The President’s Leadership Dilemma:
Exploring the Tensions Between University Autonomy and Public Accountability

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President and Vice-Chancellor Emeritus

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Outline

• Introduction
• Relationships between Autonomy-Accountability
• The Precarious Presidency
• Exploring Public Perceptions of University
  Autonomy and Accountability
Institutional Autonomy

• To succeed universities need to take their own decisions in support of the public good:
  – Organizational autonomy
  – Financial autonomy
  – Staffing autonomy
  – Academic autonomy
Autonomy: International Perspective

- *University Autonomy in Twenty Countries*
  
  (Don Anderson & Richard Johnson, 1998)

  - Survey on government influence
    - Power to intervene
    - Actual exertion of influence
Country score “government power to intervene”

- Indonesia: 80%
- France: 70%
- Malaysia: 60%
- Sri Lanka: 50%
- Thailand: 50%
- Chile: 40%
- Japan: 40%
- Netherlands: 40%
- New Zealand: 30%
- Germany: 30%
- Sweden: 30%
- Russia: 30%
- Singapore: 20%
- South Africa: 20%
- Italy: 20%
- Australia: 20%
- United States: 10%
- Ireland: 10%
- United Kingdom: 0%
- Canada: 0%
Autonomy: International Perspective

- Country score “government exerts influence”

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Increased External Accountability Frameworks

External demands for accountability vs. time

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Increased External Accountability Frameworks

• Driven by:
  – Increased resource constraint
  – Growing demand for greater transparency, efficiency and cost-effectiveness
  – Increase in competition nationally and internationally
  – Growing demand for student mobility and credit transfer
  – Increased reliance on diverse sources of funding
Increasing Expectations for Accountability

- Accountable to
  - government
  - students
  - community: internal and external
  - funders and donors
  - other stakeholders
  - society at large
Autonomy & Accountability

Prospective accountability
Decreased autonomy
Low Trust

Retrospective accountability
Increased autonomy
High Trust
Autonomy & Accountability Model

- Decreased Autonomy
- Increased Autonomy

- government (external)
- institutional (internal)

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University Autonomy

• Tuition: who sets tuition?
  – Provincial or State mandate
  – Institutional decisions
University Autonomy

• Constraints on salary negotiations
  – Government mandate
  – Institutional flexibility
University Autonomy

- Program accreditation: who accredits?
  - Government accreditation
  - Government audit of self-accreditation
  - Self-accreditation
  - Professional associations
University Autonomy

- Who determines program growth?
  - Students
    - demand-driven enrolment
  - Institution
    - enrolment management
  - Government
    - growing trend of targeted funding
University Autonomy: Program Growth

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Managing the tension: two examples

- Government Letters of Expectation
  - British Columbia and Alberta

- Changes to Manitoba’s University Act
Lessons learned

- Actively manage communications with government
- Keep it out of the media
- Keep the Board engaged
- Keep key internal stakeholders on side
- Use influential Board members
The Precarious Presidency

Over the past decade the number of “failed” presidencies has increased dramatically.
The Precarious Canadian Presidency

• Unexpected departures of presidents

Trio of resignations shock university system

Recent exit of three presidents leaves some ‘wondering what’s really going on’

BY CAROLINE ALFANO
EDUCATION REPORTER

The world of university presidents has been rocked by the unexpected departures of three presidents in recent months. The departures have raised questions about the stability and future of the university system.

David Alphonse, former president of the University of Saskatchewan, announced his resignation last month, effective immediately. He cited personal reasons for his decision.

The situation has sparked concern among university administrators and professors who are worried about the impact on the university system.

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Presidents departing after 3 years or less

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Managing the tensions between autonomy and accountability is critical

• But what does the public think?
What are the Public’s Perceptions?

