

Run for Governor, Anyone?

Dennis Danielson
English

With only half a year left in my three-year term on the Board of Governors, I'd like to share a few thoughts with fellow Faculty Members.

Although I eventually need to get a few things off my chest, I want to begin by encouraging those who might consider running for the position I expect to vacate early in 2005.

First, the basics: The Board of Governors is made up of fifteen members: the Chancellor (elected by alumni), the President, eight government appointees, and five other elected members (one staff, two students, two faculty members). Although UBC's system of governance is officially bicameral, with Senate looking after the academic nuts and bolts, the BoG approves Senate resolutions and is truly—as well as legally—where the buck stops. (For more details about the BoG and how it works, please explore <http://www.bog.ubc.ca/index.html>.)

What is it like to be a Faculty Rep on the Board of Governors? There are many positives. In my two and a half years on the Board, I've found the other governors to be bright, talented people with a genuine commitment to the best interests of UBC. President Piper and the VPs — who all work closely with the Board — are also exceptional people, a pleasure to know, and likewise honestly committed to the wellbeing of the university.

As a faculty member on the Board, you learn a lot about how the upper levels of the Administration function, and about the full range of the

university's component parts, from other academic areas to the details of planning, construction, housing, finance, politics on many fronts — it's a long list. Serving on the Board is like taking an ongoing crash course in which the learning curve never seems to flatten out.

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For the Board and by extension for the University, the role of the two faculty representatives is vital. Firsthand experience within the university can give a faculty member an extra measure of knowledge or credibility — and responsibility, too — in deliberations concerning matters that after all play out where we, unlike most other Board members, actually spend our time.

The proper exercise of this positive influence, I should add, requires that there be *two* faculty members on the Board who can support each other around the table, as Greg Lawrence and I have been able to do quite effectively, I think.

Let's hope that, in restructuring the Board in response to UBC's expansion into the Okanagan, the government doesn't decide that faculty representation can be trimmed or compromised. We shall soon find out.

If you've read this far and think that you, or someone you know, would make a good faculty candidate for the Board, then I had better also mention the time commitment.

The Board meets twice every two months — on one Thursday in full Board, and all day the previous Thursday in committees, which ideally all Board members attend.

So that's twelve full days per year, plus an evening and a day for the annual retreat, plus a couple of evenings every other month doing the homework (reading a thick “docket” of materials), plus more dinners and receptions than anyone other than Martha Piper and the Chancellor has the stamina for — and quite possibly membership on some other committee or board that requires UBC Board representation.

It is certainly a pleasure to spend all this time in the service of UBC, but it is a big commitment. And it never seems quite enough. I always find myself at Board meetings wishing I had taken more time to research issues that inevitably get somewhat pre-digested in the Board docket.

So far, then, you have my mild and mechanical introduction to faculty membership on UBC's Board of Governors. Is it a great privilege? Definitely. But are there things about it that drive me crazy?

There certainly are. I'll write about these next month. ♦



Run for Governor, Anyone? – Part 2

Dennis Danielson
English

Last month I shared some of the joys and privileges that await a faculty member elected to UBC's Board of Governors. But I also promised to write about what drives me crazy, so now I will—though not with any great relish.

Let me start with the matter of governance itself. The Board has oversight over the whole university, in particular over the Administration. However, essentially all the information that forms the basis of Board decisions is provided by the Administration. The working assumption is that everything presented to the Board will in fact be approved. If there is opposition to a particular proposal, Board members will be comforted and told that it is “being dealt with,” but only rarely will the voices of opponents be heard firsthand. For example, when the re-development of University Boulevard came before the Board, it required considerable pressure by faculty representatives before even UBC's own experts in the School of Community and Regional Planning were granted a direct hearing.

What's worse, at least some Board members hold the view that it is not for the Board to be “second-guessing” the Administration. So if you're elected to the Board, expect to be told from time to time that you are trying to “micro-manage” things

that aren't really your business. I'm not blaming the Administration for this problem; I'm just pointing out what I see as a general structural weakness in the governance of this university.

