MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF ELECTED GOVERNING COUNCIL MEMBERS

by

Renu Kanga Fonseca

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Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the motivations and experiences of individuals elected to serve on the Governing Council of the University of Toronto. Elected governors include alumni, students, staff and faculty. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with 2 alumni governors, 2 student governors, and 2 staff/faculty governors. Interview questions helped to examine personal motivations behind serving in university governance, activities and duties of governors, self-perceptions of effectiveness and improvements to the experience of elected members. The responses were used to create interview summaries and discover common themes in the experiences of elected governors. Four theme areas emerged. They are (1) initial motivations, (2) learning and informal communication, (3) personal benefits, pride and positive experience, and (4) approach to governance. This study includes a discussion of the unique position of alumni governors and suggests improvements to the governor experience as recommended by the research participants.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Rationale

With the privilege of being a Governor comes an absolute obligation: Governors are collectively and individually stewards of the University. Their stewardship must leave the University a better place and every decision governors make has to be guided by that first principle. (Information Manual for the Governing Council of the University of Toronto, 2008)

The above quotation was first presented at an orientation in 2005 for Governing Council members at the University of Toronto by Rose M. Patten during her term as Chair. Patten described the paramount duty that governors are entrusted with. As members of the prime decision-making bodies in higher education, they share the legal responsibility of making key decisions for the institution. The work of governors can be far reaching across the institution and outside communities, and the impact of decisions can last well into the institution’s future. The success of an institution may be defined through its research, teaching, or other objectives, all of which are largely be shaped by the decisions made through its governance process and the performance of the governing board.

This exploratory study strives to fill a gap in the current body of literature on governing boards by exploring the motivation and experience of elected members. The purpose of this study was to identify the common themes that may exist in the experiences and motivations of elected members, from the perspective of people who held these positions. Ultimately, it is the individual members who volunteer to serve on governing boards that contribute to the important work of the board, the decisions made, and the effectiveness of the governance process. Despite this, there has been little research done on the experiences of the individuals participating in higher education governance. The role they play can have a strong and lasting impact on the
performance of the board and the direction of the institution, so an understanding of the individual experience can provide insight into best practices for supporting governors.

The institution chosen for this study was the University of Toronto. It is the largest university in Canada and the Governing Council is its single, overarching governing body. Interviews with elected members of this council were used to answer research questions relating to the personal motivations behind serving in university governance, activities and duties of governors, self-perceptions of effectiveness or influence, and personal benefit of serving on the council. Interviews ended with a brief look at improvements to the experience of elected members and their role in governance, as recommended by research participants. As this was an exploratory study, no defined hypothesis was investigated. The absence of a hypothesis was important in that it allowed the researcher to obtain a better understanding of the experiences of these elected governors, without presuppositions.

Current literature provides insight into factors which effect overall governing board performance. A study by Adrianna Kezar named “six elements of effective or high-performing boards” (Kezar, 2006, p 982). The first was “leadership/board agenda” which called for a common vision and purpose and a multiyear agenda. “Culture” was the second element which referred to a professional, nonpartisan culture. The third element was “education” which was rooted in the orientation and ongoing learning opportunities for members. “External relationships” referred to communication through different levels of governance. Another element was titled “relationships” and concerned communications between senior members, chairs, individual board members and constituents. Finally, “structure” was concerned with having a clear role for the board, a rotating chair, ad hoc committees, and ongoing evaluation
(Kezar, 2006). Much of a board’s ability to realize these six elements of high-performing boards rests on the attitudes and contributions of the individual board members.

The current research literature does not adequately explore what motivates individuals to dedicate their efforts to a governance process. In a 2008 survey about governance in higher education conducted by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), institutions reported that the recruitment of suitable board members was a challenge. Reasons individuals shied away from board membership included concerns for the level of liability and accountability held by members, and the amount of time associated with fulfilling the responsibilities of the position (AGB 2009). However, little is known about why individuals seek membership on governing boards or why they may to serve as active participants in an institution’s governance process.

Elected members, and not appointed or ex-officio members, were the focus of this study because these governors have actively put forth efforts to become a part of governance processes. Elected members may have acted on personal motivations and interests to earn membership and serve on a governing body, or may have been drawn to the position out of a sense of duty or recommendations from peers. While the underlying motivations may differ, elected members stand out from their appointed peers based on the active steps they take in seeking out the position through an election process. Elected members may also differ from their appointed peers based on what they bring with them to the position. While some elected members may have a wealth of prior experience or knowledge useful to the role, others may not. Alternatively, appointed members are largely recognized for their qualifications or a particular expertise which led to their appointment to the board. Limiting this study to elected members provides an opportunity to focus on the experiences of these individuals.
Contributions of the Study and Possible Benefits

The examination of these experiences serves as a base point from which future studies relating to university governors can be conducted. Questions raised through the results of this study can be explored, as well as others that will increase knowledge relating to motivations and experiences of participants in university governance.

A greater understanding of the experiences and motivations of elected governors is also helpful to the overall health of institutional governance. In his doctoral dissertation, William M. Griffin explored the experiences of trustees in American Community Colleges and wrote:

The board must operate as a collective unit, not as individual members. If boards are performing at their peak, it is because each individual member is cognizant of the impact of their experiences and opinions on the board and yet recognizes the need for the concerted effort of all to function as a group (Griffin, 2011, p. 3)

To this end, appointed members may benefit from understanding the rewards and challenges experienced by their elected counterparts, and individuals from all constituencies can have a better appreciation for governors representing constituencies other than their own. Similarly, the general university population can better understand the role of the governors they elect, or use the knowledge to decide if they would like to become elected members themselves. The study can also be helpful to administrative offices while working with elected members, conducting elections, and providing information and orientation to new members.

The data collection process may also have benefitted the six individual governors participating in the study, and other governors who read the interview summaries. As participants shared experiences during the interviews and later review their individual transcripts, or read the transcripts of others, they were faced with an opportunity to self-reflect on their experience as an elected governor.


**Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter one defines the purpose and rationale of the study, along with the contributions and possible benefits stemming from this report. Chapter two is a review of literature relevant to three areas. The first section provides the reader with an understanding of the history and composition of university governance in the Canadian context and the second is an overview of governance at the University of Toronto. The third focus of the chapter is a review of literature related to the role and experience of governing board members. Chapter three contains a complete description of the methodology used in this study. The research design is introduced, followed by an account of how research participants were recruited and the consent process that was followed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the data review and data analysis processes, along with a statement of the resulting theme areas. Chapter four is a presentation of the data in the form of six interview summaries. This gives the reader an understanding of the responses and comments provided by student, alumni, staff, and faculty board members through the interviews. Chapter five contains an analysis and discussion of the theme areas which are (1) initial motivations, (2) learning and information communication, (3) personal benefits, pride and positive experience, (4) approach to governance. Two areas of interest are also discussed which are (1) the unique position of alumni governors and (2) suggested improvements to the experience of governors as recommended by the participants. Chapter six concludes the report with recommendations for future research areas, limitations of the study, and conclusions. A complete reference list along with appendices containing interview questions and correspondence with participants is found following the final chapter.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to provide a review of the research literature relevant to the study. The review of literature is organized into three categories to provide the reader with an understanding of governing boards and board members. The first section of this chapter reviews governing bodies in the Canadian context, including a historical account of events that shaped the composition and structures of governing boards. Also included is a description of governance on university campuses today. The second section focuses on the evolution and current governance structure at the University of Toronto. This is important as this study explores the experience of governors serving at this institution. Finally, the chapter contains a review of literature in which the role and experience of governing board members is discussed.

Governing Bodies in Canada

The vast majority of universities across Canada are non-profit corporations created by provincial Acts and receive provincial operating grants. Each Act dictates the governance structure for the institution, and the composition of the governing bodies. The predominant governance structure at Canadian universities is bicameral, comprised of two major decision making bodies: a senate which is charged with powers over academic issues, and a board which holds responsibility for administrative issues of the institution. A small number of universities, including the University of Toronto, operate with a unicameral structure whereby a single overarching body is accountable for both academic and administrative concerns. With and varied stakeholders, universities are constantly challenged to ensure that all necessary viewpoints are heard, and that different constituencies are represented in decision-making. So it is fitting that many institution-wide governing boards, senates and committees have formal voting
positions for pertinent constituencies that are considered to be from “inside” the institution such as such as staff, faculty, students, and the university president, as well as those that are considered to be from “outside” the institution such as alumni and lay members.

Internationally, university governance models vary significantly. A brief comparison of websites from universities around the world show that governing bodies differ widely in terms of their size, structure and composition. Some boards call for minimal to no “insider” input from students and staff and faculty, and instead include substantial “outsider” consultation by inviting community stakeholders and alumni to serve on committees and boards. An example of this structure is found at Yale University which is governed by a 19 member board comprised of 10 “successors to the original trustees” who appoint their own successors, 6 elected alumni fellows, and 3 ex-officio members, namely the President, the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor of the State of Connecticut (Yale, 2011). Other institutions, such as The University of Toronto and many others in Canada have opted to involve alumni, student, staff and faculty representation in formal governance by dedicating elected governing body positions to each of these groups. For example, McGill University has a 25 member board, composed of the 2 ex-officio members; the President, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, 12 members-at-large, 3 representatives of the McGill Alumni Association, 2 representatives from the Senate, 2 academic staff members, 2 administrative and support staff members, 1 representative of the Students’ Society of McGill University and 1 representative of the Post-Graduate Students’ Society (McGill, 2011).

However, decision-making arenas were not always representative of an institution’s constituencies. In the early example of medieval universities, students were the leading authority to make decisions they felt best served them, their peers, and the health of the institution. Perhaps this was due to the fact that students were the primary consumers of the service offered
by scholars, and therefore students dictated what their needs were, and how they could best be met. Students at the time:

…prescribed the hours when the teacher should meet his classes, the character of the lectures, the scheduling and the content of his examinations, the amount of his compensation, and the times when he could be absent not only from the classroom but from the town as well. (McGrath, 1970, p. 11).

It is difficult to determine how effective this almost unimaginable model of university governance would be today. While students do not possess nearly the same level of decision making power in today’s institutions, they are valued members in formal governance processes. Ronald Barnett described students as the “key factor – the principal educator – in the process of higher education” (Barnett, 1988, p. 249). And E.J. McGrath labelled students as ‘consumers’ and as such, they were entitled to participate in managing activities and governance at their institutions (McGrath, 1970 as cited by Menon, 2005, p. 169). With these concepts in mind, it seems fitting that students today hold positions on governing boards, as informed members of teaching and learning processes.

Not only do today’s universities exercise a completely different governance model than early medieval institutions, but modern universities are also significantly larger, and many promote a research mandate in addition to teaching. Universities are complex organizations with diverse stakeholders. This includes faculty, senior administrators, support staff, students, parents, researchers, government, alumni, employers, and members of the communities in which they exist. At varying degrees and in different ways, these groups all contribute to the activity of the institution, as well as benefit from it. During the first century of their existence, Canadian universities did not involve elected students, staff and faculty in governing boards. Even as recently as 1955, students were not members of governing boards, and only 9% of councils in the country included faculty (Rowat, 1955, as cited by Jones, 2001). Not only were these groups
poorly represented, they were further removed from institutional decision making since meetings were not open for public observation. Unrest relating to “private” meetings and little formal control in decision-making grew as an issue of concern, and in the 1960s, a decision was made to investigate and review university governance across Canada (Jones, 2001). The result was the Duff-Berdahl Commission of 1966, sponsored by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) along with the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT). Sir James Duff and Robert O. Berdahl made a number of recommendations relating to Canadian institutional governance, including increasing the transparency of governance and increasing the level of faculty participation (Zuo & Ratsoy, 1999).

Although including students as board members was not recommended in the report, the authors suggested that boards include a rector to represent students as was done at Queen’s University. The rector should be “not himself a student, but elected by the students” (Duff & Berdahl, 1966, p. 20). This would give students an avenue to participate in the election of a board member and give students a formal voice on boards. Increasing faculty involvement was also recommended, although with caution and with boundaries in order not to release too much control. The report reads:

The number of faculty members on the Board should vary with the size of the Board, not exceeding 25 per cent. The faculty should definitely be in a minority, because otherwise there would be a danger that the professors, being a more vocal by nature and training than more lay members of the Board, would tend to monopolize the discussions. (Duff & Berdahl, 1966, p. 24).

In the years following the Duff-Berdahl Commission, the level of formal student and faculty representation on governing bodies across Canada increased substantially, and sometimes beyond what was recommended. In 1975, faculty belong to 92% of boards. Students represented 14% of senate membership in the country, and 78% of governing boards included
students (Houwing and Michaud, 1972; Houwing and Kristjanson, 1975, as cited by Jones 2001). Two decades later, a national survey by Jones and Skolnick showed that students comprised 9.2% of all board members, faculty represented 17.2% of all board members, alumni represented 8.6% and support staff represented 3.2% (Jones & Skolnik, 1997). In the same 1995 survey, it was found that 100 percent of boards in Canada had dedicated student positions on their governing board. Surprisingly, this percentage was higher than even faculty, who were represented on 93% of boards. Alumni members were included in 90% of boards and only 52% of boards reported including support staff (Jones and Skolnik, 1997). These considerable increases in formal representation of different constituencies marked a notable change in the history of university governance in the country. It represented a shift in the view towards faculty and students as important members in university governance. While faculty previously held responsibilities in academic decision-making, they were given a larger role decision-making for broader matters of institutional concern. Students were also seen as more valued in decision making as displayed through their increased participation on senates.

It is commonly agreed that the release of the Duff-Berdahl report marked the beginning of change in the composition of governing bodies in Canada. In addition to some change being a direct result of the report, some changes that followed might also be attributed to increasing demands for representation made by students and faculty during that period, and a desire from institutional leaders to keep up with practices at reputable peer institutions. In just a few years after the report, Sir James Duff was quoted as saying, “The walls of Jericho have fallen with one gentle blast of the Duff-Berdahl trumpet. But this is essentially because our recommendations reflected the needs and the thinking that were already going on in most universities in Canada” (Trueman, 1969, pp.70). Regardless of the initial causes of change, students, staff, faculty and
alumni today are enjoying an increased opportunity to participate in decision making in a formal arena and are seen as valuable contributors.

Governors from these groups are able to shed light on how decisions may affect their constituency, and their sheer presence in decision making allows for representation amongst constituency members looking for a formal voice. In their report, Duff and Berdahl described the benefit of faculty membership to the overall board and recognized the imperative role of faculty in the institution. They reported that the involvement of faculty on governing boards:

…helps the non-academic Council members to understand the point of view of the academics. This is genuinely difficult for them. Academics are a peculiar race, maybe too fond of argument, maybe too anxious for mathematical certainty on questions that do not admit of a neat solution. Yet they and their students are the university” (Duff & Berdahl, 1966, p.22).

The Duff-Berhdahl report gave importance to faculty involvement in governance, and in 2008, Powell wrote that university administrators have realised the “influence of faculty and, therefore, listen to the faculty and pay attention and heed their advice” (Powell, 2008, p. 396). However, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Governance published a report in which faculty involvement in decision-making was discussed. The task force took issue with the role that faculty was able to play in academic decision making, stating that there was an increasing trend towards decisions being made by central administration, as opposed to academic divisions (CAUT, 2009). The report urged faculty to use the powers of bargaining units at each institution to halt this trend.

Canadian and American universities today include alumni, students, staff and faculty in formal governance, each with their own structures and compositions to satisfy the responsibilities of boards, senates, and committees. As previously noted, in their 1995 study, Jones and Skolnick reported student, faculty and alumni membership was included on the vast
majority of Canadian boards, as well as staff board membership to a lesser extent. The Association of Governing Boards presented a 2010 report which outlined the composition of governing boards in American institutions. Public college boards in the US had less student representation than Canadian boards, in that 50.3% of boards included one student or more as a voting member, and 28.2% included at least one student as a non-voting member. At least one faculty member was included as a voting member in 13.3% of public colleges, universities and systems and 9.7% of these boards included non-voting faculty. Similar to Canadian institutions, staff members were included in fewer boards. The survey revealed that 7.2% of public colleges, universities and system boards involved at least one voting staff member, and at least one non-voting staff member was found at 3.6% of boards. For all the groups, the median number of members was one. The same survey found that alumni membership was significantly greater, with alumni comprising 50% of membership on average (AGB, 2010). In a 1989 study of Boards of Trustees of American Colleges and Universities, authors Kerr and Gade found value in the contributions of alumni in governance and stated that “alumni service on boards and committees of boards has almost universally proved positive” (Kerr and Gade, 1989, p. 46). In contrast in the same report, the argument was made that students and faculty need not hold governor positions. Instead, these groups are considered to be “best associated in board deliberations by serving on appropriate committees and by effective consultations, rather than through board membership” (Kerr and Gade, 1989, pp.140). The argument against inclusion of these groups in formal decision-making was that students and faculty are representatives with their own special interests, making it more appropriate for them to have input on the work of committees rather than the board where the final decisions are made (Kerr and Gade, 1989).

Regardless of the constituencies board members represent, it appears they share a
common understanding of their purpose as members of one decision making body. In 1993, Dean Wood presented the results of a study that examined the participation of governing board members through a series of 51 interviews representing students, staff, faculty presidents, lay members and presidents of associations. Participants described their primary role was to serve as individuals interested in the health of the overall institution, not as representatives for any one group. Based on interview responses, it was agreed that elected governors “should speak and act as individuals” and that “the interests of the institution should be given precedence over those of their constituencies”. Further, the role of elected governors was to “report the concerns and interests of their peers but in an objective rather than advocacy manner” (Wood, 1993, p. 13). This position taken by governors is meant to uphold the best interests of the institution as a whole. It can also be used to address the issue that elected governors are in a conflict of interest position when voting, such as on issues of tuition rates, staff/faculty salaries, and other issues directly pertaining to their constituency. Although governors agreed that decisions should be made for the benefit of the institution overall, they may still find it challenging to balance the needs of their constituency with the needs of the institution.

