Student Representation within Academic Governance
Cam McCoy and Duncan Wojtaszek, Students’ Association of MacEwan University

Executive Summary

The concept of collegiality within an academic community is one as old as academic institutions itself. Within the past 150 years that concept has been extended to include the learners of the institution on an almost universal basis, with elected students bringing the opinions, experiences, and perspective of their peers to the decision-making table that shapes their learning and their institution. Academic institutions that have enjoyed having students at the table when making the decisions that shape students’ lives have been better for it – as revealed through surveys, academic literature, and the continued use of the practice.

Alberta, and Canada in general, has been leader in the inclusion of students in academic governance in North America, having included students since the 1920s within university governance. Broad conclusions from the research suggest that the situation in our province, while certainly not as underrepresented as some provinces or countries, as room for improvement – but most importantly the research supports the concept that students make the decisions and the campus environment better for both students and the entire community, both the academic community and the public.

The research indicates that students are certainly underrepresented compared to the national average at MacEwan University and Mount Royal University on our boards of governors, and are at or just above the national average at our other institutions. Comparatively to other countries however we tend to be behind European universities and colleges and ahead of American universities and colleges. Also colleges tend overall to have lower student representation without clear or articulated justification or rationale either within the literature or the legislation.

Graduate students are not uniformly represented within academic governance structures, with clear representation in some jurisdictions and lacking in others. The clearest trend is whether an identified graduate student association exists – which is the case in Alberta – then there is clear graduate representation on governing bodies within the academy. Alberta is not a leader in graduate representation however, with both the University of Toronto and the University of Waterloo having greater representation for their graduate students in their system.

The Bologna Process in Europe, which sets the standard for recognition and transferability of credentials within Europe – and has deep implications for the recognition of our degrees and diplomas in Alberta as well – requires meaningful student representation with the academic system, and should be taken into account as Alberta seeks to reform our own student representation within our board of governors and academic councils.
Alberta’s Current Post-Secondary Governing Bodies

Alberta’s current post-secondary governance is structured under the Post Secondary Learning Act, which defines the composition of both the individual boards of governors and the guidelines for the academic councils for our universities, colleges, and technical institutes. The composition for these governing bodies however is not uniform across our post-secondary system, with three distinct groupings of institutions at the public institutions within the Post Secondary Learning Act:

**Athabasca University, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and University of Lethbridge:** These four universities have their financial and operating matters governed by their board of governors that is 20 people in size and has three students, two undergraduates and one graduate.¹ Their academic councils - called a general faculties council - varies in size depending on the number of faculties and is set either by the general faculties council itself or by the board, but they can range in size from about 50 to over 100. Students must be appointed, with representatives from both the undergraduate and graduate student associations, and in the case of the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge individual students are also elected from their faculties boosting the number of undergraduates relative to the body considerably, to about 30 out of 100 members.²

**NAIT and SAIT:** At Alberta’s two technical institutes the student association nominates two students to sit on a board of governors of 16 people. The academic council is formed by the board and through a formula established by the Post Secondary Learning Act can number up to about 35 to 50 provided faculty make up a majority, and student representation remains mandatory, although the number of students on the academic council is not provided for in the act itself.³

**Other public institutions:** At all other public post-secondary institutions, including two universities, 11 colleges, and the Alberta College of Art and Design the board of governors has a single student on it out of a board that has typically 11 people, but can be as large as 16.⁴ Both MacEwan University and Mount Royal University will shortly have 13 board members, giving them the smallest ratio of students on the board of governors in the province. The academic councils of these institutions are created from the same section of the Post Secondary Learning Act as NAIT and SAIT, and so are similar size and typically have between two and ten students on it.

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² Ibid., Section 23.
³ Ibid., Section 43 and 46.
⁴ Ibid., Section 43 and 46.
Students have served on their institutions’ governing bodies with distinction - and are uniquely placed to contribute. For example, at Medicine Hat College recently it was the student nominated by the Students’ Association of Medicine Hat College who was instrumental in bringing to light the material errors to the Medicine Hat College Board of Governors that led to the audit of that institution’s international program. In this specific case the student member of the Board of Governors became interested in various expenses brought to board and queried why they did not adhere to established Medicine Hat College policy. Other board members initially felt past practice of relying upon verbal and written reports of the institution president and vice-presidents should suffice but in the end it was the perspective offered by the student that compelled the entire board to investigate further. The board’s investigation led to the full audit of the college’s international program, the Auditor General’s report on the college, and the discovery of significant risk that the college was facing – all the result of passionate and committed student representation.

