



Canadian Association of University Teachers
Association canadienne des professeures et professeurs d'université

Cross-Canada Comparison of University & College Boards of Governors

University governing boards (or similar bodies¹) are, and must be, different from traditional corporate governance structures. Collegial governance is an essential component of Canadian universities, which in turn requires academic staff representation on governing boards.

To assist associations in advocating for the full and meaningful participation of academic staff in governance, CAUT has compiled databases of the composition of CAUT member university and college governing boards based on information in applicable provincial legislation and bylaws, as well as institutional websites.² Provincial legislation typically outlines the powers, size and composition of university and college boards. Boards usually decide their operating procedures through bylaws.

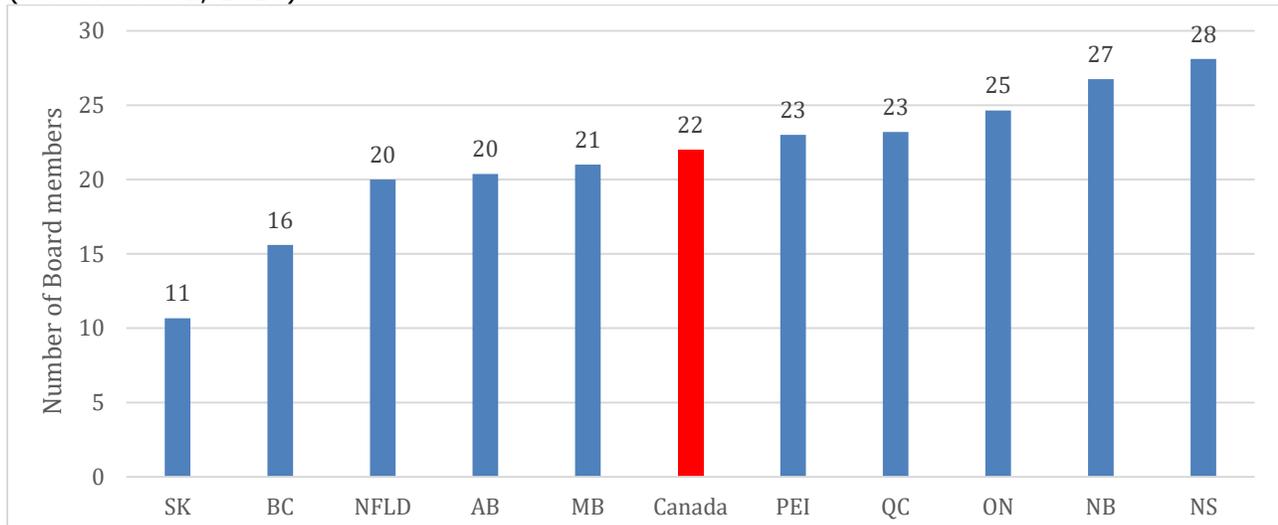
Universities

Current Board Size³

As of March 1, 2023, the average size of a Canadian university's Board of Governors is 22 members. This excludes any vacant positions, meaning that the potential size of the boards could be larger. Provincially, universities in Nova Scotia have some of the largest boards in Canada, while universities in Saskatchewan have some of the smallest.

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1. University Boards of Governors may be established using other names such as Boards of Regents, Boards of Trustees, Collegium or *Conseil d'administration*.
 2. Also see [CAUT Report on Board of Governors Structures at Thirty-One Canadian Universities \(May 2018\)](#) and [CAUT Legal Advisory: Fiduciary Duties of University Board Members \(March 2020\)](#)
 3. The current board membership figures were obtained from university websites and will vary over time as vacancies are filled or the allowance for a range of members representing a particular group changes.

