

University Governance: *From Surviving to Thriving*

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS REPORT



Based on the conference convened by CUFA BC on January 18-19, 2024 in Vancouver, BC.

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Acknowledgements

University Governance: From Surviving to Thriving is a conference proceedings publication based on the 2024 governance conference organized by the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia (CUFA BC).

We are grateful to all the fine scholars who contributed their wisdom, passion, and expertise to the conference, and to Sam Bradd of Drawing Change for beautifully transforming our discussions into graphic form.

We would like to acknowledge the professional skills and expertise of Peggy McGregor, copywriter extraordinaire, who brilliantly synthesized the material into this wonderful publication. Thank you for capturing the enthusiasm of our conference, Peggy, and for bringing life to this publication!

We would also like to thank Annabree Fairweather, CUFA BC's Executive Director, for her hard work, resourcefulness, and tireless resolve. Annabree single-handedly organised the two-day conference—and even pivoted to a hybrid format on the eve of the event, when Vancouver's one and only winter snowstorm shut down the city and threatened travel for speakers and attendees. "I'll never do this again," she says, immediately followed by, "Let's do it again next year!"

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Preface



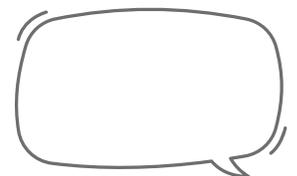
About the Conference

CUFA BC held its third-ever university governance conference on January 18-19, 2024, in Vancouver, BC. Over two days, more than 100 governance stakeholders from across Canada engaged with an ambitious agenda to tackle pressing issues in university decision-making.

The conference provided a crucial space to discuss both immediate challenges and broader systemic issues. The program began with an overview of current governance concerns before delving into key issues, including government and union involvement, EDI, and senate-board relations.

Attendees included faculty, staff, union leaders, administrators, government officials, and policymakers from across the country, including Newfoundland, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Northern British Columbia. By bringing together these key stakeholders, the conference fostered a rare opportunity to move beyond institutional divides and provincial boundaries and work collaboratively toward a shared vision of strong, inclusive university governance.

Despite the challenges facing post-secondary institutions, the conference ended on a hopeful note. Through dialogue, shared expertise, and collective action, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to governance structures that reflect the values of transparency, collegiality, and academic integrity.





I've been blown away by the talks and the conversation the last day and a half, and I've learned an enormous amount.

Shannon Dea, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Regina



About the Organizer

For more than 50 years, the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia (CUFA BC) has been the provincial voice for 5,500+ university professors, instructors, lecturers, and academic librarians at five research universities across the province. We work with the faculty associations at Royal Roads University, Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia, University of Northern British Columbia, and University of Victoria. Our purposes are to support high-quality post-secondary education and research in British Columbia, and to advocate for the interests of our members.

We respectfully acknowledge our office is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the x̣m̄m̄θkw̄ȳəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh), and Stó:lō Nations.

Sessions and Speakers

1. *State of the Union: Current Issues*

This session explored current issues in university governance, including external pressures like government interference and underfunding, and internal dysfunctions like structural imbalances and eroding relationships. This session was foundational to our collective understanding of university governance, anchoring conversations throughout the rest of the conference.



Jacqueline Holler, Professor, University of Northern BC (UNBC)

Jacqueline Holler is Professor of History and Gender Studies at UNBC in Prince George, BC. She has a dual research program in contemporary gender studies and the cultural history of New Spain. She also co-directs a student mobility program and the Queen Elizabeth Scholars program at UNBC. Holler has served on the UNBC Senate and, since 2007, variously as President, Vice-President, Grievance Officer, and Negotiating Committee member of the UNBC Faculty Association. She served as inaugural Co-Chair of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Equity Committee, member of the CAUT Executive Committee (2014-2017), and CUFA BC President (2018-2020). Holler is currently a member of the CAUT Academic Freedom Committee.



Julia Eastman, governance author, speaker, and advisor

Julia Eastman writes, speaks, and advises on university governance in Canada. She is lead author (with Glen Jones, Claude Trottier, and Olivier Bégin-Caouette) of *University Governance in Canada: Navigating Complexity*. She has also written about mergers and revenue generation in higher education. Eastman is Adjunct Professor in the Gustavson School of Business at the University of Victoria, where she served as University Secretary (2005-2018.) Prior to that, she held various administrative positions at Dalhousie University and worked at the Nova Scotia Department of Education, the Council of Maritime Premiers, and the Institute of Intergovernmental Relations at Queen's University. Eastman has a BA in Political Economy from the University of Toronto, an MA in Political Studies from Queen's University, and a PhD in Higher Education from the University of Toronto.

2. Use it or Lose it: Faculty Roles & Responsibilities

A panel of three presenters discussed current roles and responsibilities of faculty within university governance, including an overview of what works and doesn't work in the lived experience of shared governance. This panel explored a plurality of experiences from leading experts in governance.



Mark Mac Lean, Professor, University of British Columbia (UBC)

Mark Mac Lean is an award-winning researcher and Professor in the Department of Mathematics at UBC. In addition to his foundational work in geometry and analysis, Mac Lean served as an elected faculty representative on the UBC Board of Governors (2020-2023), and is a former president of the UBC Faculty Association. He is deeply committed to the principles of shared governance and collegial governance within the university. His colleagues recognize him as someone who values the contributions of others and leads through consensus-based, informed decision-making.



Rick Kool, Professor, Royal Roads University

Rick Kool is founder of the MA in Environmental Education and Communication, which began in 2003. A self-confessed generalist and academic dilettante, he has published on the walking speed of dinosaurs, Northwest coast native whaling, museum exhibit design, ciliated protozoans, and the sex life of marine invertebrates. His recent work has related to environmental education, how it confronts hope and despair, and the conceptions of change and potential role of religion within it. Of particular interest is the challenges of engaging in science, health, and environmental communications to science-resistant religious communities.



Glen Jones, Professor, University of Toronto

Glen Jones is Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education, and former dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. A globally recognized scholar in the field of higher education, Jones is a prolific contributor to the Canadian and international literature on higher education and a frequent public speaker and commentator on higher education issues. He has received numerous awards for his research and contributions to higher education scholarship, including an honorary degree. In 2021, he was the recipient of the Vivek Goel Citizenship Award. Jones teaches in the higher education program.

3. Legislation, Lobbying, Bargaining: The Role Of Government And Unions

Experts shared their perspectives on the role of unions and government within university governance. Governments legislate the structural foundation of university governance, but also participate in governance in ways that can shape institutions. There is no defined role for faculty associations (unions) within university governance, but they participate in it even if their role is historically peripheral and ambiguous.



Larry Savage, Professor & Senate Vice-Chair, BrockU

Larry Savage is Chair of the Department of Labour Studies at Brock University and past president of the Canadian Association for Work and Labour Studies. He has co-authored several scholarly books on the Canadian labour movement. His research focuses on labour politics and union strategy, and his most recent SSHRC-funded research explored labour relations in the university sector. Professor Savage is currently serving in his fifth year as Vice-Chair of the Brock University Senate. He has also served as Chief Negotiator for the Brock University Faculty Association since 2017 and CAUT Collective Bargaining and Organizing Committee since 2022. He was the 2022 recipient of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association's Lorimer Award.



Max Blouw, President, Research Universities' Council of BC (RUCBC)

Max Blouw has served as President of RUCBC since 2019. He previously served as President and Vice-Chancellor of Wilfrid Laurier University (2007-2017), Chair of the Council of Ontario Universities, and as a member of Universities Canada. Blouw was a professor of biology from 1995 to 2007, and subsequently Vice-President of Research at the University of Northern British Columbia. He has held various leadership roles and has served on many boards, including at three universities.



James (Jim) Johnson, Professor, University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBC-O)

Jim Johnson is a Professor of Economics at UBC. He previously held academic appointments at Wilfrid Laurier University, McMaster University, the University of Saskatchewan, and Okanagan University College. He spent 10 years as a member of the UBC Okanagan Senate. He has also served on the BC Federation of Labour's Legislative and Research Committee, the BC Ministry of Skills, Training and Education's Standing Committee on Evaluation and Accountability and the Key Performance Indicators Working Group. He previously served as Chief Negotiator for the UBC Faculty Association (2010-2023), President of CUFA BC, President of the Okanagan University College Faculty Association, and the Federation of Post Secondary Educators of BC (FPSE). His primary research interests are in the areas of industrial relations, labour market discrimination, and econometrics.

4. Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) in University Governance

This breakout discussion session encouraged collaboration on real-world solutions to incorporate EDI into university governance effectively. We learned from the expertise and lived experiences of equity-deserving faculty, including contract faculty.



Sarika Bose, Lecturer, University of British Columbia

Sarika Bose is a Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literatures at UBC, and teaches Victorian and Children's Literatures. She is also a faculty member in UBC's M.A. in Children's Literature program. Bose is active as a leader in local university labour associations, the current chair of the UBC Faculty Association's Contract Faculty Committee, and a board member of the International Board of the Coalition of Contract Academic Labour. She is the previous Chair of CAUT's Contract Academic Staff Committee. Bose is also active in P.E.O., which funds higher education for women. She did her undergraduate work at UBC and her doctoral work at Birmingham University in the U.K. She returns regularly to the U.K. to continue her cultural studies research.