Students on governing bodies know their campus, know their students, and are able to bring a perspective to decisions that otherwise would be missing.

**Students as shareholders**

Consistently since being assigned the portfolio of Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education Deputy Premier Thomas Lukaszuk has discussed the approach of increasing the voice of students within the policy and decision-making process under the concept of students as “shareholders.” Under this line of thinking students along with the public through direct funding from the Government of Alberta pay the vast majority of the costs at our institutions although in most cases students do not have a proportional say within the governance structure to how much they pay - which he has suggested is 25%. This rationale has merit if it leads to greater student representation from the perspective of student associations, however it is not the classical model for collegial governance within the university or college model.

Statistics Canada collects the revenue and expenditures of universities and colleges occasionally and makes the data public. The most recent data set is 2009 so is fairly dated but is specific for our purposes. Alberta’s colleges and universities spent $4.064 billion in 2009, collected $4.238 billion in revenue, and collected $806 million in tuition fees. Tuition therefore made up 20% of expenditures and 19% of revenue. It should be noted this encompasses all expenditures, including research, the cost of providing ancillary services (which is then offset by the sale of those goods to students, faculty, and the public), and so on. Also telling within that dataset is the cost of administration, which at over a billion dollars is higher than British Columbia which has more students and spends more on post-secondary education and is almost as high as Québec, a province with more than double the enrolment of Alberta.

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5 Joel Higgins, Interview by Cam McCoy and Duncan Wojtaszek. (Medicine Hat, 2013).
The idea of treating students, and student associations, more as shareholders rather than stakeholders or collegial partners would offer a mix of positives and negatives. On the positive side would be the potential for increased representation within governing bodies - indeed it should mean guaranteed representation - and adherence to the five principles of corporate governance as it relates to shareholders: rights and equitable treatment of shareholders; recognition of other stakeholders; understanding of the role and responsibilities of the board; integrity and ethical behaviour; and disclosure and transparency. Certainly all of these and particular the concept of appropriate treatment as a “shareholder” along with disclosure and transparency ring true for student associations in our claims for increased representation within the governance bodies of our institutions.

The negatives associated with a move away from traditional academe and further into a more corporate model of higher education governance is the risk that it may serve to increase the power of management, in this case the administration, rather than empower the board or even student associations. Certainly it will further disenfranchise academics, in particular faculty associations, but as well individual faculty members as they have no financial stake but rather end their role as collegial governors of the institution but become employees of a corporation - if taken to an extreme.

The Historical Positions of ASEC, CAUS, and AGC

Student associations in Alberta have historically put forward proposals to improve their representation on the governing bodies of our universities, colleges, and technical institutes. Although many of these proposals have centred around increasing the number of students on institutional boards of governors at the heart of these proposals has always been that students make institutional decisions better. The state of collegiality in Alberta compared to the rest of Canada rests somewhere in the middle depending on the institution in question - every board of governors has at least one student, every academic council has student representation as well. Graduate students are also represented within the institution and this representation for both undergraduates and graduate students is protected in law.

Alberta has three umbrella student organizations who have actively put forward positions on student representation to the Government of Alberta over the past few years - the Alberta Students’ Executive Council (ASEC), the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS), and the Alberta Graduate Council (AGC). Each of these student organizations represent different constituencies to some extent and that is demonstrated in their nuanced historical policies on the matter:

Historically ASEC has requested that all post-secondary institutions have a minimum of two students on each board of governors and that each student association or graduate student association have two students on each board of governors - although has expressed flexibility

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above that number. The disparity between different institutions within the province has not worked at institutions, in particular similar institutions such as the University of Calgary and Mount Royal University or NAIT and MacEwan University for example. ASEC has also been supportive of the graduate student association bid for a second seat at boards of governors although this has not been necessarily reflected in direct policy.

CAUS has been more cautious in their approach on the subject, as their student association membership all have two members on their institutional board of governors and also face a dynamic relationship with their graduate student associations relative to their request for a second seat on the board of governors and occasional conflicting relationships at the board level. CAUS supports broadly more students on institutional boards of governors and specifically came to a policy where by students would receive additional seats based on institutional size and a majority of the seats would be held either the undergraduates or graduates, depending on who was the majority population on campus.

AGC has consistently requested two seats for every student association, including graduate student associations, as the demands for a board member in terms of committee workload and attendance was too much for a single graduate student.

