Guide to Communications in a University Context

CAUBO
ACPAU

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Contents

Please visit http://www.caubo.ca/content/communications-university-context for updated versions of this material and additional communication tips.

1   Foreword

The success of much of what university administrators do depends on effective communication—with colleagues, within and between departments, and with stakeholders and audiences before, during, and after an initiative. Great ideas, strong business cases, good intentions, quality work, and dedication alone are not enough.

The following actual examples drawn from universities demonstrate how ineffective communications can affect the outcomes of a project and hinder ongoing relationships with stakeholders:

> *A university print shop that ran at a loss for many years was closed without advance notice to stakeholders. Disaster followed as students and faculty were left without service and angered by the unexpected change. The staff person leading the project lost her job over the issue.*
>
> *A parking lot was closed for several months during construction of a new building with little prior notice given to stakeholders. While this was a relatively insignificant issue, the time and energy required to address unhappy customers was significant and created ongoing tensions within the university community.*
>
> *An increase to parking fees and fines was approved in early summer and announced in mid-August when the majority of students and a large proportion of staff and faculty were away. At the start of the fall semester, stakeholders were upset and angered by the unexpected change and perceived lack of communication.*

These examples demonstrate how ineffective communications can derail an initiative and negatively impact relationships with stakeholders either immediately or in the future. They also highlight the importance of identifying and engaging relevant stakeholders in a timely manner regarding changes or events that affect them. Communications is not just about informing individuals but about engaging them effectively in an issue at the right time. The unique nature of the university environment and its internal communities make communications particularly challenging.

For these reasons, this guide is dedicated to providing university administrators with an understanding of the university context and its stakeholders, and their particular traditions, culture, roles, and relationships. The intention is to help administrators develop and deliver communications that achieve a positive impact. Members who are new to a management role or new to higher education will likely find this guide of particular value.

It is to be noted that this guide does not cover broader communication issues such as the use of social media, communications related to bargaining, etc. Nor does it cover communications with external stakeholder groups such as donors, governments, media, the local community, or other specialized groups as these normally fall under the auspices of specific departments within the university.

The Difference between Stakeholders and Audiences

Definition of STAKEHOLDER
   a: one that has a stake in an enterprise
   b: one who is involved in or affected
     by a course of action

Definition of AUDIENCE
   a: a group of listeners or spectators
   b: a reading, viewing, or listening public
   www.merriam-webster.com

Note: These are not static classifications. A group may be a stakeholder for one issue and an audience for another.

2   Introduction

Almost all organizations will claim that they have a unique culture. Yet commercially available courses on communications are often considered sufficient training for the administrators within these organizations. Why, then, is a guide specializing in communication required for universities?

The answer is twofold:

a. Universities around the world share deeply held common traits, culture, and values that are unique to the university sector.

b. Universities are composed of three dominant internal communities—academics, students, and staff—each of which has its own sets of shared perspectives and values that influence how individuals within each community receive and interpret communications.

Internal Communities	Includes

Academics	Full-time and part-time teaching and research faculty
	Academic administrators
	    Provost & vice-president academic, associate provost or associate vice-president academic, vice-president research
	    Dual appointment administrators (dean, associate dean, chair, etc.)

Students	Current students
	    Full-time and part-time students
	    Undergraduate and graduate
	Alumni

Staff	Central administrators Academic support administrators Support staff Trades staff Research assistants

To achieve expected outcomes, university administrators need to be conscious of these common traits, embrace their existence, and understand how they have been internalized by the respective internal communities.

3   Unique, Common Traits

Universities share a set of common traits that are unique to the higher education sector. Academic practices, values, and principles are typical of all universities around the world. Respecting their raison d'être is crucial to effective communication and to the successful engagement of university stakeholders.

An entire CAUBO course has been dedicated to understanding university culture and governance (University Culture and Governance). Without duplicating the content of that course, the following provides a brief overview of the common traits that make universities unique.

Common Traits
- Protection of Fundamental Values and Principles
- Bi-Cameral Governance
- Three Dominant Internal Communities
- Knowledge Sharing

3.1 Protection of Fundamental Values and Principles

Universities and churches are the oldest organizations in the world. Despite centuries of evolution, certain fundamental principles, such as collegiality, academic freedom, and ethical conduct of research, still lie at the core of academia as we know it today. These foundational elements affect the academic perspective on issues, including administrative matters.

University administrators who ignore or disregard these long-held beliefs and values are bound to be frustrated by their inability to advance important initiatives and priorities, and risk outright failure. These fundamental values and principles are covered in more detail in Section 5, Academic Culture.