Kumari Beck, Associate Professor, Simon Fraser University (SFU) & President, SFU Faculty Association (SFUFA)

Kumari Beck is Associate Professor, Co-Director for the Centre for Research on International Education, and academic coordinator of the Equity Studies in Education program in the Faculty of Education at SFU. As President of SFUFA, she is interested in equity and academic freedom issues. Her research focuses on university internationalization including student, faculty, staff and administrator experiences. The courses she teaches reflect diverse and inter-related interests: intercultural and international education, contemporary issues in curriculum, multicultural and anti-racist education, the politics of difference, and teaching for social justice. Her work history includes teaching and program development in international education, adult community education, and governance in the international cooperation sector.



Rheanna Robinson, Associate Professor, UNBC

Rheanna Robinson is Métis and a member of the Manitoba Métis Federation. She acknowledges the territory of the Lheidli T'enneh Nation where the Prince George campus of UNBC is located and where she has had the privilege to live, work, and learn for more than two decades. Robinson is an Indigenous scholar who is deeply committed to the discipline of First Nations Studies at UNBC. She values the role of Indigenous knowledge within institutions of higher learning and what this knowledge offers the world. Her research interests include Indigenous disability studies, Indigenous education, Indigenous theory, methods, and Indigenous-led community-based research.

5. Building Bridges: On Facilitating Collaboration Between Senate & Board

A plurality of perspectives were shared in this breakout discussion session, which discussed the important yet sometimes tense relationship between the senate and board in Canadian universities. We looked at dysfunctions in governance structures, processes, and relationships, and asked what can be done to improve senate-board collaboration.



Cheryl Foy, President, Strategic Governance Consulting Services

Cheryl Foy authored *An Introduction to University Governance*. As President of Strategic Governance Consulting Services, she provides governance reviews, strategic advice, training and education, and mentoring. She has over 20 years of governance experience in the publicly traded, private, not-for-profit and university sectors. Foy is on the Editorial Board of *Canadian Lawyer Magazine* and writes regularly on matters pertaining to governance, labour law, universities, and professional responsibility. Cheryl received her law degree and an Honours BA in Political Studies and French from Queen's University. She practised law for more than 25 years, including 20 years as General Counsel and Corporate Secretary to four organizations in the technology and higher education sectors. Cheryl was awarded the Women's Law Association of Ontario, General Counsel Award in 2020.



Jeff Hennessy, President & Vice Chancellor, AcadiaU

Jeff Hennessy began his term as the 17th President and Vice Chancellor of Acadia University in 2023. He has a long history with Acadia, completing his Bachelor of Music degree in 1999 and later serving as a Professor of Music, Director of the School of Music, and Dean of the Faculty of Arts. In 2020, Hennessy was appointed Provost and Vice President Academic and Research at Mount Allison University. He was later appointed as Mount Allison's Chief Transition Officer and then Interim President and Vice Chancellor. He has also served as Chair of the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission and as Chair of the Maple League of Universities. Dr. Hennessy holds a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Toronto, a Master of Arts from UBC, a Bachelor of Music from Acadia University, and a Bachelor of Science from Trent University.



Robin Whitaker, Vice-President, Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)

Robin Whitaker is Vice-President of CAUT and co-Chair of the CAUT Governance Committee. She is a former President of MUN Faculty Association, the union representing academic staff at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador, where she is a faculty member in the Department of Anthropology.

6. Survive or Thrive: What is the Future of University Governance?

This session asked how university governance can evolve and adapt to the changing educational landscape. Three speakers shared their visions, drawing on discussions held during the conference and identifying key components of effective governance.



Marc Spooner, Professor, University of Regina

Marc Spooner is a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. His research interests include audit culture, academic freedom, and the effects of neoliberalization and corporatization on higher education; as well as social justice, activism, and participatory democracy. He has published in many venues, including peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, government reports, and a wide variety of popularizations. He is the co-editor of the award-winning book *Dissident Knowledge in Higher Education* and is oftentimes a social/political commentator who can be followed on X/Twitter at @drmarcspooner (but is by no means a Musk supporter.)



Shannon Dea, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Regina

Shannon Dea is the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Regina. A settler scholar, she originally hails from Anishanabek Algonquin and Kanyen'kehà:ka (Mohawk) territory, and now lives and works on Treaty 4 and the Métis homeland. Dea is the author of *Beyond the Binary: Thinking About Sex and Gender* and the University Affairs column *Dispatches on Academic Freedom* (2018-2022). She has published and spoken on academic freedom, campus freedom of expression issues, and university governance. She is also the principal investigator on a SSHRC-funded project exploring better academic freedom protections for precarious and equity-denied scholars. Dea is a recipient of the Ontario Women's Directorate's Leading Women Building Communities Award and the University of Waterloo's Distinguished Teacher Award. Prior to joining the University of Regina, Shannon spent 13 years at the University of Waterloo, where she was the Director of Women's Studies, Vice-President of the Faculty Association, and the inaugural Faculty of Arts Teaching Fellow.



Sue Wurtele, Associate Professor, Trent University & Past President, OCUFA

Sue Wurtele is Chair of the OCUFA Board of Directors and immediate Past President of OCUFA. She is Chief Negotiator of the Trent University Faculty Association (TUFA) and has previously served as the Vice-President of OCUFA, Chair of OCUFA's Collective Bargaining

Committee, and President of TUFA. She is the recipient of OCUFA's 2022-2023 Lorimer Award for Collective Bargaining and currently serves on the University Pension Plan's Board of Trustees. Wurtele is an Associate Professor in the School of Environment at Trent University. Her research and teaching is in the areas of feminist, urban, and historical-cultural geography in the Canadian context. She is the recipient of numerous teaching awards.



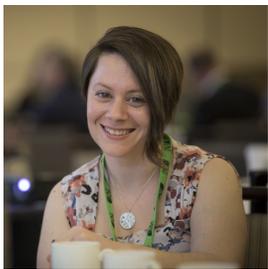
Pictured: Sam Bradd provided graphic facilitation, helping us summarize key insights and outcomes from the conference.

Conference Facilitators



Ken Christie, President, CUFA BC

Ken Christie is the Program Head and a Professor of the Human Security and Peacebuilding graduate program at Royal Roads University. He is a political scientist, author, editor, and international academic who has taught and conducted research at universities in the U.S., Singapore, South Africa, Norway, U.A.E., and Canada, focusing on issues of human rights, security, and democratization. Christie is widely published as an author and editor with 11 books to his credit, including *Migration, Refugees and Human Security in the Mediterranean and MENA* (co-edited with Marion Boulby.) Today, he is working on issues of human security, de-radicalization, terrorism, human rights, populism, and corporate social responsibility. The work he produces is truly interdisciplinary and collaborative in nature. Dr. Christie is also a frequent commentator in the media on a wide variety of international affairs topics.



Annabree Fairweather, Executive Director, CUFA BC

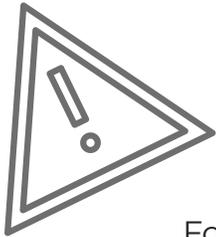
Annabree Fairweather has worked in post-secondary academic labour relations union-side for over a decade in BC and Alberta. She has experience representing faculty rights in bargaining and labour disputes, as well as personal experience as a contract faculty member. Prior to her career in university labour, Fairweather was a published researcher and contract instructor at both the university and college level. She holds a Master of Science in experimental psychology and a double major Bachelor of Arts and Science in French and Psychology, as well as a Labour Relations-Management Certificate.



Sam Bradd, Principal, Drawing Change

With 25 years' of facilitation experience, Sam Bradd focuses on creating visuals for organizational development and systems change. He has co-edited two books including *Drawn Together Through Visual Practice* and is a co-founder of the award-winning Graphic History Collective that creates peoples' histories in accessible formats. Bradd has worked in 11 countries and is recognized for expertise in health systems, environment, social policy and helping people have better meetings. Drawing Change gives back via their Foundation, which supports charities in the arts and social justice, decolonization and reconciliation, and climate justice.

Is University Governance in Crisis?



For many years, we have talked about tensions and a shifting balance of power between academic, business, and management decision-makers in post-secondary education. The pandemic exacerbated this shift as universities had to make decisions swiftly to respond to urgent health issues. Faculty saw administrators assuming full decision-making authority rather than sharing it with faculty, and this has had lasting consequences. They were left with a sense that governance had eroded—that they must fight to reclaim their rights, or forever cede them to a new norm.

Our conference aimed to explore this shift in governance and restore balance. But as the discussion unfolded, it became clear that administrations were surprised and saddened by faculty's state of alarm. While some speakers voiced serious concerns about dysfunctional decision-making, others cautioned against adopting a "crisis narrative" that might do more harm than good. Presenters agreed that universities face external pressures and internal challenges that threaten the integrity of collegial governance; yet they also felt that Canada's university governance model is among the strongest in the world and must be protected.