In all three cases, strong relationships have existed where negotiation and compromise is entirely possible and the above positions represent perhaps the idealized past positions of the three groups. In all three cases past student leaders have recognized that proposals regarding the reform of board of governors composition would require unanimity among student groups, especially without the support of an institutional leader as a champion and therefore compromise would be required, in particular between CAUS and AGC.

Institutions, in particular the administration of our institutions, have been historically resistant to increasing representation on our boards of governors and putting into the Post Secondary Learning Act increased representation elsewhere within the academy. Certainly institutions have expressed an appreciation for the input of students on committees and governance bodies however typically through to Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education that expression is muted with comments suggesting the input in the status quo is sufficient along with concerns of attendance, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, level of knowledge, and the ability to stand behind the ultimate decisions of the board.

The Situation Across Canada

The vast majority of Canadian post-secondary institutions have bicameral governance similar to Alberta colleges, universities, and technical institutes and have student representation on both bodies. This model is especially true at Canadian universities, with some colleges only having a board of governors but with the exception of colleges at Saskatchewan and the Royal Military College all public post-secondary institutions enjoy some form of student

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representation on their governing bodies. There is tremendous disparity between institutions, as well in most provinces there is no single act governing institutional governance, rather single acts create each institution on a one-off basis making comparative study time intensive and difficult.

The table below comes from several sources – the dominant of which is either the provincial act establishing the institutions or institutions or the institutional websites. It covers every public institution in Canada and shows that there is no hard and fast rule for what is the Canadian standard. The mean number of student representatives on the board of governors is 1.79, the mean number of total individuals on the board is 19.00, and the mean percentage that students make up of the board is 8.96%. The highest proportion is at the University of Winnipeg where students make up eight out of 36 of the Board of Regents – however this comes with caveat that the Students’ Association of the University of Winnipeg can only name four of those eight, two being named by the General Council of the United Church of Canada and two named by the Government of Manitoba.\(^1\) Taking that into account the highest proportion is at the University of Toronto whose unicameral Governing Council has 8 students among 49 members, or 16.33%.\(^2\) Comparatively, the mean number of student representatives on the board of governors in Alberta is 10.54%, slightly above the Canadian average – 15% at Athabasca University, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge; 12.5% at NAIT and SAIT; 7.69% at MacEwan University and Mount Royal University;\(^3\) and 9.09% at the rest of the public post-secondary institutions.

Size does matter a great deal, with it being far more common for universities to have larger boards and colleges to have smaller ones. It also is more common for colleges to have a single student on their boards and universities to have more than one – again not a rule but a tendency.

Graduate students are represented on 23 of 46 identified institutions with graduate programs on the board of governors, or half – two with two graduate students, the University of Waterloo and the University of Toronto.\(^4\) The identification and autonomy of graduate students is largely by province, with Alberta, Québec, and Ontario leading the way with graduate students being autonomous on the board of governors of their respective institutions.

Looking statistically at academic councils is much more difficult, with far more variables and intangibles to consider. While several institutions – mostly colleges – had no academic

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\(^3\) Currently MacEwan University’s Board of Governors is actually 11 members in size, however is growing to 13 shortly and as the Government of Alberta is currently advertising for two additional public members at the request of MacEwan University.

council to speak of, those institutions that do have student representation on them, sometimes numerous students, such as 54 at the University of Alberta including 14 graduate students. Legislation governing these bodies usually leave final composition up to either the board of governors or up to the academic council itself (more often than not called the senate outside of Alberta) so finding a uniform model proves difficult has membership is to some measure fluid and guided by principles such as the proportion of faculty compared to other representatives.

The size of these bodies changes drastically as well – from numbering well over 100 at some large universities to less than 30 at other institutions – the size of these bodies certainly will have an impact on how strong a single student representative would be compared to the voices of several faculty and administrators. Here again we say great disparity as well with graduate student representation, although more regular representation among graduate students. Among the 23 institutions that had graduate students but no identified graduate student on their board of governors, only four had no representation as well in their academic council.