3.2 Bi-Cameral Governance

Most universities are set up as bi-cameral governance systems; that is, they have a senate, which governs academic matters, and a board, which oversees all other matters. Even universities that are uni-cameral by law (i.e., board only), have other internal governance structures that give academic matters a separate oversight structure, effectively creating a "pseudo bi-cameral" governance.

The bi-cameral system of governance reinforces and protects the academic values and principles by ensuring that academic matters remain under the purview of academia. Particularities related to university governance are covered in more detail in Section 6, Governance and Organizational Structure.

3.3 Three Dominant Internal Communities

Universities are often described as microcosms of society, almost like small cities within cities, because of the wide diversity of their populations, the spaces and buildings they occupy, and the range of activities they pursue on their campuses. Far from homogeneous, the university population is composed of people with different interests, principles, and perspectives as to their roles on campus. Their relationship to the university administration and to each other is

different not only in perception, but in reality. Although many sub-communities exist, there are three dominant internal communities that stand out and that administrators must consider whenever planning communications: academics, students, and staff.

Each of these three communities perceives its role in multiple ways: for example, students may see themselves as "clients" and "academics-to-be"; staff may see themselves as "employees" and as "necessary enforcers of university policies, legislation and other regulatory requirements"; and academics may see themselves as "the university" and as "autonomous professionals temporarily under contract with the university." These and other perceptions that students, staff, and academics have of themselves and of each other within the university context influence how they behave, their value system, and their expectations of the university. They also impact greatly on how information can and should be conveyed across the university environment.

The three dominant communities are covered in more detail in Section 7, Three Distinct Internal Communities.

3.4 Knowledge Sharing

The academic culture values the sharing of knowledge and collegiality, making secrecy and confidentiality generally difficult to assure. As well, legislation in Canada grants access to information in publicly funded institutions. In this environment, one can expect that information and communications might eventually be made public. Therefore, one should plan for this eventuality from the outset.

Counter to this environment of openness are growing regulations to protect the right of individuals to privacy; the balance between transparency, collegiality, and privacy presents further challenges to effective communication.

Privacy

Access and Privacy at UBC: A Guide for Faculty and Staff – The University of British Columbia
http://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/files/2012/08/Access-and-Privacy-brochure.pdf
Appendix 11.1

Access and Privacy – The University of British Columbia
http://universitycounsel.ubc.ca/access-and-privacy/
Appendix 11.2

Privacy Rules! Privacy Tools! – Memorial University of Newfoundland
http://www.mun.ca/iapp/resources/
Appendix 11.3

FIPPA - Some Basics for Faculty and Staff – Western University
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/privacy/fippa_basics.html
Appendix 11.4

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4   Traits Internalized Differently

Although universities and academics worldwide share certain fundamental values, these traits can appear quite different, depending on the specific university context. For example, the following university-specific factors, among others, would likely affect how a common trait might appear in a particular university and impact communications:

- Origins of a University and Its Legislated Mandate
- History of Unionization
- University Governance

4.1 Origins of a University and Its Legislated Mandate

Many universities document their history for the purpose of fundraising or celebrating significant anniversaries. Reading these documents can provide administrators with important insight into the university's current culture. Similarly, reading the legislation that created the university will also provide insight into the university's history and long-standing priorities.

Often these priorities are reflected in terms of values (e.g., denominational values). They may also be reflected in terms of missions relative to certain populations (Aboriginal, francophone, women, etc.) Over the years, these priorities may have become less well understood or evident as they are integrated into the culture of the organization and joined by more urgent issues that are reflected in mission statements and strategic planning documents.

How a university came to be will impact how the common traits are internalized. For example, universities that evolved from a community college or as undergraduate college/university will likely have internalized the principle of academic freedom and a definition of research that is different from those created from the outset as a graduate universities.

The original driving force (e.g., political, social, or economic need) behind the creation of a university is also of significant importance in understanding the university's priorities and culture. This contextual understanding may need to be extended to neighbouring institutions (e.g., there may have been a clear distinction in roles or communities served upon origin).

Although not usually front and center, the history of the university, its values and mandates are not forgotten, and they will often be used as arguments for or against change. The history may also impact how the governance model is implemented.

The extent to which the culture of the university and perhaps the culture of individual departments are established may be impacted by the age of the institution. This insight can help inform how to interact with particular groups.

