

## Thirty Years of Scholarly Literature on University Governance in Canada (1988-2016)

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### Abstract

This article focuses on the scholarly literature of the last 30 years on university governance in Canada. After describing the research methods that I used to compile that body of literature and to analyze its individual components, I reconstruct the general approaches, or angles, from which scholars address that topic. A discussion of several features of that literature taken as a whole follows, with a focus on the evaluation that is made by scholars of the state of university governance in Canada.

*keywords: governance, universities, Canada, scholarly literature (1988-2016) main issues, trends*

Every now and then, universities in Canada and elsewhere make the headlines when situations they would rather keep internal attract the media's attention. In early 2017, for example, the sudden resignation of Mr. Andrew Potter from his position as director of McGill University's Institute for the Study of Canada was followed by what can be reasonably labelled a "media storm." Bloggers and commentators saw, in that event, a cause for concern regarding the state of free speech in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Academics expressed misgivings about the perceived manner the Principal of McGill University acted vis-à-vis Potter, a manner academic critics deemed both punishing for the individual in question and threatening for academic freedom.<sup>2</sup>

That event bears a certain resemblance to another that took place about a year and a half before. During the summer of 2015, just one year after being hired, Mr. Arvin Gupta resigned from his position as President of the University of British Columbia. As sudden as it was unexpected, Gupta's departure took place in the wake of strained relations between him and the university's Board of Governors. A few months after the initial stupor subsided, and in light of un-redacted documents that became available at that time, it became clear for the UBC Faculty Association that a secret process (that involved several members of the board) led to Gupta's resignation. As the president of the university's Faculty Association pointed out, neither the university's faculty, nor its association, was part of the conversation that pushed Gupta out. Labelling that episode a "governance failure," he signalled that the Faculty Association was hoping for an external review of the board structure at the university that would engage the entire university community.<sup>3</sup>

When university administrators either act, or are perceived as acting in a unilateral fashion faculty tend to see, in such actions, impingements upon their role in the governance of the institution they belong to. The 2016-2017 annual report of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is a reflection of actions taken by faculty to defend collegial governance as well as the shared role of faculty and university administrations in decision-making within universities (CAUT, 2017a). The report also confirms the importance of university governance as a sector of concern in Canada, in particular when

<sup>1</sup> In the Huffington Post, Suzanne Wexler (2017) wrote that in the aftermath of Mr. Potter's resignation "many in the journalistic community are left horrified about the state of free speech in Canada - as they ought to be."

<sup>2</sup> See Chiose (2017).

<sup>3</sup> See CBC News British Columbia (2016).

the aforementioned report is read in conjunction with an article also published by CAUT in March 2017 (CAUT, 2017b). Over and above the McGill and the University of British Columbia cases outlined above, issues regarding university governance were either addressed or considered as concerning by CAUT in at least four more universities since the beginning of 2016. Those universities are Carleton University, Université de Montréal, Laurentian University, and the University of Manitoba.

Unsurprisingly, university governance in Canada has become a subject of scholarly inquiry; the Canadian Journal of Higher Education devoted an entire issue to this topic in 2016, thereby contributing to a body of scholarly literature continually expanding since the late 1980s.<sup>4</sup> At that time, 20 years had elapsed since the release of the Duff-Berdahl Report in 1966. Considered a pivotal moment in the evolution of governance arrangements in Canadian universities,<sup>5</sup> that report includes three main recommendations: (1) universities were encouraged to make their governance arrangements more transparent; (2) they were invited to foster faculty participation in their governing boards; and (3) they were asked to transform academic senates into stronger decision bodies (Duff and Berdahl, 1966). In a word, the Duff-Berdahl Report proposed to move university governance beyond the dominance of secretive, businessmen-led boards making collegial governance the model for Canadian universities. In the wake of the commission's report, most Canadian universities modified their governance arrangements in ways that reflected *mutatis mutandis* the orientations proposed in that report.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the 1980s, however, a malaise, if not a tension, had set in the Canadian university world concerning governance practices and arrangements. Its presence is still being felt nowadays and is amply illustrated by recent negotiation rounds between university administrations and faculty unions.