**Governance at the University of Toronto**

The University of Toronto is Canada’s largest university. Across its three campuses there are approximately 73,000 students, 9,800 staff, 10,000 faculty members (The University of Toronto, 2009), and 490,000 living alumni (The University of Toronto, 2010). It should be noted that not all individuals represented in these figures are eligible for positions on the Governing Council, based on the requirements outlined in the Governing Council Election Guidelines, which includes Canadian citizenship for all members, and defines registration requirements for student members, as well as academic rank requirements for teaching staff.
While the numbers of potential candidates are large, the impressive size of the university is not the only thing that makes it different. It is unique in its governance structure. The majority of universities in Canada operate with a bicameral governance structure, where academic matters are dealt with by a senate, and business matters are dealt with by a board. However, U of T has operated with a unicameral governance structure since The University of Toronto Act (1971) led to the creation of the Governing Council, a single overarching governing body for the institution (U of T Governing Council, 2009). Even more unique is that the University has three federated Colleges primarily offering degrees belonging to the Faculty of Arts and Science. The University of St. Michael’s College, The University of Trinity College, and Victoria College are independent legal entities and operate under their own governing boards. The University of Toronto is also home to several self-governing theological colleges. While separate boards at the University do exist and will be discussed below, this study focuses on The Governing Council which oversees the operations of the University Toronto.

The Governing Council is 50 members large. This includes ex-officio, appointed, and elected members. The 2 ex-officio members are the University President and Chancellor. Of the 18 appointed members, 16 are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, while the other two members are senior administrators appointed by the President. Elected members make up the majority of the council. The 30 elected members include 12 teaching staff, 8 alumni, 4 full-time undergraduate students, 2 part-time undergraduate students, 2 graduate students, and 2 administrative staff (U of T Governing Council, 2009). Elected teaching staff, administrative staff and students are nominated by and voted for by members of their constituency. Alumni governors are elected by the College of Elector, which is a body of individuals representing divisional alumni associations within the integrated University of Toronto Alumni Association.
Appointed members, as well as elected staff, faculty and alumni are members for three year terms. Students are elected to serve for a one year term. A member’s duties are to attend meetings, understand issues included in the agenda, and make informed votes on the motions presented before them in the seven Council meetings held each year (U of T Governing Council, 2009).

The Governing Council is responsible for final approval of changes in the university relating to academic pursuits and business operations. The University of Toronto Act states, “Members of the Governing Council shall act with diligence, honestly and with good faith in the best interests of the University and University College” (The University of Toronto Act 1971, 1978, p. 4) Governors can expect to vote on matters relating to student life, tuition and other fees, infrastructure and capital projects, degree offerings and requirements, academic programs and units, budgets, fundraising, research policy, employment policy, and approval of audited financial statements. Much of the discussion and debate regarding these issues are first raised in meetings of the Boards and Committees of the Governing Council. The four groups of committees are the Executive Committee, the Academic, University and Business Affairs Boards, the Standing Committees, and the Special Committees (established as needed). The Standing Committees include the Agenda, Academic Appeals, Elections, and Audit Committees. These four groups have reporting relationships to Boards. Additionally, the Governing Council created the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs, the Planning and Budget Committee, and the Committee for Honorary Degrees. The memberships of the boards and committees are comprised of Governing Council members and other members of the University community (Information Manual for the Governing Council of The University of Toronto, 2008)
A series of important historical events formed the governance structure currently in place at the University of Toronto. The University of Toronto Act (1971) reformed governance with the abolishment of the bicameral structure which was favoured by the Flavelle Commission of 1906 (University of Toronto 1906 as cited by Jones, Shanahan, Goyan, 2001). The majority of Canadian universities still operate under a bicameral structure of governance (Jones & Skolnik, 1997), with separate decision making bodies for academic and administrative concerns. However the University of Toronto adopted the unicameral model of governance in 1972, whereby a single governing body, the Governing Council, was legislated as the ultimate decision making body for the institution, with responsibility for both academic and administrative issues (Information Manual for the Governing Council of the University of Toronto, 2005).

Following this notable change in the governance structure and the creation of the University of Toronto Act (1971), five reviews of institutional governance have taken place at the University. The University of Toronto Act (1971) called for a review within two years of its approval. This requirement was completed in 1973-1974. The review included a recommendation to alter the composition of the Governing Council, with the addition of 2 alumni members, 1 faculty member, 1 administrative staff member, and 3 student members. This recommendation was approved by the Governing Council, but not in the Provincial Legislature and so the composition of the Governing Council remained unchanged. Another review, The Dunphy Study was sparked by a document produced by the University of Toronto Faculty Association in 1975-78 which raised two predominant issues. First, the recently adapted unicameral structure was opposed, as it was blamed for what was seen as a reduction in the level of decision making powers held by faculty on issues of academic policy, long-term planning and use of resources. Second, academic deans, principals, and faculty members felt that the
unicameral structure caused a shift in power towards central administration and away from divisions. Following this, a working group struck by the Executive Committee made recommendations to increase input from faculty at the committee level of governance, as well as improvements to communications regarding decisions made through the governance process. The Governing Council approved the recommendations of the working group. Two subsequent reviews occurred in 1977 and 1987-88. The 1977 Review led to a recommendation that was approved by the Council to increase the membership of the Academic Affairs Committee to allow for a greater input from informed academic voices. A second change was the combining of the External and Internal Affairs Committees, to form the new Committee on Campus and Community Affairs. Through the 1987-88 Review, changes were made to clarify and modify the responsibilities of boards and committees, including the Academic Board, Business Board and University Affairs Board (Information for the Governing Council of the University of Toronto, 2005).

The most recent review of governance at the University of Toronto resulted from an institution-wide planning exercise. “Towards 2030” was the title given to a planning document and process which began in the summer of 2007. As a part of this long term planning process, five task forces were created to examine key areas of the institution. The five areas were long-term strategy, institutional organization, university resources, university relations and context, and university governance (Towards 2030, 2007). The Task Force on University Governance was comprised of one administrative staff governor, three governors or former governors of the teaching staff, two members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, one student governor, one alumni governor, and the Governing Council Secretary. The task force Chair was former Governing Council Chair Rose Patten, and the Vice-Chair was Vice-President and
Provost Vivek Goel. With a university-wide scope, the task force was asked to report on the goals and long-term strategies for governance (Terms of Reference for the Task Force on Governance, 2007).

The work of the Task Force was divided into two phases. The first phase was used to identify issues and possible solutions. Recommendations towards implementation were discussed in the second place. The Report of the First Phase outlined six areas of concern for the Task Force to focus on. They were:

- Oversight and Accountability – Quality of the Governing Council’s Meeting Agendas
- Overlap/Duplication, Deficiencies, Ambiguities – Board and Committee Mandates
- Delegated Authority for Academic Divisions – Lack of Clarity, Inconsistency
- Delegated Authority in the Tri-campus Context – Levels of Oversight and Accountability, Redundancy
- Quality of Governors – Experience Mix and Representation
- Roles of and Appropriate Interfaces between Governors and the Administration

(Phase 1 Report, Towards 2030 Task Force on Governance, 2008, pp 5-9).

The Report of the Task Force on Governance was released in the fall of 2010. Recommendations were made relating to the three categories of (1) Setting the Tone through Adopting Foundations of Good Governance, (2) Ensuring Quality of Governors, (3) Strengthening Oversight and Accountability (Report of the Task Force on Governance, 2010).

**Governing Board Members**

There is existing literature on governance in higher education that provides insight on the history and purposes of university governance, the composition of governing bodies, different models of governance, and issues of effectiveness. There has been little research, however, on elected governors in terms of their motivations, qualifications, experiences, and attitudes towards the position they hold. Questions relating to their initial and ongoing motivations for becoming a
governor, how they perceive their role, how they carry out their duties, and what challenges they face, largely remain unanswered. The majority of literature focuses on the work of governing boards as a body, and not on the work of board members as individuals. Few studies have added to the knowledge on the experience of individual members. This literature is reviewed here.

A valuable study in Canadian higher education was conducted by Jones and Skolnik (1997). This study examined university governing boards across the country and the role of board members. Surveys for this study were completed by 59 institutions and 583 board members. In addition to reporting on the size and composition of boards at the time, Jones and Skolnik reported a number of key findings relating to the work and experience of board members. Board members appeared to be a dedicated group of individuals. On average, board members spent 10.3 hours per month in meetings or preparing for meetings (Jones & Skolnik, 1997, p. 283). While the number of hours spent in advance of meetings does not necessarily indicate whether board members are adequately prepared, members conveyed their belief that they “receive the information they need to make decisions” (Jones & Skolnik, 1997, p. 285). In addition to the time spent preparing for meetings, board members belonging to three-quarters of the institutions that participated in the study were offered opportunities to attend orientations or workshops designed for new members (Jones & Skolnik, 1997). This likely aided in their preparation for the role, and ability to be effective. In response to whether board members considered themselves to be active members, 86% choose the top two options of “agree strongly” and “agree moderately” on a five-point scale. As another positive response to their performance in the role, board members consider themselves to be “active”, 65% also “agreed moderately or strongly that they were able to influence board decisions” (Jones and Skolnik, 1997, p. 285). The findings of this study appear to suggest that the self-perception of board
members is that they perform well in the role. The majority appear to be prepared through orientation sessions as well as through personal preparation. Governors also appear to be motivated to perform well given that they largely consider themselves to be “active members”. Overall, this study by Jones and Skolnik appeared to find governors’ descriptions of their work and experiences to be positive.

Wood’s examination of board member participation included a look at the performance of members. In most cases, the influence students had over decision-making ranged from “limited” to “moderate”. It was also found that although it was rare for student input to be of considerable influence, student membership was “viewed in a positive light as they were considered to constitute valuable sources of information”. The study also found that faculty members were the “most successful in achieving credibility and attendant influence” (Wood, 1993, p. 16). The ability to influence others does not however, suggest that a board member is performing well. It simply means the board member may be able to convince others of his/her point of view or choice of vote, regardless of whether that viewpoint is in the best interest of the institution or not.

A much cited report by Kerr & Gade (1989) recognized that board performance is more accurately evaluated by the role and work of the members within it. They stated “a board is only as good as its members” (Kerr & Gade, 1989, p. 39) and outlined key factors which they consider make a governor a “good member”. Some of these factors include long-term concern for the entirety of the institution (as opposed to just one division), focus on the institution and not the interests of any one group or him/herself, attention to knowledge about the institution without neglect of important information, consideration for others during debate, and dedication of the time required to fulfil their responsibilities (Kerr & Gade, 1989).
Evaluations of overall board performance are conducted at various institutions across Canada and the USA. A study conducted by the Association of Governing Boards (2009) found that annual assessments of board performance were conducted at almost half of all American public boards that responded in the study. However, the evaluation of individual board members was significantly less common. The same study reported that only 12% of boards assessed the performance of individual members. Where individual performance reviews did exist, the majority of evaluations were conducted at the end of the member’s term. This may have been useful for governors returning to serve for a subsequent term, in that they were provided with feedback which they could use to shape their future efforts. However, an assessment during the term of service may be of greater overall benefit since it allows time for governors to strengthen their performance while they hold the position.

Conclusion

Overall, existing literature that relates to the performance and work of governing boards largely focuses on the overall governing board, not on individual members. The experience of individual members is of interest in this report, as individual members are entrusted with decision making power, and who collectively form the board. There is a small body of knowledge that adds to our understanding of the work of board members, and their self-perceptions of their preparedness, dedication and effectiveness in the role. This study aims to build on this knowledge by further exploring the experiences and motivations of elected governing board members. The following chapter describes the research design and methodology used for this study, including an explanation of the participant recruitment and consent processes, and the data review and analysis methods.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A complete description of the methodology used for this study is contained in this chapter. The research design is discussed, where interviewing is named as the appropriate qualitative method chosen for this study. Following that is an account of the efforts made to recruit governors with the desired participant criteria. The important consent process is reported with references made to the associated appendices containing recruitment letters and consent letters. Next is a description of how data was collected through six individual interviews. Finally the methods used in conducting data review and data analysis for this study are explained. The chapter concludes with presentation of the theme areas determined through the analysis of the interview data.

Research Design

This study explored the motivations and experiences of elected governors in their role on the Governing Council at the University of Toronto. As personal attitudes and experiences are best described by the people living it, it was fitting to use interviews as the method of qualitative data collection. “The purpose of the qualitative research interview...is to understand themes of the lived daily world from the subjects’ own perspectives” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p.24).

A key decision in this study was to focus on those governors who have been elected to the positions they hold, as opposed to those that were appointed or served on the Governing Council by virtue of the titles they held (ex-officio members). The elected positions include those held by alumni, faculty, staff and students. While all governors would have insights to share on their motivations and experiences, elected members were chosen because they have
actively sought to involve themselves in university governance, and subsequently made additional efforts to campaign and participate in an election process. While appointed or ex-officio members may share some of the same desires to be involved in the governance process, elected members have sought out the role. Appointed members on the other hand, would more likely have followed a very different path to lead them to their position. Although some elected governors may have motivations to hold a governor position out of a sense of duty or pressure from peers as opposed to intrinsic motivations, their willingness and efforts to earn membership on the Council put them in a notable category.

Once the decision was made to focus on elected alumni, faculty, staff and students, another important decision was made to limit participant recruitment to individuals who were governors for the same body at the same institution during the same year. This was done in order to ensure that participants shared a common experience, and to reduce variations in other occurrences that would alter the experience such as a change in Chair, significant change in process, or change in dynamics between governors from different years or at different institutions. All governors that were interviewed, including student members who are elected for one year terms, served on the Governing Council for more than one year, and therefore have varying experiences from past years. However, they all do share the common experience of the year that they were interviewed. The Governing Council at the University of Toronto was chosen as the decision making body to focus on, as it is the overarching governing body for a large institution with both strong teaching and research mandates. Members of the 2009-2010 Governing Council were chosen, as it was the most current year at the time of the study.

Beyond the criteria that participants must have served in an elected governor position on the U of T Governing Council during the same year, two subsequent criteria were added. First,
the constituency they were nominated from was considered in order to include voices from a mix of all elected constituencies: students, alumni, staff and faculty governors. Second, length of service was considered. Record of the number of years of service for each member is available on the Governing Council website. Individuals who have been on the Council for over one year were preferred, as they were likely to have more experiences and a greater understanding of the role.

Interview questions (Appendix A) were developed based on gaps in current literature and the researcher’s previous experience serving on a governing body. While there has been some research on overall board performance and board characteristics, very little research has been done on the experience of individual elected board members. Having previously served as an elected member of a governing body within a division of the University of Toronto, the researcher appreciated the opportunity to work alongside an interesting mix of elected members. Some members appeared to be extremely committed and knowledgeable about their role and the issues before them, some appeared to merely fill seats and tended to vote with the majority, and others fell somewhere in between this spectrum. Regardless of their awareness of issues, commitment or contributions to decision making, each member held a single, equal-weighted vote towards the decision on an issue. The different impressions that the diverse group of members left on the researcher sparked an interest in learning more about the motivations, levels of engagement and experiences of elected members. The questions were designed to explore initial motivations for becoming an elected governor, activities and duties of governors, self-perceptions of effectiveness or influence, personal benefit of serving on Governing Council, and ways in which the experience of governors could be improved. The interview questions, and
research proposal was shared with the Secretary of the Governing Council for feedback prior to seeking research ethics approval from the University.

**Participant Recruitment**

Brief biographies, membership terms and contact information for each governor were available on the Governing Council’s website. The biographies and membership terms were reviewed and participants were selected based on the constituency they were nominated from and their length of service. It was important to recruit governors from different constituencies in order to learn from the varied perspectives, and so the effort was made to recruit at least one participant from each of the four elected groups; alumni, students, staff and faculty. Governors with the greatest number of years of service were preferred to those with fewer years, as it was assumed that the greater the number of years volunteering as a governor meant a greater amount of experience and a greater understanding of the role.

Once a list of governors meeting the desired selection criteria was identified from the list of members available on the Governing Council website, the potential participants were contacted via email. The purpose of the study was outlined along with the request for an interview. Participants were told they would be given the opportunity to review and revise the interview transcript, and were given the option to abstain from answering questions or withdraw from the study without consequence. Governors were told the 45-60 minute interview would include questions related to their motivations, expectations of the role, personal benefits, self-perceptions of effectiveness or influence, and duties and responsibilities of governors. A copy of the email sent to invite governors to participate in the study is included as Appendix B. A follow up email requesting participation in the study was sent one week following the first request to any of the initial six governors who did not respond (Appendix C). In cases where no
response was received after the follow up email, it was assumed that the governor was not interested in participating, and a request to participate was sent to another governor who fit the selection criteria. This was also done using the email included in Appendix B.

In the recruitment email, governors were asked to reply via email or telephone if they were interested in participating in the study or if they had any questions or concerns relating to the study or their participation. Upon expressing their interest, a mutually convenient interview time and location on the University of Toronto campus was agreed upon. One participant requested to be informed of the interview questions in advance of the interview. As a result of this request, the interview questions (Appendix A) were shared with all confirmed participants approximately one week prior to the interviews. All participating governors except one said they reviewed the interview questions in preparation of their interview. One governor came prepared with typed responses.

The majority of governors that were invited to participate responded with interest, allowing the study to easily include an even number of governors from each elected constituency group. The staff and faculty constituencies were combined for the purposes of this study to help protect the identity of the participants since there are only two staff governors on the Governing Council. A total of six interviews were conducted, this included two students, two alumni and two governors from the staff/faculty combined group.

Participant Consent

It was important to ensure that participants were fully informed of what their voluntary participation involved prior to the start of their interview. Complementary to the information already given in the initial recruitment email, participants were reminded of this information in a Letter of Consent (Appendix D). The Letter of Consent was read and explained at the start of
each interview and participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions relating to their involvement or the study in general. If participants were comfortable with the study and their involvement, they were asked to give their consent by signing a copy of the letter. The participant was given one copy for their records, and a second copy was returned.

