Academic Senates and University Governance in Canada: Changes in Structure and Perceptions of Senate Members

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University governance has become an important international issue in higher education. This paper reports on the findings of a new study of university senates (academic councils) in Canadian universities in order to analyze changes in structure and in senate members' perceptions of the structure and role of senates over the last decade. There have been changes to the structure and organizational arrangements of many Canadian university senates over the last ten years; the emergence of "new" universities has led to the creation of academic decision making bodies that have tended to be smaller than their more traditional peers, and many universities have rationalized and reformed their committee structures. Compared with results from a similar study conducted in 2000, in which many of the challenges to university governance were perceived as external (notably related to economic factors), respondents cited a growing number of "internal" pressures, including tensions between the role of academic senates in overseeing the academic mission of the University and the work of labour unions representing faculty members' employment interests, the importance of senate orientation programming, the need for better oversight and assessment of academic quality, the relative roles of board, senate and the administration, and continuing concerns about the limited role of the senate in strategic planning, financial, research and fund-raising issues and activities..

Introduction

University governance has become an important international issue in higher education (Amaral, Jones & Karseth, 2002). Dramatic changes in the relationships between universities and governments in many systems have led to major changes in power and authority relationships within higher education systems.

This study focuses on the role and work of academic senates in the context of university governance in Canada. Since Canadian universities enjoy comparatively high levels of institutional autonomy, and since decisions on institutional leadership, curriculum, admissions, and financial allocations are largely made at the level of the individual university (Jones, 2002), institutional governance arrangements are extremely important. The vast majority of Canadian universities operate under a bicameral governance structure where the responsibility for administrative and fiscal matters is assigned to a corporate governing board, and the responsibility for academic matters is assigned to a senate. A small number of universities have a unicameral governance structure with a single governing body. In most provinces these

governance arrangements are specified in institution-specific legislative acts, though universities in British Columbia and Alberta function under omnibus provincial legislation.

The role and function of the academic senate within Canadian university governance have been topics of interest and debate for over fifty years. The 1966 report of a commission sponsored by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), commonly known as the Duff-Berdahl Report, strongly advocated that the senate "concentrate on the 'commanding heights' of educational policy and leave the day-to-day administration of the university to the President and his associates" (Duff & Berdahl, 1966, p. 32). The Report also recommended that the senate have more faculty representation and participate in long-term academic planning as well as in the review of the university-wide budget. Universities may have responded to these recommendations differently; nonetheless, the Report did drive home the idea of shared governance in Canadian universities. The ensuing governance reforms included the expansion of the senate membership at many universities to include greater student and faculty representation, and an expansion of the senate role in institutional governance arrangements.

While the Duff-Berdahl commission attempted to tackle many of the problematic areas of university government at the time, some of those issues were still present twenty-seven years later, according to the Report of the Independent Study Group on University Governance (ISGUG) in 1993, even though the context of Canadian higher education had greatly changed. The 1993 Report of ISGUG was concerned with what its authors perceived to be the replacement of a shared, collegial governance arrangement by a corporate management model in which the chief executive officer (the president) and senior administrative officers make important decisions in a top-down manner. The Report reaffirmed the merits and necessity of adhering to shared governance on the senate.

In addition, the ISGUG report strongly supported an active role of faculty associations in academic governance and believed they would increase the importance of the senate. Concerns about job security in the face of budget cuts beginning in the 1970s had led many university faculty associations to seek legal status as labour unions, and the vast majority of Canadian university faculty are now unionized. The creation of labour unions undoubtedly had an impact on the power and influence of academic senates, especially since many key aspects of academic policy, such as appointment, tenure, and promotion policies, became component parts of collective agreements (and thus under the purview of governing boards which have authority to approve collective agreements) rather than the purview of the senate.

Changes in academic governance are not limited to Canadian higher education; they have been manifest in many other jurisdictions. In the U.S., for example, controversies regarding the managerial/corporate model, unionization, and shared governance have caused shifts in governance practices since the 1960s (Burgan, 2004; Mortimer & Sathre, 2007). The increasing importance of the market led to increased corporate management in Australian universities (Goedegebuure, Hayden, & Meek, 2009). It was reported that under the pressure of

effectiveness and efficiency the role of their academic boards (the senior academic governing body) is now more focused on quality assurance instead of a wider range of responsibilities (Winchester, as cited in Rowlands, 2012). After laws that aimed to delegate more decision-making power to universities were introduced in Portugal, traditional collegiate governance has become the focal point of debate between university management and academics and among academics themselves (Magalhães & Amaral, 2003). The effectiveness of the senate in Italian universities is considered to have been undermined with the extension of membership to represent various constituencies (Capano, 2008). As Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) noted, a noticeable trend in many jurisdictions is that "the power of academically dominated senates has been paralleled or replaced by councils, boards or trustees who incorporate representation from the world of business, public services and politics" (p. 479).

Situated in the changing international and national context relating to academic governance, the objective of this paper is to look at issues related to the role and function of the academic senate in Canadian universities through the analysis of data collected from surveys of senate secretaries and senate members that were conducted in 2011/12. The study was also designed to look at change over time by comparing contemporary findings with data obtained from a similar study conducted in 1999/2000[1]. We begin with a review of the study method, followed by a review and analysis of data obtained from the survey of senate secretaries, and an analysis of data obtained from the survey of senate members. We conclude the paper with some observations on the prospects for improving the efficacy of the senate.

Method

This study was designed to replicate a previous study of senate secretaries and senate members that was conducted in 2000 by Jones, Shanahan and Goyan (2004). The study involved two phases. The first was a national survey of senate secretaries, the administrators within each university that coordinate and support the work of the academic senate. A bilingual (English and French) questionnaire, drawing heavily on questions that had been used in the original 2000 study, was made available on line. In August 2011, an invitation to participate in the study was sent to the senate secretaries of 84 member universities of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC)[2]. Senate secretaries from 41 institutions (including 4 universities that have unicameral governance structures) completed the survey.[3]

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[1] The previous study was conducted by one of the authors with the assistance of Theresa Shanahan and Paul Goyan (see Jones, Shanahan & Goyan, 2004) and with financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The questionnaire for that study was developed in 1998 and survey data were obtained in the 1999-2000 academic year. We will refer to this project as the 2000 study throughout this paper.

[2] The study focused on institutions that offer university degrees under their legislative authority. Federated and affiliated institutions, which typically have the legal authority to offer degrees but who hold this authority in abeyance under an agreement with another degree-granting institution, were excluded from the study.

[3] One of the 4 universities that have unicameral governance structures has a senior academic committee, which is considered equivalent to a traditional senate. Therefore, this university is included in data for bicameral institutions in the paper.

The response rate was 49%. Secretaries were also asked whether their university would agree to participate in the second phase of the study, which involved a survey of the perceptions of senate member. A total of 20 institutions participated in this second phase of the study. By June 2012, when the second survey was closed, 373 completed responses had been received from voting senate members; the response rate was 23%.

