

When the Ontario colleges were created as agencies of the Crown in 1966, the Department of Education recommended that a “college committee” be established at each college.<sup>i</sup> It suggested that the committee meet weekly, include faculty and students, and promote an understanding of college policy.

In 1984, the government established the Instructional Assignment Review Committee (IARC) to address the issue of faculty workload as a result of the first-ever faculty strike. Among its recommendations, IARC suggested creating an academic council at each college as a “forum for communication between administration and faculty on academic matters.”<sup>ii</sup>

In 1986, the Minister of Colleges and Universities asked Walter Pitman to advise him about improvements to how colleges were governed. Pitman’s report called for creating an academic council at each college that would be chaired by the college president, meet monthly and report directly to the college’s Board of Governors. Moreover, Pitman favoured strong staff involvement in the governance of these councils.

College councils, as they are known today, were mandated by provincial legislation in 1986. Regulation 640 stated that the Board of Governors of each college would establish a college council through which college staff and students could provide advice to the president of the college.<sup>iii</sup>

In 1987, the Ministry of College and Universities issued guidelines for these college councils focusing on consultation, communication and advice to the college president.<sup>iv</sup> However, the guidelines did not specifically address the structure, terms of reference and accountability of college councils. Instead, each college was to establish its own definition of the scope and issues to be addressed by its college council and could determine its composition. At that time, the Ministry expected that college councils would be largely concerned with academic matters such as programs, curriculum goals and standards, teaching methodology and standards, grading and promotion policies, student appeal policies, standards of student conduct and discipline, and student awards and scholarships.

Legislation and policy directives introduced between 2001 and 2003 mandated college Boards of Governors to establish appropriate governance structures, set the college’s strategic direction, hire the “CEO,” approve the college business plan, provide plans and reports to government, and ensure a balanced budget. Binding policy directives instructed each Board to establish an advisory college council “to provide a means for students and staff to advise the president on matters of importance to students and staff.”<sup>v</sup>

Today, all Ontario colleges have advisory councils that address a wide range of academic and operating issues that affect students and staff. Postsecondary education is changing rapidly as a result of globalization, student mobility, private-public partnerships in research and commercialization, the expansion of technology, and e-learning. As a result, college councils are addressing new and increasingly complex academic and operating issues that affect students and staff. They can play a key role as a strong internal voice from the college community to the college president to help inform decisions by senior management and the Board of Governors.

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<sup>i</sup> Department of Education. (1966). *Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology: Basic Documents*. Toronto, Ontario.

<sup>ii</sup> Instructional Assignment Review Committee. (1985). *Survival or Excellence?* Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

<sup>iii</sup> Ministry of Colleges and Universities. (1986). Regulation 640 (R.R.O. 1986), *Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology — College Governance*. Toronto, Ontario.

<sup>iv</sup> Ministry of Colleges and Universities. (1987). *Guidelines for College Councils*. Toronto, Ontario.

<sup>v</sup> Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. (2003). *Governance and Accountability Framework*. Queen's Printer for Ontario.