The information contained in the Letter of Consent included a description of the purpose of the study, along with contact information for the researcher and the supervisor. Participants were reminded that with their permission, the interviews would be audio recorded and transcribed, and each participant would have the opportunity to review and revise transcriptions before data was analyzed. They were also reminded that their participation was completely voluntary and they had the option of refusing to answer any questions without consequence, penalty or judgment. Similarly, no value judgments were placed on responses to questions that participants engaged in. Finally, participants were told that they may withdraw any or all of the data they provided at any point during or after the interview and prior to the completion of the final report. Withdrawing participation from the study would require a simple email. Although no participants opted to withdraw and all questions were answered, participants understood that all data associated with a participant who withdrew from the study would be destroyed. If a request to withdraw had been made, audio interview recordings and electronic transcripts would be deleted and any data recorded on paper would be shredded. Participants were also assured that all data would be kept in a secure location in the researcher’s home or private office, and will be kept confidential for five years following completion of the study, at which time all data will be destroyed.

Participants were informed that their individual names would not be used in reporting the findings of this study, although the name of the institution, governing body, and year would be
disclosed. Pseudonyms were used in the place of the each participant name and gender was changed in some cases to ensure anonymity. Since there are only two staff positions on the council, staff and faculty data was grouped together and referred to together as the faculty & staff constituencies, in order to increase the possible number of individuals that staff data may have been gathered from.

**Data Collection**

Six interviews were conducted with members of the 2009-2010 University of Toronto Governing Council. This included two student members, two alumni members, and two staff/faculty members. In order to capture current data, all interviews were conducted over a two week period in July 2010, at the end of the academic year and Governing Council meeting year. For some governors, this coincided with the end of their three year terms, and for students it coincided with the end of their one year terms. Since each participant was only asked to engage in a single one-on-one interview, a semi-structured approach was used to ensure that comparable data was obtained while still allowing room for follow up questions which may have helped to clarify comments or increase the depth of the data collected (Bernard, 2006). All interviews consisted of the same ten open-ended questions on the interview guide (Appendix A). The interviews were each approximately 60 minutes in length, and were audio recorded. Five interviews were held in mutually agreed upon locations such as the researcher’s office, student lounge, and meeting rooms. One interview was held off campus at a conference room for convenience at the request of the participant.

**Data Review**

Upon completion of all six interviews, audio recordings were replayed for familiarization and were transcribed verbatim. At that point, transcripts were reviewed and revised in order to
ensure that participants could not be identified and that participants were comfortable with the data they provided. The first stage of revision focused on comments that could be used to identify the participant. Such comments were either removed or replaced with a broader term of similar meaning. As an example, transcripts that mentioned membership on the Academic Board and year(s) of membership were revised to simply state recent membership on a governing body.

Once transcripts were revised to remove identifying text, electronic copies were sent to the corresponding participant for member checks. Member checking is a process involving the review of data by the original data source and “is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). This process allowed participants to correct errors, provide additional comments that were missed during the interview, remove remarks they were not comfortable with, and formally agree with the data they provided and the level of anonymity contained in their transcript. While pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants and gender was changed in some cases when reporting results, a limitation existed in the protection of the identity of participant because the names and contact information for all elected Governing Council members was available to the public on the University’s website. Six members participated in the study from a possible 30 elected members who serve on the Council. In order to minimize the risk of being identified, the participants had the opportunity to revise their interview transcripts and remove any responses they felt may compromise the confidentiality of their participation despite pseudonyms and possible gender changes.

Participants were encouraged to review their transcript and make changes as they saw fit, and they were asked to return transcripts within two weeks of receiving them (Appendix E). Prior to the expiration of the two week period, participants were reminded to return the transcripts via e-mail (Appendix F). For any transcript not returned in the two week period,
participants were aware that it would be assumed that the participant was comfortable with the transcript being used to complete the study. Participants were informed of the two week deadline prior to agreeing to participate, at the start of the interview, when the transcript was sent, and finally when a reminder to return the transcript was sent. Of the six participants, 2 responded within the two week period with no changes required, 2 did not reply despite the reminders, 1 provided additional comment, and 1 late revision was accepted.

**Data Analysis and Theme Areas**

Once all transcripts were revised and returned from the research participants, the process of data analysis began. Each transcript was read from start to finish, which helped to gain an aggregate understanding of the interviews. Next, the transcripts were reread, this time question by question in order to develop a broad sense of whether there were similarities in any responses (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 229). Content in each interview transcript was then marked to draw out data that was considered relevant and meaningful in understanding the participant’s experience as a governor, as well as to eliminate statements which were not relevant to the study. The six marked transcripts were used to create six interview summaries.

The interview summaries were used instead of the original transcripts in discovering common themes and data of interest. This was because they conveyed the experiences shared in interviews that were relevant to the study in a form which already protected the identities of the governors. It was also consistent with Seidman’s reasoning for creating profile or interview summaries. He credits Stud Terkel’s Working (1972) for his notion that interview summaries are “an effective way of sharing interview data and opening up one’s interview material to analysis and interpretation” (Seidman, 2006, p.119). Since the interview summaries were used to determine the final themes, the original transcripts were reviewed at the end of the process to
ensure that no useful data was omitted. Notes were drawn from the summaries to create a broad list of possible theme areas, based on concepts that appeared to reoccur across interviews. In some cases, reoccurring concepts were clearly found through a comparison of individual responses to the same question, while other reoccurring concepts were shared at various points across interviews.

The list of possible theme areas and the interview summaries were used to begin analysing the data through a content analysis process, a process which involved coding data and sorting data into categories or theme areas. Content Analysis is a method for “making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). It was an appropriate method for analysing interview data in this study as this study is an exploratory study aiming to discover whether themes or commonalities exist in the experience of the participants. Stage and Manning write, “A purpose of content analysis is to identify underlying themes, assumptions, beliefs, and the narrative, sense-making, and meaning-making structures of the document’s author” (Stage & Manning, 2003, p. 92). In this study, the documents Stage and Manning refer to are the interview summaries, and the authors are the participants.

As a part of the analysis process, each possible theme area was assigned a colour, and the interview summaries were reviewed in detail and colour marked to highlight passages and phrases that were either associated with the possible theme areas, were particularly unique, or were of special interest (Seidman, 1998). Some concepts fell into more than one possible theme area, and were coded to reflect that. Each emerging theme area was then revisited to determine which concepts were in fact common to multiple interviews and could therefore be considered a theme. Reoccurring concepts remained on the list of theme areas, while concepts that were not
discussed significantly across interviews were removed from the list. As there was some overlap in the data which supported the different theme areas, each theme and associated data was re-evaluated to determine similarities and linkages between categories. Similar theme areas were combined so that four themes and two topics of interest resulted. The four themes found across the interviews were: (1) initial motivations, (2) learning and informal communication, (3) personal benefits, pride and positive experience, (4) approach to governance. The two topics of interest were: (1) unique position of alumni governors, (2) suggested improvements.

Conclusion

The research methodology described in this chapter was well suited for this exploratory study. The participant recruitment and consent processes were executed with ease, as the participants were all willing to participate, save for a few who were away from the university campus at the time of interviews. The interviews provided interesting data which was transcribed and used to create interview summaries. The data analysis led to the formation of four theme areas and two areas of interest. Chapter 4 presents the interview summaries for each of the six interviews that were conducted.
CHAPTER 4: INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

Introduction

As this exploratory study focused on learning about individuals’ lived experiences, creating interview summaries was an appropriate way to share interview data. Seidman wrote, “By crafting a profile in the participant’s own words, the interviewer allows those works to reflect the person’s consciousness” (Seidman, 1998, pp. 119-120). Below are the interview summaries of the six interviews conducted with elected members of the Governing Council. Names and genders of research participants have been changed in the reporting of this study in order to create anonymity. The interview summaries are presented by the constituency group: the first two interviews summaries are with student governors, followed by interviews with staff/faculty governors and ending with two from alumni governors.

Interview Summary: Max, Student Governor

Max was a student governor. Prior to his involvement as a governor, he had little knowledge of the Governing Council. His interest in the position began through his participation with a student group at the University. A member of the administration that liaised with the group suggested he run for a position on the Governing Council. Without a strong understanding of what was involved, he decided to become a student governor candidate, since what he knew of the position was of sparked an interest in him. He also felt encouraged by others.

He considered his role to be one of “overall oversight with the intent of what’s going to affect the university in the future”. He believed that some student governors may have placed more focus on student affairs and how decisions affected students, but he concentrated on the future. He considered how issues affected all students, including part time, full time,
undergraduates and graduates, and also concerned with how the university was perceived by others locally and globally.

There were some activities that Max was involved with which he did not expect prior to becoming a governor. He listed invitations to various events, openings of new facilities and other ceremonial occasions including convocations. He saw these events as opportunities to advertise the role of the Governing Council to fellow students and others. He had also been asked to sit on other committees in addition to his regular responsibilities of being a governor.

When asked about how he prepared for meetings, Max described the packages of information governors are given to read. He said there was not always adequate time for all materials, so his approach to the readings was to look at the agenda to determine whether there was an area that was more controversial or areas of his own concern such as student financial aid or others he was passionate about. He looked at items and reading materials that related to key issues he was focused on, and then areas that were of concern for the university overall such as a new construction. In that example, he would question whether the construction project interfered with the daily activities of the institution and how it could benefit the university. He noted that there was a lot of information, and a lot of activity, so he placed his focus on certain areas.

Max participated in both informal and formal discussions with others to gather information before a vote. Informally, the student governors met and discussed current issues and their relation to other activities. They also met less formally with senior administration, such as the President or Vice-Provost. Max valued the work of the alumni governors and their invitation to student governors for a meeting to discuss issues and governance at the start of the year. He said that the group of alumni governors were, “very much interested in what the students have to say, and they are very much interested in what our feelings are, what are certain
topics, as well as, we like to find out what is happening with them. They initiate these meetings and of course they are open to informal discussions at different events or during the year”.

When asked to describe how he knows whether he is doing a good job as a governor, Max said it was difficult to answer, since there was no “real metric involved” or “checklist” which outlined whether one is effective or doing a good job. Max tried to maintain a broad perspective in doing what was best for the University as a whole, with some focus given to what was best for his constituent students. In terms of knowing whether his performance as a governor was deemed “good”, he used cues from other governors such as positive comments given to him about his contributions. Another indicator was whether other students thought he was being effective, although he found that more difficult to determine. He also engaged in self-assessment by considering whether he felt he challenged issues that may not be in line with institutional goals. He also tried to ask questions to the Governing Council, which he noted was not done by all governors. He believed that some governors had questions and issues, but did not raise them. Finally, Max cited an election result for incumbent candidates was an indicator, although he recognized that only a small minority of students vote.

As a student governor, Max experienced some level of discomfort in voting when issues of fees were presented. He strongly felt that the University had a limited amount of money, and the government distributed a limited amount despite the University’s ongoing efforts to obtain more funding. Max usually voted in favour of fee increases because he did not want faculties and divisions to make cut backs which negatively affected the students that elected him. In his experience, votes regarding fees always come with “the most student activity, the most student resistance, protests and vocalization by students”. In dealing with his vote, Max told others that although he recognized that funding was a problem, and although he did not like having a
minority viewpoint among the student population, he voted based on what he believed to be right.

Voting based on the interests of the institution verses the demands on the constituency was something that Max thought a number of student governors debated. In his opinion, some student governors arrived at Governing Council with the thought that they were elected by students to represent students, and therefore their vote should reflect the viewpoints of student unions and the student body. Max viewed things differently, and as he previously mentioned, he considered how decisions affect the overall university. He raised concerns such as the availability of student aid when discussing fee increases, and voted according to what he felt would be in the best interest of the institution as opposed to what could be seen as best for any one group or area of the university. Max was also careful to run a truthful campaign and tried to make voting students aware of where he stood on issues, especially concerning tuition fees. He felt it was important that accurate information was available to students so that they could be informed voters. He credited being transparent on issues during the campaign period as a way for him to be confident in his choice of vote and eliminate possible pressures from his constituency to vote a certain way, because students indicated they supported his viewpoints by electing him. Max did not believe that being a student affected how he carried out his role as governor. He saw the Governing Council as one body that represented different groups, but that his responsibility was to the overall university.

In reflecting back to his initial expectations of the role, Max admitted he was not too sure what to expect. He found that as time went on, he grew more comfortable with his role and developed his approach where he focused on certain issues or a couple of items with the overall institution in mind.
Max believed that governors have a great deal to gain from the experience, and that the benefits vary from person to person. For some, he said it was an impressive piece to add to a resume. But for him, the most significant benefit was gaining an understanding of how the institution functions. He considered returning as an alumni governor one day, and said that his experience was a positive one and he planned to find opportunities to further involve himself in university governance in the future.

In thinking about how the experience of elected governors could be improved, Max said a meeting initiated by the alumni governors to meet with newly elected students was a positive starting point. Max believed student governors in particular need to be reminded of the primary goal of bettering the university overall. Students also needed to recognize the importance of working with other governors on committees and working at “grassroots levels”. He noted that some student governors were adversarial and mitigated the benefits of working alongside alumni and other governors when they portrayed an “us vs. them” attitude. To begin to remedy this, Max pointed out that not only would student governors need a shift in their approach, but the Governing Council would need to communicate better with the student unions in order to share viewpoints. Regarding student governors, it was Max’s opinion that, “they would be more effective if they worked with the Governing Council to effect change... there have been other student governors that have been able to effect change at what I call the grassroots level of Governing Council”.

More training and orientation sessions could address the amount of learning student governors found to be a challenge. Max suggested that mandatory training should be held following the election period in the spring, which would include observing a Governing Council meeting and a discussion on current issues and how they were approached by the University. He
also felt there was minimal to no training offered to members of committees and boards, and believed they would benefit from increased training and learning opportunities. Max was also concerned by the small number of students that participated in elections. He felt students needed to take greater initiatives to inform themselves and involve themselves, and gain a better awareness of the Governing Council. He suggested hosting information town halls between students and members of the Council, which he believed would help new student governors learn about the institution and the role of governor since they would be better informed early in their term. Another area to assist with this issue would be the spring training sessions followed by a “buddy” system where student governors would be matched with other governors and could form mentor relationships.

Max noticed that a number of student governors held elected position on student bodies prior to becoming Council members. He saw an opportunities for student unions to advertise the position and the purpose of the Council, which would complement the efforts of the Governing Council members and Secretariat to engage students in governance activities. Given that alumni governors were successful in welcoming and mentoring newly elected student governors, Max suggested they help reach out to the student body in the form of a town hall or gathering with student unions, as an avenue for further awareness and discussion. Max thought more students would become involved in elections as either voters or candidates with continued efforts to make information available online and easy to navigate.

Another area of improvement that Max saw was helping student governors be confident and reduce the intimidation that can be felt in a meeting with successful alumni, government appointees, and senior faculty. He thought it would be beneficial for students interested in becoming governors to observe Governing Council, Board, and Committee meetings. He
believed that students enter their positions with ideas of what they would like discussed, debated and changed; however meetings of the Governing Council did not provide the same open debate that they may be familiar with at the student union level. As an improvement to this, he would encourage new student governors to sit with different governors at each meeting and learn from them, and he believed that this would help decrease the initial intimidation that many student governors felt. He also thought it important for student governors to realize how approachable members of the Governing Council were, along with individuals involved in senior administration and the Governing Council Secretariat.

Max added that the intimidation felt by student governors was not always from experienced members of the Council, but also from peers involved in student unions. He recognized the challenge that students governors faced in declaring that they, for example, planned to vote in favour of a tuition increase or other changes in fees structures. For this reason, he believed a student union position should only be a secondary involvement for students interested in being a governor. Students taking on both roles during the same time period should consider the Governor role as their primary focus and responsibility. He also suggested the notion of Governing Council requiring that a student elected for a governor position not be permitted to also hold a position on a student union during the same term, due to the potential conflict, intimidation or pressure on which way to vote.

A final improvement Max wanted to see was an increase in the number of students voting in the student elections. He visited classes during the campaign period to talk about the Governing Council, and learned that many students were not aware of it. He proposed that Governing Council members take part in reaching out to the student body through events such as Frosh Week. The goal would be to create visibility and awareness of the Council, encourage
students to vote, and encourage upper year students to get involved as governors. Max believed that the student body should be more informed about the role of the Governing Council because everything the Council engaged in related to students. He remarked that even an understanding of the presence of the Council and the different levels of governance would be of benefit to first year students.

Max concluded by addressing a comment he often heard about the number of student governors on the Council. There are 8 student members out of 50, which some believed to be low. However, Max asked others to consider the number of constituencies that exist including faculty, administration, government appointees and argued 8 is a significant number. His approach in thinking about his potential level of influence was that if he was able to discuss his viewpoint with others and convinced them to share his viewpoint, then the level of support on an issue would increase. He says, “all of a sudden it’s no longer 8, it could be 15”.

**Interview Summary: Rosie, Student Governor**

Rosie was a student member of the Governing Council. When Rosie was in her first year, a senior student told her about student membership on the Governing Council. Rosie said that most students do not know that this opportunity exists. During her second year as an undergraduate student, Rosie served in an elected position on a large student society. At the end of her term she decided she was ready for a position on the Governing Council, she saw this role as the next step in her involvement on campus. Rosie described herself as someone that always enjoyed advocacy roles. While she was an elected member of the student society she saw herself as an agent of change for students. She would consult with people about their needs, and discuss things like funding student clubs and student group issues. She thought that since she had
experience with individual student issues and student groups, she could bring her perspective to the Governing Council.