Senate secretary survey

There is a very large variation in the size of senates at Canadian universities. Based on data from 38 institutions included in this study that have a bicameral governance structure, the average size of a senate is 76.8 voting members, a larger average size than was found in the 2000 study, though this is primarily a function of the fact that different institutions participated in the two surveys. The largest senate at a university participating in this study has over 200 members and the smallest has fewer than 25. Ten universities (26%) have more than 100 senate members, and eight of these institutions are among the top 15 Canadian research universities, according to the *Top 50 Canadian Research Universities List 2011* by Re$earch Infosource (2011). In contrast to the large, mature research universities, smaller and especially "new" universities, formed from existing colleges and university colleges, which gained university status in the past 10 years, tend to have a smaller senate of fewer than 50 members.

All 38 universities have faculty members on the senate, and, on average, this constituency (which in our survey excludes faculty members who hold an administrative rank such as dean, department head, vice-president or president) constitutes 48% of the total membership, the largest among all member categories (Table 1), though there is a considerable variation in this ratio by institution, ranging from 9% to 96%. Students are the second largest membership category (16%), and they are members of all senates participating in the study except one, a private institution. Deans are the third largest membership category (13% of the total membership). The smallest category of senate members is government representatives, who make up only 13% (5) of participating senates and represent only 0.2% of the total membership. Other categories of membership identified by respondents included registrars, librarians, student statutory members (such as those representing student unions as opposed to those elected by students), and the university secretary or secretary of senate.

Table 1 Senate membership by category of members (excluding three unicameral institutions and including voting members only)

Membership category	Percentage of all senate members	Percentage of senates reporting members in this category
Faculty	48	100
Students	16	97
Deans (ex officio)	13	97
Other senior administrators	5	76
Department heads (ex officio)	5	24
Vice presidents or provost	4	95
Members of affiliated or federated institutions	2	42
Alumni	2	42
President	1	97
Non-academic staff	1	39
Members of the board of governors (ex officio)	1	42
Chancellor	0.7	55
Bargaining unit representatives	0.4	16
Government representatives	0.2	13
Other	2	39

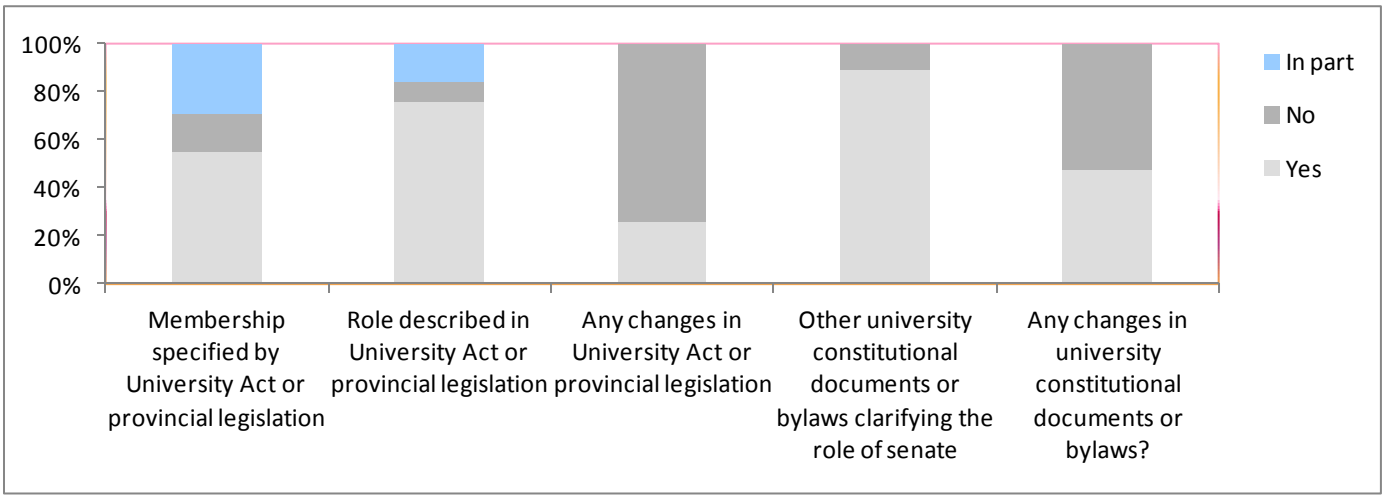
Other than faculty and students, senior university administrators are the most common membership category on Canadian university senates. For example, of the 38 senates at bicameral institutions included in this study, all but one (97%) have the university president as a voting member, and the vast majority include vice presidents/provosts (95%) and deans (93%) as voting members. In total, senior university administrators make up approximately 23% of the total membership, which is very similar to the figures reported in the 2000 study. The vast majority of senior university administrators are *ex officio* members with voting status. It is important to note that senior academic administrators at Canadian universities almost invariably hold academic appointments, so more than 70% of all senate members hold academic appointments (including faculty and academic administrators). Among the 38 institutions, thirty-two senates (84%) are chaired by the president of the university. Chairs of the senate may also be elected by members of senate (11%) or elected/appointed by a committee (5%).

Secretaries from three universities that have unicameral governance structures responded to the senate survey by reporting on the role and function of the board of governors. Although boards are not the focus of this survey, it may be worthwhile to identify a few findings about the composition of these three boards, as contrast. The average size of these unicameral boards is approximately 16 members. All three boards have the president, faculty and student members and none of them have VP/Provost, deans or department heads. One board has bargaining unit representative on it. There are government representatives or government appointees on all three boards, accounting for 45% of their total board membership. This is

very different from the senates which have very limited government representation or appointments.

Figure 2 below summarizes responses regarding the foundational authority of the senate and its membership and there have been changes in the last decade. For 84% of the institutions (32 in total), the membership or role of senates is specified at least in part by a university's Act or provincial legislation.[4] In the past 10 years, except in the province of British Columbia and a few isolated cases where the status of an institution has changed, there have not been very many significant changes in the membership, role or duties of the senate as defined under each university's legislative Act. Major changes have taken place in British Columbia where the government introduced a University Act which prescribes the governance arrangements for all universities under this omnibus legislation. The Act removed order-in-council appointees from university senates, and added a section applicable to the province's new special purpose, teaching universities which distinguishes the powers and duties of their senates from those of the more traditional research universities. Only 4 institutions (11%) do not have university constitutional documents or bylaws that further clarify the role and responsibilities of their senates; among those who do, 47% (18 institutions) reported that there had been significant changes in these documents with regard to the membership, role or duties of their senate over the last decade.

Figure 1 Foundation of and changes to the membership and role of senate (38 institutions)



Generally speaking, the changes reported over the past ten years have involved a) an increase in the membership of the senate in response to the approval of new campuses, colleges, departments, and/or programs, b) revising committee terms of reference and reorganizing and restructuring committees, c) greater delegation of authority from the Board of Governors, d) reviewing and revising the role and functions of the senate, senate composition and

[4] Only three universities do not have either their senate membership or role specified in the university's Act or provincial legislation, but they have university constitutional documents or bylaws that describe the membership and role.

membership, and senate election rules, and e) a change of institutional governance structure due to change of status. The latter relates primarily to a number of "new universities" that have transitioned from former colleges or university colleges into full university status.