That tension regarding governance practices and arrangements in Canadian universities is at the origin of this research endeavour. As a former chief negotiator for a faculty union, I wondered if the body of scholarly literature that started building up in the second part of the 1980s on university governance in Canada—in the sense of internal governance as defined by Austin and Jones (2016)<sup>7</sup>—replicated that tension. As a matter of fact, soon after I proceeded with an initial survey of that literature with that question in mind, I started noticing a few rare, yet unavoidable scholarly texts advocating a view of governance that differs from what is commonly referred to as collegial governance. I also observed variations, both at the level of key concerns, which are addressed in the scholarly literature on university governance in Canada, and in terms of the topics that are discussed. As a result, the research question that I decided to seek an answer to is the following: are there multiple approaches of university governance in Canada in the scholarly literature on that topic?

Correspondingly, this article focuses on the scholarly literature of the last 30 years on university governance in Canada. I will first describe the research methods that I used in order to: (1) compile the body of literature that I eventually worked with; (2) analyze each of its individual components; and (3) identify schools of thought on, or scholarly approaches of university governance in Canada, based on commonalities and differences between scholarly texts in terms of concerns, topics, and terminology. I will then present the general approaches, or angles, from which scholars address the topic of university governance in Canada, and discuss several features of that literature taken as a whole, focusing on the evaluation that is made by scholars of the state of university governance in Canadian universities.

## Research Methods

The first step in the research process that this study is based on was to list the scholarly texts on governance in Canadian universities that were published between 1988 and 2016. Over the three rounds that will be described below of consulting databases, such as Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database, as well as the library databases of both Western Governors University and Laurentian University, I listed 39 scholarly texts that address university governance in Canada. Since a certain num-

<sup>4</sup> Other than Houwing and Kristjanson's study on the composition of governing bodies of Canadian universities and colleges (1975), scholarly publications on university governance in Canada were relatively few and far between before 1988. Those publications were Rowat (1955); Macdonald (1966); Corry (1970); Ross (1972); Bissell (1973); and Smith (1975).

<sup>5</sup> For example Jones, Shanahan, and Goyan (2001).

<sup>6</sup> For a historical survey on university governance in Canada, and, in particular, on the impact of the Duff-Berdahl Report on university governance, see Independent Study Group on University Governance (1993) as well as Jones, Shanahan and Goyan (2001). For an alternate interpretation of the impact of the Duff-Berdahl report see Cameron (2002).

<sup>7</sup> According to Austin and Jones (2016), internal or academic self-governance "refers to the internal governing mechanisms and bodies that shape the borders of authority and responsibility for academic activities within the university" (p. 124).

ber among those, namely six texts, have external governance of Canadian universities<sup>8</sup> as their object, 33 texts among the initial 39 were retained for this study, namely those that address internal or academic self-governance in Canada<sup>9</sup>.

During the first round of database consultation, I looked for scholarly texts on university governance in Canada without any further qualification. As I started analyzing the texts whose titles were provided by the databases, a constellation of concerns, topics, and terms began to emerge in 17 of those texts. Topic-wise, these texts mainly focus on the role of both governing boards and academic senates in university governance, and the key themes that they address are the shift of power from the latter to the former; the effectiveness of senates in their oversight role; and the lack of faculty engagement in senates. As a result, I labelled the scholarly approach of university governance in Canada that is represented in those 17 texts the structure-based approach.

However, other texts would not fit, so to speak, as representatives of the structure-based approach. Instead of focusing on university governance-related structures, those texts center on the corporatization of Canadian universities, as well as on the impact of that phenomenon on university governance in Canada. As a result, I proceeded with a second round of database consulting, this time with university, governance, and corporatization as key words. Upon analyzing the 11 scholarly texts whose titles came up, I found that several among them address topics such as the differentiation of universities' senior administrations between the academic collegium and the so-called management, the corporate agenda for universities, and the displacement of collegial self-governance by managerialism. Therefore, I labelled that second scholarly approach of university governance in Canada the university corporatization angle.

Finally, there were scholarly texts on university governance in Canada that could not be associated with either one of the two approaches described above. Somewhat surprisingly, a much smaller group of scholarly texts, namely five of them, advocate a view of university governance that is reminiscent of the structure-based approach, but also diametrically opposed to some of the latter's tenets. According to a few scholars, faculty unions are causing a power imbalance between boards, senates, and university presidents on one side, and faculty on the other. In light of the recurrence in that third group of scholarly texts of topics, such as power imbalance in the sense above, of authority/power transfer to faculty, and of the impact of faculty unions in university governance, I labelled the third scholarly approach of university governance in Canada the union power approach.