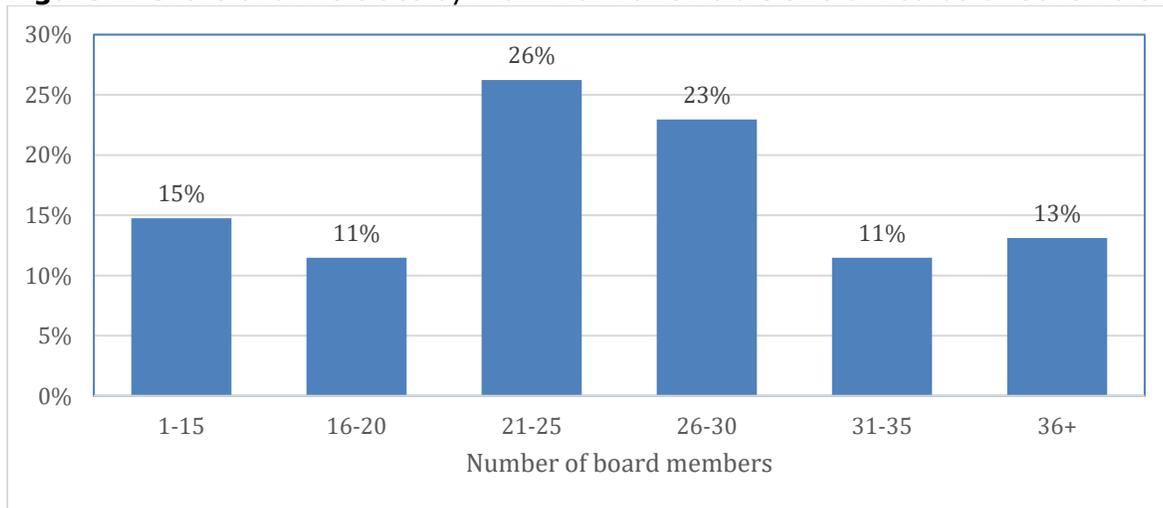
Figure 1: Current average size of university Boards of Governors by province (as of March 1, 2023)⁴



Allowable Maximum Board Size as per Act and Bylaws⁵

According to provincial legislation and bylaws, nearly half of all Canadian universities may have a Board of Governors made up of 21-30 members (49%)⁶, if there are no vacancies.

Figure 2: Share of universities by maximum allowable size of Boards of Governors



4. The Office of the Auditor General of Ontario’s report [Value-for-Money Audit: Financial Management in Ontario Universities \(2022\)](#) states that the average university board in Ontario consists of 29 members. It differs from the average value of 25 members included in this report because the information was gathered at a different time and CAUT included a larger number of Ontario institutions, many affiliated, which often have a smaller board size.

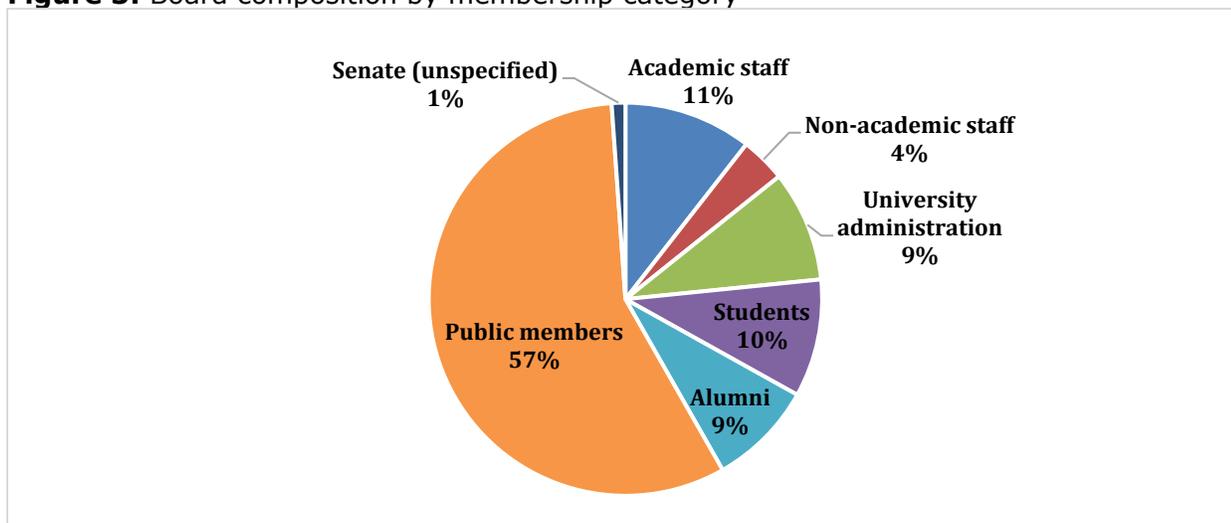
5. The data collected only includes CAUT member institutions. The calculation of the composition of boards using provincial legislations and by-laws is based on the maximum allowable number of board members, and not their current membership.