### Canadian Public Post-Secondary Institutions Student Representation at Boards and Academic Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province/Institution</th>
<th>Board of Governors</th>
<th>Academic Council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athabasca University</td>
<td>3 / 20 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>3 / 54 incl. 1 grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U of A, U of C, U of L</td>
<td>3 / 20 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>~40 / ~120 incl. ~10 grads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAIT and SAIT</td>
<td>2 / 16</td>
<td>5 / ~25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacEwan and Mount Royal</td>
<td>1 / 13</td>
<td>5-8 / ~50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta colleges</td>
<td>1 / ~11</td>
<td>2-10 / 25-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of British Columbia</td>
<td>3 / 21</td>
<td>6 / 29 at ea. campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other BC universities</td>
<td>2 / 15</td>
<td>6 / 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC colleges/tech. institutes</td>
<td>1 / ~8</td>
<td>4 / ~20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U of S / U of R</td>
<td>1 / 11</td>
<td>7 / 100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIAST</td>
<td>1 / 20</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sask. colleges</td>
<td>0 / 8</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Manitoba</td>
<td>3 / 23</td>
<td>28 / 100 incl. 3 grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Winnipe</td>
<td>8 / 36 incl. 4 from SA</td>
<td>9 / 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon University</td>
<td>2 / 17</td>
<td>8 / 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Université de Saint-Boniface</td>
<td>1 / 15</td>
<td>3 / 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba colleges</td>
<td>1 / 12</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algoma University</td>
<td>1 / 16</td>
<td>4 / 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brock University</td>
<td>3 / 32 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>8 / 67 incl. 2 grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carleton University</td>
<td>4 / 32 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>17 / 81 incl. 6 grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakehead University</td>
<td>1 / 20</td>
<td>9 / 99 incl. 1 grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurentian University</td>
<td>2 / 25; can be grad</td>
<td>11 / 61 incl. some grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMaster University</td>
<td>2 / 37 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>12 / 77 incl. 6 grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nipissing University</td>
<td>2 / 24</td>
<td>3 / 57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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16 See end note
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Freshman (incl. grad)</th>
<th>Grad (incl. grad)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontario College and Design University</td>
<td>3/27 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>4/39 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen’s University</td>
<td>2/25 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>15/68 incl. 1 grad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Military College</td>
<td>0/18</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ryerson Polytechnic University</td>
<td>3/24</td>
<td>16/69 incl. 2 grads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trent University</td>
<td>1/24</td>
<td>11/49 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td></td>
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<td>University of Guelph</td>
<td>3/24 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>32/156 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UOIT</td>
<td>2/25 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>3/28 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Ottawa</td>
<td>3/29 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>8/74 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Toronto</td>
<td>8/49 incl. 2 grads</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Waterloo</td>
<td>5/39 incl. 2 grads</td>
<td>14/101 incl. 5 grads</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Western Ontario</td>
<td>3/31 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>18/102 incl. 4 grads</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Windsor</td>
<td>3/32</td>
<td>11/84 incl. 2 grads</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilfrid Laurier University</td>
<td>3/34 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>8/77 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York University</td>
<td>2/30</td>
<td>28/167 incl. 3 grads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario colleges</td>
<td>1/12-20</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGill University</td>
<td>3/25 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>20/107 incl. 3 grads</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Université de Montréal</td>
<td>2/24</td>
<td>8/100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All CEGEPs (Québec colleges)</td>
<td>2/21</td>
<td>3/20</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Université de Laval</td>
<td>3/25 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>8/65 incl. 4 grads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop’s University</td>
<td>1/17</td>
<td>7/29</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Concordia University</td>
<td>3/25 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>16/55 incl. 4 grads</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Université de Québec campuses</td>
<td>2/16 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td>16/55 incl. 4 grads</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>2/25</td>
<td>7/46</td>
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<td>Holland College</td>
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<td>No academic council</td>
<td></td>
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<td>University of New Brunswick</td>
<td>3/24</td>
<td>8/67 incl. 2 grads at ea. campus</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Allison University</td>
<td>2/24</td>
<td>8/38</td>
<td></td>
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<td>St. Thomas University</td>
<td>2/23</td>
<td>4/38</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Université du Moncton</td>
<td>3/27</td>
<td>5/38</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>New Brunswick Community College</td>
<td>1/15</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Mary’s University</td>
<td>4/34</td>
<td>5/30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dalhousie University</td>
<td>3/27</td>
<td>7/78 incl. 1 grad</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>King’s University College (Nova Scotia)</td>
<td>3/30</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acadia University</td>
<td>3/37</td>
<td>6/57 incl. 1 grad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mount Saint Vincent University</td>
<td>2/35</td>
<td>6/36 incl. 1 grad</td>
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<td>Nova Scotia College of Art and Design</td>
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<td>No academic council</td>
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<td>Cape Breton University</td>
<td>4/34</td>
<td>8/47</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Francis Xavier University</td>
<td>3/29</td>
<td>6/40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia Community College</td>
<td>2/20</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memorial University</td>
<td>2/20</td>
<td>13/75 incl. 3 grads</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of the North Atlantic</td>
<td>2/16</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yukon College</td>
<td>1/12 (not by SA)</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aurora College</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nunavut Arctic College</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>No academic council</td>
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Looking Across the Globe