## **How Is University Governance in Canada Approached in the Scholarly Literature?**

As I mentioned above, university governance in Canada as a topic of enquiry is addressed from three different angles in the scholarly literature. The three approaches are presented below, from the most to the least dominant, based on the number of texts in which each one is discussed.

### *The Structure-Based Approach*

As the label suggests, the structure-based approach of university governance in Canada focuses on specific loci of university governance, mainly the governing boards and academic senates, either one of them or both. The scholarly texts in which internal university governance in Canada is approached from that perspective and that were retained for this study are Hardy (1988); Hardy (1996); Jones and Skolnik (1997); Jones, Shanahan and Goyan (2001); Jones (2002); Jones, Shanahan and Goyan (2002); Thompson (2004); Jones, Shanahan and Goyan (2004); Lang (2005); Trotter (2009); Metcalfe, Fisher, Gingras, Jones, Rubenson and Snee (2011); Chan and Richardson (2012); Paul (2012); Pennock, Jones, Leclerc

<sup>8</sup> Austin and Jones (2016) define external governance as referring to "the system or macrolevel of authority, and the role that the government (state, province, or nation) and other external stakeholders play in governing higher education within their jurisdiction" (p. 13).

<sup>9</sup> Other scholarly texts were published over the last 30 years on specific aspects of university governance. For example, the participation of students in university governance in Canada is discussed by B. Zuo and E. W. Ratsoy (1999), in *Student Participation in University Governance* (Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 29/1, p. 1-26). There is also a chapter on the legislative framework of university governance in Canada by B. Davis (2016), *Governance and administration of postsecondary institutions in Canada*, in T. Shanahan, M. Nillson and L.J. Broshko's *The Handbook of Canadian Education Law* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 57-78). Despite their scholarly character, those texts were not retained since they neither defend or support, nor are the reflection of an overall approach of university governance in Canada. Due to their more general content and tone, papers from symposia and conferences were not retained either.

and Li (2015); Lougheed and Pidgeon (2016); Lang (2016), and; Pennock, Jones, Leclerc and Li (2016).

Taken as a whole, that approach of university governance in Canada singles out a number of issues that its representatives consider as causes for concern. Most of the scholars whose names are listed above discuss the three issues that follow.

**Power shifting from senate to central administration.** In a series of articles published between 1997 and 2004, Jones, either as sole author or with several groups of collaborators, addressed the transfer of the political influence of senates, faculty councils, and departments to universities' central administrations. On the basis of the results of two surveys from the second half of the 1990s—one with governing board secretaries and individual board members, and the other with senate secretaries and senate members—those scholars remarked that

the governance arrangements became more participatory, complex and decentralized as a result of the reforms adopted in the 60s and early 70s. Our analysis of data on Canadian university senates suggests that the locus of control over certain types of academic decisions may be shifting. (Jones, Shanahan and Goyan, 2001, p. 8 in the electronic version)

One year later, Jones, Shanahan and Goyan (2002) wrote that their study “revealed that power may be shifting in favour of the corporate board and senior administration” (p. 42).

Again in 2002, Jones, Shanahan, and Goyan identified two new concerns that have to do with university governance that are complementary to the locus of control issue outlined above. Labelled *boundary issues*, those concerns have to do, on the one hand, with the division of responsibility between the governing board and the academic senate regarding their respective contribution to university governance. The other boundary issue opposes the executive authority of the president and, more widely, a university's central administration and the governing authority of board and senate. Those boundary issues still remain at the forefront in more recent scholarly literature on university governance in Canada. For example, Pennock, Jones, Leclerc and Li (2016) observed that one-third of the people they surveyed referenced “role confusion, power imbalance, or other tensions between the senate and the board, and between the senate and the administration” (p. 77).

**Effectiveness of senates in their oversight role.** The second concern that emerged in the scholarly literature stemming from the structure-based approach of university governance in Canada has to do with the effectiveness of senates as decision-making bodies. That concern made its first appearance in 2001 (Jones, Shanahan and Goyan) in relation to internal governance issues that address the orientation of new board and senate members, as well as with the review of those members' performance. Many of the senate members who were surveyed did not feel their senate played the role it should play in the university. Furthermore, Jones, Shanahan and Goyan (2002) noted that senates do not play a major decision-making role regarding research policy, fundraising, and development priorities, or long-range institutional planning, which is a concern that they reiterated in 2004.