> **History**
>
> Mount Saint Vincent University – History
> http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/aboutus/home/history.aspx
> Appendix 11.5
>
> University of Ottawa – Governance Framework of the University of Ottawa
> http://www.uottawa.ca/governance/documents/governance-framework.pdf
> Appendix 11.6
>
> University of Toronto – Great Past
> http://www.greatpast.utoronto.ca/
> Appendix 11.7

4.2 History of Unionization

The history of unionization of academics, students, and staff will impact culture, particularly as it pertains to meritocracy and academic governance. The history of strikes and politically motivated grievances may also affect the relationship of the administration to the unions, of faculty to collegiality, and of governance to students.

4.3 University Governance

The institution's formal governance structure (e.g., bi-cameral or uni-cameral) will have had an important impact on the institution's organizational structure, how and where academic and support units report, and the governance structure at the operational level (e.g., board, senate, president's council, faculty and departmental councils, etc.).

As will be examined later, the communications strategy should be informed by where a particular initiative fits within the university's governance and organizational structure.

4.4 Conclusion

This section briefly explored common traits shared by universities worldwide (e.g., fundamental values and principles shared by academics, bi-cameral governance, diversity of populations, and a commitment to sharing knowledge). It was recognized, however, that those traits will present themselves quite differently depending on the university's own unique history, age, mandate, and organizational structure. With an understanding of their unique environments, administrators can better frame their communications.

In the next three sections, academic culture, governance, and the three distinct internal communities (academics, students, and staff) will be considered in greater depth. When planning communications, the success of initiatives will hinge on administrators being able to effectively take these characteristics into account and understand the unique context of their particular institution.

> **Suggested Activities**
>
> • Locate and read key institutional document that address your university's history and mandate.
> • Meet with senior members of your university to discuss and better understand your university's history around academic governance, bargaining, and student participation.
> • Participate in CAUBO's University Culture and Governance online course.

5   Academic Culture

Among the longest standing institutions in the world, universities adhere to fundamental principles and values that have been championed by academics from the earliest of times. Those principles and values continue to shape the modern university and contribute to an environment that is substantially different from that encountered in private or public sector organizations. These principles and values, which include collegiality, academic freedom, and the ethical conduct of research, have a deep and pervasive effect on how faculty members perceive the university and its administrative and financial management, communications, planning, and decision making, both at the faculty and at the university administration levels.

The unique nature of universities and the academic culture impact how administrators work, interact with individuals, consult, bring forward ideas, plan for review or approval, and implement new initiatives. All administrators, whether in academic units, central services, student services, or ancillary services, face these scenarios.

To be effective in a university, it is essential that administrators understand and respect the values and principles that are so cherished and fundamental to academia and adapt their practices accordingly. Those values, which we discuss below, include:
- Peer Review and Natural Justice
- Academic Freedom
- Ethics and Academic Integrity

5.1 Peer Review and Natural Justice

Most academics are primarily motivated by peer recognition of their intellectual contribution to the discipline, the prospect of promotion through the ranks (typically based more on their research performance than anything else), and achieving tenure. The honours most prized by the majority of academics are those resulting from the recognition of their scholarly work by authorities in their own field: major prizes and awards, and invitations to join the editorial boards of prestigious journals or to deliver the keynote address at a major international conference.

Peer review derives from the notion of the community of scholars and pervades academic administration. Because colleagues (experts in one's field) pronounce on almost all aspects that affect one's academic career, the principles of natural justice play a major role (i.e., processes must be free of bias and conflict of interest and perceived to be, and the right to be heard is paramount). As a result, non-peer-reviewed assessments or reports may not carry as much weight among academics.

5.2 Academic Freedom

Academic freedom provides that faculty members should be free to teach and conduct and disseminate their research without regard to prescribed doctrine or accepted truth. This idea is fundamental to the role of universities in a democratic society. The pursuit of greater understanding and the communication of research results and findings, whether to students, the general public, or specialized audiences, lies at the very core of the raison d'être of all universities. To perform their duties, academics must have the liberty to take intellectual risks and to tackle controversial subjects in their teaching, research, and scholarship.

As a result, faculty members are quick to question the authority of anyone who interferes with or is perceived to interfere with their right to academic freedom, to the management of their class, to carrying out their research. Policies and procedures that an administrator may consider to be relatively benign or innocuous can at times become the subject of action by academics and their union. When possible, messages should avoid the use of "business" language and strive to use language familiar and sensitive to academics. Related to this, administrators need to communicate carefully to avoid violating or to appear to be violating collective agreements. For example, faculty are sensitive to taking on "additional work." A change in process may be viewed as additional work and therefore either rejected or grieved.

Early discussions of issues with senior academics and/or university executives can help identify major hurdles and how best to address them before any formal communication is made. Three simple ways of giving an issue greater credibility with the academic community can be to select the appropriate approach (inform, engage, or persuade – more on this in *Strategies for Communicating in a University Context*); to communicate with a dean on a particular topic before it comes to the dean's council; or to work with a provost before having he or she help spread the message and announce the news to academics.