At the end of the conference, there was still disagreement as to whether university governance is truly in crisis. However, we saw people on all sides come together to share perspectives, reconnect with the fundamental principles of collegial governance, and leave with a shared sense of hope and purpose.



Pandemic Perspectives: What Happened?

“The pandemic disrupted collegial governance, with people often citing ‘exceptional circumstances’ as a reason not to do things by the book. But in many cases the impacts have been lasting,” said Jacqueline Holler, Professor at UNBC. She cited a “cautionary tale” about the University of Alberta General Faculties’ Council’s executive decision to introduce a credit or no credit grading system for the Winter 2020 semester. The decision wasn’t submitted for discussion to the General Faculties’ Council because of perceived urgency—so when the council finally met, faculty were deeply divided, with many seeing the decision as a done deal.

Mark Mac Lean, Professor at UBC, examined the government’s Return-to-Campus guidelines as an example of boards allowing external interference. “It evolved from the Public Health Officer giving orders to the Ministry making decisions about how classes should operate. This was an overstepping ... and there was a tendency for the board to just accept this. But there should have been more discussion. The senate should have been better consulted, and the board had a responsibility to ensure that.” Mac Lean emphasized that there was no legal argument to support boards “rubber-stamping” the guidelines. Quite the opposite, he argues—boards should pay special attention to their statutory responsibilities during extraordinary events and circumstances.

Post-pandemic, “we’re seeing more and more proposals from senior administrators to eliminate meaningful faculty involvement,” said Larry Savage, Professor & Senate Vice-Chair at BrockU. However, he was careful to consider the external pressures behind this trend. “While it’s true that administrations may take particular approaches to budgetary constraints, restructuring, or labour relations, they’re all responding to broader political trends that are changing the nature of the university as an institution.”



One concrete suggestion I can make—and I think a point of great hopefulness—is for us all to pay attention to and articulate the importance of governance in an era of many rapid and inevitable changes, of which the pandemic was only one. This conference, then, gives me great hope for the future.

Jacqueline Holler, Professor, UNBC





It's clear that administrators weren't intentionally seeking to consolidate power during the pandemic. However, it's important they acknowledge the erosion of collegial governance as a legitimate concern and show faculty their voices genuinely matter.

Annabree Fairweather, Executive Director, CUFA BC



"I don't believe the governance model is at threat, or that we necessarily have a governance crisis ... I do think we have a leadership problem in higher education," said Jeff Hennessey, President & Vice Chancellor at AcadiaU. "We need a better informed community about how governance works and we need better leaders who respect and champion the governance model." He added that "one way we might improve that is to have more experiences like this [conference], where administrators and faculty association representatives can discuss matters away from their own local environments."

Robin Whitaker, Vice-President at CAUT, cautioned against embracing a crisis narrative, "not because the problems we're facing aren't real—they certainly are—but because that analytical frame may direct our attention from questions that we need to ask." She encouraged us to consider the effects of "mundane and routine factors" that contribute to things going wrong, such as strained relations between the senate and board.

Whitaker acknowledged that it's easy to feel hopeless in the face of the issues impacting university governance. However, she warned that a "politics of resignation" is "a conservative force in a bad way—that may serve some, but it doesn't work in the best interests of the public university."

Collegial Governance: What is it Anyway?

It's all too easy to lose sight of collegial governance ideals as we grapple with external pressures and internal tensions. Mark Mac Lean provided an essential refresher on key principles, roles, rights, and responsibilities.

Almost every university in Canada follows a bi-cameral governance system, enshrined in its founding or provincial laws. In this system, academic decisions are handled by a senate or equivalent academic council with participation from faculty members, while financial and resource management is overseen by a governing board with participation from administrations and appointed volunteers.



By many definitions, participation in academic self-governance is embedded in our academic freedom. We cannot position it as a nicety if we truly believe it is a necessity.

Glenn Jones, Professor, University of Toronto



Role of the Board

Mac Lean quoted Section 27(1) of the *BC University Act*, which states: “The management, administration and control of the property, revenue, business and affairs of the university are vested in the board.” Mac Lean pointed out that the board generally delegates much of its authority to the administration, yet always retains responsibility for the consequences of its decisions. For this reason and others, the board has an active obligation to see that it's informed.

He also drew attention to Section 19.1: “The members of the board of a university must act in the best interests of the university.” Mac Lean noted that the board should consider the university's academic mission, as well as take advice from the administration, senate, and government.

Roles of the Senate

Section 37(1) of the *BC University Act* states: “The academic governance of the university is vested in the senate.” Mac Lean highlighted that the senate comprises mostly faculty members and seldom delegates their authority to the administration. “It’s a much more active decision-making body, and in fact carries on some administrative and managerial responsibilities,” he explained.

A Duty to Cooperate

“We are statutorily required to cooperate with each other,” said Mac Lean, quoting section 47(2)(f) of the *BC University Act* which states that universities must “generally, promote and carry on the work of a university in all its branches, through the cooperative effort of the board, senate and other constituent parts of the university.”

Mac Lean stressed that “faculty governors have a right to expect full support from the administration, board leadership, and board secretariat (and the government in some instances) to carry out their responsibilities under the *University Act*. They also have the right to participate in the board without interference in their efforts to meet their statutory responsibilities.”

Want to learn more about university governance in BC? [Download CUFA BC’s governance whitepaper \(PDF\)](#).

It's a system of decision-making and accountability, and our shared governance system inside universities rests on a vision that tries to ensure that a number of perspectives inform the governance of the university. Boards are made up of external members, majority of external members, to ensure that first, the public interest is forefront in governance, and secondly, that there's a measure of independent and objective oversight over those people running the university. Faculty are to be involved in academic decision-making to ensure that those who have expertise in teaching, learning, and academic matters are involved in academic decisions. We need to support the health of the system and realize these underlying principles, and not treat it as a forum within which to do battle.

Cheryl Foy, President, Strategic Governance Consulting



The term collegial governance is often misused or misunderstood in universities. Collegial should not be confused with congenial. Collegial governance doesn't mean that we have to be polite, or that we have to defer to authority, or that we even have to get along. On the contrary, collegial governance often involves rigorous debate and strong disagreements—and I think that's a good thing.

Larry Savage, Professor & Senate Vice-Chair, BrockU

External Pressures and Problems



Canadian universities are caught between expanding mandates, shrinking resources, and overregulation. Post-secondary education continues to be chronically underfunded, while flawed “performance-driven” funding models have encouraged short-sighted decision-making that undermine academic missions. Many universities have become increasingly dependent on international tuition fees, only to be left scrambling to adjust when new federal policy imposed limits on international student enrollment. Public trust in post-secondary education has eroded, driven in part by real and perceived failures in governance, and compounded by populist movements that use universities as “political punching bags.” Governments increasingly see universities as direct extensions of government interest and public agencies to be managed, leading to interference in governance and regulatory overreach.

Julia Eastman, a governance author, speaker and advisor, emphasized that “the biggest threats are not within.” Indeed, it’s important to remember that internal issues often have external roots. Underfunding and overregulation have fueled the marketization of universities, dividing administrative objectives from core academic missions. Funding models based on flawed performance metrics are undermining academic autonomy and further marginalizing equity-deserving faculty. If universities are to find a way through these challenges, we must recognize we’re in this together.



The Neoliberalization of Post-Secondary Education

Canadian universities have a proud history of advancing public good from their unique position in society. “I see the university as one of the big pillars of democracy that joins the judiciary, the legislature, and the free press ... We're there to inform public policy and to speak truth in ways that we're protected to do,” said Marc Spooner, Professor at University of Regina. “In the current global context—when humanity and many forms of life are threatened, when we face problems of immense complexity, when many young people are very apprehensive about the future, when disinformation is rampant—it's more important than ever that universities fulfill their missions of advancing and disseminating knowledge,” said Eastman.

However, this ideal of the university may become increasingly out of reach as the federal and provincial governments continue to underfund and overregulate the post-secondary sector. Larry Savage, Professor & Senate Vice-Chair at BrockU, described this shift and its consequences:

“There are plenty of examples from across the country of government interference in university governance—whether through restricted funding, appointments, strategic mandates, bargaining mandates, enrollment corridors, or differentiation exercises. Every year there's some new term that a different provincial government is using as cover to interfere in the governance of universities. But these are all part of a more general trend in the public sector. In effect, Canadian universities have been subject, like the rest of the public sector, to a process of neoliberalization.

More precisely, what I'm talking about here is the use of market based needs, practices, criteria, and forms of delivery becoming dominant—if not legislated—in universities. And they've somewhat displaced other goals, like the development of an informed and active citizenry. Neoliberal indicators in the university are all around us, whether it's the shift to revenue-generating programs, cost recovery between departments, or the new client-centered culture that attempts to cater to students as consumers as opposed to learners.”

Max Blouw, President of the Research Universities' Council of BC (RUCBC), expressed a different view of government interference.

“Governments have a tough role. Who wants to be in charge of a health system in B.C. right now? Not me ... So when it comes to our institutions, are we on the government radar for a lot of intervention? The answer is no, not much. They have far bigger problems,” he said. However, Blouw acknowledged that the government does intervene sometimes, often with “unintended consequences.” He believes that if universities build clear, positive relationships with government then “intrusions into our institutions will be fewer—they’ll be less forceful, have fewer negative impacts, and hopefully more positive impacts.”