Based on her experience, Rosie described what was expected of her as a governor. She said governors were expected to prepare and attend meetings, give input and vote. She mentioned that other duties included sitting on the committees, sharing her perspective and speaking her mind. Rosie also commented on the level of student expectations placed on her role, “students might expect more of you, or different of you, they might expect certain things to get done”. However, she also noted that the student expectations were related to campaign promises governor hopefuls made during the campaign period. For this reason, she was careful to only promise to do her best and listen to students. Rosie was proud that during her term, she always tried to do her best and always tried to think clearly. When asked to expand on her comment regarding student expectations, Rosie said she felt some of the differences were seen from faculty to faculty, and that her faculty did not place strong expectations on her relating to what her opinions on issues should be or how she should vote during meetings. She described that some students however, “expect you to fight the man” and stop tuition increases as the student governor’s primary goals for the year. She also felt that the student unions expected student governors to be more of their advocate and to work closely with them on issues. Despite these expectations, Rosie did not receive a great deal of unsolicited lobbying emails or communications from students. In fact, there were times where she solicited it by distributing her email for people to raise concerns with her on a controversial issue. She said sometimes the student unions would lobby the governors as a whole. She described one instance as “really hostile and confrontational” although the intent may have been lobbying. She did not find the approach to be of one where the student groups were trying to influence the vote, but rather
“yelling at people for doing something that they didn’t like”. In a separate instance, she was approached by a department Chair about an issue that she was known to be against. Rosie saw this as a positive experience. She was not intimidated or pressured, and instead discussed the issue with the Chair prior to the vote, and influenced change that would benefit students prior to the motion being brought to a vote at the Governing Council meeting.

In discussing the role of governor, Rosie spoke about responsibilities, duties and involvements in addition to attending meetings and voting. She mentioned that there were numerous invitations to sit on other committees, although they were optional, such as planning committees for new buildings and overseeing the ombudsperson. As part of her role, Rosie would also spend time preparing for meetings by trying to consult with others if there was a controversial item being discussed. This included talking to fellow students, student unions, and other governors. She valued regular meetings where governors informally got together in smaller groups and discussed issues before formal meetings. Her purpose for consulting with different groups, particularly on controversial issues was to develop an informed opinion, as she cited one of her biggest difficulties was getting only one perspective from documents distributed to governors. She said her job was not to accept what was presented to her, but instead to bring her own informed perspective that others might not have. She found that bringing new information was the real value of governors. Something Rosie valued as a governor was the ability to discuss issues in optional, offline meetings with senior administrators such as the Provost, Vice-Provost and President. Rosie attended such meetings approximately once each month, and used that avenue to “get the real stuff done” and “convince someone of your point of view”.
In addition to expectations that she said students had of governors, she also mentioned that there were expectations that governors had of each other. This included active attendance at formal and informal meetings, as well as speaking at meetings. Governors that were not doing this were seen as “just kind of filling a seat”. Another indicator that showed her whether governors were doing a “good job” was a re-election, although she also noted that re-elections were not the best measure of performance, and blamed low turnout and little interest in Governing Council elections. She experienced more useful feedback on her performance as a governor from other governors, administrators, students, and the student media. People would let her know if they do not like what she is doing. Alternatively, she said that for the few comments she made during meetings, others have congratulated her and told her they appreciated her contribution.

There were times when Rosie felt uncomfortable with a vote. She particularly noted times when she felt that as a governor, “you’re supposed to be there in the interests of the University, but to a certain extent you’re also representing the interests of the students, and you’re trying to balance those two”. In situations where the two were in conflict, Rosie voted with her conscience. She talked with people if she was unsure about an issue, made efforts to solicit input, talked to her faculty Dean, and students in her own and other faculties. The conflict did not make her feel uncomfortable, but she did feel a certain amount of pressure from her constituency when voting on specific issues particularly around the issue of tuition. Students placed a lot of pressure to vote in one way, and some pressure was felt from administration to vote the other way. Rosie was always careful not to make promises and to maintain integrity. She said that there are not that many downsides to doing what you think is right, and that if you do something that is unpopular but right, people will respect you. She also found voting easier in
instances where she felt her vote would not have a large impact. She cited votes on tuition as an example, where she was comfortable having objections to parts of a proposed tuition increase, since she knew her vote would not lead to the university being in a deficit position. Voting on behalf of her constituency allowed her to make a statement and represent student interests.

Rosie felt that being a student member influenced how she carried out her role as an elected governor. Not only was she trying to find the balance between representing student interests along with the university interests at times when they did not align, but she also felt that student governors were somewhat at arms-length from the administration. In her opinion, students did not share the same stakes in some decisions and that allowed them to be more critical or more unbiased, which she felt was one of her strengths as a governor. Rosie also noted that being a student governor may have affected the sympathies student governors have in cases of academic appeals and expulsions.

Rosie was asked to reflect on her initial expectations and motivations towards the role. Although she felt she had been able to make a difference, she expected her vote to matter a great deal more, but instead described it as a rubber stamp in the governance process. Other than that, she did not have many expectations prior to being elected.

She felt that she learned and benefitted from her experience as a governor, and that most governors did too. Through the experience, she gained confidence and experience in public speaking, and benefitted from meeting interesting and influential people. From the student perspective, she noted this could translate to a reference for a job or graduate school. There was also a great deal of learning that came with being in a leadership role, and from running in an election, where a student may campaign to a class of 1000 students.
Rosie found the experience valuable, but recognized areas where the experience could be improved for elected students, staff, and faculty and alumni governors. A major area of concern to her was ensuring a strong transition from year to year. Rosie believed the biggest challenge was that students only hold one year terms. She noted that some student governors only became comfortable in the role in January or February, at which point half the term had passed, leaving only a small window for them to be effective given the February and March election period. She said anything that could help gaining knowledge would largely improve the student governor experience, and talked about efforts already being made by the alumni governors. The outgoing and incoming alumni governors and student governors met, talked, and created an opportunity to share ideas.

Rosie mentioned there had been some talk of making student governors have a two-year term instead of a one-year term. She was not sure if that was a good idea, but liked the idea of helping student governors become more experienced. In part, this was because students would not be able to be elected during their final year, or if they were, there would be student governors who graduated and were no longer students. She also found some fault in the elections process for student governors. She described block voting, where if there were two seats free, there were two votes. In the case of the Faculty of Arts and Science, there were up to 20 people running, which led to candidates being elected with only 15% of the vote. Further, she stated the number of voters fluctuated from year to year.

Rosie suggested that the training provided to governors should be improved. Although the orientation provided information on topics such as meeting procedures, she found the orientation too formal. In her opinion, more informal information needed to be shared. This included information about what was reasonable for governors to try to accomplish. For
example, perhaps it was unrealistic for student governors to try to change the Council’s position on an important issue. A more reasonable goal for a governor might be to share information on the issue so that the Council was more aware of multiple perspectives. She also thought it was important for incoming governors to know that a great deal of change occurred in the offline sessions she described earlier, where 3-4 students met informally with a member of the administration about an upcoming issue. She indicated that especially for students, that was where change could occur, not by “forcing an issue”. She cited that there were only 8 students out of 50 governors on the Governing Council, so trying to force any issue was not an effective approach. Overall, Rosie found her experience on the Governing Council to be enjoyable and very rewarding.

**Interview Summary: Dorothy, Staff/Faculty Governor**

Dorothy has worked at the University of Toronto for many years. During this time, she served on several boards, committees and task forces. Her past experiences and her desire to enhance the experience for students, staff and faculty led to her interest in being a member of the Governing Council. She felt that her past experiences prepared her for the role, and that being a governor was a good next step for her.

She described the duty of governors was to carry out the role honestly and with integrity. She explained that it is the fiduciary responsibility of governors to serve in the best interest of the University, not the best interest of the constituents. Although she would definitely stand by the needs of her constituents providing it did not diminish from her main objective, “to act in good faith to protect the financial and fiscal interests of the university”. In her decision making process, she also weighed in the quality of the staff, faculty and student experience.
In further describing the role, Dorothy explained the expectation that governors serve on at least two committees. In terms of her own interest, she served on a task force and participated in informal meetings with other Governing Council members when necessary. She dedicated approximately 10 hours to her role each month.

Dorothy determined whether she was doing a “good job” as a governor by keeping her objective in mind. She said, “our fiduciary responsibility of acting in good faith, and trust, is definitely one that keeps me grounded in realizing that I must serve Governing Council well, ensuring that my vote is made with fairness, no conflicts of interest”. She strived to remain fair and impartial when making decisions for the best interest of the University. Her belief was that good governors should be “well-read on all documentation that requires discussion and approval, review the agenda, and read past minutes”. She also noted that if a governor was unsure about something, research should be done so that people were prepared upon arrival at meetings. She stressed the importance of asking questions when making decisions and voting, and remaining fair and impartial. Dorothy felt comfortable voting, so long as issues were well debated. Dorothy explained that the most difficult part in her role was that that sometimes her constituency group and sometimes student groups “bombard you with their own personal agendas”. Regarding one issue she recalled, the motion was passed through governing boards and reviewed by stakeholders before it was brought to Governing Council. She was aware that another governor was strongly against the motion, out of concern for some constituents, but she voted based on what she felt made sound business sense. Similarly, Dorothy had a strong interest in enhancing the student life at the University, however when decisions regarding fees increases were called for, she first considered the financial liabilities which may have a negative or positive bearing on the fiscal operations of the institution. Prior to her vote, she also
considered issues such as the balance between fee increases and financial aid. Dorothy took pride in putting thought into access and equity issues when she deliberated on issues. In voting for or against issues related to fee increases, she considered whether the financial aid opportunities available to students through the colleges and faculties were adequate.

In addition to fulfilling her responsibility in preparing for, attending and participating in meetings, Dorothy described other activities she was involved in as a result of being a governor. She listed unexpected ceremonial activities such as convocation, openings of new building, awards ceremonies and other special events. She had a “wonderful time being an ambassador” for the University. She also appreciated that Governing Council held meetings on all three campuses, as it provided governors with an “opportunity to appreciate the richness of academia, getting to know the campus better, learning more about co-curricular and extracurricular pursuits”. Overall, she felt as though participating in activities as a governor was an “honour and a privilege”.

Dorothy believed that she benefited and learned from her experience as a governor on the Governing Council. She found it “inspiring to be surrounded by brilliant governors, be it academics, students, alumni, government appointees, and administration, each bringing to the table their wealth of expertise, intelligence, maturity, integrity, accomplishments, and most importantly, their wonderful articulate approach in the discussion process”. For her, meeting these individuals made her experience “exceptionally beneficial and an educationally rich exercise”. Dorothy credited her experience as a governor to building her confidence for speaking at meetings and defending issues when needed, being articulate, and feeling empowered to add her vote. She also attributed her “expertise on public speaking, debating, networking and connecting with individuals, both on a personal, board, and community level” to
her role as governor. She learned a great deal about the operations of the University of Toronto, from economic challenges, personnel issues, ancillary operations, fundraising, strategic planning and governance.

In closing, Dorothy positively stated, “I believe that GC gives each of us the opportunity to have a voice at many levels. My constituency has had trust in my leadership. This in itself makes me feel proud to serve them in their best interest, and at the same time it gives me a sense of pride and ownership to protect the assets and image of our great university”.

**Interview Summary: Austin, Faculty/Staff Governor**

Austin first considered serving on the Governing Council after it was suggested to him that he become involved in university governance. When he was forwarded a notice about upcoming elections for Governing Council, he seized the opportunity as he thought it would be a good experience for him. Reflecting back, he does not think he fully appreciated that the elected governors from his constituency in the past were much more “seasoned and senior” than he was, however he was never discouraged by anyone and was subsequently elected. Prior to starting his role, he found it helpful to speak with another governor about the position. He also attended a June meeting of the Council in anticipation of being a voting member in the following September. Austin said “In retrospect, I probably spent more time actually talking to people about the role after I was elected than before I had chosen to run. I think at the time I was sort of “ok I’ll be a joiner I’ll try to contribute what I contribute, but I may have to do a fair amount of learning on the job”.

After having been in the role, Austin described the stages of his development as a governor. Upon initially becoming a governor, he spent time “grasping process and structure and really understanding some of the basics of the university”. He described the time required to
understand the university, its complexities and “just the basics of how business flows through the structure”. He also needed time to understand the governance process, where and when to provide input or not, and how to best influence how things proceeded. He described his early experience as a Governor by saying, “I jumped into the frying pan and then into the fire”, and that “there were a lot of conversations and meetings and it was a bit overwhelming for me not knowing who all the players were and trying to figure out who’s really going to make this decision”. He recalled attending meetings with little to say during his first year.

During what he called his next stage as a governor, Austin said he was more comfortable with his involvement. He also found his work on one of the boards to be interesting because some of the issues and discussions related to his interests and knowledge base. He was pleased with his contributions and attributed a great deal of his success to bringing a perspective, and “being a voice, not necessarily a voice first but ears first and a voice second around the table”.

Austin described himself as being more mature in the role in recent times. He expanded the boards he served on in order to learn more about different areas, and his attitude changed as he recognized that not only was he contributing as a governor, but that it was also professional education for him. He valued the experience of being a part of the decision making process for a large organization, as well as learning from people he has interacted with through his role. He said this was not something that can be learned from a professor in a classroom. He noted that he learned a great deal from other board members as well as members of the administration and the knowledge they hold. Austin appreciated that both were very accessible and helpful in understanding issues that were presented to the Council. He felt that his mature attitude developed to a point that he was better equipped to ask questions that “dig halfway in between”. In summarizing his role as a Governor, Austin said “it would be being ears and a voice around
the table, not always having specific expertise to bring to any issues, but just one more sane voice when issues came up. I’d say if I had to really count the number of times I stood up at Governing Council on an issue, very limited. The number of times I would have said something in one of the boards, much more often”.

Austin added that a great deal of conversation on current issues occurred in informal meetings between governors from different constituencies. The same was true for informal meetings between governors and members of the university administration, the vice-presidents, President, or the Council Chair. Meetings such as these occurred regularly, and issues that were of concern were shared and discussed.

Outside of regular Board, Council and informal meetings, Austin talked about unexpected activities that he participated in as a part of his role. “I didn’t know I would get continual invitations to march in academic procession at convocation!” he laughed. Austin also commented on the high number of unsolicited emails he received from people who were concerned about different issues. He mentioned that at times, emails were not relevant to the University or matters of governance, and that some individuals were very persistent while others made polite requests. As the recipient of these communications, Austin distinguished between what he labelled “general email blasts” where he would reply by requesting the sender to not send similar subsequent emails or ignore them altogether. There were however, times where he became more involved by putting concerned individuals in touch with the appropriate member of the university administration so that discussions could take place, and both the individual or group perspective and the university’s perspective could be shared. Austin described that he was sometimes caught between his colleagues and the decisions of the Council. He said he was sometimes:
…surrounded by people here that I work with everyday who had strong feelings about something that the university, in their view, was not handling the way they would like it to be handled, but at the same time being informed by other members of the administration about being consistent, having a consistent stance for the university and trying to broker that back and forth.

Austin saw this conflict between the needs of his constituents and the interests of the university as a challenge for governors.

Austin told a story of another unexpected experience that he had with a student journalist following a Governing Council meeting. He was approached by a student journalist that was “really pushing” for a quote from him regarding a vote that had just occurred. He was followed from the meeting room to the full distance of his car door. He noted that the student journalist was “very polite but very persistent” and he did not appreciate the student’s actions. Austin then described how his experience with some student shaped his perception of them by saying, “On the whole I have to say the experience of how I perceive student governors and student representatives that came to Governing Council… I was rarely impressed. Everyone seemed to have an agenda; everyone seemed to be highly politicized”. Austin described the behaviour and attitudes he witnessed as inappropriate despite “repeated efforts to try to work with them or to try to guide them towards more constructive, more effective means of interacting”. He argued that a root problem with the role of student governors was that they were elected by a minority of the student constituency, which resulted in a few votes having a significant impact on election results. Austin said he was aware of complaints about poor demonstrations during campaigns and was disappointed by that. In regards to what he saw from some student governors, Austin added, “I wasn’t necessarily expecting disappointing, toxic representation, which I think on occasion it’s turned into”. He said that students have the option of approaching being a governor from two perspectives; “you can look at it as an opportunity to show your fellow students how
radical and anti-administration you can be by walking right up to the administration and
misbehaving sort of with a front row seat on the Governing Council, or you can use the
opportunity to learn how to work in a group, a governance model, and you can actually advance
your career”.

Austin spoke about finding himself in unique and unexpected social situations, where
often people were not aware that he was a governor, but had plenty to say about decisions made
at the University. People remarked about a project taken on by the University, such as a new
construction, and Austin would be well informed on the issue having recently voted on it.
However, he also commented on his occasional hesitation to engage in these casual
conversations, as he realized that some individuals were upset with decisions that were made.
He described two instances where a neighbour and a friend were upset about two recent votes
that had taken place. In each case, he told them that he heard presentations on the issues,
described what happened and what alternatives were discussed. Austin remarked on his
experience as a governor by saying, “you really take on a role as an advocate for the university
or the interpreter of university affairs for people outside the buildings, outside the campus”.

Austin had his own approach to assessing his effectiveness as a Governor. His self-
evaluation was based on meeting preparation and attendance. He commented on a need for a
formal review of governor performance, “I would say what’s missing in the governance
experience at U of T is a formal review or feedback from a board or chair or a Governing
Council chair or even a senior council member of your constituency. Now, it may be that this
sort of assessment is done by exclusion, meaning unless you are not pulling your weight, unless
you’re not doing what people want you to do you’re not going to hear anything. But I’m not sure
on that either”. Austin spoke of compliments that were given by other governors, administration
or the secretariat to governors who make strong, thoughtful points, which could be considered feedback on performance. However he said there is not any formal communication from the Governing Council outlining basic performance areas, for which he gave the example of how many meetings were attended versus missed. Austin continued, “I think if you use a swimming analogy, that’s very much keeping your head above water and figuring out which way the current is floating, and whether you’re going to swim along it or against it or aside it”. However, he said that it was a real challenge for governors with only one-year terms to be effective. In his experience, one year was not adequate time to become involved in governance.

