

Governing Canada's universities in turbulent times

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Governance defined

The “human-based system by which an organization is directed, overseen and held accountable for achieving its defined purpose”.

Structure of presentation

Topic

I. Brief historical overview

II. Research study and findings

III. External decision-making environment

IV. Implications for your universities and boards

V. Thoughts for you



Brief historical overview (1/3)

- Long tradition of academic self-governance
- Establishment of colleges and universities East to West
- Public, private, sectarian
- Universities and European colonization
- Federalism

Brief historical overview (2/3)

- 1905 Flavelle Commission and the Canadian model of bicameralism

“to administer the affairs of a State university by a political government, occupied with different matters, constantly changing its party character, and gifted with no special talent for the management of universities, has not commended itself to a practical and progressive people. We see no ground for the belief that this plan of direct State control, rejected abroad and in ill-repute at home, can be made a success in this province.”

Flavelle Royal Commission on the University of Toronto, 1906, xix

Brief historical overview (3/3)

- Post-war massification, secularization, emergence of provincial systems & multiversities
- Internal decentralization, unionization, democratization
- Late 20th c. fiscal retrenchment, targeted funding, performance measures and accountability.

Late 20th c. Canadian universities in the international context

The traditional perception:

Canadian universities as relatively homogeneous, public, bicameral institutions with high levels of autonomy

“[P]rovincial policy has been remarkably respectful of institutional autonomy. Universities have nowhere in Canada become mere agents of provincial governments, and there is no indication that any province seriously intends to have it otherwise.”

David M. Cameron, 1991, 446

Research team

- Glen Jones (U of T) principal investigator
- Julia Eastman (UVic) co-investigator
- Claude Trottier (Laval) co-investigator
- Olivier Bégin-Caouette (U de M)
- Sharon X. Li and Christian Noumi (U of T).

Funding from SSHRC

Objectives of our research project

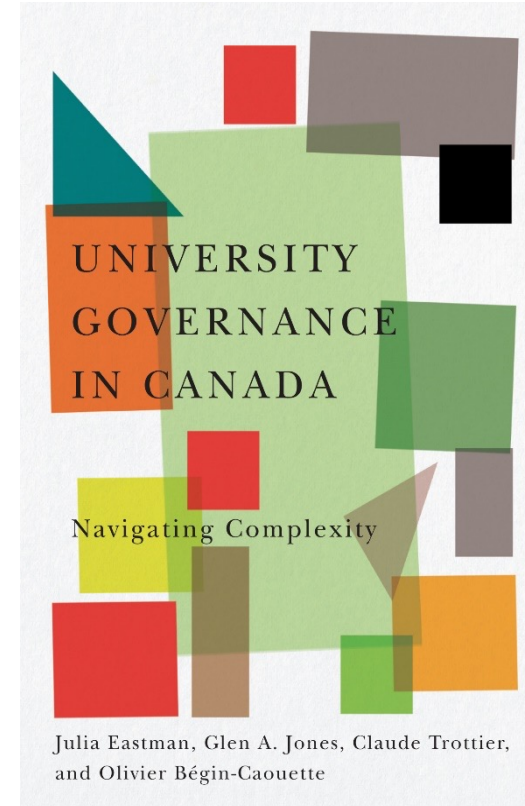
Address dearth of empirical study and knowledge of university governance across provinces in Canada

- National study of governance at 6 major universities in 5 provinces
- Review of extensive documentation and data
- 96 semi-structured interviews
- Comparative cross-case analysis of findings
- Publication of articles (2018-19).

Objectives of our book

Share the knowledge!

- Review the history
- Outline the components
- Present the findings
- Provide updates
- Provide international context
- Share insights and advice



Findings

External governance:

- Federal/national context
- Provincial 'systems' of governance
 - continuum
 - trends
- Stepping in while other governments 'step back'
- Potential fragility of universities' foundations

Findings

Internal governance:

- Diversity in governance structures
- Commonalities in:
 - Mechanisms to foster:
 - academic freedom and judgment
 - responsiveness to external needs and demands
 - Increase in governance complexity
 - Extent of professors' individual autonomy
- Differences in board and leadership roles, budget systems, collective bargaining, student participation, institutional cultures!

Observations

- External and internal governance concerns and risks, but also...
- Demonstrated institutional capacity to:
 - Navigate complexity
 - Face major challenges
- Some advantages relative to peer public institutions abroad.

That said – The world has changed since 2015...

What lies ahead?

“The next decade will be characterized by environmental and societal crises, driven by underlying geopolitical and economic trends.”

World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2023

Top global risks – 2 year horizon

1. Cost-of-living crisis

2. Natural disasters and extreme weather events

3. Geo-economic confrontation

4. Failure to mitigate climate change

5. Erosion of social cohesion and societal polarization

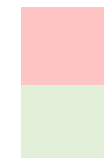
6. Large-scale environmental damage incidents

7. Failure of climate change adaptation

8. Widespread cyber crime and cyber insecurity

9. Natural resource crises

10. Large-scale involuntary migration



Societal

Environmental



Geopolitical

Technological

Top global risks – 10 year horizon

1. Failure to mitigate climate change

2. Failure of climate change adaptation

3. Natural disasters and extreme weather events

4. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse

5. Large-scale involuntary migration

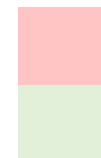
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Societal

Environmental



Geopolitical

Technological

Challenges for Canada...

- State of health care, availability of housing, affordability, cost of living, income and racial inequality
- Demographics and productivity
- Truth and Reconciliation
- Impact of global economic, geopolitical and technological change
- Climate change
- Potential for political polarization

Amongst other important issues...

Challenges for the university sector...

- Provincial fiscal capacity relative to demands
- Increasing regulation and decreasing autonomy
- Threats associated with potential rise in populism
- Lack of internal trust and internal flexibility
- Advancing Truth and Reconciliation and equity, diversity and inclusion
- Pace of developments in learning technologies
- Attractiveness of/turnover in leadership positions
- Youth anxiety and despair

Student well-being

During the past 30 days, about how often did you feel hopeless?

Response	Percentage
None of the time	21.3%
A little of the time	28.6%
Some of the time	30.2%
Most of the time	13.9%
All of time	6.0%
Valid responses	98.8%

In this context...

**The mission of universities is more
important than ever.**

Opportunity and need...

For universities to continue to:

- Advance and share knowledge and promote understanding;
- Help current and future generations prepare – and current ones retool – for new forms of work in emerging fields;

- Partner or lead in the advancement and application of knowledge in crucial areas;
- Create environments in which students can reach their full potential; and:
- Model, for students and society, what it means to be a 21st century learning community.

Your roles will be crucial!

And you and your universities have lots of assets:

- ✓ tremendous missions
- ✓ continuing autonomy
- ✓ the support of your communities
- ✓ public trust
- ✓ respect for the academic profession
- ✓ great people
- ✓ students and alumni!

So, govern wisely and well!

- Governance basics
- Leadership
- Your jurisdiction
- Integration, foresight, outward gaze
- Collective purpose, responsibility, performance
- Listening to students and alumni

One last asset: **YOU!**

Thank you!