Julia Eastman, a governance author, speaker, and advisor, believes the trend toward overregulation of the post-secondary education sector is likely to continue, “driven in part by real and perceived governance failures on the part of universities on issues like financial management, sexualized violence, and national security.” She added, “Growth of populism in Canada can pose an even more immediate threat. The risk is that universities become political punching bags and lose funding, autonomy, and public trust.”



It's important for us to acknowledge that many of the problems associated with universities can't be resolved internally because the true sources of these problems don't always originate at the level of the university.

Larry Savage, Professor & Senate Vice-Chair, BrockU



Spooner agreed, expressing that universities increasingly feel “vulnerability to government pressure, whether it's to focus on jobs or industry, or to be ‘less woke.’” He believes that “governments see us increasingly as another government agency, and that we ought to do what their mandate tells us to do ... They can do this through mechanisms like performance-based funding which ties funding to industry and other labour market indicators like salaries.”

Marc Schroeder, Associate Professor at Mount Royal University, expressed concern that some administrations may actually support the neoliberalization of Canadian universities. Caveating that his “perspective is colored by the Alberta context”, Schroeder spoke about his experience in Alberta with presidents and provosts “publicly cheerleading” rising tuition fees, performance-based funding, and the replacement of operating grants with targeted funding. In response, Max Blouw, President of the Research Universities' Council of BC, spoke about the value of relationships between universities and government, cautioning us “to think about the context from which individuals make those kinds of comments ... Sometimes presidents actually have to say that kind of stuff to maintain relationships.”

Rheanna Robinson, Associate Professor at UNBC, drew attention to the impact of performance metrics on members of equity-deserving communities, quoting a recent essay on disabled academics in Canadian universities:

“Although Canadian universities are required by law to implement policies and procedures to address the needs of disabled employees, disabled faculty still experience difficulties navigating neoliberal performance standards and medicalized conceptualizations of disability as an individual impairment and individual responsibility ... This medical discourse of disability may be intensified by neoliberal performance standards that create normalized regimes of the 'optimal' and productive academic and further perpetuate ableism within higher education.” (Waterfield, 2017)¹

As an Indigenous academic living with disability, Robinson spoke about the additional workload of seeking accommodations and navigating discrimination in employment, while being asked regularly to consult on EDI matters as part of her service work, and building equitable relationships on- and off-campus. Not only is this labour unrecognized by performance metrics, it’s also a barrier to the type of “productivity” that existing models recognize and reward. Robinson asked, “How do you measure two years of building mutually respectful relations?”

(1) Waterfield, B., Beagan, B. B., & Weinberg, M. (2017). Disabled academics: a case study in Canadian universities. *Disability & Society*, 33(3), 327–348.

Increasing Corporate Influence

Savage highlighted the growing corporate influence in universities as another factor fueling their neoliberalization. “Corporatization of universities is being driven primarily by an emphasis on fundraising for endowments, named chairs, and infrastructure all around campuses. This dynamic gives wealthy individuals and corporations outside the university enormous influence over the kinds of activities that will be supported.”

He added, “University boards themselves are often dominated by [people with] corporate interests. They often have no experience with collegial governance processes and have very different ideas about the purpose of universities—typically emphasizing the role universities play in private sector economic development and training the workforce.”

Spooner echoed this view. “I see the board of governors and human resources drift towards more top-down models of corporate governance. And I don't say that they do this nefariously—I think board members often come from the industry; they know that world and it's either consciously or unconsciously brought to bear,” he said.

Spooner also expressed concern about increasing reliance on external corporate consultants to “optimize” university operations. He spoke about a particular consultancy that leveraged external threats as a scare tactic to gain control—and even publicly promoted its services for the University of Alberta with the statement ‘External shocks can provide a burning platform that unites stakeholders behind fundamental change.’ “They definitely applied the shock doctrine by cutting hundreds of millions of dollars and ordering big restructurings,” said Spooner. Corporate consultants can be “a way of offloading responsibility, bringing in corporate sensibilities, then blaming the report,” he said, emphasizing, “they’re against collegial governance in all kinds of ways.”



Our collegial governance principles help to ensure our independence from partisan governments that hold the reins through funding.

Marc Spooner, Professor, University of Regina





Right across the country, faculty associations are helping to ensure that we resist the tide towards managerialism in university governance.

Shannon Dea, Dean, University of Regina



The International Students Dilemma

Many institutions have become heavily reliant on revenue from international student fees as a means to offset dwindling government funding. Indeed, governments actively encouraged international student recruitment up until the sudden decision of the federal government to reduce the number of international study permits.

On top of this, Jenny Ahn, Executive Director at the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA), pointed out that there is potential for widespread racism against international students if it's suggested that they're taking away university spots from domestic students or housing from communities—concerns that are largely exaggerated and deserve a nuanced understanding of the issues.

Ahn suggests universities should “have open arms to international students, but not because we want them to pay six times the tuition fee—but rather, because they bring such value, culture, and a vibrance to our university campuses.”

Can Universities Survive the Current Climate?

There were many suggestions about the external threats to university governance and our institutions' ability to successfully respond to them. Jacqueline Holler, Professor at UNBC, first described these speculations as "dark mutterings" and we collectively used the phrase throughout the conference.

"The pressures of finance and enrollment will only increase in the coming years and will undoubtedly tax governance structures," said Holler, while Jones cautioned that "we are far from isolated from the ideologies, pressures, challenges, and partisan battles that have underscored reforms in other systems ... We have a great deal that is possible to lose."

Speakers viewed university governance as both under threat from external pressures and an essential defence against them. "For an organization to respond successfully to challenges of this magnitude requires a lot of strength in governance and leadership. In my view, it also requires a level of awareness of common interests and a sense of collective mission on the part of organization members," said Eastman, adding, "At the moment, I'm not seeing that in Canadian universities."

Eastman expressed concern that "if universities falter in their missions, we're likely to see rapid downward trajectories at institutions across the country as governments reduce funding and access to fees, misguided public policies are enacted, enrollments decline, partners withdraw, and universities retrench." She emphasized the need to "recognize we're in this together," "have frank, difficult conversations," and "be prepared to radically rethink existing assumptions and arrangements."

Faculty unions are a critical source of hope, said Shannon Dea, Dean at University of Regina. Dea felt optimistic about collegial governance despite it "often being true about apathy, neoliberalization, and managerialism." Dea—who has participated in governance from "both sides of the divide" as faculty member and now administrator—asserted that "the existence of faculty associations is helping to maintain a firewall against global trends away from collegial governance." This report discusses the role of faculty unions in university governance in the next section, 'Internal Dynamics and Dysfunctions.'

Public Trust as a Route to Core Funding

“Where can we move the dial on the need for core funding?” asked David Sadoway, Professor at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Speakers were generally pessimistic about our chances of increasing core funding through government lobbying. Dea replied, “In the seven conservative provinces, you're not going to move the dial with these governments. They have no interest in increasing base funding [or] the student grant.” Dea believes there may be opportunities to gain more research funding at the federal level and use it in creative ways to support university operations, but she added “we're in a tough context.”

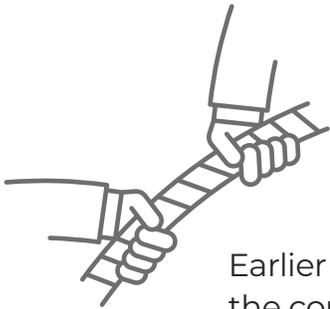
Several speakers felt that public engagement is a more promising pathway to core funding. “If we can't lobby governments effectively ... we can lobby the public,” said Spooner. Eastman described public trust as “a prerequisite to retain a level of independence ... and to secure resources and support for university activities,” while Blouw described reputation as “the currency that institutions trade on.”

However, Eastman expressed concern that Canadians have been losing faith in universities. She pointed to governance failures, such as the Laurentian University financial crisis in 2021, and populist movements that use universities as “political punching bags.” Cheryl Foy, President at Strategic Governance Consulting, agreed that “we have much work to do to build trust that we are well-governed.”

Spooner believes universities need to change the way they communicate with the public. “It's the old ivory tower trope,” he said. “When we engage the public, we often shame them for not knowing ... We ought to be engaging them in ways that are supportive and hopeful, and we have to demonstrate that we're willing to listen.” Spooner also called for universities to reexamine how they interact with alumni, ensuring they feel “invited into the conversation” instead of only asking them for money.

Dea agreed, reflecting on her own shifting view of public engagement. “Our most important allies are the members of our broader community,” she said. “They're the people who come on to university campuses to see their kids dance. I used to scoff at the dance performances downstairs from my office at Waterloo, and thought ‘what does this have to do with the university?’ Well, it has to do with making the university a place that's hospitable to the whole community, where they see themselves in it and supported by it.”