6. The following institutions have no maximum number of members and were thus excluded from the above chart: Grant MacEwan University, Athabasca University, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge, St. Mary’s University, and Mount Royal University. Pursuant to section 3(f) of Alberta’s *Post-Secondary Learning Act*, SA 2003, c P-19.5 the Lieutenant Governor in Council may appoint additional persons as recommended by the Minister.

Pursuant to provincial legislation and institutional bylaws, on average 34% of possible governor seats are occupied by members of the university community (administrators, academic and support staff, and students). This contrasts with the 66% who can be selected from outside the internal university community (public members and alumni).

Academic staff (which do not include administrators) represent, on average, 11% of university board members across Canada while non-academic staff represent on average only 4%. Members of university administration account for 9% of the governor positions, students represent 10% and alumni represent another 9%. Board appointments representing the university’s senate⁷ may be faculty appointments – but not always – and represent just 1% of board members.

Figure 3: Board composition by membership category

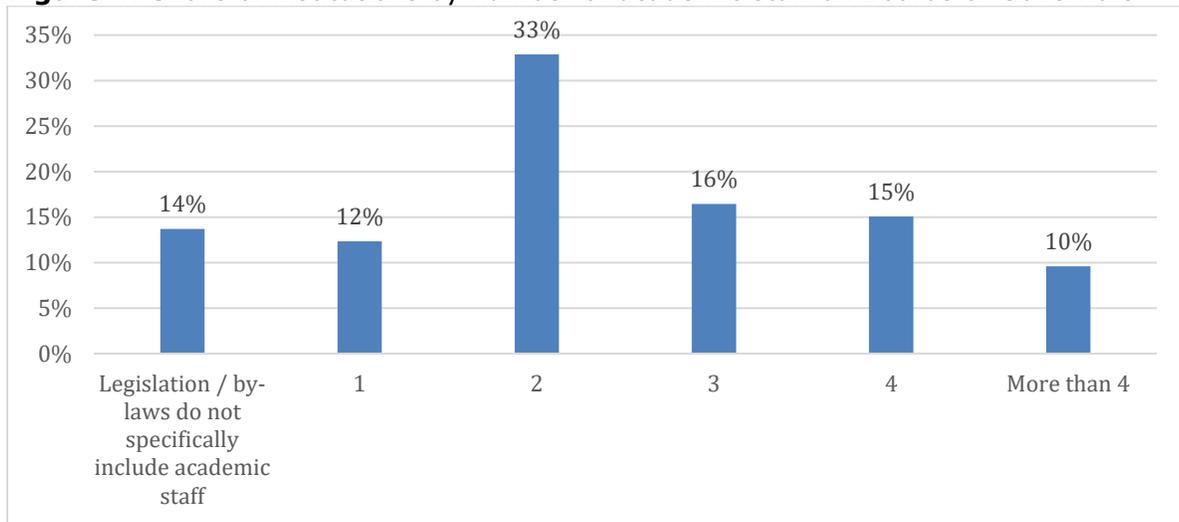


Most universities have at least one academic staff representative on the Board of Governors. Eighty-six percent of provincial legislation or bylaws specifically assign seats to academic staff on the board while 14% do not. There is no legislation which prohibits academic staff from sitting on boards.

Some board appointments from the senate and/or Lieutenant Governor in Council and/or the board itself, can be, but are not required to be, academic staff members. For example, the *Memorial University Act*, RSNL 1990 c. M-7[CL1] was amended in May 2023 to permit faculty appointments to the Board of Regents. However, there is no requirement on the Minister of Education to make such appointments.