Academic Freedom vs. Freedom of Speech

There are some fundamental and important differences of opinion between university administrations and faculty members (and faculty unions) on the subject of academic freedom. The Universities Canada (previously AUCC) has defined academic freedom as "the freedom to teach and conduct research in an academic environment" and as "fundamental to the mandate of universities to pursue truth, educate students and disseminate knowledge and understanding" (Universities Canada (previously AUCC) Statement on Academic Freedom, 2011). The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) has contested the Universities Canada's definition of academic freedom because the policy statement in which the definition appears subordinates academic freedom to institutional autonomy and thus constrains it by restricting it to matters arising from the faculty member's area of professional competence and by contrasting it with the right to free speech—a right of all citizens, but one that has no intrinsic connection with academic freedom. For CAUT, "Academic freedom always entails freedom from institutional censorship" (CAUT Policy Statement on Academic Freedom, 2011).

The dispute about the distinction between academic freedom and freedom of speech thus turns on the question of whether the former should (or indeed can) be restricted to areas in which faculty members have academic competence. If so, then faculty members enjoy no special protection when speaking on other issues. The opposing view holds that all utterances by faculty members are protected by academic freedom, including matters not falling within the member's disciplinary competence. The grounds for it seem to be that unless all utterances are protected by academic freedom, expression of unpopular or unpalatable political or moral views may lead to calls for the dismissal of the faculty member, despite the right to freedom of speech. At the same time, however, the basis for academic freedom is the need to protect free expression in teaching and in scholarship, and so the narrower view also has legitimacy. The tension between these views is unlikely to be resolved any time soon.

This deep divide has led to a number of contentious disputes about the right of faculty members to speak out publicly against institutional policies and the actions of university administrators. This requires all administrators to exercise caution in choosing whether to react in any way to public statements (e.g., letters to the editor, use of social media, opinion pieces in the mainstream media) by faculty members, even when they are strongly critical of administrative policies or the actions of individual administrators.

5.3 Ethics and Academic Integrity

The integrity of research is crucial to academics in their roles as instructors and researchers. Any tarnishing of an academic's integrity can be career-restricting—even career-ending. As a result, academics generally care very deeply about ethical and academic integrity in the university and in society, and will apply this perspective not only to their own areas of specialization and their own professional practice but more generally. In other words, they will often evaluate not only academic but administrative policies, procedures, and practices on the basis of criteria that may or may not have been considered relevant by administrators or may have been weighted quite differently.

They may, for example, be less concerned about the number of international students recruited than by the reasons for the recruitment (is it about the money, or about the mission?), the extent to which international students are supported following their arrival at the university (academically, culturally, socially, and psychologically), the university's diligence in ensuring their academic and linguistic preparedness, and the extent to which the university's recruitment practices can legitimately claim to advance its academic and social mission. This is not to suggest that administrative staff do not consider these factors, but that academics tend to approach issues with a different set of values and from a different perspective.

6   Governance and Organizational Structure

The basic governance and organizational structures of universities across Canada are similar in part because of the unique situation where oversight of academic matters is separate from that of administrative matter. This separation is apparent at the highest levels of university governance as "bi-cameral systems" and operationally in the university's organizational structure. Understanding this dual stream is fundamental to the effective management of projects and issues.

6.1 Bi-Cameral Governance System

To protect academic freedom and academic integrity, universities have adopted bi-cameral governance structures (i.e., board and senate) to isolate academic content and matters from intrusion by non-academics and the vagaries of markets and politics. Even when formal bi-cameral structures are not in place, alternative academic structures have been developed internally to serve a similar purpose.

Understanding the bi-cameral nature of universities, whether official or implied through other internal mechanisms, will help administrators understand how best to structure communications, who to involve in consultations, and how to avoid significant pitfalls.

Typical roles of the board and senate include the following:

> **The board** is responsible for the university's overall governance and management. In practical terms, the board makes the financial decisions and establishes the important policies and procedures that the university needs to operate. In addition, the board appoints the president and other officers (depending upon the university) and has overall responsibility for the financial well-being and general operations of the university.

> The board expects that items before it are there primarily for oversight or decision. As an example, if there is a space shortage on campus, the board would expect that the communications it receives would not only outline the challenge faced but also present management's action plan, whether it is there for information or approval. In contrast, the senate may be more accustomed to issues being raised for input and discussed with no conclusion or decision being sought.