Internal Dynamics and Dysfunctions



Earlier in this report we explored the erosion of faculty rights in the context of the COVID pandemic, with some boards and administrations citing “exceptional circumstances” as the reason to suspend normal collegial governance processes. We also touched on external pressures that create internal tensions, stifle academic freedom, and undermine core academic missions. This section looks more closely at the internal dynamics and power imbalances at play within university governance systems.

Faculty at the conference showed deep frustration at their weakened involvement and influence in institutional decision-making. There was debate around whether faculty unions should keep themselves separate from the senate or increase their sphere of influence in the senate’s process as a way to safeguard collegial governance rights for faculty. Speakers also debated the value of legislative or structural changes to bolster governance, with several warning against opening the *University Act* to revisions in a climate of increasing government interference. There was general agreement on the need for cultural change to strengthen governance through improved relationships, expertise, capacity, incentive, and inclusivity.



Exclusion, Conflict, and Disengagement in University Governance

What's going wrong within our university governance systems?

Jacqueline Holler, Professor at UNBC, presented an example of the recent Brescia-Western merger. Brescia University College—Canada's only women's university—fully integrated into Western University in May 2024, ending its 104-year history as an independent institution.² This merger was met with anger and disappointment from the Brescia community, who felt the decision was made suddenly and without consultation. The President of Brescia's faculty association said he learned about the merger only 15 minutes before it was publicly announced in September 2023.³

“The first relevant vulnerability here is structural, since Brescia has only a board,” explained Holler. “The absence of an academic governing body and bicameral system at Brescia has undoubtedly coloured the response to this situation, since the only senate to fully debate this issue was Western's senate, where debate understandably tended to focus on the effects on Western of the proposed merger.”

Holler stressed that structural variances “should not be overlooked ... This would include not only unicameralism, but also uneven faculty ratios on boards and senates, and other features of governance such as mode of appointment.” She noted that in BC, Royal Roads University remains in the same position as Brescia as a result of its special status outside the *University Act*.

Holler also highlighted the potential cynical use of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as a smokescreen. “The merger was initially cast as a natural evolution in the equity mission of Brescia ... [it was] later confirmed by Western to be at least partially finance and enrollment related. There are reports of similar misuses of EDI, for example to limit transparency in administrative searches.

EDI smokescreens not only enable exclusionary decision-making, they also distract from and undermine the real work of building inclusive universities. Genuine EDI efforts come from balanced governance structures that enable meaningful participation from faculty members of equity-deserving communities.

(2) www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/brescia-western-merger-1.6974221

(3) www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/staff-students-brescia-western-merge-1.6977015



EDI claims, whether sincere or cynical, should not be used to shut down academic debate, limit transparency, or circumvent the need for collegial processes, all of which are directly antithetical to the principles of equity and fairness.

Jacqueline Holler, Professor, UNBC



In the vein of structural issues and misleading narratives, Marc Spooner, Professor at the University of Regina, drew attention to a recent essay which introduces the term governance inversion: “ ... A situation in which a university administration repositions a governance body in such a way as to limit its legitimate governance function. Structural conditions might make governance inversion more likely, but narratives might also be deployed to make the inversion appear as the common-sense order of things.” (Schroeder, 2023)⁴

Many speakers and participants described instances where the function of the senate had been limited to a mere formality. Lynne Marks, Professor at the University of Victoria and President of the faculty association, remarked, “Our administration really wants to use our senate as a rubber stamp and often to get through decisions that are not good for faculty [or] students. And when people raise a concern about that—particularly people from the faculty association leadership—it's dismissed.”

“We’re seeing some pretty strong resistance to collegial governance,” said Larry Savage, Professor & Senate Vice-Chair at BrockU. “This is particularly true when faculty and their commitments to certain academic priorities constitute barriers to the internal transformation of universities ... In these cases, containing or marginalizing faculty or union involvement in decision-making processes becomes an important goal for university administrators who are leading restructuring efforts. Even the best-intentioned senior administrators will sometimes grow impatient and actively try to undermine collegial governance, rather than address the concerns of the faculty members who are using the system to push back.”

(4) Schroeder, M. (2023). The academic governance body: What's its role and who decides? *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 46(2), 276–294.

Exclusionary practices such as these make governance frustrating and unrewarding for faculty—to the extent that many become disengaged. “They don't want their time wasted. If they're going to be on the senate, they want to accomplish things. They don't want their voices silenced,” said Cheryl Foy, President at Strategic Governance Consulting. Some conference delegates observed a retraction from governance processes among faculty because they are either so overworked, overwhelmed, or angry that they don't want to participate.



This exclusion of faculty governors is political, and often supported by the unreasonable notion that unionization of faculty diminishes their rights under the *University Act*.

Mark Mac Lean, Professor, UBC



While faculty disengagement under these circumstances is understandable, it facilitates their exclusion from governance. Rick Kool, Professor at Royal Roads University, reflected, “The concept of ‘use it or lose it’ puts faculty in a bit of a bind. If they don't actively engage in academic governance, they have to live with the current command and control theories of their administrative colleagues. But faculty members who step up to engage in shared governance or faculty unions make sacrifices. The sleep that union leaders lose, for example, when taking their members on strike is not reflected either in their paychecks or in their promotion reports.”

Holler summed up several factors driving faculty’s reluctance to participate:

- Insufficient capacity due to increased teaching and research output demands
- Governance roles being undervalued at tenure promotion or merit adjudication
- Seeing other service opportunities as more meaningful
- Fear that debating will earn them enmity from administrators or colleagues

Regarding the last point, Holler cautioned against a cultural trend towards valuing homogeneity over debate. She pointed out that while governance is often fractious, “fractiousness isn't a bad thing; one might argue it's key to



Presidents can't blame the board and the senate when they can't accomplish things. It's their job to lead through our governance system, not in spite of it or around it.

Jeff Hennessy, President & Vice Chancellor, AcadiaU



democracy.” Savage further elaborated on this, emphasizing, “Collegial should not be confused with congenial. Collegial governance doesn't mean that we have to be polite, or that we have to defer to authority, or that we even have to get along. On the contrary, collegial governance often involves rigorous debate and strong and sharp disagreements.” Speakers were careful to distinguish between respectful debate and hostility.

“Fractiousness that silences less assertive voices, that leave staff in tears or dreading senate meetings, that doesn't encourage diversity of perspective, is not okay, and doesn't achieve the goal of having all voices heard around governance tables,” said Foy.

Julia Eastman, governance author, speaker, & advisor, pointed out that board members also suffer and disengage when debate becomes inauthentic or hostile. “Some terrific people step up to the plate, get appointed, get to work, and then they find it's not meaningful or rewarding ... That they're spending way too much time in long meetings where people don't speak authentically about the real issues; that board meetings are often contentious, and board members who say something uninformed or controversial risk getting shamed on social media,” she said.

Eastman also highlighted the high turnover rate of presidents and provosts as a result of unrealistic expectations, conflicting demands, and a lack of support from dysfunctional boards and senates. Sharing personal experience, one speaker said, “I actually stopped going [to faculty council] for a number of years because it was such a toxic environment ... a few people were so dominant in what they wanted to say, and it really didn't feel like a safe place ... We need to figure out ways to engage in respectful dialog with a multitude of viewpoints.”

Several speakers identified that insufficient knowledge of governance contributes to tensions between its various actors. “If you're charged with a particular role and you don't understand what these various governance bodies do and why they're there, then you won't necessarily have much

respect for those bodies,” said Glen Jones, Professor at the University of Toronto. Mark Mac Lean, Professor at UBC, noted, “Appointed governors and non-academic administrators often don't understand how faculty fit into the structure, so faculty often have to defend their right to be on the board.” Holler noted that increased mobility and shorter terms among administrators has exacerbated the “lack of institutional and relevant provincial knowledge,” and furthermore that a vast amount of governance expertise is being lost as swathes of faculty retire. There were many recommendations to improve governance knowledge, which are set out in the final section of this report.

Some speakers questioned if collegial governance is truly possible when faculty, board members, staff, and administrators seem to have such conflicting interests. “I actually have a great deal of respect for many of the academic administrators that I've dealt with, but ... the objectives that they've been given to achieve are often best achieved by undermining academic governance,” said James Johnson, Professor at UBC-Okanagan. Eastman argued that there is a collective interest in a university's performance, strength, sustainability, and reputation. Holler echoed this sentiment, but drew a distinction between shared interests and shared views. “There's a shared interest in robust, healthy universities, and I believe that administrators have that interest as much as we do,” said Holler. “Now, how you get there, that's the devil in the details. On everything from institutional autonomy to the role of unions in governance, there are going to be varying views.”



Trust and respect in building bridges is fundamental to effective governance and partnership between the board and senate.

Cheryl Foy, President at Strategic Governance Consulting



Marginalization of Equity-Deserving and Contract Faculty

Across Canada, equity-deserving and contract faculty continue to lack representation and support in governance systems. In his welcome speech, Ken Christie, President of CUFA BC, cited a 2019 study showing that Indigenous people make up only 1.4% of university faculty members. Furthermore, only 21% of Indigenous faculty were tenured compared with 37% of non-Indigenous faculty, and 31% of females were tenured compared with 43% of males.⁵ This represents a significant barrier to inclusive governance as only tenured faculty are permitted to be on the senate or board.⁶

Sue Wurtele, Associate Professor at Trent University and Past President at OCUFA, offered an example of tenure cases being denied to equity-deserving groups at her own university. “Sixteen years ago we had five tenure denials and two near denials in one year with about 200 tenure stream faculty—all but one of the individuals involved were from equity deserving groups,” she said.