The concern regarding the effectiveness of senates in Canadian universities found its most developed expression in two more recent studies. Based on a pan-Canadian survey administered in 2012, Pennock, Jones, Leclerc and Li (2016) argued that although a higher percentage of senate members surveyed believe that their senate is an effective decision-making body than a dozen years before (51% vs 44%), 68% of respondents believe that senates approve decisions that were already made elsewhere (vs 60% in the late 1990s). These authors added that “many senate members expressed the view that the senate is largely peripheral to the real decision-making and goal setting-mechanism” (p. 77).<sup>10</sup> The survey also revealed a high level of doubt from the part of respondents—about half of them—regarding the actual review, by senates, of the performance of universities in academic areas, their final authority for academic policy, and their role in determining the future direction of the university.

In the second study, based on a survey administered in 2012 in a university located in British Columbia, Lougheed and Pidgeon (2016) reached similar conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the senate as a decision-making body. As some respondents of their survey remarked: “so much work goes into items before they come before the senate, senators find themselves looking at the fine details of proposals rather than determining whether it is the right thing to do and participating in substantive discussions” (p. 99).

<sup>10</sup> This finding is consistent with the results of the international survey made in 2011 under the label The Changing Academic Profession (Metcalf, Fisher, Gingras, Jones, Rubenson and Snee, 2011). Among the full-time faculty in Canada universities that were surveyed, 53% either strongly agreed or agreed that the management style at their institution can be considered “top-down.”

**Lack of faculty engagement.** In 2016, finally, Pennock, Jones, Leclerc, and Li brought forth a concern regarding university governance in Canada that had so far received little attention in the scholarly literature: the lack of faculty engagement in collegial governance. This lack was a major theme in the open responses to the 2012 survey that the observations and conclusions of Pennock et al. are based on. Among possible explanations for such a state of affairs, the authors suggest that senates do a poor job of communicating to faculty the importance of collegial governance, the lack of motivation from the part of faculty to devote time to senate work, and the heaviness of faculty's teaching and research workload, in particular in the case of those who are seeking tenure and promotion.

**Neutral scholars.** There are several scholars whom I associate with the structure-based approach of university governance in Canada but under the label neutral scholars. These scholars focus on loci of university governance, but, contrary to the majority of scholars who are representatives of that approach, they do not address the three above-mentioned key issues. Instead, these scholars provide a detailed analysis of the role of key players in university governance in Canada.

One of those neutral scholars is Hardy (1988; 1996). Noticeably, she does not use the word "governance" in her scholarly texts. Yet, her analysis of decision-making in six Canadian universities, as well as the taxonomy that she proposes (of configurations of decision-making on the Canadian university scene) provides an enlightening overview of the varying roles of what she calls interest groups in the governance of Canadian universities. Hardy shows that the respective power of university presidents, deans, senates, boards, and, in a lesser way, of faculty unions, varies from one Canadian university to the next<sup>11</sup>. There are, she claims, different types of "university context" in Canada, including the "decentralized collegium," the "technocratic bureaucracy," and the "centralized collegium."

Another neutral scholar who represents the structure-based approach is Trotter (2009), who focuses on the role of university governing boards<sup>12</sup>. Trotter's contribution is noteworthy, as he provides a nuanced analysis of the multilevel role of boards in the governance of a university. He addresses the interactions between boards and three key players in university governance, namely the provincial government, the university president, and, in a lesser way, the academic senate. In a similar mindset to the other representatives of the structure-based approach, Trotter understands university governance as a collegial process: The internal stakeholder groups have multiple points of contact within the university that range from seats on the governing board, the majority of seats on the senate, to having collective representation through either faculty unions/associations, various types of staff unions and student government. The relationship between these constituencies is based on a collegial structure, which requires the president to balance the various stakeholders so that the university operates smoothly. (p. 111)

**A topic of interest.** Unicameralism, as a governing structure particular to the University of Toronto, is a topic that keeps attracting interest from a number of scholars associated with the structure-based approach. Unicameral governance drew significant attention in the 1970s after the University of Toronto replaced its board and its senate by a single body that was named the Governing Council. In doing so, the University of Toronto departed from bicameralism, the governance approach that most Canadian universities had opted for earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Jones, Shanahan and Goyan, 2002).