When it was time to vote, Austin did not normally find it difficult to make decisions. He voted for and against motions and abstained on occasion, but in his view much of the decision making occurred at the board and committee level. The Governing Council, he said, “is not there to re-open, re-examine and re-decide things coming from other bodies. The intention that I believe is there is to make sure that process has been followed…with the appropriate evaluation and analysis”. Austin thought that most governors voted with a similar attitude, but expressed his belief that students “tend to vote a little more with their heart” especially in instances of student expulsion or sanctions. He described that attitude as being somewhat immature, although he recognized that the challenge existed for a number of governors. Despite the challenge, Austin firmly stated that governors should not vote based on the interests of their constituency, but rather “to vote in the best interest of the university because that’s what trusteeship is and really, a governor, a Governing Council position is a form of trusteeship”.

As Austin reflected on his initial expectations and motivations towards the role, he discovered that he has grown more confident and self-assured in his ability to form and share his opinion. He said that there were governors who spoke at meetings with little substance and little
influence in their comments. However, in his experience, he had become more vocal and opinionated than when he first became a governor. He recounted one instance where he was confident enough to speak his thoughts in a recent meeting, in a way that he would not have considered doing during his first year.

His confidence in expressing his opinion was not the only thing that Austin felt he gained from serving on the Governing Council. From a career perspective, his involvement in the Governing Council led him to be more involved in governance related roles and budgets within his division. Austin also highly valued the variety of individuals he met and worked with. He described the collective group of governors in saying:

…everyone’s there for the same reason, they believe in the institution, they want to help the institution, they want to play a role, and everybody brings what they are going to bring. And whether they bring something having been a Premier of the Province of Ontario, or being a big CEO running a major company or being a student or being a faculty member, they’ve all got the same reason. And then the alumni, I sort of keep missing out on the alumni when I talk about them, but some of the most motivated and strident voices around the table are alumni. That’s not just because they think they have a financial stake in the institution, because they are big donors, but because they have strong feelings.

Austin did not think there was a great deal that needed to be done to improve the experience of governors. However, he did think there was room for structured feedback so that governors would have a better understanding of their performance. He commented that some thought should be put into increasing the length of terms that students serve so that they are governors for longer than one year similar to other governors. He placed great value in the learning that occurred from serving in the role, and felt that one year was not adequate time to gain experience. Austin said it would be difficult to restrict students from running in elections for their final year because they would only be a year away from graduation. Given that difficulty, Austin was asked to think about other ways to help students be effective governors
and he suggested the notion of overlapping terms to ensure that each year the student governor collective is comprised of new and returning governors. He believed this would also help with the unwelcomed behaviour he said was displayed by some student governors, which he felt should not be tolerated. In his opinion, “there’s very little consequence for being very unreasonably poorly behaved as a student governor. And I think although the student governor, in doing so, may think that they’ve just achieved something wonderful, they’ve actually robbed themselves of an opportunity to make change or be heard in a constructive way. Because what really happens everybody else turns off their ears, or at least their ears stay open but their brain closes off…” Austin said he wonders if more structure might help in shaping students’ understanding of what behaviour would help them become more effective governors. He noted that he does not see this as a problem for other governors, and suggested that more thought be put into the student role. However, he also recognized a challenge when “being overly authoritarian and not letting students speak their minds” which he saw as contradictory to the underlying principle of having elected members in the governance process.

It was clear that Austin valued his experience as a governor on the Governing Council. He said that if he was to start over, he would make sure he served for the full number of terms allowed, and also divest himself of some of his other responsibilities in order to dedicate more of himself to the governor position. He would also make a stronger effort to be less shy early on, although he knew this was easier said than done. He would also like to see stronger mentorship ties among governors, particularly elected students, staff and faculty. He believed that alumni and LGIC governors were in a different league since many were already members of other boards and had an easier time becoming active contributors.
Interview Summary: Ming-Ming, Alumni Governor

Years after graduation, Ming-Ming became an active alumni volunteer. She also served as a representative on an alumni body, and in another senior governance role held by alumni. At the end of her term for this position, she thought about what other involvements interested her and decided that she should run for an alumni governor position. She felt she had something to offer. She had also attended a number of Governing Council meetings and felt she would be a good fit for the role.

Ming-Ming described being a governor by clarifying the role that governors play, “we are not the managers of the university; we are the trustees of the university”. She strived to be a representative for alumni, and considered her constituency when discussions took place. As motions were debated, she was interested in finding out how the possible outcome might affect alumni or what roles alumni might play, and how the vote might affect her divisional alma mater. She considered these things although she was mindful of the entire university. It was important for her to ask questions relating to her divisional alma mater since she felt it lacked representation and as a result she did not believe it was fairly dealt with. Similarly, she felt it was important to act as a voice for the Mississauga and Scarborough campuses.

When preparing for meetings, Ming-Ming spent time reading materials. This included documentation that supported agenda items, minutes from past meetings, and minutes from the boards that she did not sit on. She noted that once items arrived to the Governing Council, they were likely previously discussed in detail so reading the minutes prevented her from asking questions that have already been answered. She was also comfortable with asking questions of deans and principals and others. Although she did not set up meetings to review issues with vice-presidents often, she mentioned that she was aware other elected governors did this. When
she had questions about an item slated to be presented at an upcoming meeting, she would often email the Secretary or the Chair of the Governing Council so that she could know the answer in advance of meetings. She did this in instances where she felt discussion during the meeting would not be time well used. Finally, Ming-Ming mentioned that there was a great deal of discussion that occurred outside of Council meetings which helped her to prepare to vote. The alumni governors met a few times during the year, and met with the President and with the student governors. They also met for a lunch with the Chair. Informally, before and after meetings, at events or receptions, Ming-Ming said that there were conversations that would take place if someone was concerned about something or had a question.

Despite the time and thought put into being a Governor, Ming-Ming believed that it would be hard for someone to gauge whether a governor was doing a good job by simply observing a Governing Council meeting. She, like some others, seldom spoke and instead contributed to greater discussion and debate at the board or committee level. She knew she was performing well as a governor from a personal feeling of satisfaction. She also received positive comments and informal feedback on her contributions at meetings from others around the table, which was an indicator of her effectiveness.

As a voting member, Ming-Ming almost always felt comfortable putting forth her vote. The only instance she felt some level of discomfort was during motions relating to fee increases. She explained, “Intellectually you know that the tuition fee increases are absolutely necessary or the quality that the education that the students get is going to go down. But you get the very dissatisfied few, either sitting in at the meeting, or outside with a loudspeaker trying to disrupt the proceedings. And I don’t really feel uncomfortable about voting for the increase, I just feel uncomfortable about those students”. On a few occasions, she did not vote in favour of a motion
and items were sent back to boards or committees for more work. In those cases, the viewpoint to send an item back was shared with the majority of the governors.

In regards to unexpected activities she was involved with due to being a governor, she mentioned a large number of invitations to attend events and receptions, and join meetings and committees. Ming-Ming tried to attend these events whenever possible as a representative of the university. She took her position as an alumni member of the Governing Council very seriously. She participated in alumni events and meetings, which allowed her to keep abreast of her constituent’s needs and opinions, while also informing them on issues she was aware of through her role. She considered herself an “information highway” in this regard and enjoyed being able to provide that avenue for communication. Ming-Ming also involved herself with current students, which afforded her the opportunity to gain a student point of view as well. She believed this was vital because “ultimately the number one constituency that any governor is there for is the students…everything that happens at Council and the committees should have that in mind, how it affects students”. Ming-Ming would often speak at meetings about something that was brought to her attention by speaking informally with members of the university community who were not involved in university governance.

When asked to reflect on her experience compared to her initial expectations of being a governor, Ming-Ming said that the most challenging part was the amount of knowledge she needed to gain about the institution and governance processes, despite her belief that she was already quite knowledgeable going into the role. She believed this challenge was felt by most governors, particularly the student governors who served for shorter terms and did not have the opportunity to develop themselves as effective governors. She said, “as your experience increases your effectiveness increases, so you know when to shut-up and when to speak”. Ming-
Ming felt that some student governors and the student constituency in particular were challenging at times. She said they “appear to be anarchistic and we still haven’t found an effective way to deal with that so that the business of this huge corporation really can run smoothly”.

Ming-Ming’s advice to new governors trying to learn about their role and the University was to ask “who” and “what” when decision-making and be involved in discussion and activities as much as possible. Over time, Ming-Ming learned who at the university was responsible for different areas, and in some cases how effective they were or were not. She also praised the President in saying that, “what he is telling you is the absolute honest trust and no matter how it may hurt his reputation, he’ll be very honest about his actions, and I find that so admirable”. Ming-Ming remarked that she knew one governor who was very effective during meetings, but less involved as he was frequently absent. She did not feel this was adequate and commented, “we don’t want people who are effective half of the time”. In order to help governors through the initial learning period, Ming-Ming engaged in an informal mentoring relationship with newly elected student and alumni governors. This provided student governors with a person to speak with, answer questions, introduce them to others, and clarify the purpose of the role.

Ming-Ming spent a great deal of time in her role as Governor. She was aware of the time commitment before she was elected, and was assumed that her contributions during her first year would be modest, but that here contribution to the work of the Council would increase as her experience increased. However, she did not think that all governors realized these two things prior to obtaining the position and she recalled one alumni governor who had great potential to be highly effective, but decided not to run for re-election, because he felt did not feel he was an effective governor. Ming-Ming was confident that the feeling of ineffectiveness would have
diminished with more experience, and described situations like this as a “huge loss”. She also
described her experience with the strong efforts that were made to ensure the best people were
elected as alumni governors. She was interested in the motivations of candidates and was wary
of individuals she thought might be running to add the title to their resume as opposed to
volunteering for the betterment of the institution. Efforts were also made to ensure that alumni
governors were equipped with information they needed to become effective, although Ming-
Ming did not think that candidates had a strong idea of what the position entails. Alumni
governor candidates were given a large amount of reading material which she found to be an
indicator of the amount of time one needed to dedicate to the position. She sometimes wondered
if newly elected governors spend the time to read what they were given, which included the
mission, institutional statements and other relevant documents. Ming-Ming placed importance
on preparing for the position by reviewing these documents in detail, and in attending Governing
Council and Board meetings prior to being elected.

Ming-Ming indicated that there were some areas of the governor experience and the
governance process that could be improved. She pointed out the need for alumni governors to
continue working with student governors. While most were wonderful, she said others needed to
understand that “we’re on their side”. She said, “there are some who come with the proverbial
chip on their shoulders that we’re all corporate hacks who are out to screw the students. And I
wish there was a way to assist them to understand that we’re not”. The result was that governors
would often shut-down and stop listening if they felt time was being wasted. Ming-Ming spoke
about one student governor who she felt has realized how to change her approach to be more
productive instead of relying on previous “tactics running counterproductive to what she wants”.
Ming-Ming’s experience also included instances where issues were raised despite not being appropriate for governors to discuss, because it was not an issue of governance but rather the responsibility of another person or department. She also distinguished between management and governance, noting that governors were not managers, but rather volunteers. Management issues were not always raised by student governors, she clarified, on occasion they were been raised by staff or teaching governors who were misinformed. Ming-Ming said sometimes individuals simply wanted governors to hear about an issue, but she felt it was a misuse of time since governors were generally already aware about issues on campus. She believed there was a need for meetings to become more efficient by removing discussion that was not necessary. She summarized, “why make a meeting two hours long when it should have been an hour and a quarter because you’ve had your five minutes say on every motion?”

When asked to describe what she has personally learned or how she has benefitted from serving as a governor, Ming-Ming laughed and said “I couldn’t begin!” She took personal satisfaction in seeing how her work and the work of the Council benefitted the institution, students, staff and teaching staff. She valued the “incredible people” she worked with and socialized with. She volunteered in different areas for years, and described being a governor by saying “It is the ultimate volunteer job just by the amount of time and effort and thought that has to go into it. It’s incredible what you get out of it as a volunteer. When people thank you for assisting them in some way, whether it’s a student governor or an alumnus or whatever… It’s immeasurable. I’m a happy governor”.

*Interview Summary: Diego, Alumni Governor*

Diego was an alumni governor. As he reflected back on his undergraduate experience, the University of Toronto was a very meaningful place to him and played a role in his decision to
continue his education. Years ago he was contacted by the University regarding a project unrelated to governance. That project led him to return to campus. In speaking with people on campus at that time, he decided he would like to be involved as an alumni governor and felt that his past professional experiences made him a natural fit for the role. At that point, he decided to begin the process of meeting with representative from the alumni association and became a candidate for the upcoming alumni governor elections. As an alumni governor, Diego appreciated his ability to compare life at the university today with when he was an undergraduate student, and recalled his own experience to be “idyllic” with regards to tutors and access to the best professors in the world.

In thinking about his role, Diego distinguished alumni governors from the other elected governors as being the only elected group that are from outside the university. He used the term outside to describe the fact that alumni do not spend their daily lives on the university campus. Students, staff and faculty are all elected, but come from within the institution, and so he referred to these groups as being from inside the institution. This distinction was important to Diego, because he saw the inclusion of outside governors as a requirement for a fair governance process. Outside members were expected to bring a different perspective to debate and decision making than inside members. Diego explained that not only was this his belief, it was also a matter of legislation. Diego spoke of a ruling by the Minister of University Affairs John White, during discussions regarding the draft University of Toronto Act (1971), where he said the Minister stated the composition of the Governing Council should include a 50-50 split between inside and outside governors as part of the design for a good governance process. Diego clarified that students, administrative staff, academic staff, the President and senior administrators are all inside governors, and the 16 members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor and the alumni
members make up the outside group. Although interview questions referred to alumni governors as elected members, Diego expressed that he identified himself as belonging to the outside group of governors first, and referred to himself as an elected member second. This was due to the strong sense he felt towards his duty of providing an independent perspective as member from outside the university community.

Diego believed that the University’s governance processes were straying away from the initial purpose of the University of Toronto (1971) Act, as it related to the important contribution of outside governors. He says, “I think the University, for very understandable reasons, incrementally….has gone too far in terms of the actual culture and control of decision making relative to the intent of the legislation, and where outside governors get involved and where they don’t”. He agreed with the notion that academics are best equipped to make decisions on purely academic issues. However, he felt that in recent times, the original intent of the legislation was nibbled away at to the point that there was a “blending” of pure academic issues with other areas such as budget planning for a department or faculty. Diego argued that in order to follow good governance principals outlined in the legislation, there should either be a 50-50 split of inside and outside governors, or items that are partially academic and partially not academic, or “blended” should be sent to the Business Board. Diego recognized that sometimes, shifts in the interpretation or application of policy “just happens”. Although membership of outside governors on the Governing Council was legislated in the University of Toronto Act (1971), Diego shared his concern in feeling that some Council bylaws were not designed to reinforce the importance of outside governors in decision making when stating the composition of some Boards and Committees. He was uncomfortable that some sections of the by-laws made “no mention of the legislation…so the basic principles of governance aren’t even in the bylaws”. He
also stated that if there was a desire to make changes, it should be done by going back to the government lawyers and lawmakers.

Diego described his role as a governor by saying it was “to work with all governors as governors, for the best interest of the University” and that “once you are elected, you have a role to play collectively”. He added that outside governors brought a different experience and different perspective than a faculty member would, for example. When proposals were presented from within the University, Diego saw it as his role to ask questions especially from the viewpoint of an outside member. He would “clearly, politely, challenge proposals coming from within on a whole range of issues and ask questions to the insiders”. He found this to be an important role for him, since those that were actively involved within the institution as insiders, may have lost a broader perspective or lost sight of the legislation. Diego also mentioned that there were some of his colleagues that did not see the value in having outside governors, and felt that the tradition of the academy, a place for professors and students, was more appropriate.

Despite this, Diego was confident in the role outside governors play, and noted that the job has been done well “as long as you intervene well prepared, knowledgeable….you’ve done your homework on an issue you care about and think it is important for the welfare of the University as we go to 2030”.

Diego stopped to clarify his use of the term “insider” staying that it was not used disparagingly, but was a descriptive term. He also described the different types of proposals, and said that in cases where faculty were putting forth recommendations on pure academic matters, there was not the same need for outside governors as there was with other issues that were raised. He also noted that there were instances when faculty members worked on a proposal since its inception, and were later asked to comment on their own proposal in the governance process.
Diego highlighted this situation as an example of why outside governors are needed for proper governance. When asked to vote, Diego recognized that some faculty members would be transparent and disclose their contributions to the proposal. Despite this, Diego felt there was a lack of understanding in the university community about the importance of outside governors on the Governing Council, and the role they play in bringing outside viewpoints to the governance process.

Along with being from outside the institution, alumni governors are elected governors, which Diego felt gave them an added feeling of legitimacy. He meant nothing derogative to the appointed members, but noted that alumni governors follow a very different and thorough election process. Although he recognized that appointed members are vetted carefully, Diego wondered if a more formal process should exist for appointments, however perhaps less detailed and onerous than what exists for alumni governors.

In addition to attendance at Governing Council meetings, Diego found himself involved in other committees and projects, although he did expect that would be the case once elected as governor. In some cases, he thought the invitation and requests to sit on other committees may have been because in addition to being a governor, he was also an alumnus, an outsider, or because he might have a visible connection to an issue or activity. He recognized contributing to the work of a committee or other body may result in a proposal that would be brought before Governing Council for approval. Diego then pointed out that while his contribution to a committee’s work may be valuable, as a governor he would be a position of voting on a proposal that he helped to create. He may have been brought onto a committee because of his expertise in a given area or his role as an elected governor, but would become involved in management. He noted that he would have the option to disclose that he was involved in the planning process and
choose not to comment and abstain from a vote, or depending on the situation, he said he might inform the membership of his involvement while still contributing to discussion. Diego pointed out that similar situations have occurred for faculty members who are co-opted to be a part of a committee. He drew attention to the fact that outside governors sometimes found themselves in roles that could be considered part of management. Diego gave the example of an outside governor with an expertise in finance who may be asked to serve on a committee that deals with university investments. That expertise may be a reason that individual was appointed to a position on the Governing Council in the first place, but he/she would then be a part of governance and management. A similar example would be of a realtor, since the University owns a great deal of property. There may be a need for someone with knowledge in that area to sit on the Board. Diego found this issue interesting but said he is not a purest on where his viewpoint stood given that “it’s really using people for the good of the University”.