> **The senate** oversees the university's educational curriculum and policies and is responsible for academic issues on campus. It deals with such issues as academic regulations and programs and the setting of admission, degree, and diploma requirements. As well, subject to the approval of related financial requirements by the board of governors, the senate has the power to create and abolish faculties, departments, schools, and institutes. Unlike the board, which is composed mostly of individuals who are external to the university, the senate is composed solely of internal members of the university with the vast majority of its members being regular faculty members along with academic administrators. It is typically chaired by the president. Students and, in some cases, staff are represented as well. Senate is all about debate and discussion and attempting to reach a consensus. At times, there may be tension between the board and the senate with respect to jurisdiction since the lines are sometimes grey. It is often better to involve the senate in major decisions that may affect the academic mission of the university or to seek its input even if the senate is not the decision-making authority in the particular matter.

Legislation and Governance

The following example from the University of Regina illustrates the relationship between the legislation that created the university and its current organizational structure:
http://www.uregina.ca/president/governance/index.html
Appendix 11.8

The university's governance structure is established by the University of Regina Act and is bi-cameral.

6.2 Structures Reflect the Bi-Cameral Nature of Universities

In planning a change initiative of any kind and developing a significant communication, administrators should consider from the very outset where the initiative fits within the university's organizational structure and, in particular, whether the initiative falls directly or indirectly under the senate (academic governance). This will facilitate early identification of key stakeholders, collaborators, and areas of potential conflict or interest.

Seeking the support and input of the highest and most relevant possible authority can also help establish effective strategies for ensuring that an initiative has credibility among other administrators and with the various internal communities, where necessary.

The following outlines the more common authorities administrators would seek out for a highly sensitive issue or a major change initiative within the administrative or academic stream. The structure itself will vary from university to university but the major elements will be similar and the relationships to be considered will be relatively the same. Governance systems within schools or faculties often mirror the university's structure, and the same types of considerations should be given to structures within the school or unit.

General university-level authorities (this is not a comprehensive list; nor does it imply hierarchy among VPs or types of services or units):
- Board and senate
- University executives (president, provost/VP academic, VP research; VP finance and administration; VP development and public relations)
- Assistant or associate vice-presidents or principals (AVPs), assistant or associate vice-provost, and directors of central services that support the academic mission usually reporting to the provost/VP academic or VP research (e.g., registrar, library, research services, etc.)
- AVPs and directors of central administrative services usually reporting to the VP finance and administration (e.g., facilities, finance, human resources, internal audit, procurement, risk management, taxes, treasury and investment). Along with the VP finance and administration, these are groups that CAUBO primarily serves.
- AVPs and directors of student services that support the students as learners (directly and indirectly); usually reporting to a provost/VP academic
- AVPs and directors of development and public relations (usually reporting to a VP development)

Academic authorities (this is not a comprehensive list):
- Senate
- Provost/VP academic and VP research
- Deans, associate deans, departmental chairs
- Any university position requiring academic credentials (e.g., chief librarian)

There is an expectation that in a "collegial" environment information or knowledge will be shared. As a result, university environments are highly consultative in nature and administrators would do well to consider their own university's historical and traditional approaches to consultation. In planning a project or communication, university administrators must be cautious not to assume too quickly that a particular matter is simply administrative in nature (e.g., of interest to administrators only) and of no interest to or has no impact on individuals outside of administration. Identification of the units that are affected and the ultimate governance responsibility will help determine which internal communities might have an interest, and better anticipate whether or not the issue could be considered by a faculty member to be a possible infringement on academic freedom, or as an academic matter, subject to approval by the senate. Administrators can also more easily anticipate how students and student representatives might respond. Anticipating potential reactions allows the message to be modified to better explain the reasons for a change and/or to avoid misunderstandings.

Sample of Organization Charts

University of Ottawa, Organizational Chart
http://www.uottawa.ca/governance/orgchart_5.html
Appendix 11.9

Memorial University of Newfoundland, Organization Chart – PDF
Appendix 11.10

University of Saskatchewan, Organization Chart, September 2013
http://www.usask.ca/secretariat/documents/orgchart.pdf
Appendix 11.11

Suggested Activity

Locate your university's organization chart and anticipate how you would manage a particular issue. Who are the stakeholders? Who would you engage first?

6.3 Organization of Communication Responsibilities

Most universities exercise a degree of control over who can communicate on behalf of the university with particular external parties, especially those where funding or critical and strategic relationships are involved and where there may be significant legal or regulatory ramifications. This is normally done through administrative units or individuals who are designated, explicitly or implicitly, to oversee the relations and communications with the external parties.