It appears that a key area of reform for a number of senates is their committee structure. Seventy-six percent of the senates (29 institutions) reported that there had been some change in the senate committee structure. The average number of standing committees per senate is 12; one university reported a total of 26 standing committees, the largest number in this study, and one university indicated that there was only one standing committee, the smallest number reported by participating institutions. New universities tend to create committees in accordance with the requirements of their founding legislation and then to revise the committee structure as the institution matures. While some institutions indicated that new standing committees had been created, the overall trend among universities was to decrease the number of committees. When describing the changes, secretaries used words such as "delete", "merge", "combine", "collapse", "eliminate", "dissolve", "suspend", and "abolish". In contrast with the senates of the bicameral institutions, the boards of three unicameral institutions have fewer committees, ranging from 2 to 5. Only one board reported some change to its committee structure by adding two new committees.

Senate secretaries were also asked a series of questions about the status and reporting requirements of faculty councils, the academic councils associated with each faculty or large academic unit within the university. While the membership and role of the senate is clearly specified under legislation and/or institutional bylaws, the composition and role of faculty councils is less clearly articulated at some universities. Excluding two institutions that do not have faculty councils, 7 institutions reported that the role and composition of faculty councils is not specified in legislation or university-level bylaws or other constitutional documents.[5] At 11 universities (31%) faculty councils exist but are not constituted under the authority of the senate; nor do the former make reports to the latter. Only 36% of the senates (13 institutions) receive reports from faculty councils, and for ten of these institutions this reporting is "as needed", "not regular", "not formal", "infrequent", or "occasional". These findings suggest that the formal relationship between the academic senate and faculty councils is somewhat ambiguous at many Canadian universities, and that there may be a need to clarify reporting and authority relationships between these two levels of academic governance.

Compared with the 2000 study, senate secretaries reported that much greater attention is now given to providing senate members with orientation materials and programming. When asked about whether new senate members are provided with any orientation, only 18 % (7 institutions) out of the 38 participating bicameral institutions answered "No" compared with 38% in the 2000 study. Thirty institutions (79%) now provide some form of orientation materials (such as a handbook or binder) to new members, and these materials may include the relevant legislation, senate bylaws, academic plans, senate and committee structure and membership,

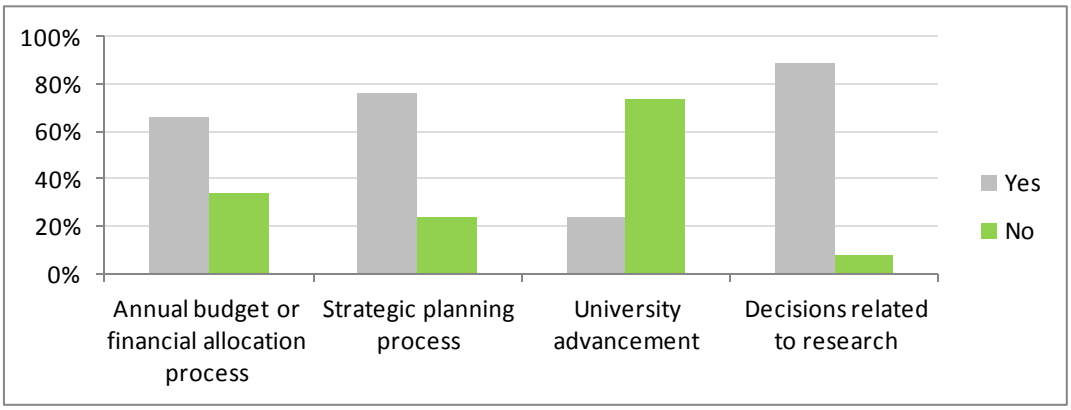
[5] In contrast, all three secretaries from the unicameral institutions reported that they have institutional documents or bylaws that further clarify the membership and roles of their faculty councils in addition to their University Act or provincial legislation.

sample agendas, meeting schedules, and policy documents. Twenty-five universities (61%) reported that orientation sessions were organized for new members; these sessions ranged from 30 minutes to a full day in length. Orientation programming can take a variety of forms, including panel discussions, formal presentations, opportunities for one-on-one meetings, lunch meetings, and retreats. A common format involves presentations from key officials, such as the chair of senate, university president, board chair, vice-president, committee chairs, and/or the secretary of senate. Usually the secretary of senate organizes or coordinates these sessions with assistance from other administrative offices within the university.

As for the operational practices of the senate, the frequency of senate meetings ranges from 4 to 12 times each year, with an average of 9 times per year. Senate meetings are open to the public in 20, or roughly half, of the bicameral institutions while 5 institutions (including 2 unicameral universities) hold senate meetings in closed sessions; meetings for the remainder are open only "in part." The length of term for an elected member of senate (other than student members) usually varies between 2 to 3 years, and for most student members, the term is one year. For all 38 bicameral institutions, the term of office for senate members is renewable. More than 71% of the respondents (27) indicated that senate members can serve unlimited consecutive terms, while 29% (11 respondents) reported that there are term limits, usually involving a maximum of 2 or 3 consecutive terms.

Senate secretaries were asked a series of questions on the role of the senate beyond its primary role in the approval of academic matters (that is, matters relating to teaching and learning), including its formal role, if any, in the annual budget or resource allocation process, strategic planning, university advancement, and research policy. Their responses are summarized in Figure 2. Most university senates play at least some role in decisions related to research policy, strategic planning, and the budget process. Relatively few senates play a formal role in university advancement policies.[6]

Figure 2 The role of senate in four policy areas



[6] All the boards of three unicameral universities play a formal role in the institution's budgeting and strategic planning processes. Two of them also play a role relating to decisions on university advancement. Only one board has a role in decisions related to research while another board approves the broad research objectives of the university.

Four points warrant further clarification regarding the role of senate in the above-mentioned four areas. First, with regard to research, institutional research policies and procedures (such as a strategic research plan or academic plan) typically move through the senate or its committees for final approval or before being forwarded to the board of governors for final approval. Four secretaries also noted that the senate allocates some internal funding for research.

Second, in terms of the role of the senate in a university's strategic planning process, respondents from 11 institutions (29%) indicated that the senate approves the plan which usually requires final approval from the board of governors. The senate plays a consultative or advisory role to the administration or the governing board in the strategic planning process at 10 institutions (26%). Two respondents indicated that the plan is presented to the senate for endorsement before it is forwarded to the board. Respondents from 5 institutions indicated that senate involvement included the selection and appointment of a senate member to the strategic planning working group or implementation team, or to have senator members on the university's planning committee.

Third, although 66% of respondents indicated that the senate plays a role in the institution's annual budget or financial allocation process; this role usually involves providing recommendations or comments on the draft budget as "advice" from the senate (according to 12 respondents) and the Senate has no approval power. The budget is presented to the senate for information at 5 institutions. Eighteen respondents noted that the senate role has been delegated to a standing committee (for example, a planning committee, or a budget/finance committee) to deal with budget matters. One institution has two liaison subcommittees, one operating under the authority of the senate and one operating under the authority of the board. According to the respondent, these two subcommittees meet "at least once per year to share information and discuss issues of shared concern, including, but not limited to, the University's budgetary planning regarding academic matters and curriculum, (and) the University's strategic/academic plans". At another university a two-thirds majority of board members must approve a budget that has not received senate approval. A senate may also influence the budget process by having representatives from its planning committee on the budget committee of the governing board, as reported by respondents from two universities.

