



# Academic Governance: The UNBC Context

Presidents' Roundtable on Collegial Governance

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# The UNBC Context

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- ✎ The Provincial legislation of the “UNBC Act” of 1990 set the stage for the creation of UNBC and its initial governance by a Board of Governors and a specially composed Senate, in which faculty were a minority
- ✎ UNBC opened its doors in 1994 under the UNBC Act
- ✎ after UNBC reached a set of targets, it was transitioned into the “BC Universities Act” on July 16 2002. This resulted in a recomposed Senate with majority Faculty representation
- ✎ not all BC institutions called “Universities” are governed by the same provisions— this has important consequences for the institutions
  - ✎ UNBC is grouped with UBC, SFU and UVic in the Act

# Highlights of the Universities Act

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- Section 37: Powers of Senate– 37 (1) The academic governance of the university is vested in the senate and it has the following powers:
  - (f) to consider, approve and recommend to the board the revision of courses of study, instruction and education in all faculties and departments of the university;
  - (i) to recommend to the board the establishment or discontinuance of any faculty, department, course of instruction, chair, fellowship, scholarship, exhibition, bursary or prize;
  - (p) to deal with all matters reported by the faculties, affecting their respective departments or divisions;

# What is Collegial Governance

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- ☞ provisions of the University Act are a necessary condition but not sufficient to ensure collegial governance
  - ☞ just as a nation's Constitution provides a framework, there is still a need to enact laws, bylaws, policies and procedures to reflect the intent of the institution
- ☞ as a semi-democratic institution, Universities try to find balance between Administrative and Faculty requirements on a wide range of issues
- ☞ Collegial Governance reflects the approaches used to create the necessary internal decision structures, and approaches to deal with the conflicts that arise

# The Need for Collegial Governance

Conflicts will arise— how are these resolved?

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- ☞ Example 1: Proposed restructuring of CSAM academic units (2002)
  - ☞ Dean's proposal to merge smaller academic units to attain "efficiencies"
  - ☞ several units agreed, others not so much
  - ☞ after long negotiations, attempt to impose the changes
  - ☞ resulted in grievances, arbitration to resolve issues raised
  - ☞ outcomes:
    - ☞ imposition of changes disallowed
    - ☞ poisoned atmosphere between Admin and several academic units
    - ☞ creation of Task Force on Collegial Governance, report in 2003

# Highlights from the *Report of the Task Force on Collegial Governance (October 2003)*

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- Recognition of the powers laid out in the BC Universities Act
- recognition of collegial governance principles as essential to the function of the institution:

*Collegial governance is fundamentally a process in which faculty and administrators make decisions concerning academic matters in an open, responsible and democratic process. Further, collegial governance involves the rights and duties of faculty to contribute to open debate and decision-making and the obligation to participate in governance processes.*

- recognition of formal and informal aspects of collegial governance
- Formal aspects include College Councils, Senate and the relationships with the Board
- Informal aspects refer to structures and procedures put in place to facilitate “...good faith consultation among...colleagues prior to decision-making.”
- a sense of intellectual excitement and collective purpose also promote collegiality and a culture supportive of collegial governance

# A Bigger Crisis on the Hill

## Example 2: Suspensions of Admissions, Pressure on Faculty

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In 2006-7 the University entered an existential crisis about its role and purpose in serving its communities. There was an “Academic Visioning Initiative” (AVI) that fed into a new Academic Plan.

***Memo to Faculty Feb. 21 2007: Implementation of the Workforce Adjustment Plan for FA Members***

...we cannot meet the current challenge without reducing faculty and staff positions as part of the overall management plan

...the University has proposed an incentive-based voluntary program be used to assist with faculty reductions over and above what might be expected from natural attrition

***UNBC Press Release Feb. 22, 2007: UNBC Limits Effects of Budget Reductions***

For this fall, UNBC is temporarily suspending new admissions into the bachelor's degree programs in Northern Studies, Women's Studies, Physics, and Economics. Courses in these subjects will still be taught...

# Failure of the Restructuring Initiative

## Good Governance Policies and Procedures Reassert Themselves

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- ✧ The consultation procedures for AVI led to decisions that were not seen as legitimate outcomes or in the best interests of the University (inside and outside)
  - ✧ perception that many of the outcomes were predetermined by Administrators, with procedures designed to reinforce the desired outcomes (incl. sham metrics designed for the purpose and never used again)
  - ✧ the budgetary crisis was perceived to be a paper tiger, designed to create a climate of crisis which would justify drastic responses
- ✧ Faculty and Student Senators challenged the academic decision to close admissions to degrees, as it had not been debated and passed at Senate. A motion to assert to the Board of the role of Senate in academic matters was to be debated at Senate.
  - ✧ at the last minute, Administration withdrew the suspension of admissions (no press release was issued however)



# Status of Collegial Governance Principles at UNBC

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- ↳ Institutional memory currently guides governance operating principles
- ↳ Collegial Governance requires recognition and buy-in by both Administrators and Faculty
  - ↳ the 2003 to 2007 period shows that we cannot assume that our governance principles will not be subverted
- ↳ Collegial Governance requires a degree of transparency, consultation and negotiation that can be time-consuming
  - ↳ Faculty must recognize and carefully apply the powers entrusted to them
  - ↳ Administration must recognize the challenges and limitations of authority over academic policies

# References

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