



**a place of mind**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

## **How to Govern Scholars**

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Dear Working Group on Faculty of Education Governance,

How do we govern scholars? What ethic and responsibility now prevail given the fact that the vast majority of members on the Working Group on Faculty of Education Governance are elected to represent colleagues and their interests? Representation by election necessarily differs from practices that involve representation by voluntarism or appointment.

Recall that one of the failures of the Working Group on Cross-Border Collaboration was the neglect of accountability to colleagues. It was argued that since the group was hand-picked by the Dean it had no responsibility to respond or account for decisions or recommendations. As it went, the WG on CBC attempted a sudden retrofit adjustment to their process at the point of delivery of a final report (i.e., name and mandate changed in January from cross-border collaboration to faculty governance). Of course, ultimately the group failed its mandate and terms of reference. The report was rejected at the retreat, despite attempts to spin a success story out of it. Hence, this Working Group on Faculty of Education Governance implies the failure of the previous group. I'm certainly inclined to agree with colleagues who note that this was a failure of accountability and part of a larger set of crises within the Faculty of Education.

I outline these crises below, including the crisis of faculty governance. One point is that a single crisis (e.g., faculty governance) cannot be addressed in isolation of the other four. They must be simultaneously addressed and resolved—resolving one crisis, be it faculty governance or accountability will not automatically resolve the others. We cannot acknowledge the crisis of faculty of governance and arbitrarily deny the other crises. As was the case leading up to this new working group, it's ridiculous to affirm one crisis with the creation of a new working group and reduce other crises through pop psychology to fantasies of a few faculty members.

A second point is that “faculty governance” demands a different logic than the “governance of the Faculty.” The two are not the same and I urge this group to take seriously this difference. I am readily available to speak to this issue or attend components of meetings. Three very thoughtful reports I submitted to the Working Group on Cross-Border Collaboration during the fall were entirely ignored to the point of refusal to even acknowledge the submissions. As I indicated in an open letter to the Dean, the refusal to engage with these issues is just petty anti-intellectualism [go to [http://educ.ubc.ca/foedocuments/faculty/working\\_group/index.html](http://educ.ubc.ca/foedocuments/faculty/working_group/index.html) (username=faculty; pwd=education)].

I included one of these reports as an attachment, but I encourage this working group on governance to download the others, as they are all germane to a challenge of “how to govern

scholars.” What follows is an overview of this challenge in context of five crises within the Faculty of Education:

Across higher education it would seem that “faculty governance” has become an oxymoron. At the University level, Senates have become little more than steering committees for corporate expansion while at the Faculty level administratively top-heavy structures and autocratic decision-making processes erode the remains of faculty governance. How do we restore a locus of control to faculty members? Should we provide robust models of Senates that percolate down into units? Can we reclaim space for faculty governance at the unit levels that facilitates grass-roots propagation to the top levels of the University? The Canadian Association of University Teachers’ (CAUT) *Policy Statement on Governance* includes a clause that is germane to current conditions in the Faculty: “Academic staff should be a substantial majority in all bodies that make recommendations or decisions on academic matters in departments, faculties or schools or colleges.”<sup>1</sup> But an increasingly marked disregard for faculty governance at all levels have left the CAUT to focus on contract language that spells out how to govern scholars and how to let scholars govern. Indeed, academic freedom and faculty governance have always been, and will continue to be, thoroughly interdependent.<sup>2</sup>

Within a context of eroded structures for faculty governance, concentrated administrative power and decision-making, and centralized resources, our working conditions in the Faculty of Education are significantly different than eight years ago. One difference is an intensification of our intellectual work within an increasingly part-time academic labour economy, seen most strikingly in our Faculty. A second difference is the recurrent budget shortfall within the University and impending reductions in a recessive or depression economy. Faculty members are doing more with much less, including less information, while in many ways in the Faculty it is business as usual (e.g., maintenance of an unsustainable teacher education program). A third difference is the transformation of the university system in British Columbia and an outlook for further changes described in *Campus 2020*. This third distinction looms large with changes well underway but has yet to be addressed with the Faculty of Education. These trends are compounded by, and have resolved in, five interlocking crises specific to this Faculty: 1) The crisis of confidence; 2) The crisis of reform; 3) The crisis of administration; 4) The crisis of accountability; and 5) The crisis of faculty governance. How ought scholars respond to such far-ranging changes and crises with apparently so little time or without structures to support proper responses?

The **crisis of confidence** manifests in increasingly alienated and apathetic scholars, now at an all-time high in the Faculty, with most taking “duck and cover” or “this too shall pass” options toward heavy-handed administrative plans. There is now a disquieting number of what Williams et al. call the “copers” and “disengaged,” albeit for various reasons including covertly enforced isolation or a chilling of academic freedom.<sup>3</sup> Participation at the Faculty level is at an all-time low, visibly symbolized by attendance at Faculty meetings. For example, at the first

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<sup>1</sup> CAUT *Policy Statement on Governance*. <http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?page=726&lang=1>.