Finally, the senates' role in university advancement appears at most to be to consider proposals for fundraising campaign priorities and recommend them to the board for approval. The senate may review advancement plans and advise the board or may simply receive periodic updates on campaign activities. One institution is in the process of setting up a committee under the board that will include faculty members from the senate to address issues related to advancement. Two respondents also reported that the senate plays a role in university advancement in terms of policies related to the funding and approval of scholarships or bursaries. Fourteen respondents (37%) acknowledged that the senate plays a role in the budget process, strategic planning and research policy, but no role in advancement.

The questionnaire asked senate secretaries to describe the key issues and challenges associated with the senate, and answers to this open-ended question suggested that many Canadian university senates are still facing many of the same challenges that had emerged in the 2000 survey (Jones, Shanahan & Goyan, 2004), including financial constraints, vested interests and territoriality, and rigidity in an ever changing environment. However, there was a noticeable shift in focus between responses from 2000 and 2012. Rather than focusing on the external environment such as the lack of funding, respondents to the new study tended to emphasize internal governance issues such as the role of senate, membership, structures, and elections. While respondents identified a wide range of issues and challenges, a detailed review of responses led to the identification of three broad themes. The first theme involves the tension between the roles and responsibilities of the senate in relation to the university administration and the board within university governance. Ten secretaries pointed out the sometimes vague and conflicting relationships between and among the senate, the board and the administration.[7] One respondent wrote that it is important to "ensure that they [senates] understand the extent of their role and not drift into the responsibilities of the Board and of the Administration. Keeping the demarcation lines clear is an ongoing challenge."

Second, some senate secretaries indicated that there were issues and challenges associated with the tensions between individual and constituency interests versus the interests of the university as a whole. Collegial governance, in the words of one respondent, does not mean a venue to "bully, to advance ideology, and to 'fight the man'". Six respondents expressed their concern over the negative impact of collective bargaining on the effectiveness of senate. As one commented, "[S]enate is therefore an emasculated decision making body if money and labo[u]r relations dominate." The large size of senate was an important issue identified by three secretaries; one noted that size becomes an obstacle to "high level, high quality strategic discussions of long-range issues." According to one respondent, the senate needs to "determine how to reduce the size of Senate and the number of committees" even though "it tries to be inclusive."

The third and final theme, and also the most prominent observation among respondents, was the challenge of engaging senate members. In the answers to this question, words like "engage", "engagement" and "engaging" were used 15 times by 9 respondents and the word "participation" was mentioned twice. Respondents indicated that there was a need for senior administrators, for students, for the academy in general and for young faculty in particular to become more engaged in the governance of their institutions, and for the senate itself to become more engaged in carrying out its governance role and responsibilities. To quote from two respondents, "meaningful" and "vigorous" participation is lacking. The responses from

[7] In addition, the secretary from a unicameral institution noted tension between the board and faculty who wanted to have a traditional senate approach, which would "entail opening up our enabling legislation where the Board's responsibility with respect to the senate function is specified" (quotes from respondent). Faculty in this institution tend to consider the relatively fast decision-making process of the Board as "being driven by the university executive" (quotes from the respondent).

senate secretaries suggested three general reasons for this lack of engagement: workload pressures on young faculty given the imperatives of research productivity; a general sense of apathy towards work that is seen as administrative and tedious; and a failure by the academy to communicate the importance of collegial self-governance to its members.

Senate member survey

This section focuses on the responses received from senate members from the 20 universities participating in the second phase of the study, including 19 bicameral institutions and 1 unicameral institution that has a senior academic committee

Demographic information

Of the 373 respondents, 48% were from faculty members (who are not in administrative roles), and 15% were from students (Table 2). Given the official composition figures provided earlier by senate secretaries, the composition of respondents is quite representative of the whole population of senate members, at least based on membership categories.

Table 2 Senate member respondents by membership category

Response	# of respondents	Percentage
Faculty member	117	48%
Academic administrator (dean, chair, department head)	74	20%
Undergraduate student	42	11%
Senior university administrator	23	6%
Other*	16	4.3%
Graduate student	14	3.8%
External to the university**	13	3.5%
University support staff	12	3.2%
Other university appointment	2	0.5%

* "Other" category mainly includes alumni, board members, librarians, student union representatives, community representative, professional administrative staff, and continuing sessional.

** External members include alumni, government officials, representatives of external organization (e.g., church or profession), and members from affiliated or federated universities.

The average age of senate member respondents was 48. Sixty-two percent of the respondents were in the 45-64 age group. Three quarters of faculty members were 45 years of age or older. The percentage of male senate members dropped from 73% in the 2000 study to 58% in this study, suggesting a significant increase in female participation. Male senators outnumbered their female counterparts in all membership categories except "Other". The ratio

between male and female graduate student members is 6:1, the largest among all membership categories.

About 43% of the respondents reported being either alumni or current students of the university where they are a senate member. A small but significant proportion of the respondents (15%) were either a board member or had been on the university's board before. A majority of the members (58%) are elected by constituencies, while 23% of the respondents become members by virtue of their office (*ex officio* members).

Work as a senate member

On average, respondents had been members of their senate for 3.7 years. Half of the respondents had served on the senate from one year to less than five years and about a quarter of respondents had been a senate member for less than one year. The longest period of senate membership reported in the survey was 26 years by a respondent who was external to the university (a senior administrator from an affiliated institution). Almost two-thirds of the respondents reported that they also serve on senate committees; a majority are members of only 1 or 2 committees.

Regarding time spent on doing senate-related work (e.g., preparing for and attending meetings) during the months that the senate is in session, over half of the respondents (55%) reported spending between 3 to less than 7 hours per month. On average, members reported working 6.5 hours per month, which is the same as in the 2000 survey. While faculty members make up nearly 50% of all senate members, the amount of time they report spending on senate related work is below average, less than the amount of time reported by students and by senior university administrators (Table 3)

Table 3 Average time spent on senate work per month (by membership category)

Membership category	Average (hours)
Other	9.3
Undergraduate student	8.5
Graduate student	7.9
Senior university administrator	7.5
Faculty	6.2
Academic administrator	5.7
University support staff	5.2
External to the university	3.4
Other university appointment	3.0

Most senate members report that they are generally well prepared for senate-related responsibilities. For example, over 90% reported that they prepare in advance for senate meetings and three-quarters think they are provided with the information they need to make

decisions as a member of the senate. A majority of senators (51%) consider the orientation material they received as a new member to be adequate. This is substantial improvement over the findings of the 2000 study (Jones et al 2004) where only 25% of respondents reported that the orientation materials were adequate.

Approximately 88% of respondents indicated that they know the organizational structure of the university. While over three-quarters of the respondents (78%) perceive themselves as active members of the senate, only 45% feel that they are able to influence senate decisions (and 25% indicated that they are not able to influence senate decisions); a decrease from the 55% of faculty who indicated that they were able to influence decisions in the 2000 study (Jones et al, 2004).

When responses are grouped based on membership category, some noticeable variations emerge (Table 4). Perhaps not surprisingly, both academic administrators (65%) and senior university administrators (70%) are far more likely than other membership categories to perceive that they are able to influence senate decisions. These two categories also have a larger proportion of members (85% and 83% respectively) who regard themselves as active members. More than half of the support staff member respondents (58%) do not feel that they are able to influence senate decisions, the highest proportion among all categories. Similar to the 2000 survey, student members are more or less equally divided in their perception about their influence on the senate, although graduate students tend to report less influence than undergraduate students. Compared with members from within the university, external members are less likely to think they know the organization structure of the university. This category has the largest percentage of people (54%) who chose "neutral" when asked if they are active members, and the proportion of this category to perceive themselves as active members is the smallest among all major categories (38%).