Across the border in the United States the tradition at most public universities, colleges, and community colleges can be familiar to Canadians, however there is far fewer examples of student representatives sitting on the highest governing body, whether that is referred to as the board of governors, board of trustees, or a board of regents. The student movement as a whole developed more an event planning and cooperative body to the main institution rather than a representative body and that may be reflected in their representation within the institutional governance structures. Most large, public universities will have the president of the student council sit on the board of trustees, and have student representation within the academic senate, although in both cases the number of student representatives tends to be smaller and the bodies themselves tend to be larger, such as at the State University of New York (SUNY) where the Board of Trustees is 18 and the student president sits. Their faculty senate has no student representation. At Pennsylvania State University no student representation is present on the Board of Trustees but 26 students serve on the Faculty Senate that has over 200 members. At the University of California - a system of 10 campuses that are considered among the very best in the world such as UCal Berkley and UCLA - there is a Board of Regents overseeing the whole system that has one student among 26 regents while each campus has an academic Senate that does not have student representation. Complicating things further is the greater prevalence of institutions that have multiple campuses, with multiple identities, but a unified governance structure. Although multiple campus institutions exist in Canada - indeed many exist within Alberta - typically those separate campuses still retain the brand and institutional identity of the governing institution. In the United States, particularly at the public community college level there are examples of multiple campuses of a state-wide system existing where the individual school may develop a student association but ultimately has no impact and certainly no formal role within the governance structure that is centralized within the state capital, sometimes with the state government itself, not even granted independence from the government. The Contra Costa Community College District is a good example, governing over Contra Costa College, Diablo Valley College, Los Medanos College, San Ramon Campus, and Brentwood Center with the Contra Costa Community College District Board of Directors being a unicameral system with no student representation and serving ultimately 60,000 students.

In the United Kingdom almost all higher education is publicly subsidized and from a funding perspective and the perception as a social good is somewhat comparable to Canada. Newer universities often follow a model similar to Canadian institutions, bicameral in nature with a Council similar in size and composition relative to Canadian Boards of Governors, typically

with two or three student representatives with a total size of about 24. The academic council at these newer universities are also called Senates and will range in size from about 50 members to 90, dominated by members of the faculty and have student representation from the student associations of between four to eight members. In some cases specific representation will be provided for graduate students on both the Council and the Senate. Student representation is not uniform in all cases however, such as the example of the University College London, a public research university founded in the mid-nineteenth century whose Council has no student representation, although there is considerable representation of students on the Academic Board.21 In between those extremes lies the London School of Economics with a single student member on the Council and also considerable membership on the Academic Board including a dedicated graduate representative.22 An entirely different model to look at is a unicameral model, such as the Queen’s University Belfast, which has a Senate that manages all of the policies and procedures of the institution, both academic and operational. It’s student representation is relatively unremarkable - two students out of 23 - but the makeup of the rest of the Senate consists of 10 members of the public, two students, two alumni, five academics, two support staff, the Chancellor selected by the Senate, and the President - meaning that the institutional academy itself outnumbers those members appointed from outside the campus community but the students plus the public members make up a power bloc of 12 of 23 - the students can be the swing vote in many situations. Other unicameral models exist within the United Kingdom and Ireland, although most have significantly more “lay people” or “co-opted members”, what we in Canada would designate as public members.23

Older universities in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe can be very different, as their history stretches back into the middle ages, predating the very concept of the nation state and have governance structures that reflect that age. Cambridge University for example is tri-cameral, with a Regent House with 3,800 members acting as the principal procedures and policy-making body, the General Board of Faculties which acts as the academic council, and a Council similar in structure and powers to other UK university councils but does report to the Regent House which has 23 members including 3 students. Even more bizarre is that the Regent House is a relatively recent creation in 1923, replacing the Senate which still exists and includes all 3,800 members of the Regent House and every single living masters or above graduate of Cambridge and meets to elect a new Chancellor and High Steward when necessary.24 Another example would be Oxford which is bicameral essentially, governed by a Council similarly structured as others with three student members including one graduate student from 28 members. The graduate student however does not come from a graduate student organization, but rather is the VP (Graduate) from OUSU. The Congregation, which has jurisdiction over academic affairs as well the final arbiter over

23 “University Structure,” Queen’s University Belfast, accessed August 5, 2013, http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/TheUniversity/AboutQueens/UniversityStructure/
matters that have been delegated down to the college-level (college in this case meaning a faculty or department of the university), is a large body of all academic staff numbering 4,200 plus and does not include any student representation. On the other hand, the University of Edinburgh may possess the most unique and perhaps antiquated nomenclature in terms of names for their bodies - the University Court in place of what Canadians would identify as the Board of Governors and Senatus Academicus as the Senate - they have fairly straightforward and familiar structures and ratios of student representation.