The following are the more typical examples of such external audiences and the designated units:

Audiences	Designated Units
Board	Board Secretariat
Senate	Senate Secretariat and/or Office of the Provost
Public media of any type	Public Relations
Alumni and donor community	Development and Alumni Relations
Provincial funding agencies	Designated executives
Research granting councils	Research Services; VP Research
Suppliers	Procurement Services
Employee unions	Human Resources or designated executives

Designating service units or executives for communicating with external parties allows universities to ensure that messages are clear, consistent, and timely in order to have the maximum impact. It is crucial for university administrators to know whether or not communication with a particular external group is permitted at his or her level or by his or her particular administrative unit. If in doubt, check with a superior or with the designated unit. Much harm can arise for the university by an unauthorized communication with external parties.

7 Three Distinct Internal Communities

In communications, it is essential that administrators recognize and understand that the university's internal population is comprised of three distinct communities (academics, students, and staff), each of which has its own set of shared perspectives and values that influence how individuals within the community receive and interpret communications.

The culture of academics is discussed in depth under Section 5, Academic Culture and will not be elaborated upon further in this section. Suffice it to say that the culture of academics is the predominant culture of universities since universities were created to and continue to exist to pursue and share knowledge with others. This is also why faculty members will at times refer to themselves as "the University" or "the Academy" or object to the use of "the University" as a corporate entity that exists separate from faculty.

A sub-community, that of administrator, has been added for purposes of this guide only (see Section 8, Administrators as a Particular Community).

7.1 Students

Student Culture
The current student culture and the history of student organizations and demonstrations will impact how students participate in university affairs and respond to changes.

Student culture is influenced to varying degrees by the following contextual factors (Clark, B. R., & Trow, M. (1966). The organizational context. In T.M. Newcomb and E.K. Wilson (Eds.), College peer groups: Problems and prospects for research. (pp. 17-70). Chicago: Aldine Press.)
- an institution's ethos, its sense of identity, its core values;[1]
- its governance structure, the extent to which students participate in the governance structure and whether this participation has typically been adversarial or in partnership with the administration;
- institutional size and complexity;
- the direct or indirect influence exercised by faculty members on students; and
- the culture in place in the particular program/faculty/school in which a student is registered.

Given the above, the student culture in place at a particular university can be best defined locally: how and to what extent students participate in university life, how they view and interact with administrators, policies, regulations, etc. differs widely from one institution to the next. It should also be noted that the student population is incredibly diverse. Between part-time and full-time, undergraduate and graduate, domestic and international students, there are men and women, people of different ages, cultures, and religions.

For the purpose of this guide, it is assumed that communications made by university administrators relate to financial, operational, or governance issues that affect all or a subset(s) of students (as opposed to communication sent to a particular student). The types of student most likely to be concerned by these issues are those who are elected to their student association or to a governance role, or those who are members of a student group that is concerned about university decisions (e.g., sustainability, investment, social justice, etc.).

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[1] The institution's ethos includes its "official culture, historically derived" (Clark and Trow, 1966, p. 32) and is reflected in current beliefs and practices, organizational purposes, and institutional character. The more distinctive the institutional ethos, the more likely it will be that constraints will be placed on student cultures.

Administrators would do well to consider their own university's historical and traditional approaches to consulting with the various student body groups when planning or announcing significant or potentially contentious issues that affect the student population, in whole or in part.

Consultation will likely imply bringing leaders of representative groups into discussions at an appropriate time if the changes will directly impact their membership. Note that consultation or advance notice of a change should always be arranged through the officially designated unit. These may include the office of the Dean of Students, Student Services, or the VP Students, where these positions exist. International students may require unique communication protocols as they may interpret messages differently than their domestic peers.

Student Unions and Groups

Student associations at Canadian universities perform a wide range of services, and student leaders sit on almost all major committees and governance bodies.

Student associations are political and tend to be value-driven. Elected student leaders often have a clear agenda and have been elected on a mandate to make change, making them passionate advocates on behalf of students. That said, elected student leaders have specific challenges. Generally, they are in office for a year (usually May to April) and may have limited experience prior to assuming their roles. They have a finite amount of time to accomplish their goals.

Student advocates who are pushing for change, (e.g., gender equality, curriculum change, tuition and fees, etc.) face similar challenges. Continuity from year to year can be difficult, and it will sometimes feel to students (and administrators, for that matter), as though they have to start from scratch every year.

Student associations, by nature and by intent, are advocacy organizations. Although relations with administrators may be cordial and friendly, it is natural and understandable there may also be an innate suspicion, just as between managers and unions, or in any other hierarchical relationship.