Contract faculty are also being overlooked for tenure, according to a 2018 CAUT survey.⁷ The survey found that 53% of respondents wanted a tenure-track job and, of these, 55% said it was “not likely at all” to happen in the next two years and 25% said it was “somewhat unlikely.”



There is an immense amount of work to do to make universities welcoming and culturally relevant for Indigenous students, Indigenous faculty and staff. We must hold this context in the forefront as we contemplate who makes decisions in the academy, who is represented, and whose voices are missing.

Ken Christie, President, CUFA BC



(5) www.150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200922/dq200922a-eng.htm

(6) www.ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/adultedpsegov/chapter/session-2-the-governance-structures-of-postsecondary-education

(7) www.mrfa.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Out-of-the-Shadows-Experiences-of-Contract-Academic-Staff-CAUT-Contract-Academic-Staff-Survey-Report-Sept-2018.pdf

Nigmendra Narain, Lecturer at the University of Western Ontario and President of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA), shared that contract faculty at his institution don't have formal representation on the board, have limited representation in committees, and aren't allowed to serve as chairs or deans. This essentially means they “don't have a say in anything the university does and are vertically controlled.”

Sarika Bose, Lecturer at UBC, said, “Contract faculty aren't even considered when it comes to their stake in the academic mission because they aren't seen as fitting into the organization in any way. They tend to be often equity-seeking groups in other contexts as well.”

Wurtele notes that the “most unsettling” aspect of the tenure denials at her university was “a failure on the part of faculty, deans, and others to see any elements of discrimination.” Kumari Beck, Associate Professor at SFU and President at SFUFA, spoke about a study that found many administrators deny discrimination issues or view them as individual rather than systemic.⁸ She reported that “from within our ranks of faculty, there's also this pushback ... they're subscribing to this myth of meritocracy and the view that hiring minoritized faculty somehow amounts to lowering the standards of the university. We've also heard this—surprisingly and quite shockingly—from a number of our [union] members.”

Often, senates and boards show plenty of “goodwill” but generally “struggle to create the right incentives or demand the right accountability,” said Foy. She noted there's a focus on “inclusive digitization,” and that while diversity supports cultural change, it isn't necessarily enough on its own. Rheanna Robinson, Associate Professor at UNBC, noted that many institutional EDI strategies actually reinforce marginalization of disabled academics due to a lack of representation and understanding. She added that “there's an immense misunderstanding about what consultation means ... I've been in discussions myself where people don't see it as an experience of engagement where it's reciprocal in nature. You get the draft, but they don't want any changes.”

We must also consider the capacity of equity-deserving faculty as we strive to increase their involvement in university governance. Generally, they're already “overburdened [with] higher teaching, mentorship, community outreach, and service loads both at work and at home,” said Beck. It's essential we consider, share, and reduce these burdens to allow for sustainable, meaningful participation.

(8) al Shaibah, A. (2023). EDI Leadership and Change Agency in Canadian Academe: An Analysis of Democratic Discourses of Senior Leaders. *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 55(1), 101-124.

Does Collective Bargaining Belong in University Governance?

“The preservation of meaningful, collegial governance increasingly rests on strong faculty associations,” said Savage—a sentiment expressed by many faculty and union members at the conference. Don Kozak, Associate Executive Director at the Faculty Association of the University of Calgary, said he believes faculty associations are “the only police force available within the university” and that “the senate is the only place where people can verbally call the administration to account.” He referred specifically to instances at his own university where “the administration violated the Universities Act, violated the rules.”

Holler drew on the Brescia-Western case study (mentioned earlier in this section) to illustrate “the necessary but still highly contested role of the unionized faculty association as a kind of watchdog over collegial governance.” Having been announced in September 2023 without sufficient consultation, the merger earned strong condemnation from the faculty associations at both Western and Brescia. Holler recounted that the president of the University of Western Ontario Faculty Association (UWOFA) raised concerns at the senate in October—only to be “cut off by the president, who accused her of conducting a legal argument on the floor of the senate and, crucially, stated that he was not okay with the union position being articulated on the floor of the senate.”

Holler summarized the president’s view as the “MacKinnonite Position—essentially, that unions are one more external interference with the autonomy of universities, and that any articulation of a union’s position is, in a sense, a power play, rather than the truth-seeking behavior that the senate should engage in.” Nevertheless, the Brescia-Western story supports the role of unions in guaranteeing collegial governance, said Holler. She explained that Western apologized to its faculty association in November, and that their vice provost admitted consultation should have taken place much earlier.

However, it’s “no easy feat” for faculty to balance their dual responsibilities to collective bargaining and collegial governance, said Eastman. “There are obviously going to be tensions, because most faculty associations are legally responsible for looking out for the interests of their members and collective bargaining is an inherently adversarial process,” she explained.

Citing Bucklew et al. (2012),⁹ Foy pointed out that achieving a symbiotic relationship between unions and governance can be challenging, particularly in instances when the union encroaches on the territorial domain of the senate, thereby diminishing the senate's role. "In the past two years I've worked with well over 20 universities, and I've observed that senates and faculty unions do have a hard time with this balance," said Foy. "Academic policy does affect the terms and conditions of employment, but they are not one and the same thing. While it takes work and analysis, the two are capable of separation. And I would say they must be separated for the health of the system, even if well motivated by an intention to improve the effectiveness of governance."

Foy argued that union involvement in governance often results in administration further marginalizing faculty, thereby "perpetuating a divide." She observed that "boards don't partner with the senate because they don't perceive senate as a governance partner, but rather perceive them as another forum in which to negotiate with faculty unions." Foy added that unions are "very important stakeholders in the governance system, but it's the faculty themselves that play a role in the system."



We form lots of different kinds of solidarity groups all the time. That's normal and healthy and to be expected. Those things are, of course, going to influence how we conduct ourselves in collegial governance. But I think it's unhealthy when we start to whip the vote, because then we're preventing the collegial bodies from doing the work that they need to do.

Shannon Dea, Dean, University of Regina



(9) Bucklew, N., Houghton, J., & Ellison, C.C. (2012). Faculty Union and Faculty Senate Co-Existence: A Review of the Impact of Academic Collective Bargaining on Traditional Academic Governance. *Labor Studies Journal*, 37(4), 373-390

Jeff Hennessy, President & Vice Chancellor at AcadiaU, raised the issue of bloc voting. “In a true collegial governance system, the faculty would not have one position on anything,” he said. “They would have the freedom to exercise multiple viewpoints, as would administrators. And with respect, if we want to involve more early-career and diverse faculty in governance and leadership, we shouldn't tell them how to vote.”

Hennessy also asserted that, on principle, unions should not have to ensure collegial governance through bargaining. “Collegial governance is not something to be negotiated. It's endemic to our system and our legislation,” he said. “If [administration] do our jobs right and according to our legislation, leaders will respect and practice collegial governance along with faculty colleagues.” However, he allowed that “as collegial governance suffers at institutions, collective bargaining fills the void. It just shouldn't have to.”

Johnson promoted “bargaining for the kinds of things which in an earlier era might have been within the purview of a truly empowered academic senate,” while Savage stated that separating the union from the senate “just isn't realistic.” Savage went on to say that the “competition” between collective bargaining and collegial governance actually amounts to a self-imposed division between union issues and academic issues; “the reality, however, is that academic decisions are almost always workplace issues, because they affect the kinds of work that faculty are expected to carry out.”

Savage also pointed out that “administrators have no qualms about coordinating their interventions in bodies like senates.” He ended his talk on the note that “faculty unions can best safeguard collegial governance by fully participating in it, by challenging attempts by senior administrators to undermine it, and by doing a better job at explaining to their members and the public why collegial governance is worth preserving.”

If unions are to participate meaningfully in governance, and if faculty are to successfully balance dual roles as employees and governance actors, it's critical that we improve expertise, capacity, inclusivity, and relationships. Avoiding or reinvigorating “rubber stamp” senates also presents a significant challenge, and this report explores possible tactics in the final section, ‘Pathways From Surviving to Thriving.’

Success Story: Striking to Strengthen Governance at Memorial University

“Last year my union went on strike for two weeks. One of the main issues related to an impasse over the union's attempt to introduce new language that would have, in the view of the faculty association and in my view, have strengthened the basis for collegial governance at Memorial. ... It wasn't about controlling governance; it was about safeguarding the opportunities for faculty to participate meaningfully and to have access to information that would allow for that meaningful participation. Two main outcomes happened. One was that our provincial government finally modified our governing legislation to lift the longstanding ban on academic staff members serving on the board. And the second was the establishment of a joint committee to examine governance at Memorial University.”

Robin Whitaker, Vice-President, Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)

Is the Governance Model Broken?