Norway has what might be seen as closer to an ideal system of governance, with a unicameral system of a University Board or a University College Board depending on the type of institution, each with two student representatives and the remaining representatives filled out with faculty and public members. Explicitly the Norwegian Act establishing higher education bodies states 20% representation for students. The relative small number of members strengthens the student voice and approaches the level of 25% suggested by Alberta’s Deputy Premier in conversations on the topic.

Annika Persson has fortunately done some of our work for us in Europe, in her work Student Participation in the Governance of Higher Education in Europe, Results of a Survey in 2004 which received results from 28 of 35 of the countries who participated in the Bologna Process. The survey struggled with certain definitions, such as what constitutes an institution as they were trying to limit their survey to universities, as well they even struggled with the concept of countries given the complexity of places such as Scotland and the Flemish and French communities of Belgium. Persson does not breakdown the results of the survey by respondent but presents some of the overall trends and trends and averages in Europe that we would find useful for comparative purposes here in Alberta. She found that most countries have legal requirements for student representation on the board of institutions, and the most common percentage interval was 11-20% - higher than Canada. The next most common percentage variable was 21-30% followed by 1-10% - it would certainly be fair to conclude as a percentage of votes European higher education institutions by large offer a greater student voice than their Canadian counterparts.

Can it get worse? Absolutely. Voluntary student unionism in Australia has gutted student representation within public institutions to the point where major universities and colleges are often bereft of student representation altogether on both their councils - the equivalent of the board of governors - and their senate. Enacted over a decade starting in the late

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28 Annika Persson, Student Participation in the Governance of Higher Education in Europe: Results of a Survey (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2004), p. 32.
29 Persson, p. 35.
30 It is difficult to cite the lack of student representation – some universities such as the University of Melbourne still retain students on their councils and senates while others like the University of Sydney have dropped them. For a
1990s and completed by 2007 this has had a direct impact on the representation role students have within the higher education governance of institutions. Voluntary student unionism (or what is referred to there as voluntary student membership) has not yet had a direct impact on student representation within the governance structures of institutions however this policy has only come into effect as of 2011. The University of Auckland for example as a Council of 20 with two members elected from the student body and the Senate includes five student representatives including one graduate among a body that does include every single professor so is quite large.31

**Reviewing the Literature on Student Representation in Higher Education**

It should be of little surprise that there is a relative paucity of academic literature specifically on the subject of student involvement in academic governance – the role students play remains relatively small in the sense that at no institution do they hold the balance of power or a majority on a governance body and all institutions pride themselves tremendously on institutional independence and freedom. Internal navel-gazing might be a favourite past time of many institutions it does not always translate into full-fledged academic articles – however relatively recently with the Bologna Process within Europe there has been a wave of academic articles about higher education governance rather than higher education management – two linked and similar topics, but the latter certainly receives far more attention in the literature.

Before Bologna was an article from Earl McGrath, the United States Commissioner for Education in the 1960s and 1970s who wrote about university governance at various points and specifically about student representation in his paper *Should Students Share the Power? A Study of Their Role in College and University Governance* in 1970. McGrath first traces the roots of student involvement in post-secondary governance in North America to its rightful home, Canada. In the 1920s it was actually our university faculty who agitated for greater student involvement on the boards of governors and academic senates as a part of greater campaign to wrest more power towards a collegial academy rather than administration. By 1970 McGrath notes that the majority of the Canadian institutions have adopted the practice and also notes that Canadian administrations overwhelmingly see students making valuable contributions. McGrath notes the situation in the United States in 1970 is very different, with only 20% of boards of trustees having student representation.32

McGrath puts forward six reasons for the participation of students in the governing bodies of colleges and universities: the significance of institutional professions and actions on their lives; the sophistication of students today (in 1970); students should be educated for democratic living; students could help improve higher education; the abolition of *in loco

