

Chapter 13

The Impact of External Factors on Academic Governance in Universities: The Case of Canada and France

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ABSTRACT

In a number of countries, the main issue regarding internal or academic governance in universities is, at least from the standpoint of faculty and faculty unions, collegial governance. In North America and Western Europe in particular, the degree to which the academic governance of universities is carried out in a collegial fashion, that is, through conferring, collaborating, and gaining consensus is the object of an abundant scholarly literature. The author reviews the external factors that have an impact on the internal, academic governance of universities in both Canada and France, asking if those factors have any altering effect on collegial governance in Canadian and French universities.

INTRODUCTION

In a number of countries, the main issue regarding internal, or academic governance in universities¹ is the degree to which that aspect of their governance is carried out in a collegial fashion, that is, through conferring, collaborating and gaining consensus. According to Austin and Jones (2016), collegial governance is “a collective process for decision-making in which academics play an integral role” (p. 125). In North America as well as in Western Europe, the role of faculty in academic planning, decision-making and overall management of universities is a regular concern, both in the scholarly literature and from the standpoint of faculty unions, among others. Focusing on both Canada and France, two countries where university governance structures have evolved in an important fashion over the last 50 years, it is fair to say that academic governance practices are, overall, collegial in the above-mentioned sense.

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However, a number of external factors are perceived as affecting the academic governance of universities in both countries. For example, the corporate sector influences the overall way universities are managed in Canada. As a result, some are weary of the trickle down effect of that influence on academic governance. For example, Newson (1993) analyzed the causes of the decline of faculty's influence in decision-making in Canadian universities. She concluded that the corporate agenda of some universities is the root cause of a certain recession of collegial modes of decision-making in their midst, resulting in a marginalization of faculty from university governance.

In France, the national government has a considerable influence on the governance of that country's universities. For example, several laws were approved over the last 50 years that changed the way French universities govern themselves. According to Austin and Jones (2016), those laws resulted in French universities becoming enterprises that are managed in a both collegial and democratic fashion:

Rather than just acting as internal mediators and representing the university, presidents became managers of universities, playing a very influential role in decision-making and strategic direction, particularly with major decisions. French universities became managed enterprises with a collegial, democratic governance arrangement. (p. 101)

Nevertheless, a number of university governance scholars don't seem to fully share that somewhat optimistic assessment. Musselin (2014) observes that the *Loi relative aux libertés et responsabilités des universités* (2007), or LRU, brought about a major centralization in the governance of French universities. Over the last several years, certain critics started raising concerns about possible, detrimental impacts of such a centralization on collegial governance in those institutions (for example, Pacitto and Ahedda, 2016).

In this paper, the author reviews the external factors that have an impact on the internal, academic governance of universities in both Canada and France. Our research question is the following: what are those factors, and do they have any altering effect on collegial governance in Canadian and French universities. Given the dramatic impact of COVID-19 on organizations and on their functioning worldwide, we also ask, in the last part of this paper, if it also is, currently, an external factor on the governance of Canadian and French universities.

Impact of External Factors on Academic Governance in Canadian Universities

In Canada, two factors that are external to universities have an impact on their academic governance. Those are, on the one hand, the corporatization of Canadian universities, and, on the other, the interventionism of provincial governments and, more importantly, of the country's federal government in university-based research.

Corporatization

The relationship between Canadian universities and business has drawn a fair amount of scholarly interest for almost four decades, as that relationship came to be perceived as problematic towards the end of the 1980s, when Newson and Buchbinder published *The University Means Business: Universities, Corporations and Academic Work* (1988). The term *corporatization* was coined a few years later in order to identify the impact of the corporate world on Canadian universities.

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