A final issue Diego rose in relation to practices of good governance and the initial intent of legislation concerned the election of alumni governors. He said that over the years, there had been individuals who have recently retired from faculty or other positions at the university and were subsequently nominated to be alumni governors. Although these individuals remained a part of the regular alumni governor election process, he felt recent employees should not be nominated to serve as alumni governors. This was because he did not see it as being in line with the original intent of the legislation outlining board composition. Diego explained that the alumni governor position was meant to be held by individuals that were considered to be from outside the university, “from the broader community, lay members”. To this point, he said that recent faculty members and university employees therefore not be eligible to apply for alumni governor positions, since they are so recently “inside” members. Diego suggested they should
perhaps have a 5 year wait period before submitting their candidacy for an alumni governor position.

When asked about improving the experience of elected governors, Diego noted that the Task Force on Governance was examining this question. Diego put great emphasis on the role of the President, and believed that the University was “heavily dependent” on the President which he cautioned was “very dangerous in terms of corporate governance theory” because “no organization should be so heavily dependent on one”. It was Diego’s observation that there was a strong interest from “high quality people” including faculty to be involved in different aspects of governance. He thought that an improvement to the experience of governors would include involvement in the early stages of discussion around issues and setting agendas. He believed that would alleviate the confusion and feeling which has been felt on occasion regarding why he or other alumni governors were not involved at the start of certain issues being discussed. Diego commented that this also gave “a sense of ownership” as was the case with the recent Task Forces set up by President David Naylor that he and the other alumni governors really enjoyed working on. He found it exciting as they were “shaping the university”. Diego praised the work of the President in deciding on the mixed composition of the task forces, with membership that included students in addition to governors, registrars and others. He described meetings of the task force as “where the real governance took place about where the University should go, and David Naylor set it up brilliantly. Everybody felt good about it, we’re all involved in real decision making, as opposed to a rubber stamp”.

Diego described where he found his sense of performing well as a governor. The alumni governors met informally together, and met as a group with the President. He found that such meetings gave him a sense of making serious contributions as a group and in private. He also
commented that the level of trust that existed in these instances was a good indication of individuals performing well in their roles. Likewise, requests to become involved in other areas outside of regular Council work let him know that people wanted to hear what he had to contribute. In providing examples of how he determined whether he was an effective governor, Diego spoke largely about activities which took place outside of the traditional duties of governors, or the governance process. Instead he spoke of activities and informal meetings where he felt he was able to make strong contributions in discussions. In maintaining a high level of performance, Diego also noted that alumni governors were held accountable through meetings with the College of Electors each year. He applauded the rule by which once an alumni governor’s three year term ended, they must follow the same election process as new candidates. Alumni governors seeking re-election must face an open competition, and there have been governors who sought re-election without success. Diego saw this as a very positive thing, especially given that he believed “the quality and the number of highly qualified alumni are there”.

Diego appreciated his experience as a governor on the Governing Council. He enjoyed the opportunity to work on complex issues, and was “engaged in something worthwhile, engaged in something I care about”. He said “it’s totally voluntary but time consuming. I’ve been tempted to make some more money, but this is very valuable”. He described meetings that alumni governors had with newly elected student governors each spring, and found value in meeting student leaders. He was extremely positive about his involvement and meeting with “some amazing people, some of the best in North America”.

Conclusion

The interview summaries illustrate a descriptive story of the experiences of the Governing Council members that participated in the study. Although it is impossible to comment on whether participants shared their thoughts with complete honesty and openness, the experience and viewpoints that were shared provided valuable insights into their perceptions about their role and work as governors. Creating interview summaries from the verbatim interview transcripts, allowed for the data to be presented in an interesting and meaningful way. The interview summaries also served as a basis for the data analysis process, and resulting theme areas discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter begins with a description and discussion of four theme areas which were developed from the analysis of the data, using the content analysis process described in the third chapter. The four theme areas are (1) initial motivations, (2) learning and informal communication, (3) personal benefits, pride and positive experience, (4) approach to governance. Following the four theme areas, one comment of interest relating to the unique position of alumni governors is highlighted. The position of alumni governors as members from outside the institution is discussed because it was a major focus of one interview, despite not directly relating to an interview question. The chapter concludes with suggestions made by the participants on ways to improve the experience of elected governors.

The themes relating to initial motivation and to personal benefits stemmed directly from the questions posed. The learning and informal communication, approach to governance, and pride and positive experience theme areas were derived from common remarks expressed during multiple or all interviews. Discussion of each theme area is presented with pairings of the two alumni, two student and two staff/faculty governors that participated in the study. This was done to highlight or contrast the responses of the governors from each constituency within the discussion of overall governor perceptions.

Initial Motivations

Each governor participating in the study was asked to describe their initial motivations for becoming an elected member of the Governing Council. In all cases, their responses related to forms of encouragement from someone else to run for election, or past involvements which led them to consider being a governor as the “next step”, or a combination of both.
The two alumni governors, Diego and Ming-Ming, shared a passion for their alma mater. Diego described his undergraduate experience at the University of Toronto as “wonderful” and “idyllic” and noted that “this place really meant something to me”. He returned to campus to continue his involvement with the University as an alumnus, and was drawn to the role of governor through discussions with his peers. The combination of his career related experiences and knowledge, and his fondness of the University led to his decision to begin the process of becoming a candidate for the alumni governor elections. Ming-Ming’s initial motivation stemmed from her previous involvements. She was an active alumni volunteer, and was heavily dedicated to the activities of the undergraduate division she once attended. After years of involvement in various roles and capacities, Ming-Ming saw serving on the Governing Council as a new way of remaining involved. She felt that her past experiences provided her with something to offer as a governor. Her attendance at numerous Governing Council meetings allowed her to feel comfortable and ready for the role, prior to being elected. Although Diego initially considered the role through discussions with others, and Ming-Ming considered it after examining where her past involvements should take her, both alumni governors indicated that the knowledge they gained through past experiences made them more confident in their ability and their interest in being elected to the Governing Council.

The two student governors, Max and Rosie, both had little knowledge of student governor positions and attributed their initial awareness of the role to people that suggested they consider running for election. Max was an active student leader and involved in student activities on campus. He admitted that he “had very little knowledge of the existence of the Governing Council and what it stood for” and had “no real idea of what was involved” prior to becoming a governor. Similarly, Rosie was involved in student government prior to becoming a
governor, and said that most students did not know the position exists. Both Max and Rosie were initially motivated to run in the Governing Council elections after it was suggested to them by others. Max was approached by an administrative member of his division, and Rosie was made aware of the position by a senior student leader. Despite having a strong sense of the role or the work of the Governing Council, both students were interested in the position and were previously active members of the university community outside of their academics.

Austin and Dorothy first decided to run in Governing Council elections for different reasons. Austin decided to run after it was suggested to him by a colleague. He was less experienced in leadership roles than some previous governors he knew, however he never felt discouraged. He realized that he would “contribute what I could contribute, but I may have to do a fair amount of learning on the job”. Dorothy, on the other hand, came to the decision on her own, after having served on other task forces, committees and councils. For her, serving on the Governing Council made sense based on her past experiences and interests. She said, “I felt the need to represent my constituency at the highest board of the University…With my past experiences…I felt ready and prepared to face the election process and take the next leap”. Although all but one discussed past involvements as experiences that led up to their eventual candidacy, it was Dorothy and Rosie that spoke of the role as the next obvious step in their involvement with the University.

In terms of what motivated governors to first add their name to the election ballot, there was no distinction between responses based on which constituency they were elected from. Of the six governors interviewed, four governors attributed their initial motivation for becoming a governor to it being suggested to them. Another common reason to run for election was that it was considered an appropriate position, given their past experiences. All governors recognized
the importance of the role and expressed pride in serving as elected governors at various points in each interview, and so it was interesting to discover that the two main motivators were not directly related to the work they would be doing as governors. When asked what motivated them to run for election, governors did not speak of a desire to make change at the institution or make improvements, or ideals they held for the activities of the university or its governance. In fact, some admitted to seeking the position with little knowledge of what being a governor entailed. Perhaps less surprising then, was the challenge expressed by many regarding the amount of learning that needed to be done early in their terms. This common experience is discussed below as a theme which emerged through the analysis of interview data.

**Learning and Informal Communication**

Although the governors were not asked to comment on how they prepared themselves for the role, all governors but Diego spoke at some point during their interview about amount of knowledge they felt they needed to acquire in order to perform well as governors. They also all spoke about channels of informal communication that they felt helped them succeed as governors, both when they initially began the role, as well as throughout their terms.

The governors described the challenging task of learning about the institution, the governance process, and the role of governors. They named the University of Toronto’s physical size, complexity, number of people, and range of activities as reasons why the amount of learning was at times overwhelming. The complexity of the university and a governance process that many were unfamiliar with, coupled with the small number of meetings during the year, made it especially challenging for many new governors to be effective in the role.

Austin recalled the intense learning experience he encountered when first elected. He explained that it took time to learn even the basics of the university and how business “flows
through the structure”. In his early days on the Council, he sat in conversations and meetings but said very little as he found them overwhelming. The majority of what he learned was “on the job” and as he gained more experience, his comfort level and involvements increased as well. Austin said a challenging amount of learning must be done by all governors at some level. He also commented on the even greater challenge faced by student governors who serve one year terms. Although some did better than others, he did not think a year was an adequate amount of time to be effective in the position.

Regardless of her past experiences and feeling of preparedness for the role prior to being elected, alumni Ming-Ming knew that she likely “would not be doing very much in terms of a huge contribution for the first year or so”. Ming-Ming recalled having a strong understanding of the roles and responsibility of governors prior to being elected. Despite this, she commented on the amount of learning new governors do in a short amount of time, “I already had what I thought was a lot of knowledge about Council and how it worked…once you’re on Council there is about a ninety degree learning curve straight up, and I would say that for most governors. And unfortunately for the student governors, they don’t get the opportunity in a lot of cases, as your experience increases your effectiveness increases”. Ming-Ming said new governors must learn about the structure of the institution, university policies, activities carried out by different divisions and where responsibilities fall. While formal training and orientation can help governors obtain facts about the university such as structure, policy and budget, some learning comes only from experience. As an example, Ming-Ming’s experience taught her who should be consulted about an issue and she said, “sometimes you learn who not to consult…because the answer is never going to be satisfactory”. The interviews with Diego and Dorothy were the only two interviews where the amount of knowledge new governors needed to obtain was not raised
in relation to their own experience or that of others. This may be because both Diego and Dorothy had previous experiences in areas of policy or board/committee work that would have helped them to become effective members of the Governing Council. Other governors that were interviewed also had prior related involvements; but in comparison, Dorothy and Diego had more years of more directly related experience and held roles with greater responsibility.

Many governors specifically noted that student governors were the most disadvantaged when it comes to learning how to be an effective governor. Since they only serve one year terms the argument is made that they do not have an adequate opportunity to act on the knowledge they develop in their first year as a governor. In speaking about their own experiences and those of their peers, student governors felt they had a short amount of time to acquire the large amount of knowledge they felt was needed in order to be effective governors.

Along with serving for a shorter term than his elected peers, Max named other areas he found challenging as a new governor. He admitting that he “didn’t know what to expect” in the role, which likely led to the greater difficulty in learning and preparing for the role soon after the election. Max also highlighted his need to develop his confidence early in his term, given that he was working with “highly respected and successful governors”. He noted that for student governors, there was often a sense of intimidation felt from student governors advocating student needs. Rosie said the amount of learning that needed to be done was the biggest struggle faced by student governors as they started to understand a large and complicated university. Noting that the position is only held for one year, she said students were not comfortable in the role until January or February, when only a few meetings remain and only just prior to a new set of elections are held in March.
A recent study by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) reported that 94% of boards provide orientation programs to new members to help them prepare for the role (AGB, 2009, p. 2). However, while some orientation programs may provide governors with a wealth of tools and knowledge, others may not. In a 1989 study, Kerr & Gade reported “almost universally, once selected, new members are not given an adequate orientation” (Kerr & Gade, 1989, p. 47). Their findings concurred with the concern illustrated in the interview data, “it takes time (at least two years) to gain a deep understanding of such complicated institutions as colleges and university campuses….It takes even longer to get to know a system of several or many campuses” (Kerr & Gade, 1989, p. 48). Both student governors and other elected governors that were interviewed expressed the view that one year was short period of time to understand the University and make strong contributions. To assist new members in their learning process, Kerr & Gade (1989) prescribed four actions. They included the review of documents, introductions to members of the senior administration on campus, orientation to the governance process and board operations, and training on the legal obligation of board members.

Governors did not credit orientation sessions as valuable opportunities which helped them prepare for their responsibilities. Instead, many cited informal communication as a tool which allowed them to learn about their role and to discuss issues presented to them prior to meetings. In order to learn about the role itself and current business of the Governing Council, governors found informal meetings to be the most beneficial. These meetings were not required and were often initiated by governors themselves. They included meetings between governors as well as meetings with members of the Governing Council Secretariat or with members of the university’s senior administration. Such meetings provided an opportunity for governors to ask
questions, gain confidence in speaking, and understand written materials. Governors perceived these meetings to be very positive and helpful to them. Surprisingly, no governor displayed concern for the fact that these meetings were informal and not part of the official governance process. While this may have allowed for the meetings to be more casual and comfortable to some, informal information sharing in this way may be considered dangerous to the overall governance process at the institution. Through informal channels, information may be lost, misconstrued, or missed by absent members or those unaware of the existence of an unofficial information meeting.

Informal meetings with other governors and with members of the senior administration greatly helped all governors who spoke of their efforts to learn about the institution and governance. All governors spoke highly of these meetings, and valued the ability to initiate the meetings as needed. Each year the alumni governors invited the newly elected student governors to meet with them and discuss the work of the Governing Council and the role of governors. Both student governors, Rosie and Max said alumni governors were very supportive and interested in what students had to say, and that the casual meetings over lunch were well received by students. Max added that it allowed students to feel as though they could informally speak with fellow governors as mentors throughout the year, and additionally, Rosie used the opportunity to talk and share ideas. As alumni governors, Ming-Ming and Diego also spoke of their collective efforts to mentor student governors as well as newly elected alumni governors. Their goal was to help answer questions and introduce people to others that could be helpful. In addition to meetings with students, Ming-Ming valued ongoing opportunities for alumni governors to meet and discuss issues informally, as well as meet with the President and the Chair. These informal meetings took place a few times each year, and could be initiated by the
governors. Ming-Ming said, “we are not afraid to ask questions of Deans and Principals and whatnot…we can arrange to meet with a VP just to make sure you understand an issue”. She added, “if I had a serious question then not protocol, but courtesy would invite you to email the question to the Secretary or Chair for assistance or clarification”. Rosie used informal meetings with other governors to help her prepare for Governing Council meetings. She said smaller groups of governors from the same constituency or from different constituencies would get together over a drink and discuss issues prior to a meeting, or meet with student union members. She also used meetings with the Provost, Vice-Provost, and President to prepare for meetings. Meetings were held approximately once each month, and in Rosie’s opinion smaller and less formal meetings were “where you get the real stuff done, so to speak. That’s where you can really convince someone of your point of view”. Her observance was shared by a study on board influence which determined that:

…the social capital of board members in the form of ties to others on the board is a much stronger factor in gaining influence on the board as compared to the human capital of board members such as management experience or committee memberships” (Stevenson and Radin, 2009, p 17-18).

Although attendance at meetings other than the Governing Council meetings was not required, Rosie said they are expected to an extent.

Informal communication was also valued by governors as a way for them to evaluate their own performance. This was largely through casual comments and unsolicited feedback given to governors from other board members or administrators. This was apparent in almost all interviews when governors were asked to describe how they knew if they were doing a good job as a governor. Governors agreed that there was no predefined way of knowing whether they were “doing a good job”. Max commented, “there isn’t a checklist” or “metric involved”.
However, the informal feedback provided a sense of how others viewed their work. Much of the informal feedback was brief and perhaps not even always intended to inform a governor on their performance. Most often, it came in the form of a simple complement following a meeting.

Ming-Ming, Austin, and Rosie also shared Max’s appreciation of hearing both positive and constructive feedback from other governors during and after meetings. Austin said that comments as simple as, “that was a really a good point” or “I’m glad you said that” were helpful. Governors that spoke about receiving informal comments appeared content with this as their method for reflecting on their performance. Despite the comments being informal, small in number, and brief, all governors seemed to value the comments as genuine and meaningful indicators of their effectiveness. The importance given to these comments may be attributed to obvious high level of respect the governors felt towards those giving feedback. There was a sense that the high regard given to some governors, members of senior administration and the Secretariat was based on their experience in governance processes and their own accomplishments inside and outside of the University.

During the interviews, governors shared similar responses regarding their motivations and experiences. This suggests that they shared a common culture and understanding of the values and norms associated with serving on the Governing Council. In a study by Kezar (2006) published in The Journal of Higher Education, “culture” was one of the “six elements of effective or high-performing boards”. Another element she named was “relationships” where she wrote, “the CEO/President should establish strong relationships and communicate regularly with every board member. Effective board members trust the president” (Kezar, 2006, p. 993). Comments from governors throughout all six interviews illustrate that strong relationships are present, among elected members and other member of the Governing Council. Governors often
spoke in great appreciation of informal meetings with governors from their own constituency, other constituencies, the President, Chair, Council Secretariat, or senior administrators. As they reflected on their experience, many governors made a point to speak of the high regard they hold for the University President. They found him approachable, honest, and valued his working style. These qualities, along with his willingness to engage in informal communication were reasons they attributed to their positive working relationship. They also felt their relationship and interactions with the President assisted them in being better governors. The benefit of a strong relationship between a president and board members was highlighted by Kezar:

…the president spends time with board members outside of the official board business. Trust and communication are also essential for board learning, as members will be more open to the information and ultimately assist the board in making better decisions. (Kezar, 2006, p. 994).