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parentis (or the institution acting in place of a student’s parent); and the improvement of instruction.\textsuperscript{33} McGrath clearly makes the case four decades ago that student representation within the academic community will improve the academy itself, make them better teachers, and importantly, make the students who participate better citizens. He discusses and then dismisses the arguments against student involvement – students are too immature, too transient, and should focus on their studies – by suggesting inclusion is simply an imperative and that students are in fact critical thinkers. He is clear in refuting the argument that students should hold the majority power\textsuperscript{34} – and certainly no one within the Alberta context is making that argument either – but he makes it clear that involving students and expanding their role “has real advantages over governmental structures dominated by an administrative patriarchy or a faculty oligarchy.”\textsuperscript{35}

Bing Zuo and Eugene Ratsoy take a different look at the question of student representation within university governance through the microcosm of the University of Alberta in 1999 in their article \textit{Student Participation in University Governance}. Rather than focusing on the structures, which they do cover, or the perceptions and impact the students have at the University of Alberta, they survey extensively the students who choose to participate in the governing bodies within the University of Alberta.

They interviewed 31 individuals, including six administrators, five academic staff, and one community member of the board of governors, but the vast majority of those surveyed are student representatives.\textsuperscript{36} Their conceptual model was trying to develop what link existing between the motives of the students involved, the motives of the other members of the governing bodies, their interactions, and then the ultimate university decision-making process.

Of note should be the motives of the student representatives, in order of frequency of how often they were mentioned: to improve university governance; to gain experience; for social reasons; desire to serve other students; and influenced by friends or parents. Also of note was that in almost all cases those involved in university governing bodies had prior experience in student government and certainly were coming to university decision-making table with understanding of what it means to govern and represent students.\textsuperscript{37}

Interestingly, administrators who were surveyed largely echoed agreement with both the student representatives surveyed as well McGrath in terms of the positive contribution but added that the primary role of students should be to study rather than serve as “politicians” and that university-sponsored surveys should provide students with an adequate voice into university affairs.\textsuperscript{38} Ultimately Zuo and Ratsoy endorse the idea of student representation

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p 10-11.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p 15.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p 15.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 15.
within the university community, as do the participants of their survey, but they offer a
degree of advice moving forward both to the university community and to student
representatives within the system. To the community they urge greater understanding of the
role student government plays on the individual student representatives, and a clearer
understanding that the needs of the collective should by no means suggest the interests of
students be ignored. To student representatives and student groups as a whole they suggest
recognition that their temporary status means they likely will not see the impact of their
contributions within a governing body and to demonstrate clearly that they have the long-
term interest of their university and its mission at heart, not simply the interests of their
electorate.39

Sjur Bergan in Student Participation in Higher Education Governance is looking at the
question of student participation in academic governance through the lens of the Bologna
Process in 2003. The Bologna Process was a series of meetings and agreements aimed at
ensuring harmonization of standards, transfer, and quality of post-secondary education in
Europe. The direct participation of the European Students’ Union in the Bologna Process led
to agreement that student participation within academic governance was an essential
component to entry into the European Higher Education Area, although such representation
could occur either institutionally at the board level or nationally in some fashion. The direct
quote from the Glasgow Declaration as a part of the Bologna Process is “In order to fulfill
these commitments, universities highlight the importance of student involvement as full
partners in the process and will search for the means of reinforcing this co-operation in the
future.”40 Bergan is writing in a time advising the group at the Oslo conference in the midst of
the Bologna process on how to handle the question of student participation, but prior to the
question being settled and certain prior to the implementation of the Bologna Process.

Bergan makes the case for how vital a post-secondary institution can be to its community –
especially when that institution is seen as valid and legitimate to its own population. She
cites the aforementioned Queen’s University Belfast for example as being a truly collegiate
model – not just in structure but also in practice.41 The result of not just student
representation, but broad and collegial representation was a university community that was
confident enough to play a vital and important role in the peace process in Northern Ireland,
an educational institution that was able to demonstrate values such as democracy and
problem-solving in a place that desperately needed such leadership in the 1970s and
1980s.

