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## Organizing for collegial governance at Canadian colleges

### Overview

Although details vary by provincial and institutional context, colleges in Canada often lack the bicameral structures necessary for even a modicum of collegial governance. Even when colleges have academic councils or similarly named advisory bodies on which academic staff sit, boards of governors and administrators frequently retain decision-making authority over both operational and academic matters.

Academic staff may constitute a minority of council members and may be appointed by administrators. Councils may lack robust terms of reference and overall responsibility for the academic and student affairs of the college. College faculty may lack academic freedom rights as part of their fundamental terms and conditions of employment, in which case they lack a precondition for meaningful collegial governance.

Arguments against change are based on the claim that, because colleges are different from universities, colleges don't need collegial governance. Like at any university, however, a community of scholarly practice should lie at the heart of a college, and that community's work should be understood as the source of value for the communities the college serves.

Beyond the immediate academic labour of academic staff, including teaching, conducting research and engaging in professional practice, the academic staff at a college must participate fully in the institutional processes that shape the conditions of their academic work.

## Pathways to achieving collegial governance

An organized academic staff association membership that is prepared to help formulate and then support collective bargaining demands for collegial governance can achieve changes. Objectives of collective bargaining for collegial governance may include:

- Modifying existing academic council structures or introducing new ones that are based on elected faculty majorities and more robust terms of reference
- Achieving equitable representation within governance settings, including by discipline and academic staff employment category
- Introducing or strengthening academic freedom rights that include strong rights of intramural speech and collegial participation
- Bargaining for other gains that protect and strengthen collegial governance (see the Collective **Agreements** section of the CAUT **Governance Library** for more)

Winning improvements to collegial governance through bargaining requires extensive member education, organizing and capacity for mobilization. It may also depend on coalition building with students and other allies.

It may also be necessary to change legislation that undermines collegial governance or that permits, at best, only weak forms. Beyond all that is required of members and their allies to achieve bargained improvements, legislative changes will likely require a unified provincial strategy that also engages government, the public, the media and other post-secondary allies.

It is important to remember that protecting and fostering the voice of college faculty within governance requires not only improvements to formal governance structures (for example, through collective agreement language, legislative provisions, etc.) but also educating and organizing that develops an institutional culture of collegiality and shared governance. This is an ongoing project that cannot be completed in one round of bargaining or through a single, short-lived campaign.

See the CAUT **Governance Library** for ideas about how to organize the association and its membership around objectives like the ones described here.

## Key messages in a collegial governance campaign

Academic staff associations may consider approaches such as the following:

- Linking collegial governance to academic freedom and linking academic freedom at colleges to the public interest – that is, academic freedom and collegial governance are necessary for faculty at colleges to do their best work in support of the communities they serve
- Linking the above to the quality of education
- Building the understanding that collegial governance and academic freedom apply to all academic areas, including trades and professional programs
- Promoting all members of the academic staff, regardless of their institutional or disciplinary affiliations, as experts in their fields who should be free to play a meaningful role in overseeing the health of their trades, disciplines and institutions
- For internal audiences, linking collegial governance to workload
- For internal audiences, linking collegial governance to control over the conditions of work
- For internal audiences, linking collegial governance and academic freedom to job security
- Highlighting situations in which an absence of collegial governance and academic freedom has led to bad decisions and outcomes at the college and at similar institutions
- Building consensus with students and other campus allies, because collegial governance gives them a voice, too

Academic staff associations will likely need to counter and inoculate their members against opposing messages such as the following:

- The employer message that “faculty are self-servingly seeking total control” (for example, at the expense of students or other groups)
- The employer message that “to be nimble, management needs a free hand and should retain control”

- The employer message that “academic staff associations are seeking co-management of the college” (that is, trying to take over academic decision-making rather than trying to secure members’ right to participate meaningfully in decision-making)
- The employer and/or government message that “collegial governance is out of scope” of the association’s role

For campaigns that aim not only for stronger collective agreements but also better legislation, associations will need to consider a coordinated provincial strategy that seeks to make a healthy college system and the quality of education political issues. This will require discussing the role of the college sector and its importance to the region and province, as well as developing public-facing resources and campaigns that educate the public about the diversity of teaching, scholarship and professional practice undertaken by college faculty.

University and college faculty can amplify each other’s messages by working together. They can focus on the many things that unite them and resist narratives intended to divide them, promote the value of each other’s important roles, and champion the health of a post-secondary education system in which a diverse array of institutions is properly supported.

This document is part of CAUT’s Governance Library, an evolving collection of resources for supporting member associations in efforts to strengthen systems of collegial governance at their institutions and to protect and foster academic staff voices within them.

Feedback and suggestions for continued library development are welcome. Please contact CAUT’s Governance Committee at [governance-gouvernance@caut.ca](mailto:governance-gouvernance@caut.ca).



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