  - 2004 survey: 1,139 respondents (UVic)
  - 2013 survey: 1,529 respondents (with AUCC)
    - Additional questions on trust in universities
  - 2014 survey: 1,530 respondents (with AUCC)
    - International comparisons USA, England, Sweden, Spain
Trust in Universities (International)

Universities / Higher Education Institutions

Canada
- Low level (1-3): 2
- Moderate level (4): 8
- High level (5-7): 17
- DK/NR: 74

United States
- Low level (1-3): 3
- Moderate level (4): 16
- High level (5-7): 23
- DK/NR: 57

England
- Low level (1-3): 4
- Moderate level (4): 9
- High level (5-7): 27
- DK/NR: 59

Spain
- Low level (1-3): 1
- Moderate level (4): 15
- High level (5-7): 23
- DK/NR: 60

Sweden
- Low level (1-3): 4
- Moderate level (4): 7
- High level (5-7): 25
- DK/NR: 63
Canadian Trust in Institutions (2014)

- Universities: Low level (1-3) 17%, Moderate level (4) 74%, High level (5-7) 20%
- Hospitals: Low level (1-3) 16%, Moderate level (4) 73%, High level (5-7) 11%
- Community colleges: Low level (1-3) 19%, Moderate level (4) 70%, High level (5-7) 7%
- Public schools: Low level (1-3) 18%, Moderate level (4) 67%, High level (5-7) 13%
- Municipal government: Low level (1-3) 24%, Moderate level (4) 47%, High level (5-7) 28%
- Provincial government: Low level (1-3) 24%, Moderate level (4) 32%, High level (5-7) 43%
- Federal government: Low level (1-3) 21%, Moderate level (4) 32%, High level (5-7) 46%
- Religious institutions: Low level (1-3) 45%, Moderate level (4) 20%, High level (5-7) 3%
## Trust in US Institutions (2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>DK/NR</th>
<th>Low level (1-3)</th>
<th>Moderate level (4)</th>
<th>High level (5-7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universities / HE institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospitals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public schools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal government</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial/State government</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal government</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious institutions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Trust in Provincial/State Government (Int’l)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Low level (1-3)</th>
<th>Moderate level (4)</th>
<th>High level (5-7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada (n=1,530)</td>
<td>6 43 24 32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (n=1,004)</td>
<td>0 3 41 28 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England (n=1,014)</td>
<td>6 37 34 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain (n=1,011)</td>
<td>1 65 19 16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden (n=1,004)</td>
<td>6 41 34 19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: DK/NR, Low level (1-3), Moderate level (4), High level (5-7)
Trust in Federal Government (Int’l)

- **Canada** (n=1,530)
  - Low level (1-3): 46%
  - Moderate level (4): 21%
  - High level (5-7): 32%

- **United States** (n=1,004)
  - Low level (1-3): 3%
  - Moderate level (4): 53%
  - High level (5-7): 21%

- **England** (n=1,014)
  - Low level (1-3): 5%
  - Moderate level (4): 42%
  - High level (5-7): 23%

- **Spain** (n=1,011)
  - Low level (1-3): 73%
  - Moderate level (4): 13%
  - High level (5-7): 14%

- **Sweden** (n=1,004)
  - Low level (1-3): 36%
  - Moderate level (4): 28%
  - High level (5-7): 33%

Legend:
- DK/NR
- Low level (1-3)
- Moderate level (4)
- High level (5-7)
Trust in Religious Institutions (Int’l)

- **Canada** (n=1,530): Low level (1-3: 45%), Moderate level (4: 20%), High level (5-7: 32%)
- **United States** (n=1,004): Low level (1-3: 31%), Moderate level (4: 20%), High level (5-7: 45%)
- **England** (n=1,014): Low level (1-3: 48%), Moderate level (4: 24%), High level (5-7: 22%)
- **Spain** (n=1,011): Low level (1-3: 65%), Moderate level (4: 15%), High level (5-7: 19%)
- **Sweden** (n=1,004): Low level (1-3: 66%), Moderate level (4: 18%), High level (5-7: 12%)

Legend: DK/NR, Low level (1-3), Moderate level (4), High level (5-7)
Summary of survey results

- Universities are among the most trusted public institution in each country examined.
- Canadians show the highest level of trust in universities, Americans the lowest.
- Americans show the highest level of trust in religious institutions.