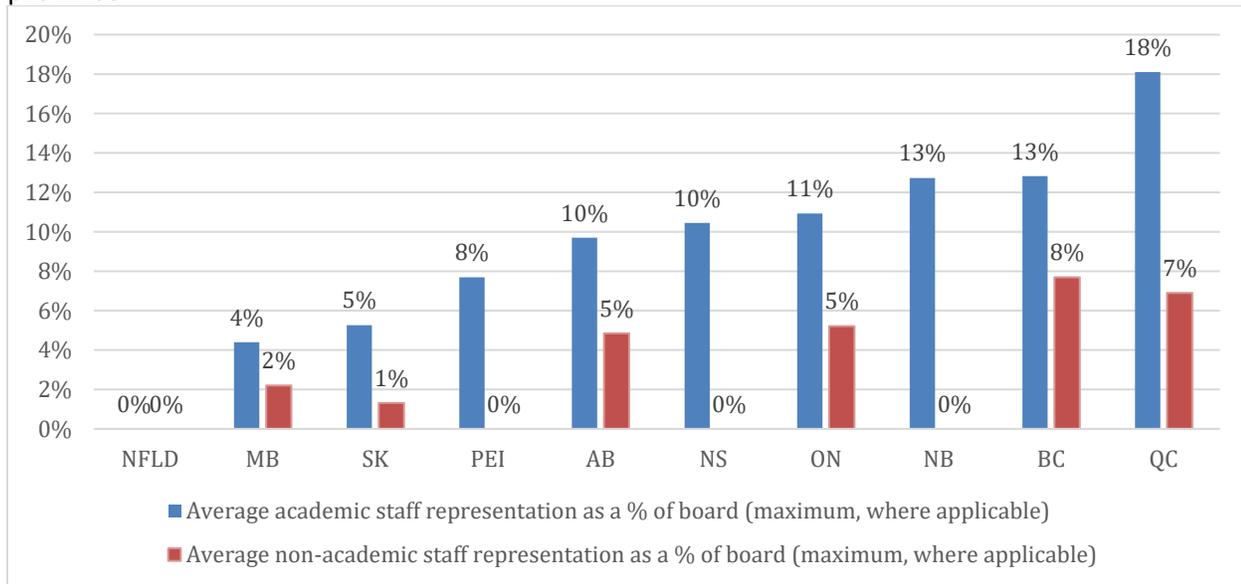
7. In Alberta this is the General Faculties Council.

Figure 4: Share of institutions by number of academic staff on Boards of Governors



Quebec universities have the highest representation of academic staff on Boards, at 18% on average, while Newfoundland and Manitoba have the lowest representation at 0% and 4% respectively.

Figure 5: Share of academic and non-academic staff on university Boards of Governors by province



The universities with the highest representation of academic staff on governing boards are the University of Waterloo (25%), Université de Montréal (25%), University of Toronto (24%), Concordia University (24%), and Saint Mary’s University (21%).

Colleges

The composition of the Board of Governors in colleges generally exhibits greater uniformity compared to those found in universities. For instance, in Ontario, college governance is primarily

guided by the *Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act (OCAATA)*⁸, also known as the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act. This legislation delineates the governance structure and operational framework for public colleges within the province. In contrast, each university in Ontario operates under its own separate act, which establishes its unique governance model and operational guidelines. CAUT reviewed the membership composition of college Boards of Governors in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, where our college members are located. In Alberta, college boards may have 12 or more members while polytechnic boards may have 16 or more members. In British Columbia, college boards may also have 12 or more members and in Ontario, boards may have 17 to 25 members. College boards in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario have one academic staff representative as per legislation. Polytechnic boards in Alberta have two academic staff representatives.

Bargaining Rights

Academic staff members who serve on the Board of Governors should retain the full protection of the collective agreement.⁹ Unless explicitly excluded from the bargaining unit (either through legislation, the bargaining certificate or collective agreement), the default is that they retain full membership in the bargaining unit.¹⁰ At 16% of universities¹¹, academic staff members explicitly retain their bargaining unit rights while serving on the Board. At 26% of universities, a labour board certificate and/or academic staff collective agreement exclude members who serve on the Board of Governors from membership in the bargaining unit. In such cases, CAUT advises that associations include a clause in their collective agreements which ensures that members temporarily excluded from the bargaining unit because of their membership on the board retain all rights and privileges provided by the agreement, including academic freedom, as if they were members, and that any dispute involving an excluded member's terms and conditions of employment will be resolved using the process outlined in the grievance/arbitration clause of the agreement. For 58% of universities examined for this compilation, information about the continuation of membership in the bargaining unit while serving on the board of governors was not available.

8. [Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002](#), SO 2002, c 8, Sch F

9. See CAUT Policy Statement on [Membership in the Bargaining Unit of Academic Staff Members Serving on the Board of Governors](#), approved by the CAUT Council in November 2010.

10. See [CAUT Policy Statement on Conflict of Interest for Academic Staff](#), approved as revised, by the CAUT Council in October 2021.

11. Among others, institutions at which faculty explicitly retain bargaining unit rights while serving on the Board include Mount Allison University, Trent University, and the University of Regina.