In the scholarly literature of the 1970s on university governance in Canada, unicameralism was an issue, in particular its implementation at the University of Toronto (Ross, 1972; Bissell, 1973; Smith, 1975). Since the late 1980s, however, scholars that are associated with the structure-based approach tend to mention the emergence of unicameralism at the University of Toronto as an important development in university governance in Canada in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thompson (2004) slightly departs from that historical angle, as he notes that

(u)ltimately, the University of Toronto, after almost two decades of struggling with a unicameral structure, created a de facto bicameral system by delegating substantial powers of the unicameral Governing Council to two standing boards: the Academic Board and the Business Board (p. 189).

<sup>11</sup> Paul (2012) also provides an overview of the key players in university governance in Canada: the board of governors, the senate, faculty and departmental councils, and faculty associations, as well as collective bargaining. In all likelihood because of his vantage point as a former university president, Paul labels those players as "the major instruments of Canadian university governance."

<sup>12</sup> Lang (2005) as well as Chan and Richardson (2012) can also be considered as neutral scholars due to their focus on the internal functioning of governing boards in Canadian universities for the former and on the roles of those boards in Canadian universities for the latter.

### *The University Corporatization Angle*

Since 1988, there has been a relatively steady flow of scholarly literature on the corporatization of Canadian universities. The 11 texts in which university governance in Canada is approached from that angle, and that were retained for this study, are Newson and Buchbinder (1988); Buchbinder and Newson (1990); Newson (1993); Tudiver (1999); Turk (Ed.)(2000); Chan and Fisher (2008); Newson and Polster (2008); Turk (Ed.)(2008); Lim (2009); Bruneau (2012); and Brownlee (2015).

These publications on university corporatization address a wide array of issues that include, in some instances, university governance. Newson and Buchbinder (1988) describe what they refer to as the differentiation of universities' senior administrations. They argue that, due to the expansion of the scope of the role of university administrators that took place in the 1960s, "the constituency of people with administrative positions, rather than being the academic collegium, has become the 'management'" (p. 17). That differentiation, they argue in another article (1990), was followed by a decline in the influence of senates in university affairs that caused, in turn, a marginalization of faculty:

The political influence of senates, faculty councils and departments has been eroded in relation to the growing authority of an extensive, centralized managerial apparatus. Even within collegial bodies, the influence of academic staff has diminished while the influence of the administration is considerable. (Buchbinder and Newson, 369)

In 1993, Newson further analyzed the causes of decline in faculty's influence on decision-making in Canadian universities. She claimed that the marginalization of faculty in what she called the new decision-making process is, ultimately, a consequence of the corporate agenda. According to her, research is one sector of activity where that marginalization is particularly obvious. She observes that central administrations who act on behalf of those who participate in academic-corporate relationships go as far as by-passing department meetings, faculty councils, and senates without any care for the concerns departments might have—for example, about the effects of corporate-related research arrangements.

The by-passing of senates is a key issue for those who address university governance in Canada from the university corporatization angle. In 2008, Newson and Polster argued that the displacement of collegial self-governance by managerialism is caused by various practices that undermine collegial relations and, especially, collegial forms of decision-making in Canadian universities. One of those practices is what they call the documentary modes of decision-making. These modes involve the circulation of plans and mission statements to the whole university community with the expectation that responses will be directed to the central administration, who will make the necessary decisions. According to Newson and Polster, that mode of decision-making by-passes participatory processes of decision-making—first and foremost, the senate(s). Bruneau (2012) argues that managerialism's influence on university governance runs even deeper. Based on studies in governance in three Canadian universities, he concludes that what he labels the new managerialism determines, and thereby dominates, decision-making in Canadian universities. According to Bruneau, even boards of governors are incapable of restraining their respective university's managers—a group that includes university presidents. As a result, academic and educational priorities do not take precedence in decision-making, such that "one way forward is to arrange matters so that two main 'actors' take a greater part in academic and institutional leadership – the senate and the faculty association" (p. 58).

