

# University Governance 101- a very brief introduction

Cheryl A. Foy, BAH, LLB  
Strategic Governance Consulting Services Ltd.  
[www.universitygovernance.ca](http://www.universitygovernance.ca)



# What is governance?

- The system by which organizations govern themselves
- The whole decision-making and accountability structure
- Starts with the document that created the corporate entity (legislation, letters patent, articles of incorporation). All decision-making power or authority flows from there and subsidiary instruments like by-laws and policies have to be consistent with the constituting document
- A governance system can be an effective system or an ineffective system
- Non-university corporations have a governance structure in which the board is at the top of the decision-making structure, CEO reports to the board and presides over the operation of the entity.
- School boards have boards of trustees who oversee the Director of Education, accountable to the public.
- University governance structure is more complex and the culture is very different than other governance models.



# Governing complexity

Universities are not simple organizations. In fact, given the breadth of their goals and missions, the tremendous expertise and specialization that characterize their basic functions, and the huge diversity of their activities, universities have evolved to become one of the most complex organization forms that the human species have ever created. They employ hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of highly specialized experts who share their knowledge through teaching and pursue what are frequently unique programs of research. The university's physical plant includes classrooms and laboratories, but it may also include medical centers, restaurants, rental housing, museums, art galleries, spaces for worship, and a plethora of specialized research facilities, ranging from agriculture research lands, to supercomputing facilities to nuclear reactors.

Peter McKinnon, *University Commons Divided: Exploring Debate and Dissent on Campus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018) p. 90.



# Unique aspects of university governance

- Created by individual legislation or charters (older universities)
- Shared governance:
  - Board size and composition - "representatives" on boards
  - Academic Governing body – size, composition
  - More complex, unique relationship and jurisdictional challenges between the governing bodies
  - Board role in hiring
  - Different models of shared governance (unicameral, bicameral, tricameral)
- Different culture
  - Autonomy inside universities – federated organizations
  - Faculty as members
  - Academic Freedom
  - Collegial decision-making and collegial processes:
    - What it takes to hire a president
- Complexity and scope of activity / many stakeholders
  - Research, Teaching and Service
  - Partnerships and affiliations
- Risk and compliance
- High degree of regulation



# Stakeholders

Governing bodies are responsible to stakeholders. In the university environment there are many:

- Students
- Faculty
- Staff
- Provincial government
- Federal government
- Municipal government
- Partners – hospitals, other universities, public and private corporate entities
- Donors
- Parents
- Community
- Groups and Associations
- And .....

