

Advocacy Matters: Governance under Assault, Part 2

Thursday, November 18, 2021

Advocacy Matters is a new feature of the Weekly Bulletin. At least once a month, the MRFA Advocacy Committee will share a short article that focuses on a PSE advocacy-related issue. This fall, installments are focusing especially on the Alberta government's plan for transforming PSE: Alberta 2030.

The [September 27 installment](#) of *Advocacy Matters* presented a brief overview of the provincial government's *Alberta 2030* project to thoroughly transform public post-secondary education in Alberta. The [October 25 installment](#) focused in on one of AB 2030's many interlocking components: the plan to transform the current model of shared university governance (also known as collegial governance) such that elements within the private sector gain outsized influence over institutional and system priorities.

Back in October we could anticipate the next round of legislative changes. With *Bill 74* now before Alberta's Legislative Assembly, we know for certain what the next round of changes will be.

At the time of writing, [Bill 74](#) is awaiting its third and final reading. Given the majority provincial government, we can expect that the bill will pass soon, in its present form, and that it will come into force soon after.

Bill 74 dissolves Alberta's *six-sector model* of post-secondary education. However, institutions will remain categorized more-or-less as before. Mount Royal University will remain an *undergraduate university*, still governed under *Part 1 (Universities)* of the *Post-Secondary Learning Act*.

More significant changes are embodied in *Bill 74*, however.

First, the PSLA has been provided with a new preamble that sets down the new vision for a transformed system of PSE. Industry is now included explicitly as a stakeholder playing a guiding role. The importance of aligning programs with labour market needs is emphasized. The importance of research commercialization is also foregrounded. Overall, the roles of scholarship and education are recast more intensely as supporting private sector success in a global economy.

Second, the question of who prepares recommendations to government on funding and performance expectations has been answered: Up to nine appointees will constitute the *Minister's Advisory Council on Higher Education and Skills*. The Council reports to the Advanced Education Minister on matters including strategic goals and directions for PSE and metrics for performance-based funding. A new performance-based funding regime has already been established via amendments to the PSLA last year, but its full

implementation was delayed during the pandemic. We can expect that its implementation will now proceed. Ultimately, 40% of institutions' operating grants (already contracting sharply, year-over-year since 2019) will be "at risk", subject to performance against government-decided metrics. It remains to be seen how long the government will wait to populate the new Council and how long PSE institutions will wait to see informed of their new metrics. The government has already described [the range of metrics in which it is interested](#). In any case, metrics will ultimately be imposed via *investment management agreements* between the government and institutions' boards of governors. The extent to which board, general faculties council, and overall institutional autonomy are curtailed will become apparent.

Bill 74 [isn't the first or only step](#) in implementing the strategy for transforming PSE in Alberta, and we know it won't be the last. [It isn't too late](#) for faculty to inform themselves about the *Alberta 2030* plan and to consider how they might formulate and realize alternative visions. **You are encouraged to hold Tuesday, November 30, 11–noon for a special online panel session event. Watch for details this week!**

If you have ideas about advocacy-related topics that you'd like to see us dig into, including issues related to the *Alberta 2030* initiative, please don't hesitate to contact the Advocacy Committee via facultyrelations@mrfa.net.