Another manifestation of the same syndrome is the elaborate “consultation process” the Administration routinely goes through. Sometimes the consultation is genuine, but at other times I can't believe that it is. A prime example is the newly updated “TREK 2010,” which is

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scheduled for approval by Senate in October and by the Board in November. Despite the document's many virtues, it contains certain elements that I consider pernicious—and when the “Green Paper” version was circulated back in the spring, I duly offered written objections, with reasons. But in vain. So here's a question for faculty members: If an elected Board representative's articulated objections are ignored, what chance do you think *you* have of exercising any influence in this “consultation”? (I'll email my

critique to any faculty member who requests it:
danielso@interchange.ubc.ca.)

The problem of who gets listened to at this university has many dimensions. The phrase that most drives me crazy is “stake-holders”—as in “we must first consult with the stake-holders.” To take an example close to my heart, for a decade a number of faculty members have been trying to reverse former President Strangway's unilateral decision to permit vehicle traffic on East Mall between the Law Building and the Bookstore, a move the late Michael Smith described as “insane.” Meetings were held, signatures by the hundred were placed on petitions, officials at Campus Planning were lobbied—all to no avail. But having become a Board member I thought just maybe I might be able wield some positive influence. Every day I watch as thousands of students cross from the SUB and the bus loop to their classes in the central campus while cars going nowhere fume, honk, and lurch in their midst. If I simply draw this matter to the Administration's attention, I thought, surely they can see how obviously dangerous and ugly and unbecoming it is, and *do* something.

Well, no. Before taking action, we must first consult the

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stake-holders—or better still, “the community.” Question is, if students and staff and faculty have expressed their views, yet we still have to consult “the stake-holders,” then who *are* those stake-holders? I don’t know. What I do know is that if a road on campus needs to be blocked off to accommodate a movie set for a week, it magically happens, and students, faculty, and staff can like

it or lump it. But wait! Maybe those fee-paying studios—along with courier companies, of course—are the stake-holders.

Anyhow, yes, I’m discouraged. At UBC it is far too hard for mere members of the professoriate to effect any constructive change on an institutional level.

I am not despairing, however. There are grounds for

optimism. As individuals, the members of our Board and Administration are good, reasonable people. And in any case, we must never give up. I for one still believe that UBC is a great university with a bright future—but only if enough of us insist on good governance, frank debate about things that matter, and the primacy of humane and academic values.

“Visible Minorities”*...continued from page 5*

Table 3. UBC Faculty Self Identified Visible Minorities, Faculty of Ed and CUST, 2002-2003

Sample	Minorities	Total	Percentage
UBC Faculty & Instructors (2003)	245	1,831 (2,289)*	13.5%
FT Faculty of Education (2003)	15	129	11.6%
TEO Instructors (Nov 2003)	7	138	5%
CUST FT & Sessionals (Sept 2003)	3	81	3.7%

* First total is full-time Faculty; second total (#) is full-time Faculty plus Instructors.

2004. Now I am left wondering how administrators in CUST and the TEO addressed racial equity in the hiring of sessionals for the summer and fall 2004 terms beyond the standard rider that is attached to advertisements.

In meetings, administrators have told me “we are required to abide by the university’s equity language when we advertise positions.” “All of our advertisements include this equity language.” By implication, we appear to be doing our job. Nonetheless, contract language of “systemic barriers” suggests that the mere inclusion of

the government’s equal opportunity language will not necessarily translate into participation. Are systemic barriers — structural barriers — at work? Is this an administrative or faculty problem?

Barriers noted in discussions with administrators include the primary population (retired school teachers) for sessional hires and clauses within the Framework Agreement. For example, Articles 3 and 10.1 in the Agreement on Conditions of Appointment for Sessional and Part-Time Faculty Members govern the reappoint-

ment of sessionals. Data are needed on the actual turnover of sessionals in the faculty. This issue of contract interpretation is one place where the Faculty Association can play an active role. How political and proactive dare the Faculty Association be? Of course, even without representation from a single racial minority group the Executive Board has a responsibility to act on employment equity. Is it enough to rely on administrators and administrative offices to protect our most sensitive and tenuous rights — which include equity — at UBC?