



Message from the president

by Charles Draimin

The CUFA Council meeting to be held this coming Monday, January 28, will be devoted in large part to a special discussion of the question of university governance. Jim Turk, executive director of CAUT and Cécile Sabourin, president of FQPPU will be our special guests. The article that follows *The Crisis of University Governance* is intended to situate the discussion. The Council meeting is at 9:30 in AD-308 on the Loyola campus. Council meetings are open to all CUFA members.

There is no report on negotiations in this issue as there were only a few negotiating sessions in the weeks following the publication last November of the *Special Negotiation Issue of CUFA Report* and none have been scheduled for January. In late November and December, the librarian articles were substantially completed along with most of the other outstanding non-monetary issues. The one article on which there was no progress was Article 4, Governance. Governance, of course, will be the major topic of discussion at the Council meeting next Monday.

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The Crisis of University Governance

by Charles Draimin

Recently Concordia has seen several senior administrators leave before the end of their terms, often under pressure. Some of these departures have occurred under the radar but the sudden and very public “stepping down” of President Lajeunesse in September, which left the University without either of its two senior academic administrators, brought back memories of the administrative chaos of the mid 1990s.

CUFA had a number of specific questions about the President’s departure. The unsatisfactory nature of the answers provided has raised even more general questions about accountability at Concordia: Who is responsible for our strategic direction? Since the president has a central role in carrying out academic policy, why were not Senate and the Councils consulted? What exactly are the roles of the administration and of the Board of Governors? Most important, should there not be a measure of accountability for major decisions of the type recently undertaken? After all, in the Lajeunesse case a substantial amount of public money was expended for ostensibly non-academic purposes. Do those who have taken this action not at least owe an explanation to the general public who ultimately supply these funds?

When we look at the larger picture, we see that governance questions that have arisen here are not peculiar to Concordia. There have been

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governance concerns in Canadian universities for many years; they have for the most part focused on the relationship between the faculty and the administration. As universities began to expand in the 1960s, there was a sense, as noted in the *Duff-Berdahl Report* of 1966, that career administrators were taking away control of the universities from the academics. The response, as reflected in the recommendations of the *Duff-Berdahl Report*, was to reaffirm the tradition of shared governance between the senate and the board of governors. Reformed senates would be responsible for academic policy and planning while the board of governors would remain in the background, overseeing the general operations of the institution and ensuring prudent financial management. The role of the administration was to carry out the policies of the senate and report to it. (CAUT has prepared a discussion paper on the history of governance concerns. If you would like a copy, please contact me at charles.drainin@concordia.ca .)

Despite the best intentions of the authors of *Duff-Berdahl*, the power of university administrations continued to grow over the next decades. When a CAUT study group revisited the issue in the early 1990s, the general concern was that senate had become a rubber stamp for the administration. Major decisions were increasingly made by administrators in private meetings, undermining academic accountability. Many saw this as increasing corporatization of the university.

Oddly, the board of governors do not figure very much in these discussions. The focus was always on the relationship between the academics, represented by the senate, and the administrators. This began to change in the 1990s. An early example was the removal of Concordia's senior administrators by the Board of Governors. These actions were never publically justified, but coming in the wake of the Fabrikant murders and the severe judgements of subsequent outside

administrative investigations, they were generally understood. Moreover, in the subsequent realignment of power in the University, the faculty, acting through the Councils and the Association, was able to reassert itself, particularly in the hiring procedures for administrators.

But still, the long-term diminution of the role of senates has continued. The difference now is the increasing activism and the decreasing accountability of boards of governors. At Concordia, this is exemplified by the departures of senior administrators, most certainly with a push from the board. In universities across Canada, we are seeing examples of similar board assertiveness, exercised most directly at the expense of administrators but, in a larger sense, at the expense of the traditional power of the faculty to determine long-term strategy and set academic policy. As at Concordia, boards have done this by engineering the resignation of presidents. As at Concordia, there is no explanation and confidentiality agreements are cited as the reason that no questions can be answered. Boards have been much more aggressive in involving themselves in the management of the institution in other ways. For example, at both St. Thomas University in New Brunswick and Bishops University in Quebec, the boards have taken a much more direct role in labour negotiations.

There is a political aspect to university governance that is now emerging. The protection of university autonomy in the interest of maintaining academic freedom against political pressure has traditionally been the motivation of most independent policy recommendations on university governance. This is the justification for demands of transparency and for full accountability for all major decisions, including those of the board of governors. Governments do acknowledge this principle as well, but as they bear an increasing share of the cost of universities, they understandably want more control. This control is sometimes exercised at the

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expense of the traditional academic values of autonomy and academic freedom.

The possibility of increased government control of universities is a very real threat in Quebec. Last September the Institute for Governance of Private and Public Organizations (IGOPP), a research institute sponsored by HEC and the John Molson School of Business, published a study of university governance in Quebec entitled *Report of the Working Group on University Governance* (see link at end of this article). The Working group was made up primarily of board members and senior administrators at Quebec universities (including Dr. Claude Lajeunesse) so it is not surprising that it has attracted the attention of the Quebec Government. Education Minister Michelle Courchesne finds the principles expressed in the Report “well founded” and has asked the boards of all Quebec universities for their views. She reminds the boards that the government is very concerned with governance of universities, and has already involved itself in this area, passing a law in 1997 requiring university boards to adopt a code of ethics. The implication is clearly that another intervention is being considered. Indeed, this consultation seems to be a preliminary stage to writing legislation.

Whether introduced through legislation or by the Board itself, the principles spelled out in the IGOPP Report would, if applied at Concordia, mean a significant change in the way the board operates including a further marginalization of faculty on our Board. It would most certainly have implications beyond the Board and would result in a shift in the balance of power in the University to the disadvantage of the faculty.

The Board of course is discussing the report, but Senate is as well. There was a preliminary Senate discussion on Friday, January 18, and the view was expressed by many Senators that this document be discussed in departments and at

Councils. I strongly recommend that faculty members read this report and discuss it among their colleagues. Responses from departments and Councils would be most appropriate. Next Monday I will ask CUFA Council to draft a response as well.

In the last two years, we have seen a marked change in structure of governance at Concordia. Acting in secret, without accounting for its actions, the Board has wrested power from the administration and, by extension, from the academics. This is evident. Beyond this, there is some indication that over the last few years there has been a concentration of power *within* the Board. The fact that the decision to terminate the President was not taken by the Board as a whole, supports this view. The net effect has been a major shift in power toward the outside Board members, most of whom know relatively little about the University.

This brings us back to the issue that began this article, a question of great concern to faculty members which we can summarize as follows: what do these recent administrative departures mean for the University? As we all know, we have asked the Board these questions but the answers were most unsatisfactory. In my view, we will not get answers until we have Board accountability and until the broader questions of university governance relations are resolved, both at Concordia and throughout Quebec. This resolution must be done in a way that is consistent with university autonomy and which makes the maintenance of academic freedom its cornerstone.

Editor's note: The Report of the IGOPP can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/2ev4ck>

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Upcoming Council Meeting

When: Monday, January 28, 2008

Where: Loyola Campus AD308

Time: 9:30 AM

All CUFA members are invited and we encourage you to attend

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