Table 4 Percentage of responses within each membership category (The letter "D" indicates "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree", N means "Neutral", and A means "Agree" and "Strongly Agree".)

Membership category	**Active member**			**Able to influence**			**Knowing structures**		
(# of participants)	**D**	**N**	**A**	**D**	**N**	**A**	**D**	**N**	**A**
Faculty member (177)	6%	14%	80%	25%	33%	42%	3%	9%	88%
Academic administrator (74)	4%	11%	85%	12%	23%	65%	1%	7%	89%
Undergraduate student (42)	5%	21%	74%	36%	31%	33%	5%	5%	91%
Senior university administrator (23)	13%	4%	83%	9%	22%	70%	4%	0%	91%
Other (16)	6%	25%	69%	44%	25%	31%	0%	19%	81%
Graduate student (14)	7%	14%	79%	21%	57%	21%	7%	7%	86%
External to the University (13)	8%	54%	38%	31%	31%	38%	23%	8%	69%
University support staff (12)	0%	25%	75%	58%	33%	8%	0%	0%	100%
Other university appointment (2)	50%	0%	50%	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%	100%

The role of the university senate

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement (agree or strongly agree) or disagreement (disagree or strongly disagree) to paired statements concerning the role the senate **should** play and the role the senate **does** play in various aspects of governance. Sometimes they were simply asked to agree or disagree with one statement. These statements cover a wide range of roles of senate in policy, accountability, budget, research, fundraising, and institutional autonomy.

For some questions there were important differences between the degree to which respondents believed a senate should or does fulfill a specific role. Table 5 presents the percentage of respondents who agree (agree and strongly agree) with each statement. Except for a few questions (such as the senate confining itself to academic matters) there were significant differences between what the senate members believe should be the role of the senate in comparison with the role they believe it does play in this area. The most striking difference is related to the senate's role in reviewing its own performance. Although 94% of the respondents agree that the senate should review its own performance, only 26% of the respondents agree that their senate actually does so. The responses to these questions in the 2011/12 study are quite similar to the responses that were obtained in the 2000 survey (Jones et al 2004).

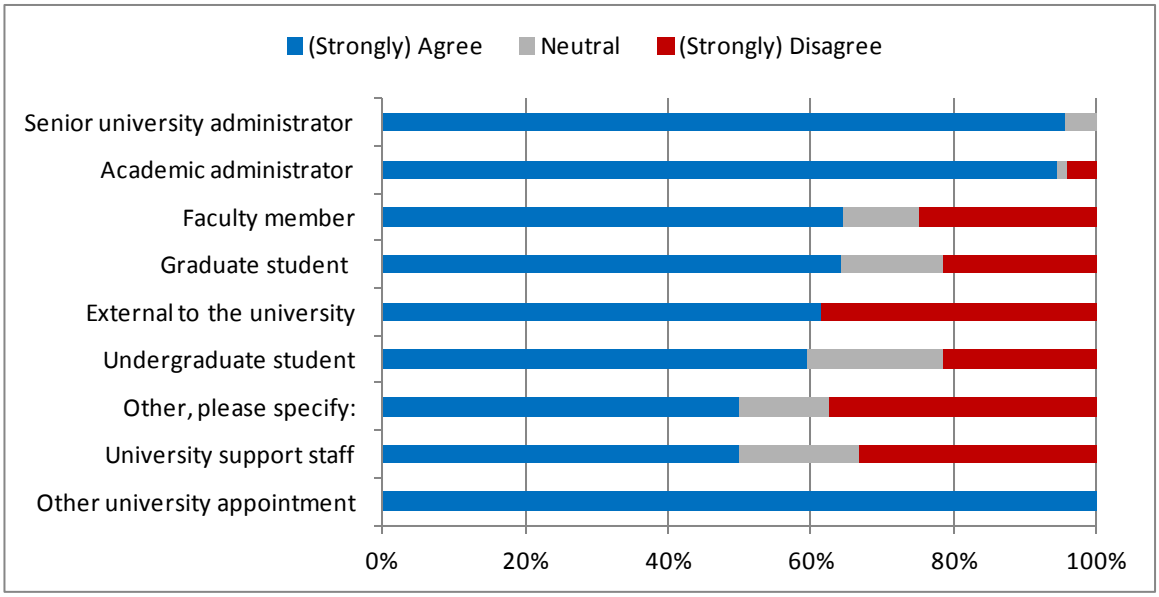
Table 5 Comparison between respondents agreeing ("agree" and "strongly agree") with statements on the role a senate should play and the role it does play.

Statement	Agree Should	Agree Does
Periodically review its own performance	**94%**	**26%**
Regularly review the performance of the university in academic areas	**93%**	**48%**
Defend and protect the autonomy of the university.	**93%**	**49%**
Play a role in determining the future direction of the university	**91%**	**49%**
Ask tough questions of senior administrators	**94%**	**52%**
Play a role in setting the university's budget	**60%**	**19%**
Play an active role in monitoring and trying to influence government policy	56%	17%
Play a role in establishing research policies and strategic research directions	72%	37%
Play a role in defining priorities for fundraising and development	37%	10%
Be the final authority for approving major academic policies	92%	66%
Confine itself mainly to academic matters	70%	74%

It is interesting to note that there were differences in response by membership category. For example, the responses to the statement "A senate should confine itself mainly to academic matters" are presented in Figure 3. Senior university administrators (96%) and academic administrators (95%) were far more likely to agree with this statement than university support staff, external members and members from the "other" category. A larger percentage of administrators agreed with this statement in this study than in the 2000 survey (Jones, Shanahan & Goyan, 2004). There was much greater agreement among membership categories in terms of the role of senate as the final authority for approving major academic policies. A

very small number of respondents (2%) supported the view that a senate should make decisions primarily about operations and implementations of policy, although opinions were divided as to whether the senate should make decisions primarily about policy/strategy (42%) or a combination of policy/strategy and operations/implementation (57%).

Figure 3 Responses to statement that "A senate should confine itself mainly to academic matters", by membership category



In terms of the senate's role in relation to government, in the protection of institutional autonomy, and in reviewing the performance of the institution in academic areas, there was once again a major gap between the degree to which respondents believed that the senate should or does fulfill these roles. As in the 2000 study, a majority of members (56%, 62% in 2000) believed that the senate should play an active role in monitoring and trying to influence government policy and a small minority believe that it does so (17%, 15% in 2000). Students and university support staff (nearly three-quarters of respondents from each category) seem to be especially supportive of this external role for the senate; by comparison, external members (with 23% of the membership) are far less supportive (See Table 6). Overwhelmingly, respondents (93%) think that senate should protect the autonomy of the institution; however, less than half (49%) agree that their senate fulfills this role. Again, external members, as well as senior university administrators, are not as supportive of this role as faculty or students. Compared with other membership categories, external members and senior administrators were less likely to agree with the statement that the senate should regularly review the performance of the university in academic areas (See Table 6). Not surprisingly, they are also less supportive of a senate's role of asking "tough questions" of senior administrators, and 65% of senior administrators believe the senate is already doing so, the highest percentage of all membership categories. In contrast, only about 40% of students and university support staff believe that the senate does ask "tough questions" of senior administrators (See Table 7).