Many speakers felt that collegial governance is under threat from government interference, corporate interests, and an internal culture of increasing mistrust, hostility, exclusion, evasion, and disengagement. Various structural, cultural, and policy changes were suggested to address these issues. However, there was widespread agreement that the provincial university act—which enshrines the shared and bicameral models of university governance across Canada—should be protected against reforms.

“I would say most strongly we should never, never try and talk the government into opening up our *Acts*,” said Johnson. “And that’s partly because, by and large, governments are not sympathetic to the notion of academic governance.” Jones warned that “the governance reforms in many higher education jurisdictions and systems have generally reduced the role and influence of faculty within university governance.”

Foy also voiced concerns about “faculty unions turning to government to help solve challenges, as that invites government in and further erodes autonomy.” She added, “Some declare that bicameralism has failed. I haven’t—and I haven’t because in this climate I worry what will replace it.”

Several speakers, including Mac Lean, Johnson, and Eastman, spoke about the strength of the *University Act* on paper. The question, it seems, is whether universities can make collegial governance live up to what it’s supposed to be. Some speakers were more optimistic about this than others, yet even those who engaged in “dark mutterings” encouraged us not to give up.

I worry that we aren't united in our understanding that protecting institutional autonomy primarily from government is a priority. I worry when I see faculty unions turning to government to help solve challenges, as that invites government in and further erodes autonomy. Some declare that bicameralism has failed. I haven't. And I haven't because in this climate I worry what will replace it.

Cheryl Foy, President, Strategic Governance Consulting



Pathways From Surviving to Thriving



Our conference closed with an interactive exercise to identify participants' top takeaways and a wrap-up from our graphic facilitator, Sam Bradd. Bradd illustrated pathways forward, showing what universities can do to continue surviving and what it would take from them to thrive. Survival involves remaining relational, protecting what we have, speaking truth to power, and overcoming secrecy and government overreach. Thriving means building trust, capacity, education, and meaningful work—collecting great people and finding new ways of working along the way. At a certain point, the paths diverge, because while survival is about navigating obstacles, thriving has no single answer. We must embrace multiple paths and reject a one-size-fits-all approach.



Actionable Advice

Below, you'll find the collective wisdom of the conference's diverse speakers. We've presented it as actionable advice to help you create real, lasting change in your university governance systems.

Mindset



Be cautious of crisis narratives

Crisis narratives can create apathy and resignation, while also distracting from the more mundane and routine factors that contribute to things going wrong.

Recognize that collegial governance requires patience

What we call “efficient” is sometimes corner-cutting, offloading responsibility, or being short-sighted or anti-democratic. It's okay to deliberate on things.

Conservatism can be seen as a feature, not a flaw, of our system. Boards are conservative to protect against financial crises. Senates are conservative to protect against short-term thinking that undermines the academic interests of the university.

Listen with discernment

Recognize that there is a lack of knowledge and research on university governance, yet no shortage of opinions, some of which are uninformed, partisan, and unhelpful.

Be mindful of the University Act

Remember that the board and senate are statutorily required to cooperate and to see that they're informed. Also, faculty governors have a right to expect full support from the administration, board, and senate to carry out their responsibilities under the *University Act*, and to participate in the Board without interference.

Value our reasons for optimism

Canada's university governance is among the strongest in the world. We have defended collegial governance and academic freedom better than most regions as global tides turn against them. Recognize this as grounds for hope and a reason to steward our system.

Create safe spaces where collegiality can flourish

Protect communal spaces, such as university clubs and message boards, where administration and faculty can come together on neutral terrain to work things out.

Create spaces to discuss the continuous improvement of our governance practices and policies. Encourage a periodic "how are we doing?" agenda item, where members reflect on how processes can be more efficient, strategic, and engaging.

Be cautious of virtual meetings, where the organizers have greater ability to suppress engagement and debate. Technology allows more people to participate, but we should carefully assess the cost.

View governance as a human-based system

Our shared governance system rests on ensuring a number of perspectives inform the governance of the university. We need to support the health of the system and realize these underlying principles, and not treat it as a forum within which to do battle.

Develop a good policy framework

Articulate your institution's values and commitments as to how it will develop policy, such as who should be consulted and how governors should behave. Ensure that the people who'll use this framework buy into it and can actually implement it.

Find what works for your institution

Recognize that universities aren't monolithic institutions, and that one-size-fits-all solutions have failed us at the operational level where tailored local solutions were needed.

Success Story: Collective Bargaining for Inclusive Policy

In the previous section we touched on a story from Sue Wertle about tenure denials at her university. Her anecdote ended with a positive example for other unions: “We took two rounds of bargaining to develop a structure to examine our entire collective agreement and rewrite it—including rewriting 15 articles to include new language on hiring, placement on the salary grid, data collection, verification of Indigenous identities, political leaves, training, personnel committees, tenure, promotion, and merit—the whole gamut. We have reworked it to recognize, for example, that different career patterns may be more common among members of underrepresented groups and this should be considered in assessing the experience and qualification of members for the purpose of initial salary placement. Another example is recognizing Indigenous leadership in home communities as a form of political leave.”



Deliver a “University Civics 101” to new hires

Educate all faculty and staff on the basics of university governance, including the core structure and principles. For example, include a 30-minute training as part of the orientation of new hires.

Invest in ongoing programming for governors

Build robust, continuous education programming for boards and senates. Ensure that new members not only understand their own roles, rights, and responsibilities, but also those of other governance actors. Explore new and emerging issues.

Increase research and scholarship in university governance

Improve our understanding of governance from the perspective of various disciplines like public policy and organizational behavior, and study aspects that have evolved, such as fiduciary duty.

There is a clear thirst for governance knowledge. In 2023, Jones and Eastman delivered a webinar on university governance to the Canadian Association of University of Business Officers. Over 500 people registered!

Participation

Position governance as a professional responsibility

Develop a culture among your peers of treating participation in governance as a duty rather than just a service. Recognize that academic self-governance is embedded in our academic freedom.

Nurture the next generation of academic leaders

Encourage your university to devote more thought to succession planning. Provide mentorship, professional development opportunities, and learning experiences for those who might be interested in moving into academic leadership.

Recognize and reward governance work

Fight for faculty members' contributions to be adequately recognized and supported, even when it might mean less teaching and research outputs.



I've spent more of my governance career as a faculty association leader than as a dean, and I don't feel that I've crossed to the dark side ... If professors don't take on leadership roles, then CEOs or bank managers will.

Shannon Dea, Dean, University of Regina





Recognize your responsibility for cultural transformation

Boards and senates need to understand they have a pivotal role in changing institutional culture to allow universities to progress towards inclusion and indigenization.

Challenge identity politics

Change the view that universities hire unqualified candidates of colour and Indigenous candidates over white folks when diversity is set as a hiring goal. This view isn't rooted in evidence. In fact, the literature shows that equity-deserving candidates are disadvantaged in hiring practices, not favoured.

Hold meaningful, early consultation

Have at least two conversations with the people who are affected and interested. Be open-minded and prepared to act on their feedback.

Set up equity-deserving faculty for success

Provide mentorship, actively seek to accommodate their needs, and recognize contributions outside of traditional academic outputs and performance metrics.

Universities can gauge their progress towards indigenization using Gaudry & Lorenz's three-part spectrum. On one end is Indigenous inclusion, in the middle reconciliation indigenization, and on the other end decolonial indigenization. (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018)¹⁰

(10) Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy. *AlterNative*, 14(3), 218-227.

Advocate for contract faculty

Individual departments can advocate for contract faculty to be placed on university and faculty-wide bodies, and consider ways to compensate them for this service work so they aren't discouraged from advocating for themselves because of their financial vulnerability.

Support junior faculty who want to participate

Offer mentorship and opportunities to the new generation of faculty—which is probably the most diverse cohort we've ever had—while being conscious of the space and capacity they need for professional development.

Speak and act loudly

Claim governance rights for contract faculty at every level—invitation to department meetings, consultations and voting rights, and seats at faculty and university-level councils and committees. Change the current narrative that contract faculty have nothing valuable or practical to contribute. Challenge the administrators to follow the university's mission statements.



As someone that is in three of the four equity deserving spheres, the role of the collective agreement is so important to me, and I value all the work that my colleagues put into it.

Rheanna Robinson, Associate Professor, UNBC





Create a governance committee

Break out of the day-to-day and reflect on your own effectiveness as a governing body. Think about how you're governed and assess the health of your system.

Reinvigorate “rubber stamp” senates

Instead of walking away from spaces like the senate, faculty associations should organize to revive their democratic or collegial potential.



Adopt a model of stewardship

Engage in more direct and honest communication with the senate and faculty, and take on the sometimes uncomfortable challenge of dealing with faculty members whose academic freedom extends to intramural speech.

Get the right board members

Invest in attracting external board members with an affinity for universities, high level of expertise in governance or leadership, backgrounds that reflect the diversity of the community, and willingness to give a lot of their time and energy for free.

Lobby the government regarding the quality of people they appoint to the boards and their training. The government should have no fundamental, ideological objections to putting skilled people who know what they're doing on the board.



Have a clear vision

Develop the university's vision through consultation and lots of dialog. It can't simply be encapsulated in your mission and mandate—it has to be lived, elaborated, and part of the fabric of the organization.