That said, student leaders will tend to appreciate directness. They are not usually shy about expressing their own opinions about issues; if there is disagreement over their position, it is better for everyone concerned if it is out in the open. For example, if a student leader is taking a strong position against raising a particular fee, it is fine to say that it necessary for maintaining that service, especially if there is a clear rationale behind it; the conversation can then become about what options might exist, rather than devolving into an adversarial conflict.

When student leaders are not consulted about issues affecting students, they may feel as though their role is not being respected. It is far better, whenever possible, for student leaders to be well-informed throughout the decision-making process.

Alumni

Students eventually progress to being alumni. While this group is most often communicated with through specific departments (advancement, alumni relations), it is still an important potential stakeholder to consider when planning and implementing communications on a topic.

Alumni hold multiple roles. In addition to being former students, they may at a minimum have an emotional tie to their alma mater and therefore feel impacted or have an interest in particular decisions. They may also be donors, active in the governance of the university (e.g., board of governors), members of the local community and participants in any additional programming offered by the university (mentors to students, fans of sports team, and parents to future or current students). Lastly, they may be faculty or staff. The number of roles this group can fill is almost endless.

Given the variety of roles, they can be an influential ally and vocal supporter when engaged correctly. Likewise, if mishandled they can be visible opponents and mount a strong opposition. It is important for administrators to keep alumni on their radar with their work and communication activities in order to ensure that they are not overlooked. Note that direct communications with alumni groups are typically under the responsibility of the alumni office.

7.2 Staff

The term *staff* refers to all employees of the university who have roles that are other than teaching and research, regardless of academic credentials. For example, an individual with a PhD working in health and safety is considered staff because his or her principal responsibilities do not primarily include university-level teaching and research. The staff group is far from homogeneous; it includes everyone from professionals to administrative and clerical staff, academic support staff, technical staff, trades staff, research staff, and many others.

Staff are significantly less bound by university culture than academics or students as evidenced by their greater mobility within and beyond the university. Staff's professional training and background give them mobility within the university and other organizations that is not enjoyed by academics. Consequently, their language, context, and value system are generally not unique to the university environment. Similarly, having well-defined roles (job descriptions) and relatively constrained fields of action, they do not generally share nor even fully understand academic freedom or the freedom of action in doing one's work that is enjoyed by academics.

Talk of inputs and outputs, for example, is more natural to them than to academics, whether the question is financial or organizational: they often speak in terms of so many registrations, graduates, students advised, research grants managed, this or that pattern of classroom usage, this or that distribution of students, so much liability for deferred maintenance or pension deficit, and "x" amount of risk to be mitigated. Bound by rules, policies, regulations, and legislation, the staff culture is more procedural and transactional, relies more on technology and business processes, and tends ultimately to be more hierarchical.

Notwithstanding the similarities among staff, there are important differences within this community to consider when addressing staff that can significantly impact their perception of a particular issue. For example, individuals working in central units may be more accepting of the need for controls, policies, and procedures than individuals working closely with faculty members and students where greater flexibility is valued.

The professional and training backgrounds of individuals can also impact their value system; consider, for instance, librarians, student counsellors, architects, accountants, laboratory technicians, athletics staff, and trades (plumbers, electricians, etc.). Each of these groups may respond differently to different types of change because of their professional backgrounds.

Similarly, the positions they hold at the university, their access to resources, and the degree to which they can control their own environments will also affect their perception of issues.

In conclusion, staff may share similar values with each other but also with non-university employees off-campus who are part of similar professions. In communicating with staff, administrators must be wary of treating them as one homogenous group given the variety of functions and levels typically present.

8   Administrators as a Particular Community

The term administrator comprises individuals of three types:

> 1- Central administrators have managerial or supervisory responsibilities of an organizational unit in a central operation (facilities, finance, human resources, internal audit, procurement, risk management, treasury, etc.).
>
> 2- Academic administrators have faculty status (e.g., a provost, assistant or associate vice-provost, dean, departmental chair) and managerial responsibilities of an organizational unit within an academic unit. Everyone in this group will usually hold a dual appointment; this means that once their term as an academic administrator is complete, they can and often do return to their faculty positions.
>
> 3- Academic support administrators have managerial or supervisory responsibilities of an organizational unit within an academic unit or services. This group includes professionals that work in direct support of the academic mission or of students and can include the administrative leads in faculties and schools, the registrar, librarians, counsellors, student services, financial aid, learning support, etc.

Administrators are not really a community of their own since they essentially retain their profiles of "academics" or "staff." However, their administrative responsibilities give rise to certain shared values with other administrators as pertain to the management of human resources, balancing budgets, and ensuring compliance with collective agreements and/or university policies. Because they are important allies in the administration of the university or of a particular unit, it is important to dedicate time to this sub-group.