Table 6 Responses (disagree, neutral, or agree) with statements on whether the senate should play a role of influencing government, protecting institutional autonomy, and reviewing institutional academic areas, by membership category

Membership category (# of participants)	Influencing gov't			Protecting autonomy			Reviewing academic areas		
	D	N	A	D	N	A	D	N	A
Faculty member (177)	17%	28%	54%	1%	4%	95%	2%	3%	94%
Academic administrator (74)	27%	20%	50%	1%	7%	91%	5%	4%	88%
Undergraduate student (42)	5%	21%	74%	2%	5%	93%	0%	0%	100%
Senior university administrator (23)	30%	13%	57%	9%	4%	87%	0%	17%	83%
Other (16)	13%	19%	63%	0%	6%	81%	0%	0%	100%
Graduate student (14)	21%	7%	71%	0%	7%	93%	0%	0%	100%
External to the University (13)	46%	31%	23%	8%	0%	85%	8%	0%	92%
University support staff (12)	17%	8%	75%	0%	8%	92%	0%	0%	100%
Other university appointment (2)	50%	0%	50%	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Table 7 Responses to the senate's preferred and actual role with regards to asking "tough questions" of senior administrators, by membership category

Membership category (# of participants)	Preferred role			Actual role		
	D	N	A	D	N	A
Faculty member (177)	1%	2%	98%	33%	15%	52%
Academic administrator (74)	5%	4%	88%	22%	12%	64%
Undergraduate student (42)	0%	5%	95%	50%	17%	33%
Senior university administrator (23)	0%	13%	87%	13%	22%	65%
Other (16)	6%	6%	81%	31%	19%	44%
Graduate student (14)	0%	7%	93%	29%	29%	43%
External to the University (13)	8%	8%	85%	15%	31%	54%
University support staff (12)	0%	0%	100%	50%	8%	42%
Other university appointment (2)	0%	50%	50%	0%	100%	0%

Compared with the 2000 survey results, respondents in this study seem to be less supportive of the idea that a senate should play a role in determining priorities for fundraising and development. Only 37% indicated agreement that the senate should play this role, compare to over half of respondents in the 2000 survey findings. Most academic and senior administrators (54% and 57% respectively) disagreed with the statement that the senate should play a role in approving fundraising and development priorities, while external members (54%) provided the strongest support for this role, followed by university support staff (50%) and faculty (41%). Only 10% of all respondents indicated that their senate does play a role in determining fundraising and development priorities.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (97%) regard their role on the senate as advancing the best interests of the university as a whole, whereas about two-thirds agree that

their role is to make decisions in the best interest of the broader society. A little over half of the respondents (53%, as opposed to 49% in the 2000 survey) agreed that it is clear with most issues what course of action is in the best interest of the university.

Many would argue that issues of academic quality should be a key concern for an academic senate. Sixty-two percent of the respondents indicated that processes are in place to assure the senate that the academic quality of their institution is being maintained. While the majority of members believe that appropriate processes are in place, it was interesting to note that only 48% of respondents indicated that their senate regularly reviews the performance of the university in academic matters. Given the important role of the senate in relation to academic standards and quality, these responses raise important questions for further research concerning specific senate processes and procedures in this area.

Senate's relationship with the board, management and faculty unions

The majority of the respondents agreed that the division of responsibilities between the governing board and the senate was generally quite clear (62%) and that senate members were made aware of decisions and actions being taken by the board (52%). Fewer than half of respondents (42%) agreed that the senate should have more autonomy from the board. Once again, there were differences in the level of agreement by category of membership, especially between faculty (and frequently students) and senior administrators. For example, while 70% of senior administrators indicated that the senate was made aware of the board's decisions and actions, only 45% of faculty agreed with this statement. A majority of faculty (53%) and students (54%) agreed that the senate should have more autonomy from their board, while only 17% of senior administrators and 15% of external members agreed with this statement.

In terms of the relationships among the senate, board and administration, 59% of respondents (64% in the 2000 survey) disagreed with the statement that the authority of their senate is increasing in comparison to that of the administration and the board. Approximately 72% of faculty disagreed with the statement, while only 30% of senior administrators and 15% of external members disagreed. There were more modest but similar differences of opinion among member categories when considering the relationship between the senate and the faculty union or association (Table 9). While 28% of all respondents (roughly the same response as the 2000 survey) think that the role of senate is being strengthened by the work of faculty unions, 35% of faculty members, 0% of support staff and 9% of senior administrators agreed with the statement. The views of faculty and senior administrators were somewhat closer when they answered the question of whether the influence of the faculty association on academic matters was increasing in comparison to that of senate, with 27% of faculty and 39% of senior administrators agreeing with the statement. Nonetheless, there is clearly no emerging consensus regarding the impact of faculty associations/unions on the role and influence of the senate.

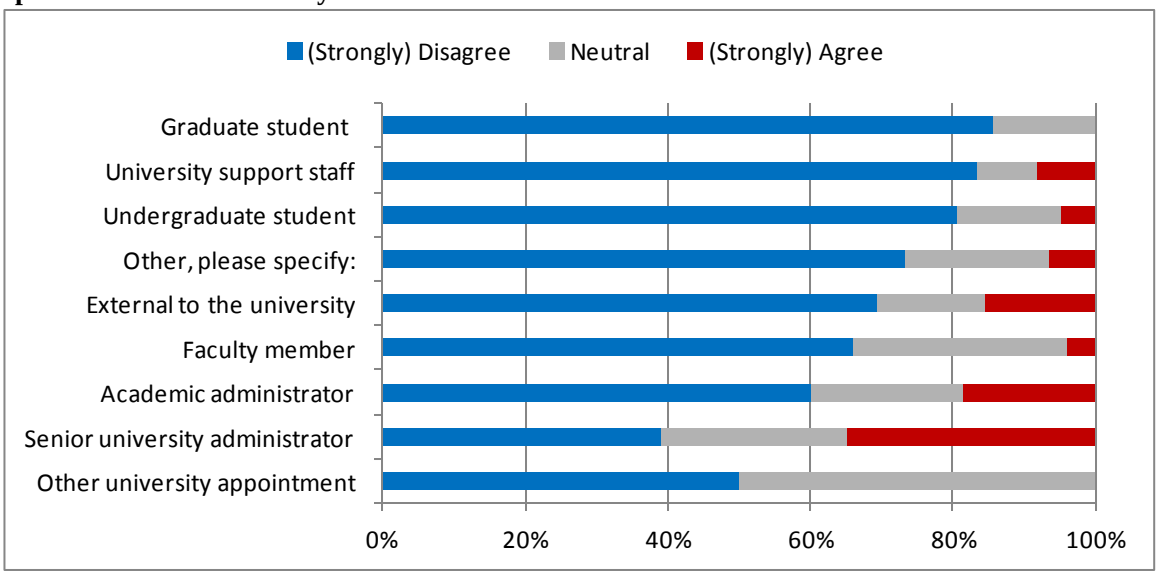
Table 9 Responses about the relationship between faculty associations/unions and the senate