Nurture institutional reputation

Remember that reputation is the currency that institutions trade on. One really adverse event can very much threaten the reputation, and it takes a long time to build it back up again.

Explore adaptive management

Bring in a range of voices so that you don't get stuck in tunnel vision. Avoid bad decisions driven by economic interests and political power by sharing management power and responsibility with stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the university and committed to its long-term vision. Learn by testing ideas and creating better ideas for further testing.

Commit to being honest

Nurture and protect the trust of your board and senate. Recognize that bad things happen when presidents and provosts lie or try to work around these bodies.

Choose leaders who relish the challenge

Hire leaders who not only respect bicameral and collegial governance, but also enjoy the complexity of our system and relish the challenge of advancing the university with initiatives that will satisfy both Board and Senate governance and oversight.



Pay attention to soft skills

There is always a pathway through our dysfunction and misunderstandings, and we have to rely on soft skills to get there. A critical element of success is in strong, trusting, and clearly communicated relationships.

Have frank, difficult conversations. Develop the capacity to disagree and to learn from disagreement, and move forward together, notwithstanding deep differences in views.

Demand transparency

Put measures in place to protect the integrity of the decision-making process and keep the administration from overreach, such as annual reporting or the use of freedom of information requests.

Rethink assumptions

Challenge opinions and behaviour that demonizes or “others” people. Remember that people may be supporting your interests in discreet ways in order to preserve relationships.

Connect through a shared interest

Be cognizant that while administrators, staff, faculty, and unions may have very different views, we all have a shared interest in robust, healthy universities.

Act in good faith

For relationships to improve, everyone has to commit to acting in good faith with each other, to have frank conversations, and to ensure there's representation in decisions.

Success Story: Building Trust to Shift Perspectives on Bargaining

After hearing from an executive search consultant that her university's faculty were seen as “ungovernable” due to previous strikes, Sue Wurtele was concerned that the board and administration also held this view. So she began working with her faculty association to shift the perception of collective bargaining.

“It didn't happen overnight. But gradually we worked to balance the needs of the university with the needs of the faculty. One of the best examples is probably the successful transition of our pension plan,” she said.

The original defined benefit pension plan was a drain on the financial security of the university—so while faculty had the bargaining power to maintain it, doing so resulted in staff layoffs and hiring freezes. They started to look for an alternative that would maintain strong benefits at a lower cost to the university, and were eventually able to become one of the early joiners of the University Pension Plan in Ontario.

The success came down to building trust between the administration and faculty members on a narrow point, said Wurtele. “I think we are now recognized as a very strong faculty association with strong benefits for our members,” said Wurtele. “So the two takeaways: a lack of trust can have very significant costs all around, and the presence of trust doesn't have to signify weakness.”

Participants' Key Takeaways

Our interactive “25/10” exercise asked participants to write their biggest takeaway from the conference on cue cards, exchange and rank them through multiple rounds in a quasi-peer-review process, and share the highest-ranked responses. Here’s what emerged as the top takeaways:

Collegial governance needs more faculty engagement.

- Faculty must be socialized into governance roles.
- Governance education is essential for faculty, administrators, and all actors in the system.
- The collegial governance model isn't broken, but sometimes fails to live up to its potential in practice.

Unions play a crucial but contentious role.

- Unions are viewed by many as essential in defending governance.
- Unions must ensure they support faculty rights to participate in governance without overstepping.

Trust and relationships are key.

- Acting with honesty and in good faith should not be seen as a weakness.
- Governance relies on mutual commitment from all stakeholders.

Government should provide frameworks but avoid overreach.

- Universities should be autonomous from government while ensuring effective governance.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) must be integrated.

- EDI needs to be foundational to governance, not just an add-on.
- Acknowledge that equity-deserving faculty and contract faculty face barriers to full participation in governance.

Governance literacy is crucial.

- All university members (including administrators, faculty, staff, and students) should be educated on governance structures and rights.
- A "university civics" course was proposed as a way to improve governance knowledge and participation.

Not everyone agrees there's a crisis in governance.

- There's some debate about whether university governance is under threat, but widespread agreement that it needs improvement.
- There was general consensus that Canada has some of the strongest university governance models in the world.

Governance can move from surviving to thriving

- Governance should evolve toward greater participation, adaptability, and effectiveness.
- There is a need to shift from reacting to crises to proactive governance reform.

These ideas were reinforced through further discussion, graphic facilitation by Sam Bradd, and reflections in the final wrap-up session.



GOVERNMENT & UNIONS

LEGISLATION, LOBBING, BARGAINING

PANEL:
 DR. MAX BLOOM
 DR. JIM JOHNSON
 DR. LAUREY SNAKER

WHAT LEADERS MUST GET RIGHT:
 VISION • FINANCES
 • BRING IT TO LIFE LEARN WHAT YOU NEED
 REPUTATION • RELATIONSHIPS
 MANAGEMENT OF + and - * CRITICAL: TRUST, RESPECT and COMMUNICATION
 and then use all of these relationships to make the best possible governance decisions for public policy and PSE

TO DEFEND OUR INTERESTS: SENATES ARE POWERFUL AND WE SHOULD ENGAGE

DO NOT OPEN THE UNIVERSITY TO ADDRESS GOVERNANCE

SENATE IS STRONGLY POWER

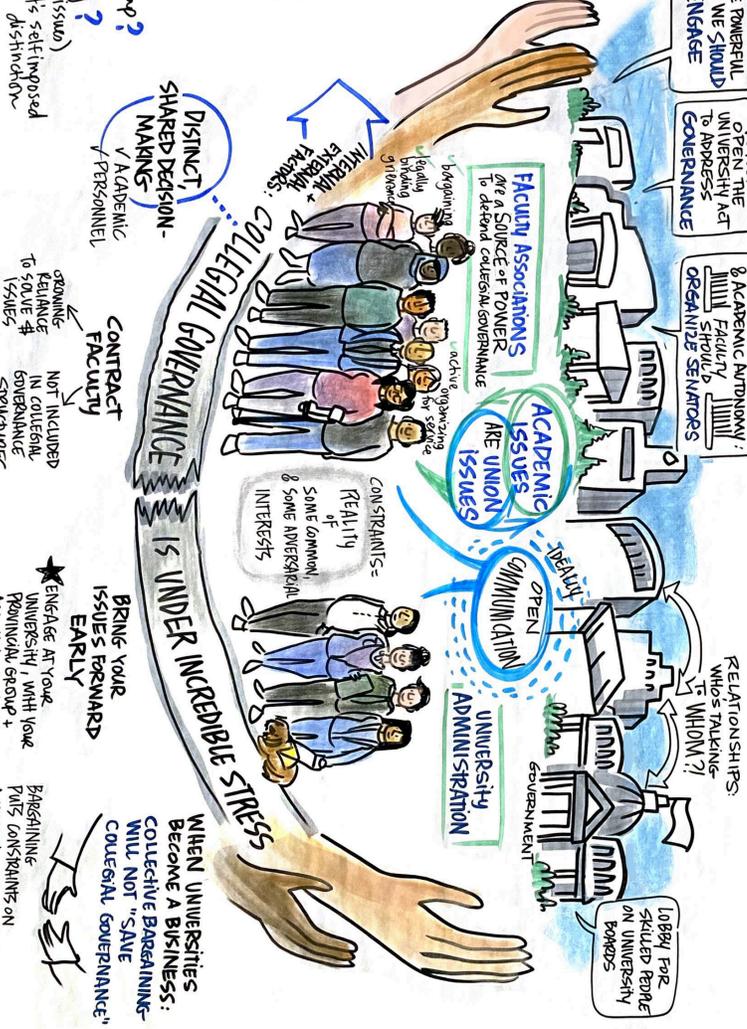
ENGAGE

PILARS ARE COLLEGE GOVERNANCE & ACADEMIC AUTONOMY: ORGANIZE SENATORS

TIPS:
 • Outrigger
 • Run together
 • or variations

STRESSORS:

- EXTERNAL**
- GOV + INTERFERENCE IN UNIVERSITIES' GOVERNANCE
 - Mandates, F, etc
 - NEQU BERNALIZATION
 - COORDINATE INTERESTS
 - Huge influence including on boards
- INTERNAL**
- SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS with corporate culture
 - MAINTAINING FACULTY INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING
 - FACULTY ASSOCIATIONS:
 - Senate as rubber stamp?
 - Competition with collective bargaining? (union vs academic issues) that's self-imposed distinction



CONTRACT FACULTY

NOT INCLUDED IN COLLEGE GOVERNANCE STRATEGIES

GROUNDING RELIANCE TO SOLVE # ISSUES

BRING YOUR ISSUES FORWARD EARLY

ENGAGE AT YOUR UNIVERSITY, WITH YOUR REVENUE GROUP + ASSOCIATION'S MEMBERSHIP

WHEN UNIVERSITIES BECOME A BUSINESS: COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WILL NOT "SAVE COLLEGE GOVERNANCE"

IS IT

BARGAINING PUTS CONSTRAINTS ON ACADEMIC STRATEGIES