Although they may share some common values and understandings, one must not assume that they will generally have a common view of administrative issues. The following sections highlight a few important distinctions between administrators.

8.1 Centralized vs. Decentralized

Whether or not individuals have spent their entire university careers in central units, academic units, or academic support units, or have had a mix of university experiences can significantly affect their views of the university, its management and its policies. Administrators working in central units may more readily accept the need for controls, policies, and procedures than individuals working closely with faculty members and students. The latter will generally want more flexibility to deal with the unique circumstances of a faculty member's research or a student's needs.

8.2 Influence of Professional Background

Administrators have varied backgrounds that can affect their perception of university policies, governance, priorities, and practices. Backgrounds vary from administrative leads in faculties and schools, academic support roles (e.g., student counselling and advising, admissions) to professional fields (librarians, academic counsellors, architects, engineers, accountants, human resources professionals) to technical specializations (e.g., computer programming, laboratory technicians), each of which represents a different culture, level and type of education, and degree of interaction with others outside of their particular unit. Depending on the issue, their professional backgrounds and careers will impact how they respond to issues. For example, academic support administrators in a faculty may share academics' views on certain issues while they share central administrators' views on other issues.

8.3 Variations in Values

Academic support administrators and central administrators generally have a common understanding of professional or business ethics, expected behaviour, and the need for collaboration. This common understanding comes from numerous managerial and professional development events they may have attended and explicit statements in job descriptions and performance evaluation criteria. Although they may have a different perspective on the need for or the importance of policies and procedures, they generally accept that policies and procedures are required for greater efficiency and effectiveness of the organization. This shared understanding generally facilitates the exchange of information, consultation on expected changes, and the provision of constructive feedback.

Although their experience has substantially been learned on the job, starting with the administration of research grants and managing projects, academic administrators, such as deans and chairs, can be highly effective. Their chief role is that of providing academic leadership and vision for a department, school, or faculty, recruiting academics, and enforcing the collective agreement in terms of performance evaluation and promotions. Like all faculty, they share a deep commitment to academic freedom and academic integrity, and their first commitment is to their discipline and faculty. Some academic administrators are particularly successful at bridging the divide between academic and administrative priorities. Their strengths often lie in their ability to understand and explain the need for policies and procedures while promoting and advancing academic values and priorities. Where possible, central administrators would benefit from finding ways to engage or consult academic administrators and academic support administrators early in any problem solving exercise or project.

Successful central and academic support administrators are similarly able to bridge the divide by developing and implementing policies and procedures that respect academic values while advancing efficiency, effective use of resources, and compliance with regulatory requirements.

9   Conclusion

Universities are not like any other organization. Universities are some of the oldest institutions in the world, and they have survived by adhering to and protecting fundamental principles and values. Those principles and values may have been modified through the generations, but they survive in the modern university and remain the cornerstone of the pursuit and sharing of knowledge.

These principles and values have translated into models of university governance and organization that are truly unique to the sector. Yet each university, while sharing common traits and values with other universities, is unique because of its own particular history.

Universities are home to three dominant internal communities with which administrators must interact with on a continual basis: academics, students, and staff. This guide provides general insights into each of these groups and their cultures so that administrators may consider how to most effectively plan, message, and deliver their communication to have the maximum positive benefit.

Universities are unique environments, and the complexities and differences that exist among the different populations, who will ultimately be either stakeholders or audiences, need to be constantly kept at the forefront of an administrator's mind.

As a companion to this "Guide to Communications in a University Context," CAUBO has developed a "Strategies for Communicating in a University Context" to provide a series of concrete approaches that help ensure that communications are on message, focused, and clear. Together, these guides prepare administrators to produce successful communications that facilitate positive outcomes.

10 Thank you

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11   Appendices

Click the permanent links below to access the resources referenced in the document.

11.1 Access and Privacy at UBC: A Guide for Faculty and Staff – The University of British Columbia

11.2 Access and Privacy – The University of British Columbia
      1 of 2
      2 of 2

11.3 Privacy Rules! Privacy Tools! – Memorial University of Newfoundland

11.4 FIPPA - Some Basics for Faculty and Staff – Western University

11.5 Mount Saint Vincent University – History

11.6 University of Ottawa – Governance Framework of the University of Ottawa

11.7 University of Toronto – Great Past

11.8 University of Regina governance

11.9 University of Ottawa, Organizational Chart

11.10 Memorial University of Newfoundland, Organization Chart

11.11 University of Saskatchewan, Organization Chart, September 2013