Bergan also speaks directly on the issue of student apathy in terms of decision-making,
noting a direct correlation between the level of involvement at the board level of student
representatives and the level of engagement of the student body.42 Simply put, if students
believe they have little or no influence in the decisions made at their institution, why should

40 European University Association, Glasgow Declaration (Brussels: European University Association Publications,
41 Sjur Bergan, Student Participation in Higher Education Governance (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2003), p. 10.
42 Ibid., p. 15.
they participate or vote? Bergan does not offer a direct number of participants but certainly moving past “one” student representative would be seen as essential at the board level for students to feel they have a clear voice in the affairs of the institution from the point of view of Bergan.\textsuperscript{43}

Maria Menon looks at an even smaller microcosm than Zuo and Ratsoy by looking specifically at the Education department at the University of Cyprus in her paper \textit{Students Views Regarding Their Participation in University Governance: Implications for Distributed Leadership in Higher Education}. She cites Zuo and Ratsoy repeatedly, but comes to a far more pro-student representative view, at least within the context of limiting her study to just the department, intentionally not looking at the institution level. Her participants are aspiring teachers enrolled in the education program, and she asks them about their level of input on the decisions made by their department. She found almost universal disenchantment and detachment from the decisions being made by the university leadership.

A feeling of ownership of the institution and community is lacking among the participants who feel distant from both the University of Cyprus Students’ Union and their department as decisions are imposed upon them with little input.\textsuperscript{44} Those surveyed expressed sympathy with Students’ Union, but felt that their voice was too small on the Senate and Council (the University of Cyprus’ version of an academic council and board of governors). 60\% of those surveyed felt greater representation within the university system would produce better results within their program of study.\textsuperscript{45}

The perception of these students in Manon’s view is that they have little or no involvement in the governance of their institution – despite one representative on their Council and some representation on their academic Senate. The overall feeling among this group of students is that decisions made by the institution are “top-down,” made without regard to the student body but for reasons that are not communicated adequately to these students.\textsuperscript{46}

Countering Manon’s study would be a study from the University of Girona in Spain that surveyed a broad group of students and instructors from across Spain looking at opinions of student representatives in \textit{Student Participation in University Governance: The Opinions of Professors and Students} in 2013. Also citing Zuo and Ratsoy for inspiration, the University of Girona study survey 673 students to discover what the students thought of their representatives, not just what motivated the representatives themselves. Within their study they found the vast majority of students unengaged as to who their representatives are or if they voted in the last election for their class assembly.\textsuperscript{47} The opinions of the students surveyed were overall positive in regards to their representatives – they overall felt that they

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 13-14.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Maria Menon, “Students’ Views Regarding Their Participation in University Governance: Implications for Distributed Leadership in Higher Education,” \textit{Tertiary Education and Management}, 11:2 (2005), p. 175.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 176.
  \item \textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 177.
\end{itemize}
were trying to make a positive difference in their education and in their institution, but cited a lack of knowledge about the process. Professors surveyed expressed an opinion that many students are simply overwhelmed with part-time work and study, as well as a lack of ownership of the academic space as additional reasons for a lack of engagement.48

The authors of the study do make several recommendations to improve engagement and participation in the Spanish post-secondary system: provide more and clear information to students in regards to the importance and existence of governing bodies, make student electoral processes more flexible and visible, make institutional governing more transparent, and offering training to those student representatives elected to serve on governing bodies.49

How do we reconcile the differing views of Manon and the study of the University of Girona? Manon took a specific group of students – education students, students who for disciplinary reasons might be more engaged in matters concerning their education or for localized reasons might be more interested in matters pertaining to their education. The University of Girona survey also took place not just across many programs but also multiple institutions, and was done by way of automatic telephone survey rather than in person interviews. Where they coincide is perhaps most interesting of all – a feeling of detachment when you are not represented in the decision-making process, regardless of whether the students in question are banging on the doors of power or focusing on their studies instead.

Also noticeably lacking within all of the literature is any discussion beyond the university experience – which is deeply unfortunate given a look at the Canadian post-secondary system shows the greatest need for more student representation is at the college level. In every case in Canada students have only a single seat on a college board of governors, and in some cases none. Often times, the college structure is unicameral, meaning the board is the only decision-making body and the single voice of a student is the only time for that perspective to be heard on any matter, be it program related or operational. Similarly there is no specific literature relating the presence of graduate student representatives, but as mentioned above the concept graduate student associations is relatively rare.

Endnote in Regards to Canadian Institutional Student Representation

Rather than footnote each institution it is substantially easier just explain at the end of the research paper to allow the table to be readable and easily referenced. As most Canadian universities are established by their own provincial act the institutional website served as the primary source for determining the composition of both the board of governors and their academic council. Canadian colleges typically are created collectively by a single act of the provincial legislature and then individually established by Order-In-Council in which case referring to the provincial act in question was easiest. As these sources are relatively straightforward in terms of the information gleaned from them they are not included in the bibliography.

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