Membership category (# of participants)	Strengthening the role of senate			Increased influence on academic matters as compared to that of senate		
	D	N	A	D	N	A
Faculty member (177)	33%	29%	35%	41%	29%	27%
Academic administrator (74)	50%	23%	23%	41%	34%	22%
Undergraduate student (42)	19%	45%	33%	24%	48%	26%
Senior university administrator (23)	78%	9%	9%	35%	26%	39%
Other (16)	19%	63%	13%	25%	63%	0%
Graduate student (14)	50%	21%	29%	29%	43%	29%
External to the University (13)	38%	38%	23%	0%	54%	46%
University support staff (12)	67%	33%	0%	42%	25%	33%
Other university appointment (2)	0%	50%	50%	0%	100%	0%

Effectiveness of the senate

When asked whether the senate is an effective decision-making body, approximately half of the respondents agreed (as compared to 44% in the 2000 survey) and 23% disagreed. Administrators (59%), graduate students (71%) and external members (62%) were more likely to agree with the statement than faculty (44%), undergraduate students (35%) and university support staff (33%). Two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement that the senate primarily approves decision made elsewhere. A large majority of respondents (82%) agreed that most of the work of the senate is done in committees. Almost two-thirds of respondents disagreed with the statement that the senate is too involved in decisions about the day-to-day operations of the university, though, once again, there were differences in response by category of member (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Responses to the statement that the senate is too involved in decisions about day-day-day operations of the university

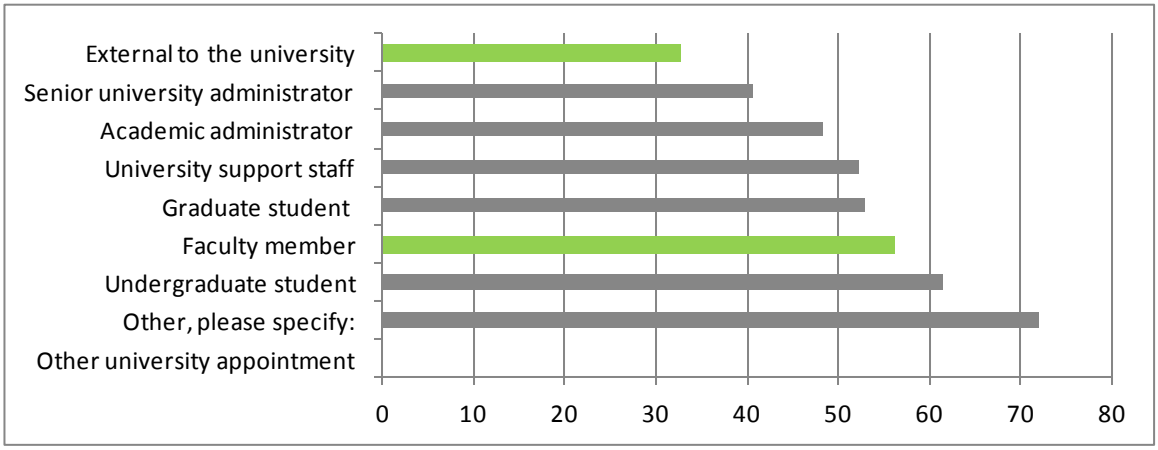


A majority of respondents (59%) agreed that the senate plays an important role as a forum for discussing important issues, although a smaller percentage of graduate students and support staff (50% each) agreed with the statement than administrators (65%) and external members (62%). Many graduate students (43%) and external members (46%) disagreed with the statement that the senate plays an important role in facilitating the exchange of information in the institution, while the majority of academic administrators (62%) and undergraduate students (57%) agreed with the statement.

The questionnaire asked a number of questions concerning senate members' perceptions of the effect of the size of the senate on governance. The majority of student members (54%) and many faculty members (46%) disagreed with the statement that the size of the senate is a barrier to effective decision-making. In contrast, more senior administrators agreed that the size is a barrier (48%) and only 30% disagreed with the statement. Overall, 29% of respondents agreed that size is a barrier as opposed to 43% who did not.

When asked what they believe to be an ideal size of the senate, the average size proposed was 54 members, much smaller than the actual average size (88) of the twenty senates included in the second phase of the study. External members and senior administrators expressed a preference for smaller size than did faculty and undergraduate students (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Average size of an ideal senate, by membership category



Issues and problems related to the role and work of university senates

Similar to our survey of senate secretaries in the first phase of this study, we asked senate members to identify issues and problems related to the role and work of university senate. A majority of the respondents (58%, or 218) offered their views and many of them were willing to respond at length to this open-ended question. Their responses cover a wide range of issues from the defining of roles of senate, to communicating among different governing bodies, to the impact of the increasing influence of presidents and administrators and hierarchical modes of management in the academic work of the institutions.

Many of the issues revolve around the notion that the senate is not an effective decision-making body, and a number of different reasons for this problem were identified. Some respondents indicated that the university act and bylaws did not clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the senate in relation to the board. Some respondents suggested that the senate does a poor job of communicating the importance of collegial self-governance to faculty within the university. As a result, they do not understand fully why the senate is an important governing body, and they are not motivated to commit the necessary time and energy to senate work. Some respondents indicated that confusion about the role of senate in the relation to the roles of the board and management may trigger intrusion by each into others' purview. Others reported either that too little information is provided to senate members, or that so much information is given to members that there is no time to digest it; hence, they are not likely to make informed decisions. In the absence of appropriate background information respondents suggested that it is difficult for members to engage in meaningful discussions on issues brought forward to senate meetings. When discussions or debates do take place, they very often get lost "in the narrow context of a specific recommendation/action proposed by a senate committee" (comment from academic administrator) or deal with "small pieces of the 'whole' without any opportunity to decide what the 'whole' should be" (comment from faculty member).

Comments from respondents suggest a complex range of factors that may reduce the effectiveness of a senate, and that even small process issues can have a major impact on the work of the senate. For example, a number of respondents explained that there was little debate at senate meetings because most decisions are already made elsewhere (in committees or by the administration or board). Given the fact that recommendations have moved through many layers of authority before reaching the senate, members are "implicitly discouraged from defeating or challenging these decisions". Sometimes junior members, especially junior administrative members are not willing to "rock the boat" (quote from a faculty member) or members do not want to be "talked about as disturbing the flow" (quote from a university support staff). Debate is unlikely to take place. In other cases, as one faculty member noted, "[P]olicies or decisions of the senate that originated there often have little to no binding power or enforcement", which undermines members' will to discuss or debate serious issues. Therefore, a senate functions like a "rubber stamp", a term that appears 9 times in the responses.

On some issues there seems to be polarization of views between responses from members from different membership categories. For example, faculty members (9), academic administrators (4) and students (3) identified tensions created as a result of the bicameral governance structure in which the board has authority over financial matters and the senate has authority over academic matters. However, this theme is not mentioned by members from any other membership category. One faculty member commented, "[the] interplay between budgetary/fiscal matters (external and internal) and decisions on academic matters [is] complex, and not separable into two governing bodies." Another faculty member observed that

> "[T]he Board and more specifically the Senior Administrators do not respect the authority of the Senate and use resource/financial justification to either usurp Senate authority or to refuse to consult with Senate at all! Senate having no control over financial matters is powerless to prevent this."