<sup>2</sup> Yet, it was only in the 2006 Collective Agreement that the Faculty Association of UBC included academic freedom language and the agreement currently does not contain a faculty governance clause.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, D., Gore, W., Broches, C. & Lostoski, C. (1987). One faculty’s perceptions of its governance role. *Journal of Higher Education*, 58(6), 629-657.

Faculty meeting of this year, attendance amounted to about 31 FT faculty members, 10 of whom were administrators (Heads and higher), out of a total of about 120 FT faculty members. With signs of waning confidence, conditions and mechanisms related to accountability and governance at the Faculty level have for quite some time actively discouraged initiative, participation, and democratic action. Confidence in reform is waning as well, as changes are protracted and arbitrary.

The **crisis of reform** manifests in continuously anxious faculty and exacts a cost in various ways, including cynicism, mistrust, stress, and tense social relations. Reform is unnecessarily protracted in some cases and rushed in others. On one hand, the teacher education program has been submitted to over a decade of formal processes of reform, with no substantive changes to the program whatsoever. The reform of teacher education has been a running joke, with faculty members who know the history dismissing any suggestions that changes are immanent. Some units are staged for reform and then neglected, depending on circumstance and preference or partiality. On the other hand, reform of selected programs is furious and threatening, or arbitrary and with disregard for symmetry or due process (e.g., Ed.D. program review)<sup>4</sup>. Some reforms are facilitated and resourced while others are arbitrarily blocked or undermined.

The **crisis of administration** manifests in inconsistencies and unpredictability in decision-making, procedure, response, and planning. Similar to the crisis of reform, administrative response and planning seem capricious; some plans are fast and furious, while others are neglected and deferred; some university procedures are followed while others are transgressed; some faculty members are empowered while others are powered over or disempowered. In the past six months alone in Faculty level administration, we have witnessed arbitrary moratoria imposed on new courses, capricious interference with University procedure, and variable commitments to administrative plans (e.g., 24 credit minimum for Ph.D. programs in the Faculty). One result is that operative standing committees and procedures for governance have become dysfunctional.

The **crisis of accountability** manifests in increasingly centralized administrative lines of hierarchy that have all but eliminated public dialogue, participation, response, and rules of order at the Faculty level. Eroded conditions and mechanisms for public engagement reduce the Faculty commons to a conduit for the unidirectional flow of information from the top, dispersed on what one colleague called ‘an as need to know basis (and you don’t need to know).’ A lack of transparency and flow of information in the Faculty is accompanied by illusive sources and terminals of responsibility, which, coupled with expansive administration and mistrust have proven to be the death knell for collegial governance.

The **crisis of governance** at the Faculty level manifests in two directions: the first toward increasingly concentrated power and expansive administrative intervention via an array of ad hoc and standing committees chaired and managed by Associate Deans; the second toward decision-making increasingly based on mistrust, paranoia and reaction. Faculty members find themselves neglected or unappreciated as the Dean and Dean’s Advisory Committee recommend and decide just-in-time on more and more of the big issues. One indicator of the

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g., the *Response by the EdD Management Committee to the External Review of the EdD Program* (24 September 2008), which is a serious wake-up call for the Faculty.

problem is the fact that, to this moment, only one standing committee at the Faculty level is chaired by a faculty member, as opposed to an Associate Dean (i.e., CCASA). This begs the question: Does the problem lie with administration or governance? Or both?

Some have said that governing scholars is like herding cats— it's possible but unlikely. I feel however that this exaggerates the challenge. The trick is to know when and where to recede to *laissez-faire* and let up the reins to allow scholars to govern.

Certainly, faculty members should have primary authority over curriculum, research, and faculty status, and their decisions should be submitted to administrative intervention, interruption, or overrule only in exceptional circumstances. With primary responsibility for research and teaching, faculty members should be authoritative with a substantial majority of representation on the governance on these issues. Allocation of this authority to faculty members is the first condition for faculty governance. The second condition is the academic freedom to express professional opinions and judgment without fear of reprisal. Faculty governance requires that faculty express views, recommend, and decide on 1) academic matters of curriculum and teaching, including evaluation; 2) all matters of research; 3) matters of the Faculty's budget, direction, governance, procedures, and policies; and 4) matters of communicating to the public generally— even if or when views, recommendations, and decisions conflict with the administration's view.<sup>5</sup> With a goal of re-affirming and re-establishing these two conditions, academic freedom and authority over research, teaching (including curriculum, evaluation, etc.), and faculty status, it is urgent that we restore faculty governance in the Faculty of Education.

Thank you very much for responsively attending to this input. Please make this report available as one of the public documents forwarded, and include on a meeting agenda for discussion. I look forward to an invitation to talk with the Working Group on Faculty of Education Governance about these issues of “how to govern scholars.”

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<sup>5</sup> American Association of University Professors. (1994). On the relationship of faculty governance to academic freedom. *Academe*, 80(4), 47-49.