More recently, Jamie Brownlee (2015) also claimed that "in the corporate era, the role of senates has declined, while the role of boards has expanded" (p. 113). He described the increasing hold of the corporate world on universities through what he labels as interlocking (business leaders sitting on university boards and university leaders sitting on corporate boards) and integration (individuals linking universities and corporations through participating in the governance of both institutions). According to Brownlee, such mechanisms channel an increasing influence of the corporate world on universities. For example, business leaders dictate the type of research that is done in universities, but also on the kind of training university students get in industrial settings<sup>13</sup>.

### *The Union Power Approach*

The union power approach is the least dominant among the three scholarly approaches of university governance in Canada, as it has given rise to only five scholarly texts: Cameron (1991); Cameron (1992);

<sup>13</sup> Lim (2009) describes in some detail the impact of "the introduction of business techniques to the universities" (p. 118)—in other words, managerialism on governance in Canadian universities.

Cameron (2002); Clark (2003); and MacKinnon (2015).

Cameron, who pioneered the union power approach, pointed out in 1991 that faculty unionization in Canada “brought with it a new form of centralization,” such that “collective bargaining imposes uniform rules and a hierarchical appeal process” (p. 448). He remarked, however, that centralization did not bring about increased managerial discretion. Instead, that discretion diminished, according to him.

Cameron adopted a much more critical stance in 2002 when he argued that one of the main challenges for both Canadian universities and university governance lie in faculty unionization and collective bargaining. According to him, those two phenomena disturbed the balance between boards, senates, and university presidents that was the hallmark of university governance since the beginning of the twentieth century. Cameron claims that there is a power imbalance between faculty unions and university presidents, who negotiate on behalf of governing boards.<sup>14</sup> He believes that such an imbalance becomes more acute when CAUT gets involved in the negotiating process. The results are dire in his view:

Almost every important aspect of the internal governance of universities has bowed to union demands. Appointment criteria, tenure and promotion procedures are all written out in excruciating detail. In most unionized universities, merit disappears from salary policies, replaced by automatic increments marking ‘progress through the ranks.’ Dismissal and lay-off are prohibited or subjected to procedures impossible to administer. (Cameron, 2002, 154)

Clark (2003) goes even further than Cameron, remarking that university boards’ authority and power have been substantially eroded, but also yielded to the faculty. According to him, this change is due to CAUT’s advocacy in favour of formalized collective bargaining, as well as to that association’s efficient, powerful support to local faculty unions: “By and large, faculty unions gained nearly all of their demands, and confirmed legally the forms of participatory management that had been developing over the previous years” (p. 182). Clark argues that, collectively, faculty members have control of strategic planning, priority setting, enrollment management, hiring, appointments, academic programs, and academic administrative appointments—over and above having a great influence on budgeting.

Finally, Peter MacKinnon (2015) also acknowledges the impact of faculty unions on university governance. As the two previous scholars did, he claims that collective bargaining “encroaches on governance and collegial management and challenges their authority” (p. 98). Referring to two recent judicial cases where governance was at stake in Canada,<sup>15</sup> MacKinnon challenges CAUT’s and its member faculty union’s views on university governance, particularly the claim(s) that universities have adopted a corporate model of administration where senates’ influence is weak. According to him, “university administrations have not acquired more power in a formal sense, though they do not behave as they did decades ago”(p. 107). Furthermore, the view (according to which senates are weak) is, in MacKinnon’s estimation, a generalization that is not supported by compelling evidence.

## Observations

Through showcasing, analyzing, and comparing the numerous contributions as well as the multiplicity of views of those scholars who wrote about university governance in Canada over the last thirty years, this review has shown that their contributions and views illustrate three different approaches of that topic. In light of the materials discussed so far, it is possible to push the analysis further, first by showing that although the above-mentioned scholars use three different approaches to address university governance in Canada, they nevertheless end up proposing only two assessments of the state of university governance in Canadian universities.

### *Three Approaches, Two Assessments of the State of University Governance of Canada*

The scholarly approaches of university governance in Canada that were outlined above have, at first glance, little to do with each other. On the one hand, the angle from which university governance is addressed varies significantly from one approach to the next. A subject of scholarly analysis on its own in the dominant approach, university governance comes up, as a topic in the second most dominant approach, in

<sup>14</sup> See also Cameron (1992).