Budget cuts may have intensified this tension between the senate and the board/administration. For example, one faculty member noted that "[T]he crisis of financing PSE ...is severe and strengthens the administrations hand over budgetary measures where academic programming is rarely a major part of decision making. This makes the role of Senate much more difficult." Faculty, academic administrators, and students characterized the administration as "top heavy", suggesting that the administration avoids "'tough' questions" and hides information, and that decisions are "driven by senior administrators."

On the other hand, responses from senior administrators suggested that many senators do not understand the nature of bicameral governance, that the Senate is unable "to see beyond personal issues and focus on the broader issues", and that the Senate should "take time to address the important issues facing universities as opposed to micromanaging the administration." One senior administrator noted that "[F]aculty members prefer to focus on administration issues and not the issues of the academy. Too many professors try to second guess administration and pay little attention to the diminishing quality of the faculty". According to a university support staff member, "[F]aculty members seem to have a lack of trust in the senior administration, so decisions tend to be based on the best interest of individual constituencies instead of the interest of the institution." Nonetheless, across the board, there seems to be consensus that some senate members confuse management and governance and that some senators discuss issues which are not within the purview of the senate.

As it was in the survey of senate secretaries, the influence of faculty unions on the senate is referred to frequently in the responses (10 times). Most of these comments convey a negative view of the unions (including from three faculty members), although two faculty members think unions help provide "a more productive articulation with the administration and the Board" or appear to be "the effective guarantor of academic integrity".

Not surprisingly, respondents seem to view the work of senate from the perspective of their role or constituency. For example, student members tended to touch on such issues as accessibility, awards and transcripts, while members from the "Other" category, who are more likely to be representing alumni, government, community, and federated and affiliated institutions expressed anxiety and doubt over how members from within the university think of the contributions made by those who are not at the university all the time.

Respondents also described good practices at their institution that they believed help to improve the performance of the senate. For example, one faculty member reported that his academic unit held pre-Senate meetings to review the upcoming agenda and discuss questions or comments that they will bring to the senate meeting. In his words, this is "tremendous(ly)

helpful, especially for new(er) senators". One member commended the senate's efforts at communication and orientation which have helped the student representatives (who have a high turnover of members) to be "more independent and effective".

Discussion:

Jones, Shanahan and Goyan (2004), in their concluding observations based on their study of university senates in 2000, suggested that there was a need for major reforms to the senates at many Canadian universities. Based on the data collected for this study it is possible to conclude that some positive steps have been taken in the last dozen years, but that many of the same problems and concerns that emerged from the 2000 study remain.

There is evidence that there have been some important structural and organizational changes to many university senates. Almost half (46%) of the senate secretary respondents in this study reported that there have been changes to the constitutional documents related to the role and composition of the senate during the last decade, and three-quarters of respondents indicated that there have been changes to the committee structure, with most of these changes involving an attempt to decrease the number of standing committees and rationalize committee arrangements with the aim of improving committee effectiveness. There is also evidence that more attention is now being focused on orienting new senate members to the role of the senate and their responsibilities as members of this governing body, and senate members have a more positive perception of these orientation materials and programs.

While these are clearly positive steps, many of the major concerns identified in the 2000 study were echoed in 2012. The size of the academic senate continues to be viewed as an issue at some universities, and while a number of new universities have governance arrangements that include a much smaller senate, many of the older, traditional institutions continue to have large, cumbersome senates. Fewer than 1% of respondents indicated that the size of the senate should be left "as is," and the average preferred size for a senate indicated by respondents was just over 50 members – roughly one-quarter the size of the largest senate included in this study and a full third smaller than the average size of senates in Canada. It is worth noting that this issue is enshrined in governing legislation for most respondents and beyond the ability of most universities to address on their own.

A telling outcome of the survey is the important differences it reveals in the perceptions of the senate, its effectiveness, and its role by member category. The majority of senior university administrators view the senate as an effective decision-making body, and their responses suggest a more positive view of the senate, and a quite different set of concerns, than faculty and students. Faculty members are less likely to view the senate as effective and to support expanding the role and influence of the senate.

To some extent, this divide in perception between the administration and the faculty reflects the ongoing tension between corporate and shared governance models. Rather than constituting a dichotomy in governance, the two models form a continuum. The key point here

is to reach agreement as to who should make what decisions on what matters. As Tierney (2008) put it, for most universities, "the tension with governance…comes not so much from attacks that try to destroy structures as from the lack of a common language about the role of different constituencies in making decisions" (p. 202).. The role of senate, and an understanding of the characteristics of an effective senate, also need to be clarified.. If discussions and debates—especially those that are "in-depth", "transparent", "conceptual", asking the "hard questions" of administrators, and seeing "the bigger picture" (quotes from respondents)—are prerequisites for an effective senate and are what the senate is meant for, then it is important to set up structures and processes that can encourage and facilitate these discussions and debates.

While there are clearly differences of opinion by constituency, there is considerable agreement that there is a gap between the role the senate does play within the university and the role that it should play, and the responses to the questions in this regard in our study were remarkably similar to the responses in the 2000 study. The vast majority of members believe that the senate should play a role in reviewing the performance of the university in academic areas, periodically reviewing the performance of the senate, defending institutional autonomy, and determining the future direction of the university, and yet fewer than half of the respondents believe that the senate is currently fulfilling these roles. There is also considerable agreement that there are tensions related to the role and authority of the senate in relation to the role of the senior administration and the governing board. There are also tensions at some universities between the senate and the faculty association related to issues of territory and influence a theme that was discussed in some detail in responses to the open-ended question on issues and challenges.

Are these problems simply inherent to the academic senate in that, as suggested by Birnbaum (1989), the senate fulfills so many latent functions within the university environment that it will not "go away" despite its deficiencies as an effective governing body? The answer may be yes and no. Both the 2000 and 2012 studies suggest that what one thinks of the senate depends in part on where one sits within the university. Generally speaking, faculty appear to have quite different views of the senate than senior academic administrators. Students report quite different views than support staff and external members. Tensions created by these different views and perceptions of what is taking place in academic governance may indeed be inherent in the organizational life of universities, and any attempt at reforming the senate with a view to creating a utopic solution based on consensus is doomed to fail. At the same time, the findings of these studies suggest that some improvements are possible; many universities have already taken at least modest steps towards revising constitutional documents and reforming committee arrangements. There is also considerable consensus that there are important roles that the senate should be, but is not currently, playing, including roles in the review of the performance of the university in academic areas and in determining the future direction of the institution. These are roles that are central to the purpose of the senate which has (in most cases) the final authority for academic matters within the institution. Perhaps most importantly, most senate members do not believe that the senate is assessing its own performance, suggesting the

need for some senates to devote attention to understanding and exploring what structures, policies, and arrangements can be improved in order to strengthen their work. Perhaps the first step towards improvement of efficacy is self-assessment, and the willingness of the senate and the broader community to become engaged in a discussion of the role and work of the academic senate in the context of university governance in Canada.

The findings of this study suggest that Canadian university senates are changing but it is a evolutionary process rather than a revolutionary reform. Perhaps this is due to the inherent conservatism of academia. There is a strong sense on the part of senate secretaries that the role and responsibilities of the senate need to be clearly defined. There also seems to be a strong sense on the part of senate members that senates should be doing more work with regard to assessing their own performance and reviewing the performance of the university in academic affairs. The road to increased senate effectiveness likely lies in open, frank and engaged discussion and work in these areas as much if not more than through structural changes.

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