

Time to Regain Faculty Control of University Council

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Much has been written about faculty-administration relations at the University of Saskatchewan recently. Some elements of what we are witnessing at the University can also be found at other institutions in Canada, and more widely in North America, where strong academic tradition may not be as deep-rooted. But some challenges are unique to us. The most important of these – in my view – is the absence of unquestionable faculty ownership of academic decision-making.

University Council, ostensibly a self-sustaining faculty-led body, is tasked with academic decision-making at the University of Saskatchewan. The problem is that University Council is faculty-led only superficially. In practice, independent faculty members form only a minority of University Council.

In this article, I would just like to present the numbers game. Over the last year, I have shared this information with the USFA and some senior administrators. Although we may quibble over minor details, the main argument appears to be sound.

Until sometime in 1995, academic

decision-making at the University of Saskatchewan was the domain of the General Academic Assembly (GAA). Figure 1 shows the distribution of votes in the GAA. All faculty members are members of this body and hence enjoy overwhelming majority. The next largest group is the students, who cannot exceed 10% of the GAA membership. Senior administrators are only about 2% of the GAA membership. The quorum for a GAA meeting requires 150 members to be present.

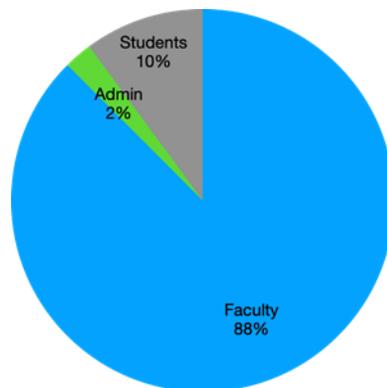


Figure 1: Distribution of Votes in the GAA

Then came the University of Saskatchewan Act of 1995, according to which a new body, the University Council, was tasked with academic decision-making. Council is ultimately answerable to the GAA because the GAA can ask Council

to reconsider some decisions, and critically, the GAA can dissolve University Council.

Numerically, University Council was to be different from the GAA; however, faculty would still be in a comfortable majority, and could even continue to form the overwhelming majority. The percentage of senior administrators was still to be around 2%. Students increased to 17%. Faculty representatives were to form about 81% of University Council membership. Figure 2 illustrates this graphically.

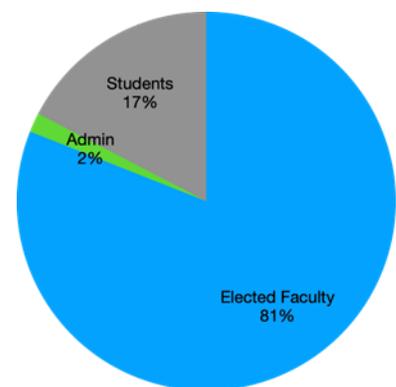


Figure 2: Allowed Maximum Representation of Faculty on Council

These faculty representatives included members at large (45% of Council membership) and representatives of colleges (36% of Council membership), two for each col-

lege. Here's where things get interesting. The U of S Act of 1995 allowed both college representatives for each college to be elected by the college faculty members; it specifically required that at least one of them be elected. Somehow, it was decided at the University that only one of the two college representatives for any college would be elected, and the other would be the Dean. This reduced the potential faculty representation at University Council to about 63% (45% + half of 36%), less than 2/3 majority now (see Figure 3). It is unclear to me how this decision was made to interpret the Act in this way, maximally reducing faculty representation at University Council.

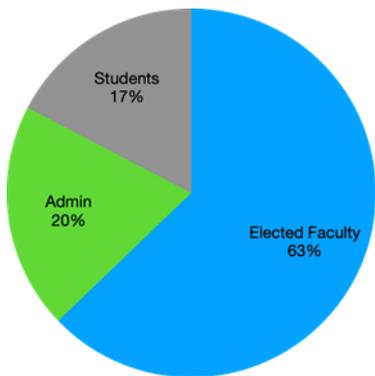


Figure 3: Allowed Maximum Representation of Admin on Council

But things didn't stop there. As Figure 4 illustrates, somehow, the remaining 18% of the college representatives – who are to be elected by their respective college faculty members – seem to have been historically hand-picked by the deans, effectively reducing faculty-elected members of Council to 45%.

This should not be allowed to stand.

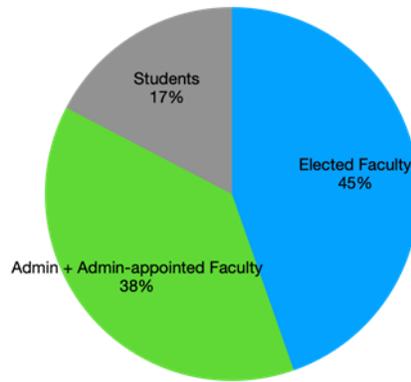


Figure 4: Actual Distribution of Votes on Council

I spotted this sleight of hand a few years ago and challenged it from the Council floor. I was told that it wasn't materially a violation of the Act, and I was assured that elections would be held for one of the college representative positions going forward. At the time of the next Council elections, I was happy to see that nominations were called for these college representative positions. However, there was a procedural problem. One had to pick whether to nominate oneself for a college position – of which there was only one per college – or to nominate oneself for one of 54 member-at-large positions. This to me appeared to disincentivize nominations for the college positions. I expressed this concern to the University Secretary's office, and recommended that faculty should be allowed to nominate themselves for both their college and the member-at-large positions, and the college positions should be filled first. My suggestion was dismissed on the pretext that a Council member has to represent either their college or all faculty, and one can't possibly be willing to serve Council in either of the two capacities.

Why not let those nominating themselves indicate if they are so willing?

Because of a lack of transparency, it is difficult to know how the elected college representatives ended up being selected that year. In the latest call for nominations for Council membership, I noticed that there was no mention of college representatives. I found this surprising considering there were at least three vacant positions for college representatives. I wrote to the University Secretary's office to ask why nominations were not being invited to fill these positions. I was essentially told that the Governance Office works with the colleges to "see that their vacancies are filled"; however, "the responsibility rests with the colleges." In other words, no elections for these positions.

Whether this reducing of faculty to 45% of University Council – a clear minority – is by design or by some accident, over the decades this has led to a disengaged and apathetic faculty, and a senior administration that feels emboldened to presume to lead the University's academic agenda. The University is a weaker institution for it.

For some faculty, Council has become an easy way to tick the University Service box on their CVs. For others, it is a place to show their loyalty to the administration to hopefully join their ranks someday. For the handful of independent-minded faculty members - who read the documents and try to offer useful feedback - it is a humiliating experience; many are subjected to

mockery and belittling comments and occasionally accused of grandstanding, just for trying to do their job.

We cannot have a University where academic decision-making is not

clearly and unquestionably the domain of the faculty.

I feel that the time has come for faculty to challenge this fundamental overreach by the administration. It is time to demand the

full 81% of elected faculty members on University Council allowed by the University of Saskatchewan Act of 1995. If deans want to represent their colleges on University Council, let their college faculty members elect them.

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