<sup>15</sup> MacKinnon analyzed a case involving the British Columbia Court of Appeal regarding appointments, promotions and dismissal at the University of British Columbia (2007), and a tenure case at the University of Saskatchewan involving the Saskatchewan Court of Queen’s Bench (2010).

the context of descriptions of the corporate world's multi-layered impact on Canadian universities. In the least dominant approach, university governance is addressed in the context of critiques of the impact of faculty unionization on universities in Canada.

Accordingly, the conclusions the three approaches lead to (regarding the state of university governance in Canada) also vary, and, at times, they contradict one another. Whereas one approach insists that power has shifted from senates to governing boards and the second concludes that faculty have been marginalized from university governance, the third approach counters that faculty play a dominant role in university governance in Canada, and that senates have not lost any power in Canadian universities.

Nevertheless, although the three approaches of university governance in Canada are distinct, it is also possible to argue that while the two dominant ones do not agree on the main governance issue in the Canadian university world, their overall assessment of the state of university governance in Canada is quite similar. From the perspective of the structure-based approach, the main issue for university governance in Canada lies in the power shift from senates to governing boards. The university corporatization angle reaches a different conclusion, as it considers the marginalization of faculty that results from the differentiation of senior administrations from the academic collegium as the main governance issue for Canadian universities. Yet, the university corporatization approach also notes that the marginalization of faculty is exacerbated by the undermining of collegial forms of decision-making. Conversely, several representatives of the structure-based approach claim that the power shift from senates to governing boards is an important cause of the marginalization of faculty from collegial governance.<sup>16</sup> Although representatives of those two approaches disagree on the nature of the main governance issue in Canadian universities, they consider the marginalization of faculty as resulting from the undermining of collegial forms of decision-making, either in part or fully. Despite fundamental differences that make them distinct, there are important commonalities between the two dominant approaches of university governance in Canada.

The same cannot be said, however, about the union power approach. There are neither similarities, let alone commonalities, between what representatives from that approach consider as key governance issues in Canadian universities, on the one hand, and, on the other, the issue that the two other approaches focus on. The union power approach considers that the main governance issue in Canadian universities lies in the dominant role faculty play in university governance at the detriment of governing boards and senior administrations. At its core, that issue is the diametrical opposite of the two main issues that are stressed by the two dominant approaches: (1) the marginalization of faculty and (2) the power shift from senates to governing boards in university governance. In fact, as I mentioned before, representatives of the union power approach go as far as invalidating the assessment of university governance in Canada made by the dominant approaches, as they deny the validity of their claims regarding the marginalization of faculty and the shift of power from senates to governing boards. Therefore, in terms of their respective assessments of the state of university governance in Canada, the three approaches of university governance can be grouped in two camps. The structure-based approach and the university corporatization approach are on one side, and the union power approach is on the other.

### *Two Opposed Camps, One Key Issue*

Among the various issues that are touched upon by scholarly approaches of university governance in Canada, several have been addressed by representatives of all three of these approaches: the power of academic senates in the context of university governance and the participation of faculty in the governance of universities. As we have seen, both the structure-based approach and the university corporatization approach contend that senates have lost some of the power they used to have in university governance. Those approaches claim that some of the senates' power is being transferred to governing boards in Canadian universities. Alternatively, the union power approach posits that senates play their role in Canadian universities in an effective fashion and that there has been no transfer of power from senates to governing boards. One camp believes that faculty are increasingly marginalized from university governance, while the other camp claims that the exact opposite is actually taking place. It would seem, then, that both the issue of the power of academic senates in the context of university governance and the issue of the participation of faculty in the governance of universities are front and centre for all three approaches discussed here.

Is one of these issues more important than the other, such that it could be seen as the main governance

<sup>16</sup> See Metcalfe, Fisher, Gingras, Jones, Rubenson & Snee (2011); Chan and Richardson (2012).



issue in Canadian universities in the scholarly literature of the last 30 years? A closer look at the structure of the three approaches and their overall arguments suggests it is the case. On the one hand, the marginalization of faculty is an important governance issue for Canadian universities from the standpoint of the structure-based approach. The analysis made by Pennock, Jones, Leclerc and Li (2016)—of the responses to the open-ended questions of a survey made in 2012 on academic senates—illustrates this point. The level of doubt expressed by stakeholders, who were surveyed regarding the ability of senates to play their role in Canadian universities, is particularly telling in that respect. The fact that 68% of respondents agreed with the statement that the senate primarily approves decisions made elsewhere illustrates that, beyond the doubts about the effectiveness of senates as well as about their relevance and their power, what is ultimately at stake, but also decried, is the marginalization of faculty from university governance.