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The Canadian perspective
Public feels Universities are Accountable

“Overall, to what extent do you think universities in your province are currently accountable to your provincial government for the funding they receive?”

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Importance of Accountability

“Thinking now about other important issues facing your provincial government, how important would you say it is for your provincial government to take steps to make universities more accountable for the funding they receive?”

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University Autonomy is supported

“Which of the following are in the best position to make decisions about how funds are allocated to different types of academic programs, would you say...?”


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Trust in Universities is High

“Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with: Canadian universities can be trusted to do the right thing with the public funding they receive.”

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Awareness of University Governing Boards

“Governing Boards at Canadian universities have the ultimate responsibility for each university. University governing boards are generally made up of a mix of government representatives, faculty, students, alumni and community leaders. University presidents are accountable to the governing board. Were you previously aware of the existence of governing boards at Canadian universities?”

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Trust in University Governing Boards

“How confident are you that these governing boards ensure that universities are held accountable for funding they receive from their provincial government?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>DK/NR</th>
<th>Not confident (1-3)</th>
<th>Somewhat (4)</th>
<th>Confident (5-7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Observations

• Universities are viewed as accountable.
• There is support for institutional autonomy.
• Universities are trusted to do the right thing with the money they receive.
• The awareness of governing boards is growing and they are perceived as holding universities to account (with the exception of Quebec).
Has Trust in Universities Changed over Time?

- Autonomy is based on trust.
- Has that trust changed over time?
Change in Trust in Universities – International

“Has your trust in universities increased, decreased or stayed the same over the past ten years?”

- **Canada** (n=1,530): 20% decreased, 71% stayed the same, 7% increased
- **United States** (n=1,004): 5% decreased, 51% stayed the same, 9% increased
- **England** (n=1,014): 8% decreased, 55% stayed the same, 9% increased
- **Spain** (n=1,011): 2% decreased, 45% stayed the same, 7% increased
- **Sweden** (n=1,004): 8% decreased, 52% stayed the same, 9% increased

DK/NR: 1%
## Reasons for Decreased Trust in Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>United States (n=351)</th>
<th>England (n=280)</th>
<th>Spain (n=466)</th>
<th>Sweden (n=316)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of education has fallen</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High / Rising tuition fees</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s all about the money / making profit</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget cuts / Lack of funding</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of graduates has decreased</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t trust it / It’s a scam</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not guarantee a job in the field of study</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No focus on good education</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching standards have dropped</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too politicized</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative press comments</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reason for Decreased Trust (Canada)

- Mismanagement: 25%
- Poor quality of education, teaching: 21%
- Tuition too high, costs/fees too: 17%
- Lack of preparation for future jobs: 13%
- Had a negative personal experience: 10%
- Standards getting lower/worse: 8%
- Political agenda / Government controlled: 7%
- Disagree with ideals they uphold: 6%
- Lack of social support for the students: 5%
- DK/NR: 3%

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Reasons for Decreased Trust – Regions 2014

Mismanagement/Lack of transparency
Tuition too high
More funding necessary
Lack of preparation for jobs
Poor quality of education
Disagree with ideals they uphold (left and right)

BC/Territories
Alberta
SK/MB
Ontario
Quebec
Atlantic

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Summary of survey results

• Universities are among the most trusted public institution in each country examined

• Canadians show the highest level of trust in universities, Americans the lowest

• In Canada, Universities are viewed as accountable and there is strong public support for institutional autonomy.
Summary of survey results

- Canadian universities are trusted to do the right thing with the money they receive.

- The awareness of Canadian governing boards is growing and they are perceived as holding universities to account.
Summary of survey results

• In all countries surveyed, there has been a decline in Trust in Universities over the past decade

• This decrease is highest in Spain, followed by the United States. It is lowest in Canada

• The reasons for the decrease in trust clusters around issues such as poor or declining quality of education, rising tuition, mismanagement and lack of preparation for jobs.