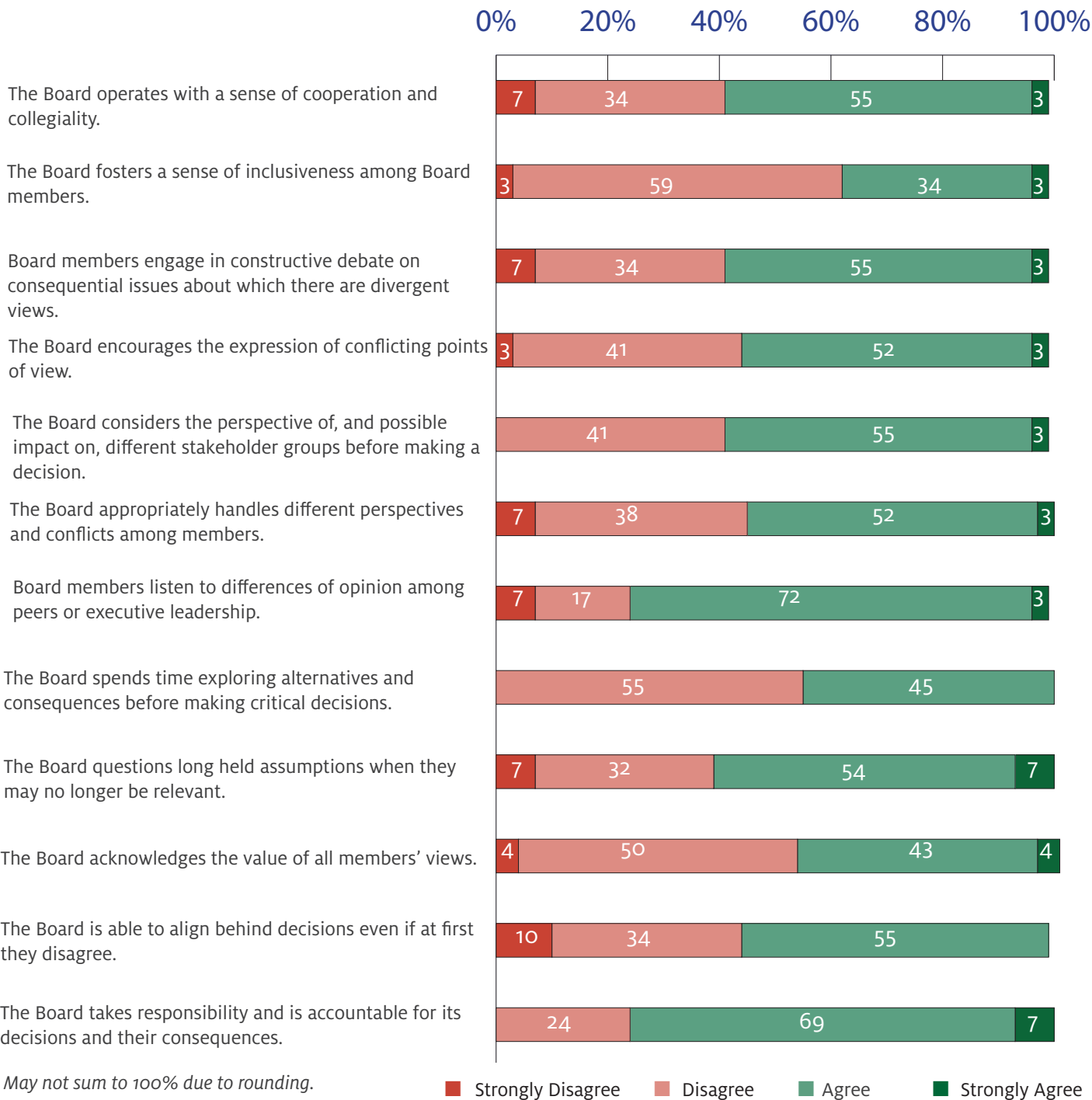
Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The work of the Board's committees is guided by the strategic goals.		62	31	7
The Board has adequate procedures for orienting its new members to their duties and responsibilities.	14	48	34	3
The Board's current committee structure is effective.		14	79	7
The Board's substantive work should be accomplished through the work of Board committees.		10	52	38
The Board meets about the right number of times per year.		24	66	10
Board and committee meetings and their agendas are planned and structured to provide members with a meaningful opportunity to address key strategic issues of the University.	3	48	45	3
The Board has adequate processes for staying informed about University policies, regulations, and guidelines.	3	21	72	3
The Board promotes transparency while maintaining appropriate confidentiality of closed session Board deliberations and other matters deemed confidential.	17	21	55	7
The Board has access to consistent and reliable strategic and operational data and information.	17	41	38	3

Legend: ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

May not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Open-ended comments for this section focused on the following themes:

- **The need for more effective and timely information sharing** (6 comments). Illustrative comments include: *"We need an effective way to share Committee information with members before Friday Board meeting..."* and *"The system's lack of comprehensive management financial statements makes decision making on financial matters very difficult. Understanding the scope of decisions against the enterprise is almost impossible when you have no context. Board meetings should be one day with committees in the morning and full board in the afternoon."*

- **The need for a better understanding of and use of committees** (5 comments). Two comments that reflect this theme are: *"The committee structure has always worked very effectively until the past 24 months, which should say something about the problem...Respecting governance and process is critical in an enterprise as large as UNC; and the committee structure is part of that process. A least half the board lacks the respect for those processes"* and *"It seems there are some members who believe we should be a 'committee of 32' on all issues. An understanding of the need for an effective committee system is needed for the Board to effectively and efficiently tackle the scope of the work we are tasked to do. Trust, or a lack thereof, between the members of the Board is an issue preventing the committee system working as designed."*

Board Dynamics

This scale contains twelve items focused on Board dynamics. Scale reliability (calculated using Cronbach's alpha) was 0.81, which is acceptable.