Similarly, the university corporatization approach's central claim is that the differentiation of senior administrations from the academic collegium ended up causing the marginalization of faculty from university governance. Furthermore, in the scholarly literature that stems from the same approach, senates are one among many instances of collegial structures being undermined in Canadian universities. Although a non-negligible issue, the matter of the power of academic senates shifting to governing boards hardly qualifies as being the main issue from that approach's standpoint. At the very best, it comes in at a distant second compared to the marginalization of faculty in university governance.

Finally, the structure of the third approach's argument confirms that the role of faculty in the governance of Canadian universities is the key issue for all three approaches of university Governance in Canada. According to the union power approach, faculty unionization, combined with the power imbalance between faculty unions on one side and university administrations on the other, has caused a power shift in Canadian universities. As a result, faculty now play an important, if not a dominant, role in university governance in Canada. Senates are mentioned in the scholarly literature that stems from the third approach of university governance in Canada, but they are not considered as a contentious governance issue on the Canadian university scene.

Despite the idea that appearances that seem to suggest that the key issue in the scholarly literature of the last 30 years on university governance in Canada amounts to power considerations having to do with senates, the role of faculty in university governance is the common denominator for all three approaches. Other issues are mentioned and discussed, especially by representatives of the structured-based approach for whom senate-related governance issues have a definite importance. Some of those issues are touched upon in more than one of the three approaches. The senates' power, or lack thereof, in university governance is one of those issues, arguably the second most important one from the standpoint of both the structure-based approach and the university corporatization approach. Although its importance varies significantly from one approach to the next, the effectiveness of senates is another important issue from the standpoint of the two dominant approaches. Finally, the lack of engagement of faculty in university governance has recently become an issue of significance for the structure-based approach. Yet, the relative importance of the governance issues in each approach, as well as those approaches' respective structures, suggest that the common, key issue, over the last 30 years, is the role of faculty in university governance. For some, that role is diminishing—arguably dangerously—while in the opinion of others, it has increased inordinately.

Governance has become a hot topic in North American universities as a number of recent events confirm. Over and above the situations that were mentioned in the introduction, changes to the *Université de Montréal's* charter that are currently being proposed by its chancellor include a redistribution of power between the university's council of administration and its *assemblée universitaire*, which is responsible for academic policy. According to that university's faculty union, the new configuration of powers would jeopardize collegial governance (Vallée, 2017). Among the many examples of situations where university governance is at stake in the United States of America, the decision that was made by the University of Wisconsin at Superior in the Fall of 2017 to cut two dozen programs, without discussing or notifying faculty, comes to mind (Mangan, 2017). Given the nature of those situations, but also due to the impact of developments that have been taking place in a number of universities over the last several decades, governance issues may arguably become an important factor regarding the future of academic freedom in Canada and North America.

The scholars, whose contributions were outlined above, have made enlightening observations, as well

as highly commendable, state-of-the-art work of either gathering perceptions on university governance in various places in Canada, or of observing how governance is carried out in certain Canadian universities. Additionally, those observations and perceptions converge inasmuch as they yield a well-defined constellation of governance-related topics. The next step, I believe, would consist of testing those observations and perceptions. A systematic, empirical, and all-encompassing study of actual governance practices in Canadian universities would provide that next step. Such a study would also foster a shift from the current reliance on observations and perceptions to what that reliance begs for: empirical confirmation.

The complementary direction that is proposed here for the study of university governance in Canada would also test a somewhat peculiar feature of the body of scholarly literature of the last 30 years on that topic. As I observed, two diametrically opposed evaluations of the state of university governance in Canada coexist in that body of literature in seeming obliviousness of one another. It seems fair to note that this obliviousness is both an illustration of the limitations of, as well as a consequence of the reliance on local observations and perceptions that characterize all three approaches discussed here. A systematic, empirical, and all-encompassing study of actual governance practices in Canadian universities would help in moving that field of study beyond such an untenable opposition. This study would also bring clarity regarding the actual state of university governance in Canada through either confirming one of the evaluations that is made of it in the scholarly literature or proposing a different one.

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