The amount of learning governors felt was required for the position was significant. Informal communication in the form of comments given from one governor to another or from senior administration or the Secretariat of the Governing Council was mentioned on more than one occasion as an avenue to learn about or clarify information needed to carry out their role. In most cases, informal communication and feedback were said to have helped governors self-assess their performance.

**Personal Benefits, Pride and Positive Experience**

Throughout each interview, governors were extremely positive about their experiences. Towards the end of the interviews, each was asked to describe what they learned or how they personally benefitted from their experience. In addition to their responses to this specific question, comments were made throughout the interview that reinforced the personal benefits, pride in service and overall positive experience that these six governors felt. Although the
There was no distinction between what was expressed by governors from the different constituencies as they reflected on personal growth and development, and passion towards serving the university community. They all shared thoughts on their commitment and dedication to carrying out the role and making a contribution. This was interesting given that none of the governors expressed sentiments relating to their passion for serving the community or making strong contributions towards change as strong motivating factors for becoming a governor. It appeared that their initial motivations to run for elections came from suggestions from other members of the university community or a “next step” in the progression of their involvements, and their ongoing motivation to be effective governors during their terms came from positive experiences that were largely unknown at the time of election.

Diego valued the opportunity to serve on the Governing Council because it was an avenue where he could dedicate his time to something that was important to him. Although he said it was an extremely time consuming volunteer role, he benefited from a sense of feeling worthwhile and meeting “some amazing people…some of the best in North America”. Ming-Ming shared Diego’s sentiment when she described the people she worked with as “incredible”. Similar to the praise alumni governors Diego and Ming-Ming expressed towards the people they have met and worked with, the two governors from the staff and faculty constituencies valued their interactions with others. Dorothy she said she found it “inspiring to be surrounded by brilliant governors…each bringing to the table their wealth of expertise, intelligence, maturity,
integrity, accomplishments, and most importantly, their wonderful articulate approach in the
discussion process”. Austin said he benefited from the role as he met “an incredible variety of
people, who are all there for different reasons, all coming from a variety of different
backgrounds”.

As previously noted, almost all governors appreciated the helpfulness and
approachability of other governors, senior administration and the Governing Council Secretariat.
This was apparent in the comments made by governors about their communications with these
individuals, as well as when describing the benefits of serving on the Council and the positive
experiences they shared. Many also commented specifically on the approachability and working
style of the President. Diego appreciated President Naylor’s efforts to engage governors in
decision making, citing task forces that were formed with Governing Council members as well
as other members of the university community. Diego expressed his appreciation for the
President’s working style, “David Naylor set it up brilliantly, everybody felt good about
it…we’re all involved in real decision making, as opposed to a rubber stamp, and we are at the
front end of something”. Max found him to be “a very big presence being the President, but also
an extremely intelligent man, very interested in student affairs” and Ming-Ming also praised
President Naylor, “what he is telling you is the absolute honest truth, and no matter how it may
hurt his reputation, he’ll be very honest about his actions, and I find that so admirable”. The
positive light that the President was viewed from by this group certainly contributed to their
positive experience and pride in serving the university.

Ming-Ming took personal satisfaction from seeing the work of the Governing Council
benefit the university community. She also appreciated the opportunity to answer questions that
alumni may have, as well as brought information to the Council based on feedback alumni gave
to her. Ming-Ming said being a governor was “the ultimate volunteer job by the amount of time and effort that you put into it” and said “it’s incredible what you get out of it as a volunteer…the satisfaction that comes from being a part of something that is immense, it’s immeasurable, I’m a happy governor”.

As younger members of the Governing Council, Max and Rosie both mentioned the added benefit of including the experience to their resumes, and the possible benefit of having strong references for employment or further education. Like Dorothy, Rosie was able to build on her own skills, and attributed serving on the Council to her improved confidence in public speaking. A big personal benefit to Max was his new understanding of how the university functions, different levels of systems and the work of the administration. He recognized that this experience could lead to other involvements for him in the future, and with a big grin on his face he said, “maybe I’ll come back at some point as an alumni governor, I’d like to do that”.

Austin found the experience provided him with a type of “professional education” and described his newly obtained knowledge as something that “really can’t be replaced by listening to a professor talk”. He also credited the experience with providing him with insights into his own career which he may not have considered otherwise. Dorothy spoke about the knowledge and personal skills that she was able to build on since becoming a governor. She says she was more confident and more articulate when speaking at meetings. Her knowledge base expanded to include a better understanding of different aspects of the university such as economic challenges, personnel, ancillary operations, fundraising, strategic planning, and institutional governance. She clearly expressed her dedication to the role and said she felt “proud to serve my constituency in their best interest and at the same time it gives me a sense of pride and ownership
to protect the assets and image of our great university”. Dorothy summed it up by expressing the same point as Austin when she said, “you can’t learn this in a classroom”.

Governors are often invited to attend events and receptions to open new facilities, recognize achievements on campus or other special events, such as convocation ceremonies. All governors other than Rosie mentioned being invited to and attending such functions. Although attendance at events was an unexpected part of the position the five governors that spoke about these events did so in a positive light and enjoyed participating in these activities. In speaking about attending “ceremonial activities,” Dorothy said, “I’ve really had a wonderful time being an ambassador and representing my constituency.” Ming-Ming’s pride for serving the university community through this position shined through as she said “I try very hard to represent the university in as many places and as many times as I can”. The governors did not feel pressure to attend the events, although most said they made strong efforts to be present when possible.

Overall the comments shared by governors were positive, and it was apparent that the governors truly valued the experience they had serving on the Governing Council, both for what it meant for them personally as well as what they felt they have been able to accomplish for the university community.

*Approach to Governance*

All six governors spoke eloquently as they described the approach they took in carrying out their role. They all shared the same understanding that it was their duty to make decisions based on what was best for the university as a whole, rather than voting based on what may be in the best interest of the constituency from which they were elected. Along with this notion, many also spoke about the expectations of their constituencies, or their own feelings towards acting as representatives of their constituencies. Governors also showed an understanding of the
important distinction between governance and management of the university. Finally, in speaking about their approach to governance, elected governors shared some of the challenges they have experienced. This included balancing the interests of different constituencies or divisions of the university, and challenges they experienced when working with some student governors. In speaking about their approach to governance, governors generally spoke about the decision making process that lead to their vote, as opposed to their contributions in discussion and debate. It is the researcher’s opinion that this was likely due to the phrasing of the interview questions.

Alumni governor Diego explained that although elected governors were brought into their position through the votes of their constituencies, the vote they held should be placed in the interest of the university, not in the interest of their own constituency. He said his role was “to work obviously with all governors as governors, for the best interest of the university. Yes, I happen to be an alumni governor, but once you are elected you have a role to play collectively”. Ming-Ming shared this view of the role, but also added that she found her role “in my ways has been a representative purely of the alumni”. She approached much of her role with the needs of alumni in mind and was interested in how decisions would affect alumni or how alumni might become involved in changes that are passed. Ming-Ming also defined the boundary under which the role of governor is meant to function. “We are not the managers for the university. We are the trustees for the university. And Governing Council as a whole, its job is to make sure that the university is governed efficiently and well”. She noted that the line between management and governance was “a very easy line to step over”.

Austin described his approach to being a governor as “not just being a voice around the table, but ears first and a voice second around the table”. In deciding how to vote, both Austin
and Dorothy shared Diego’s standpoint regarding the balance between being a representative of the constituency and a representative for the university overall. Both clearly stated that their approach was to consider the result of their vote on the university overall, as opposed to the result any one constituency. In explaining his rationale for a vote for or against an issue, Austin said:

I think you have to be careful not to vote to the constituency. You’re not there because the rest of your constituency wants you to vote a certain way. You’re not there to vote a certain way because all the students want you to vote a certain way. You’re there to vote in the best interest of the university because that’s what trusteeship is and really, a governor, a Governing Council position is a form of trusteeship.

Dorothy expressed a similar view, she said, “as a governor you enter your role with honestly, integrity, and meeting our fiduciary responsibility that is serving in the best interest of the University, not the best interest of our constituencies. I would definitely stand by the needs of my constituents, providing it does not diminish the main objective as a governor”. Dorothy also added a challenge that was faced by elected governors in carrying out what she described as the responsibility of governors, and that was pressures put on them by their own and other constituencies to vote in their favour.

The two student governors were no different when it came to their understanding of the role of governors. Max said his role was “overall oversight with what’s going to affect the university in the future”. He was concerned with the outcome of the decisions he helped make from a local and global perspective. Max and Rosie both spoke about how they balanced the “overall oversight” with needs of their constituency as student members of the Governing Council. Max said he looked “at the Governing Council as a body, one body, representing different groups but overall I have a responsibility to the university as a governor…everything we do on the Governing Council basically effects students. Whether it’s tuition increases or the
creation of a new Masters or PhD program, it affects students. So everything I’m doing is for students in one way or the other”. Rosie’s experience included difficult situations where her constituency’s best interest did not perfectly meet with that for the university. While she was mindful of the interests of the university and voted with her conscience the majority of the time, she added “sometimes it can be helpful that your vote generally doesn’t really decide anything. So, say for tuition, if you have objections to parts of the tuition increases you can vote “no”, knowing full well that you won’t put the university into a deficit because of it. So, you’re trying to make a statement and try to represent students that way”. To this end, Max discussed his experience with students that disagreed with his vote. He explained to others that his vote may not always be popular, and even he may not like voting the way he chose to, however he knew that the vote he made was what was right for the university. Both student governors described the pressures they have felt from their constituency at various times, usually relating to issues of special concern to students such as student fees. Rosie said that there was pressure put on her as a student governor from members of the student body, but alternatively she had also felt the opposing pressure from members of the administration.

The one common concern that most governors spoke of was dealing with student governors. They described cases where they felt the behaviour some students displayed and their approach to advocacy was inappropriate. This viewpoint was shared to various degrees by five of the six governors including both students. Alumni governor Diego was the only person to not make some reference to this. In Max’s opinion, the problem begins when some student governors are elected with the mindset that it is their duty to represent the students who elected them, and should therefore advocate on their behalf regardless of the larger picture. He described the resulting relationship between the adversarial students and the remaining
Governing Council members as being “us versus them”. Similarly, Rosie said that the expectation some student governors brought with them was that their role was to “fight the man” which she felt stemmed from student unions. Clear frustration and disappointment on some student actions was apparent from Austin and Ming-Ming. Austin was “rarely impressed” with how he felt student governors attempted to influence decision making and conducted themselves in meetings. In his observations, students who thought they were achieving something “actually robbed themselves of an opportunity to make change or be heard in a constructive way because what really happens is everybody else turns off their ears, or at least their ears stay open but their brains close off”. Austin asked himself whether this problem existed with non-student governors and decisively answered “not so much”. Ming-Ming was a part of the alumni group that met with student governors in an informal mentorship role. Despite recognizing that it was not the majority of student governors she found difficult to work with, she noted that it was a challenge to convince others that “we’re on their side”. Aligned with Rosie’s experience, Ming-Ming believed that these student governors adopted their negative attitude towards the administration and the Governing Council prior to being elected.

Overall, the six governors shared a common understanding that their role was to act in the best interests of the university. Despite there being no interview questions that directly asked how governors felt about acting in the interest of their constituency or the university overall, or the challenges faced in balancing these objectives when not aligned, all governors spoke on this topic. They acted as representatives of their constituencies in addressing issues, but not necessarily through their vote which was decided upon based on the overall picture of the institution. Finally, the attitude of some student governors came under criticism by almost all governors, included student members. However, in all cases, negative feelings expressed
towards student behaviour or activism was met with a desire to improve communications and processes.

**Unique Position of Alumni Governors**

Diego was the only governor to discuss the unique position of alumni governors, and his strong concern for what he felt was a growing imbalance in the role of “outside” and “inside” governors. He described alumni governors as “outside” governors, and noted that they were the only group of governors that were from outside the university and elected. Diego found it important to mark this distinction among the elected group of governors, and related its importance back to the original legislation regarding the University’s governance, The University of Toronto Act (1971). There, it outlined the membership of the Governing Council, which was comprised of 50% outside governors and 50% inside governors. Inside governors included students, staff and faculty governors as they were from within the institution, whereas outside governors included alumni and those appointed by the Lieutenant Governor on Council. The reason for this, Diego explained, was to ensure that an appropriate viewpoint was brought to discussion from the broader community. As prior research on governance structures has noted, “it is considered important to have outside, independent directors on the board to resist potentially opportunistic behaviour from executives” (Frankforter et al., 2000; Kosnik, 1987 as cited by Stevenson and Radin, 2009, p. 18). Having the balance between the perspectives of those from within the institution and outside the institution was an element of what he described as a “proper governance process”. Although they were elected, Diego said that he and other alumni saw themselves primarily as “outside” governors first. He used his past experiences and knowledge from outside the university to inform discussion and debate. When it came to vote,
however, he recognized that “once you’re on the Governing Council there’s no distinction, you’re there for the best of the university”.

Diego raised the issue as a key concern, because he felt that the balance between “inside” and “outside” governors was being “nibbled” away at. He placed no blame for the issue, and described it as something that “just happens” although he disagreed with it. Diego was concerned because he said that in some instances, there was a “blending pure academic matters with everything”. He illustrated examples of instances where a decision that should have been made with the 50/50 split of governors, but was presented under the umbrella of academic issues. As a result, it was discussed and voted on before a decision making body that included a greater number of inside governors and academic staff. Diego felt this was not proper governance, as he did not agree that the issue was academic in nature. He believed it should have been brought forth to the Business Board instead of Academic Board.

This was interesting, given that a recent report cited in Chapter 2, by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Governance focused on the reverse situation as a current concern in higher education. Instead of central issues being presented to governing bodies as academic issues and thereby increasing the role of an academic board or senate, they argue there is a growing trend that decision-making responsibilities are shifting away from faculty. The report reads:

Academic staff at universities and colleges are familiar with the increasing centralization of administrative power and the growth of a managerial culture which marginalizes the role of academic staff in decision making. (CAUT, 2009, p. 4)

The Ad Hoc Committee made recommendations for faculty members to work with their bargaining units to ensure they maintain formal decision-making power. It appeared that greater
is clarification was required in the governance process so that issues were discussed and decided upon in the proper forums, and all individuals involved were in agreement on the process.

**Suggested Improvements**

For the most part, governors shared similar thoughts on their experiences regardless of which constituency they came from. They also shared similar responses when asked how the experience of governors might be improved for the future. The area of improvement that governors spoke of most was for the initial learning period and ongoing information governors needed in order to be effective. Governors also spoke of improving ways for governor performance to be assessed, changing the one year term students serve, and improving the student governor election process.

Ming-Ming discussed the mentoring of students and new alumni governors by returning alumni governors as something that was done to improve the initial and ongoing learning process for governors. While she found this informal mentoring to be helpful, she believed that more could be done in order for it to be even more effective. Austin found value in informal meetings with governors from one or multiple constituencies, or members of the administration and the Chair. He recommended that opportunities for discussion such as these continue and be expanded where possible in order for governors to engage in conversation and become more informed.

Suggestions from Max focused on helping governors learn about the university and its governance by way of greater orientation and training. He suggested that a spring greeting and training session be held following the election of new governors. It should include information about the Governing Council as well as the various committees. He also thought that an
orientation/training book should be made available to student governors upon election so they are able to begin to better understand and prepare for the role. Ming-Ming described the process alumni governors were involved in at the stage that they are merely candidates. They were given “a pile of material” that she viewed as an indication of the amount of time and commitment required for the role, in addition to providing valuable information that a governor would require. Max felt that providing similar material to student governors early on would provide them with a greater opportunity to succeed in their role.

In order to perform well in the role, governors often learned about institutional policy and university activities through reviewing information packages or through their own research until the governor felt they had acquired adequate knowledge to contribute to debate and make an informed decision. Austin described the mindset he believed many new governors take on:

I think if you use a swimming analogy, that’s very much keeping your head above water and figuring out which way the current is flowing, and whether you’re going to swim along it or against it or aside it. I think that at a certain point, you realize, I’m not getting a report card, there’s no transcript for this activity so let’s think about how I’m going to self-assess.

Governors said they took cues on their performance from comments made by other governors and administrators, and from their own feeling of self-accomplishment and contribution. In addition to this, Austin believed that governors would greatly benefit from the introduction of structured feedback on their performance.

Rosie, Max and Austin expressed their belief that students faced a greater challenge in learning about the institution and their role as governors, since they are only elected for one year. This shorter term made it comparatively more difficult for them to become effective governors before the end of their terms. All three governors suggested that the term-length for student governors should be re-evaluated, or some form of overlapping structure should be in place.
among student governors to aid the learning process among them. However, no concrete suggestions to the logistics of this change were made, given the challenge that the obvious solution of extending the term for students to greater than one year poses a challenge for students in their graduating year, since following the first year after election they would no longer be students. Max also noted that a weakness existed in the election process of student governors. He believed many students were not adequately aware of the role or informed about the work of the Governing Council. He would like to see a greater understanding of the role on the part of student candidates, and a greater voter turnout from the student body.

**Conclusion**

Despite being from different constituencies, and having a different number of years of experience serving on the Governing Council, the six governors that were interviewed shared many similar responses to questions relating to their experience and role. Overall, students, alumni, staff and faculty responses to questions were more similar than different. The following chapter presents a summary of the key findings and areas for future research.
CHAPTER 6: AND CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the research along with an overview of conclusions. Following that, the limitations of this study are acknowledged and presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of areas for future research. Suggestions for future research include adaptations of this study to different governing bodies based on their scope, jurisdiction and other factors which may impact the experience of governors.

Summary and Conclusions

This study was designed to create a greater understanding of the motivations and experiences of elected members of governing bodies, from the perspective of the students, alumni, staff and faculty holding these positions. Interviews were used as the research method for this exploratory study, and focus was placed on elected members of The Governing Council at The University of Toronto. Participants were asked to share their thoughts on personal motivations for involvement in governance, duties, comfort in decision making, self-perceptions of effectiveness in the role, and individual learning outcomes or benefits. Governors also made suggestions for possible changes that could be made to improve the experience of future elected members in the governance process. Interview data was reviewed and interview summaries were created. Data was analysed through a content analysis process, where comments and descriptions of experiences were marked and categorized based on overall topics they related too. Interview data was then grouped based on the topic or theme it related to. Four theme areas and two topics of interest emerged, which were presented in chapter five.