	0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%

The Board operates with a sense of cooperation and collegiality.
7 | 34 | 55 | 3

The Board fosters a sense of inclusiveness among Board members.
3 | 59 | 34 | 3

Board members engage in constructive debate on consequential issues about which there are divergent views.
7 | 34 | 55 | 3

The Board encourages the expression of conflicting points of view.
3 | 41 | 52 | 3

The Board considers the perspective of, and possible impact on, different stakeholder groups before making a decision.
41 | 55 | 3

The Board appropriately handles different perspectives and conflicts among members.
7 | 38 | 52 | 3

Board members listen to differences of opinion among peers or executive leadership.
7 | 17 | 72 | 3

The Board spends time exploring alternatives and consequences before making critical decisions.
55 | 45

The Board questions long held assumptions when they may no longer be relevant.
7 | 32 | 54 | 7

The Board acknowledges the value of all members' views.
4 | 50 | 43 | 4

The Board is able to align behind decisions even if at first they disagree.
10 | 34 | 55

The Board takes responsibility and is accountable for its decisions and their consequences.
24 | 69 | 7

May not sum to 100% due to rounding.

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree

Open-ended comments for this section tended to focused on the following themes:

- **Board dynamics are improving** (5 comments). A sample comment for this theme is: *"While somewhat rocky during the Presidential Search, I believe the board dynamics are improving, and will continue to do so once President Spellings arrives."*

- **There are few members who are disruptive and divisive and that negatively impacts Board dynamics** (3 comments). An illustrative comment is: *"No sense of cohesion and loyalty to the Board. Several cliques have developed. Too much attention given to a few loud members."*

- **Politics and partisanship are getting in the way of Board effectiveness** (3 comments). A comment that illustrates this theme is: *"Too much emphasis on politics and too much time spending worrying about influence."*

Summary of Open-ended Comments

In this final section of the report the responses to the three general open-ended questions are summarized. Themes reflecting the bulk of comments are shared with the number of comments that were grouped as belonging to the theme indicated are shared in parentheses and at least one sample comment provided to illustrate the type of sentiment expressed.

What does the Board of Governors do well?

Comments to this open-ended question reflected the following themes:

- **The Board is a committed group that wants to support the UNC system** (8 comments). Illustrative quotes include: *"In general there is a passion for the role of the UNC System in determining the future success of the state of North Carolina."* And *"The Board is committed to a better University and is willing to put in the hard work to make it happen."*

- **The diversity of thought and experience on the Board is helpful** (7 comments). Comments that reflect this theme include: *"We are a dedicated Board, committed to the University. We are learning to appreciate and trust each other, which takes time. We have talented members who each bring wonderful perspective. In general, we are good at analyzing an issue from several different perspectives in order to arrive at the best solution."* And *"Approach issues from a variety of perspectives / Recently allowed open dialogue and a respect for each governor."*

- **Being open to and driving change** (3 comments). A comment that illustrates this theme is: *"Being open to changes that allow students to receive an education that will benefit them in the future while understanding that not everything needs to change. The board actually understands we need to find appropriate ways to control and reduce the student costs."*

What does the Board of Governors not do well?

Comments to this open-ended question focused on the following themes:

- **The Board is not adequately aligned and cohesive** (9 comments). Illustrative comments include: *"Lack of cohesion and effectiveness. Failure to support Board actions that individual members do not agree with. Too much loyalty in some instances to individual campuses and the General Assembly."* And *"Align behind board decisions."*

- **The Board gets "into the weeds" too often and does not focus adequately on the "big picture"** (6 comments). Sample comments for this theme are: *"We sometimes get bogged down 'in the weeds,' risking the loss of perspective of the larger picture that requires even more attention..."* and *"Too much 'mission creep' - losing sight of the strategic by getting into weeds too often."*

- **Too much focus on personal and political agendas** (6 comments). A comment that reflects this theme is: *"Communicating personal agendas through the press or political allies in the legislature is counterproductive to building trust, communication and effective working relationships between Board members."*

Responses to "Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the Board and its functioning?"

The responses to this question did not fall into any strong patterns. The majority of comments are included below; some are not shared because they were not substantive (e.g. "No."), did not add new information, or because it may have been possible to identify the author of the comment.

"I think it needs to use committees more effectively, especially the Budget Committee. We should not take as gospel every initiative a campus wants. The Budget Committee needs to stop more programs to control costs."

"General Administration staff and BOG should always try to work together for the greatness of the university system. BOG members do not always know enough about all issues to ask the best questions and seek all the necessary information. GA should be responsible for always providing this for the BOG. We should always be working together for the success of our system."

"Generally a dedicated, intelligent, hard-working group. Can be dismissive of 'lone wolves' even when they may be right."

"Operates very poorly with the GA calling most of the shots."

"The Board's days of dysfunction, unilateral decision-making and secrecy have somewhat disappeared with the change in leadership. Lingering doubts still exist with factions closely aligned with the former Chairman."

"The President needs to step out early and establish her respect for openness and transparency."

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