



Alice Laberge
Acting Chair, UBC Board of Governors
6328 Memorial Road, Room 121
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

9/3/2015

Re: Policies and Practices of the UBC Board of Governors

Dear Alice Laberge,

I send this open letter to the UBC Board of Governors on behalf of the Graduate Student Society of UBC Vancouver (GSS), representing more than 10,000 UBC graduate students. It is the mandate of the GSS to advocate for, promote, and protect the academic, social, intellectual, cultural and recreational interests of its members.

The GSS recognizes the Board's important role as one half of UBC's bicameral governance structure and the work it undertakes to ensure that the institution maintains its position as a globally significant research university. The GSS also recognizes that the Board regularly deals with sensitive matters for which discretion and confidentiality is required. Furthermore, the GSS recognizes the Board's stated commitment to the principle of accountability to the students, faculty and staff of the University and to the public which is served by the University.

However, when examining the Board's recent actions in conjunction with its longer-term practices, it has become increasingly difficult to reconcile this stated commitment to accountability with those actions and practices. Graduate students have indicated particular concern about a lack of transparency regarding the functioning and decision-making practices of the Board.

It has come to the attention of the media that the Board has held meetings outside of its regular meeting schedule, not just without informing the UBC community and the public of those meetings but, even more concerning, the Board Secretary publicly denying its occurrence.

The Chancellor and Board Chair were invited to attend GSS Council and to engage directly with graduate students. They both declined to attend, now and in the foreseeable future. Overall communication by the Board to the GSS has been limited to 1 phone call and 1 letter in a span of at least 3 years.

Earlier this year, the Board considered a resolution to restrict photography and recordings at meetings. Questioning such recordings, which are a useful practice for ensuring accuracy and proper documentation, also demonstrates a lack of commitment to overall transparency.

Both the Board and the Acting UBC President recently announced being fully confident in the Board Chair after serious allegations had been made against him. The GSS is concerned about this rush to support the Board Chair before an investigation or fact-finding process had been concluded or even commenced. Graduate students feel a Board supporting the UBC value of integrity should suspend all judgement until all facts are available.

The GSS has concluded that the practices of the UBC Board of Governors are not sufficiently transparent to ensure that UBC's values – integrity, public interest, mutual respect and equity – are maintained.

The GSS is committed to building an open, respectful, and constructive relationship with the Board of Governors. Student representatives elected to the Board have a fiduciary duty to UBC. Recognizing this fact, the GSS seeks to work with the Board to create more opportunities for engagement for the graduate student body and regular communication and interaction with the Graduate Student Society to establish a fuller student representation at the Board.

In an attempt to provide constructive feedback on how the Board can achieve alignment with the aforementioned values of the university, the GSS asks the Board to consider the attached **list of recommendations of reforms (see the next page)** to increase the level of transparency. The GSS believes that adoption of these recommendations will re-establish the UBC community's trust in the Board by demonstrating a renewed commitment to transparency and accountability.

The GSS would welcome the opportunity to present the recommendations to the Board on its next regularly scheduled meeting on September 29 and address any questions of the Board regarding those recommendations.

Sincerely,



Tobias Friedel

President, Graduate Student Society

Email: president@gss.ubc.ca

Enclosure

Improving UBC Board of Governors Transparency and Accountability

The Graduate Student Society of UBC Vancouver suggests that:

1. A GSS representative be given the opportunity to address the Board directly, in person, regarding up to one agenda item per regular meeting of the Board.
2. The location, date, and time of all Board of Governors meetings be publicly disclosed.
 - This be required even in circumstances where the meeting does not have an open portion of the agenda.
3. The Board creates a University Policy clearly articulating its procedures for conducting votes via email.
 - This statement includes a clear rationale for how this practice is consistent with the *University Act*.
 - Alternatively the Board creates a University Policy or statement affirming that such votes are not permissible.
4. All open resolutions, agreements, policies or decisions of the Board that occur in between meetings be promptly published on the Board's website.
 - The Board Chair also announce all items approved in between meetings at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board for inclusion in Board minutes.
 - All previously unrecorded open resolutions by the Board passed via email voting, if any, be disclosed at the meeting of the Board on September 29.
5. Policy #93 be revised to better articulate the criteria used, and the circumstances under which topics are placed on the closed agenda. Suggested clarifications include:
 - All agenda items that appear on the open agenda of Board meetings appear on the open agenda of committee meetings.
 - Agenda items not appear on both the open and closed agendas in a single meeting cycle.
 - The following never appear on the closed agenda or a consent agenda:
 - Approval of tuition fees, student fees, non-instructional fees
 - Approval of capital projects
 - Approval of Board Policies
 - Approval of the University's Annual Budget
 - Approval of Land Use Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, or other regulations governing development
6. Closed agendas of the Board, limited to a broadly-described listing of topics discussed, be disclosed to the public.
 - These agendas need not contain descriptions or documentation.

(Continued on the next page)

7. All members of the Board be given a university-issued email address for conducting business in their role as Governors. This contact information is to be made publicly available.
8. Members of the Board appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council be disallowed from holding any concurrent appointment to a UBC advisory or decision-making body which undertakes work related to the academic governance of the university.
9. The Board implements a policy or issue an official statement affirming the rights of the public to record Board meetings and take photographs as long as those activities are being done in a respectful and non-intrusive manner.