The group of six interview participants was comprised of governors from all four elected constituencies, and all were asked the same set of interview questions. No hypothesis regarding
whether governors would share similar viewpoints based on their constituency was laid out for this exploratory study, although the effort was made to include an equal number of governors from the different groups to allow for some comparison. The result was that there did not appear to be any noteworthy relationship between perceptions and experiences of governors based on the constituency they represented. For the most part, governors described their individual experiences, but the overarching messages, themes and perceptions expressed during the interviews were notably similar for governors across the four elected groups. The perspectives shared on effective governance, understanding of their responsibility, and identification of challenges were largely alike.

In the fall of 2007, a Task Force on Governance was created at the University to examine and make recommendations regarding its governance processes. This task force was one of five that was formed as a part of the University’s long term planning exercise, following the release of the planning document titled, “Towards 2030: Planning for a Third Century of Excellence at the University of Toronto”. The Task Force on Governance was chaired by Rose Patten, former Chair of the Governing Council and, like the Council itself, included individuals from faculty, staff, students, alumni and government appointees. The resulting report was released in June 2010. It was fitting that the findings of the report shared many common elements with comments expressed by governors during the interviews for this study. While the report was of a much broader scope, the topics that were shared with findings from this study fell under the headings of “expectations and attributes”, “orientation and education” and “evaluation” (Report of the Task Force on Governance, 2010). In the Task Force report, the “expectations and attributes” included the following passages; “Governors are collectively and individually
stewards of the University. Each Governor must act in good faith with the view to the best interest of the University” and:

…While each Governor may be informed by concerns of his/her individual constituency, it is the absolute duty of a Governor to do what he/she can to ensure that all the constituencies in the future will also be well-served by the decisions that are taken today (Report of the Task Force on Governance, 2010, p 14).

These two statements clearly outline much of what all governors spoke about during the six interviews. Some governors experienced instances of conflict between what was seen as best for a constituency versus for the institution overall. However, each in their own words expressed an understanding and a practice of these notions in their approach to governance.

A significant hurdle that governors commonly expressed was the amount of knowledge they felt they needed to gain early in their terms. The much appreciated avenues to alleviate this challenge were through mentorship, informal meetings, and increased training. The Task Force recognized this challenge, and provided three recommendations slated to be implemented immediately. These recommendations were very much in line with the suggestions put forth by governors during their interviews; (1) the creation of orientation sessions, (2) formal mentoring and (3) increased education.

Another area examined in both this study and reported on by the Task Force on Governance related to the evaluation of governor performance. As a part of this study, the six governors were asked, “How do you know whether you are doing a good job as governor? In what ways might other members of Council or members of the university community know if governors are doing a good job?”(Appendix A). The responses were comprised of notions of self-effectiveness and casual comments and feedback from others. Governor Austin suggested a need for a more formal evaluation process. The Task Force’s recommendation for an annual
survey as well as greater individual feedback was approved (Report of the Task Force on Governance, 2010). This positive change is supported by literature on board and board member assessment for multiple benefits, “regularly assessing board and individual trustee performance can also increase engagement, as well as aid accountability and provide avenues for further board development” (Summerville & Roberts, 2010)

Through the interviews with six elected governors in this study, it was apparent that their motivations to be effective governors stemmed from a desire to serve the institution, although most required an outside voice for their initial encouragement in seeking election candidacy. It was also very clear that the governors were dedicated to their role and had positive and rewarding experiences. They all took pride in their efforts, valued the opportunity to serve on the Governing Council, and recognized the importance of being active and effective governors. Overall, the elected governors who participated in this study largely experienced the similar initial and ongoing motivations, challenges, and benefits of serving as governors. Their decisions to run for election stemmed from the recommendation to do so from a friend or colleague, or as a further involvement based on previous experiences. Their ongoing motivations were rooted in the benefits they felt from their role, their pride for serving in the position, and the positive experiences they had. They expressed a challenge in the amount of learning they felt they needed to do in order to perform well in their role. They also valued informal communication in the form of meetings and brief comments, as they felt these communications helped them learn about their role or current issues. Informal communication was also used as feedback to help them assess whether they were performing well. Governors also shared an understanding in their approach to governance, which included decision making in
the best interest of the overall institution as opposed to the needs of their constituency or of one group.

**Limitations**

This study focused only on the experience of elected alumni, students, staff and faculty on the Governing Council at the University of Toronto from the governor perspective at one point in time. The number of participants was small, and all were from just one institution. For these reasons, the study results are not representative of all governors at all institutions and cannot be generalized. Although elected members of other governing bodies likely share some of the motivations and experiences described by the research participants, the results of this study cannot entirely be transferred to other members of this council, faculty/departmental councils, other university wide councils, councils of past or future years, or councils at other universities or colleges. The experiences and ideas expressed by the elected members are subjective. The reflections elected members described may not be shared by others. Their perceptions about their role, their influence, their performance, or the governance process may not be accurate.

Despite these limitations, the lived experiences described by the elected members are valuable. It allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the unique role in university governance performed by elected governors.

**Areas for Future Research**

This study aimed at adding to the body of knowledge regarding university governance, specifically to the motivations and expectations of university governors. Focus for this study was limited to elected members of a governing board of one institution. Participants were selected based on the constituency they represent and their years of experience. Further, all
participants belonged to the same institution and the same governing body; the Governing Council at the University of Toronto.

Unanswered questions remain relating to the role of governors. Research topics stemming from interviews include elections processes, quality of candidates and voter participation. Further study could also be done on the role played by governors from individual constituencies, and approaches to initial and ongoing learning.

Further research examining the motivations and expectations of governors would be beneficial to increasing our understanding of governors. For example, it would be useful to replicate this study, with the addition of appointed governors. Another alteration could be based on years of service. This study involved governors who served for multiple years or terms. However, it could be conducted with new governors in their first year on the Council, or with governors who have completed a term and decided not to run for re-election. A study comparing the experience of governors with different lengths of service could provide an understanding of whether the amount of time spent as a governor impacts their role and work, or in what ways the experience may differ. Other variations could include expanding participants in order to explore experiences of governors belonging to different levels of governance at the U of T, such as Academic Board, Business Board, and Faculty and College Councils. Similarly, a great deal could be learning from comparing the experiences of governors from different institutions. For example, research could be done to explore the extent to which the experiences of governors differ by institutional type, governance structure, or institutional leadership.

Further exploration on the motivations and experiences of governors, and their approach to carrying out their role would be valuable. A greater understanding of their experiences could be of assistance in recruiting, training and retaining governors, as well as assisting governors to
strive for or maintain a strong level of performance. The topic of this thesis, as well as those named as future areas of research are important elements in understanding and developing effective governing bodies.

Conclusion

This study focused on the motivations and experiences of elected members of the Governing Council at the University of Toronto. An exploratory approach was taken to learn about personal motivations behind serving in university governance, activities and duties of governors, self-perceptions of effectiveness, and improvements to the experience of elected members. The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of what led governors to run for election, and the overall positive experience they share. There is also a greater understanding of what challenges elected governors encounter, including the initial and ongoing learning required for the position. Overall, governors found their experience of serving on the Governing Council to be extremely positive, and conveyed pride and personal satisfaction for the work and activities they engaged in. The experience of students, staff, faculty and alumni members were largely similar, indicating that the elected governors shared a common culture. Through the lens of six individuals elected to serve on the 2009-2010 University of Toronto Governing Council, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on university governing boards by describing the experiences of elected governors.
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Appendix A – Interview Question Guide

1. Reflecting back to before you were elected, what led you to add your name to the ballot to serve on The Governing Council? Describe how you first got involved. Did prior governance/committee experience play a role in your decision?

2. How would you describe your role on The Governing Council? What are you expected to do as a member of The Governing Council?

3. Outside of attending meetings, what expected or unexpected activities do you partake in as a result of your role? This may include required as well as optional actions. How do you prepare for meetings?

4. How do you know whether you are doing a good job as governor? In what ways might other members of Council or members of the university community know if governors are doing a good job?

5. Are there times when you don’t feel comfortable voting? If so, what have you done in such instances? What helps you decide how to vote?

6. Does being a (student/staff/faculty/alumni member) influence how you carry out your role as an elected governor? If so, how?

7. Now that you are nearing the end of your term, how does your experience compare to your initial expectations for the role? Have your motivations changed?

8. Have you personally learned or benefitted from your experience? How? What do individuals gain from serving on Governing Council?

9. What can be done to improve the experience of elected students, staff and faculty members or their role in the governance process? What can be done to help governors be more effective?

10. Do you have any other comments or experiences you would like to share?
Appendix B – Invitation to Participate Email

Email Subject: Invitation to participate in study regarding Governing Council members

Dear (governor name),

My name is Renu Kanga Fonseca and I am an MA Candidate in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies at OISE/UT. I am writing to you today to ask for your participation in an exploratory study examining the experience of students, alumni, staff and faculty elected to serve on the 2009-2010 Governing Council at the University of Toronto. The title of the study is “Motivations and Experiences of Elected Governing Council Members”. Your participation would require meeting with me for a 45-60 minute, one-on-one interview to discuss your experience as an elected governor. You have been chosen based on your biography on the Governing Council website.

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivations and experiences of elected students, staff and faculty serving on The Governing Council at the University of Toronto. There is an existing research literature on governance in higher education that provides insight on the history and purposes of university governance, the composition of governing bodies, different models of governance, and issues of effectiveness. There has been little research, however, on elected governors in terms of their motivations, qualifications, experiences, and attitudes towards the position they hold. As such, the purpose of this study is to uncover and understand the motivation and unique perspective of elected students, staff, alumni and faculty serving on The Governing Council at the University of Toronto as well as how each group sees their role within that council. This exploratory study strives to fill the gap in the current body of literature on university governance by better understanding the experiences and roles of elected members from the perspective of people in these positions.

Five to six interviews will be conducted with elected governors on the Governing Council at the University of Toronto. With your consent, your interview would be audio-taped. All audio recordings, and written and transcribed notes will be kept in a secured location and will not be shared with anyone, including the research supervisor until pseudonyms have been used. The identity of all research participants will be made anonymous and pseudonyms and gender changes will be used in reporting results. You have the option to decline from answering any questions during the interview. An electronic version of your interview transcript will be sent to you shortly after the interview is conducted. At that time, you will have the opportunity to read the transcript and make changes that you feel would more accurately reflect your thoughts. You will be asked to revise and return your interview transcript within two weeks of receiving it. If it is not returned in the two week period, it will be assumed that you have read and are comfortable with the researcher using your interview transcript without any changes. As a voluntary participant in this study, you have the option of removing yourself from the study during your interview or withdrawing at any point before the completion of the study without consequence, at which point your interview records will be destroyed.
An electronic copy of the final report will be available to any participants wishing to receive a copy. This study is being supervised by Professor Glen Jones, Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education, OISE, gjones@oise.utoronto.ca or 416-978-8292.

Interviews will be conducted on campus at a mutually agreeable time. If you are willing to participate or have questions, please respond to this message. Thank you for considering this invitation to participate in this study.

Best Regards,

Renu Kanga Fonseca
MA Candidate at OISE/UT
renu.kanga@utoronto.ca, 647-344-8386
Appendix C – Follow Up Recruitment Email

Email Subject: Invitation to participate in study regarding Governing Council members

Dear (governor name),

I am writing to you to follow up on an earlier email sent requesting your participation in an exploratory study for my MA Thesis at OISE/UT. I am examining the experience of students, staff and faculty elected to serve on the 2009-2010 Governing Council at the University of Toronto. The title of the study is “Motivations and Experiences of Elected Governing Council Members”. Your participation would require meeting with me for a 45-60 minute, one-on-one interview to discuss your experience as an elected governor. This study is being supervised by Professor Glen Jones, Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education, OISE, gjones@oise.utoronto.ca or 416-978-8292.

I have attached the initial email which describes the study and what is involved in participating to this email. Interviews will be conducted on campus at a mutually agreeable time. If you are willing to participate or have questions, please respond to this message. Thank you for considering this invitation to participate in this study.

Best Regards,

Renu Kanga Fonseca
MA Candidate at OISE/UT
renu.kanga@utoronto.ca
Appendix D – Participant Letter of Consent

Title of Research Project: Motivations and Experiences of Elected Governing Council Members
Researcher: Renu Kanga Fonseca, MA Candidate
Supervisor: Professor Glen Jones

I, ______________________________ (please print name) agree to participate in the study titled “Motivations and Experiences of Elected Governing Council Members” being conducted by Renu Kanga Fonseca, MA Candidate at OISE/UT for the purpose of her thesis. This study will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Glen Jones, Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), gjones@oise.utoronto.ca or 416-978-8292.

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivation and unique perspective of elected students, staff, alumni and faculty serving on The Governing Council at the University of Toronto. To do this, you will be asked questions relating to motivations behind serving in university governance, activities and duties of governors, comfort levels in decision making, self-perceptions of effectiveness or influence, and personal benefit of serving on the council. This exploratory study strives to fill the gap in the current body of literature on university governance by better understanding the experiences and roles of elected members from the perspective of people in these positions.

The data collection process can benefit individual participants. As you share experiences during the interviews and later review the transcript, you will be faced with an opportunity to self-reflect on their experience as an elected governor. The study can also be helpful to The Office of the Governing Council in working with elected members, conducting elections, and providing information and orientation to new members.

Five to six interviews will be conducted of governors from the 2009-2010 Governing Council at the University of Toronto. Participants for this study have been chosen based on two main criteria. First, the constituency they were nominated from and the number of terms they have served on the Council. Second, individuals who have been on the Council for over one year are preferred, as they are likely to have more experiences and a greater understanding of the role.

Your participation would require meeting with me for a 45-60 minute, one-on-one interview to discuss your experience as an elected governor and the opportunity to review your interview responses if you choose to. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions you are not comfortable with, without consequence, penalty or judgment. In order to withdraw from the study, you must email the researcher. At no time will you be judged, evaluated or at risk of harm. Similarly, no value judgments will be placed on your responses. All data will be kept in a secure location in the researcher’s home or private office, and only be accessible to the researcher. Data will be kept for 5 years following completion of the study, at which point all data will be destroyed.
The identity of all research participants will be made anonymous. Pseudonyms will be used and genders may be changed when reporting results. Audio recordings from interviews and written data will not be shared with anyone, including the research supervisor until pseudonyms have been used. At this point, results of the study will only be disseminated through the MA Thesis. Any future reporting of the results of this study in the form of presentations, reports or publications will use the same pseudonyms and gender changes to protect the identity of individual participants, although the name of the institution will be disclosed.

An electronic version of your interview transcript will be sent to you shortly after the interview is conducted. At that time, you will have the opportunity to read the transcript and make changes that you feel would more accurately reflect your thoughts. You will be asked to revise and return your interview transcript within two weeks of receiving it. If it is not returned in the two week period, it will be assumed that you have read and are comfortable with the researcher using your interview transcript without any changes.

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Boards of the University of Toronto. If you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study, or if you have any complaints or concerns about you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 647-344-8386 or renu.kanga@utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Prof. Glen Jones at 416-978-8298 or gjones@oise.utoronto.ca.

Thank you for your participation,

Renu Kanga Fonseca
MA Candidate, Theory and Policy Studies, OISE/UT
15 King’s College Circle
Toronto, ON M5S 3H7
renu.kanga@utoronto.ca
647-344-8386

Dr. Glen Jones
Professor, Theory and Policy Studies, OISE/UT
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
gjones@oise.utoronto.ca
416-978-8298

By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions above.

Name ___________________________ Signature ___________________________ Date ______________

Please initial if you would like to receive an electronic copy of the final report ________

Please initial if you agree to have your interview audio recorded ________

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.
Appendix E – Member Checks Email

Email Subject: Thesis Participation: Motivations and Experiences of Elected Governing Council Members

Dear (governor name),

Thank you once again for participating in my MA thesis titled, “Motivations and Experiences of Elected Governing Council Members”. It was great speaking with you this summer and hearing about your experiences. At this point, I have transcribed all audio interview recordings and am attaching a transcription of your interview for your review and revision. This is your opportunity to correct any errors, provide additional comments that were missed during the interview, remove any remarks you are not comfortable with, and formally agree with the interview data provided.

I have made edits to the transcripts in attempts to remove remarks that either directly or indirectly reveal your identity, and for clarification in the few instances where the recording was inaudible. Once the transcripts have been reviewed and returned, they will be used to report common themes and data of interest. When sharing results in the final thesis report, pseudonyms will be used in the place of your name to ensure anonymity. Given that there are only staff positions on the council, staff and faculty data will be presented under a shared heading.

As I mentioned when we met, you are asked to review, revise and return your transcript within two weeks of receiving it. Please email the revised document as an attachment to renu.kanga@utoronto.ca by Friday, November 26th. If I have not heard from you at that time, I will assume that you have no revisions to make and will continue onwards in this study.

Please be reminded that as a voluntary participant in this study, you have the option of withdrawing at any point before the completion of the study without consequence by emailing me, at which point your interview records will be destroyed.

Thank you once again for your willingness to participate and your engaging conversations. I look forward to sharing my thesis with you once it is complete.

Best Regards,
Renu

Renu Kanga Fonseca
MA Candidate at OISE/UT
renu.kanga@utoronto.ca
Email Subject: Re: Thesis Participation: Motivations and Experiences of Elected Governing Council Members

Dear (governor name),

Just a reminder that any revisions you might have to your interview transcript should be returned to me by Friday, November 26th. If I have not heard from you at that time, I will assume that you have no revisions to make and will continue onwards with the study.

Thanks once again for your participation! It is appreciated.

Regards,
Renu

Renu Kanga Fonseca
MA Candidate at OISE/UT
renu.kanga@utoronto.ca