

Overview

At the request of the UASU Executive Committee, this project explores common and uncommon governance models in 48 Canadian student associations (SAs). We focused on understanding the presence, absence, and responsibilities of five types of official:

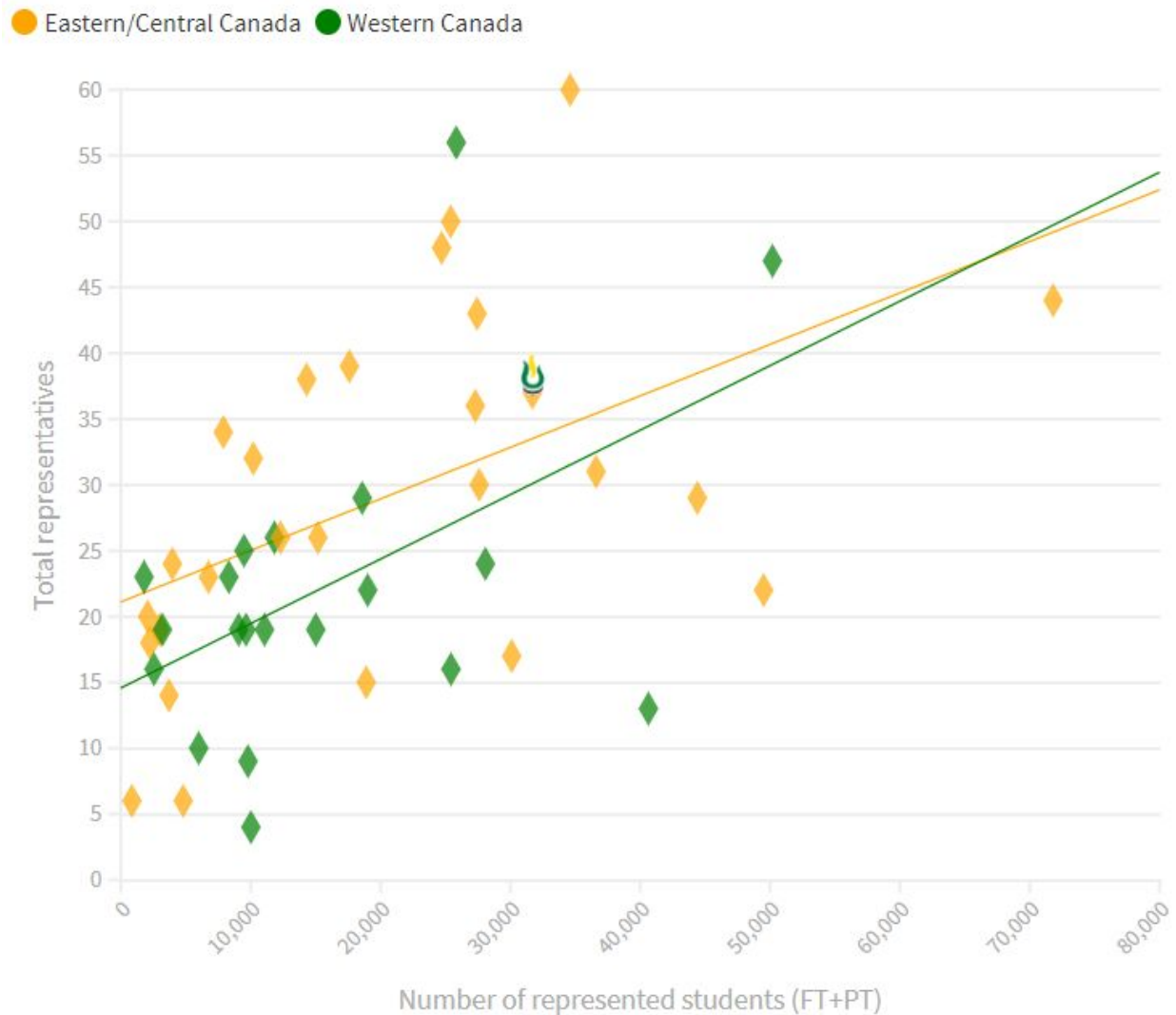
- Representatives of specific faculties
- Representatives of special interest groups, including equity-seeking groups (e.g. students in residence, first-year students, Indigenous students)
- Officials with specific portfolios (typically called Executives or Commissioners)
- Miscellaneous elected representatives who may or may not have full council seats (e.g. representatives at large elected by the entire student body, or representatives on a school's Board of Governors)
- Any non-elected, non-student officials or employees who hold seats (typically non-voting) on student councils

This project faces three main limitations:

- SAs define the powers and responsibilities of councils and specific representatives in varying ways.
- As a result, it can be difficult to accurately group various SAs' approaches into discrete models or trends.
- We have no objective, consistent way to measure *whether a given model works* in its own context. In general, we understand 'whether it works' as a reasonable balance of efficiency, representation, and attenuation of unnecessary conflict.

Nevertheless, clear patterns emerged, offering a coherent picture of SA governance models across Canada.

Total Representatives



Combining all representative categories, we find a limited relationship between the number of representatives and the size of a given SA's member base. Most small to midsize schools have around 10-25 total representatives; most larger schools have around 20-40.

With 32 faculty representatives, five Executives, and one Board of Governors representative, UASU falls comfortably into the latter category, alongside many eastern universities.

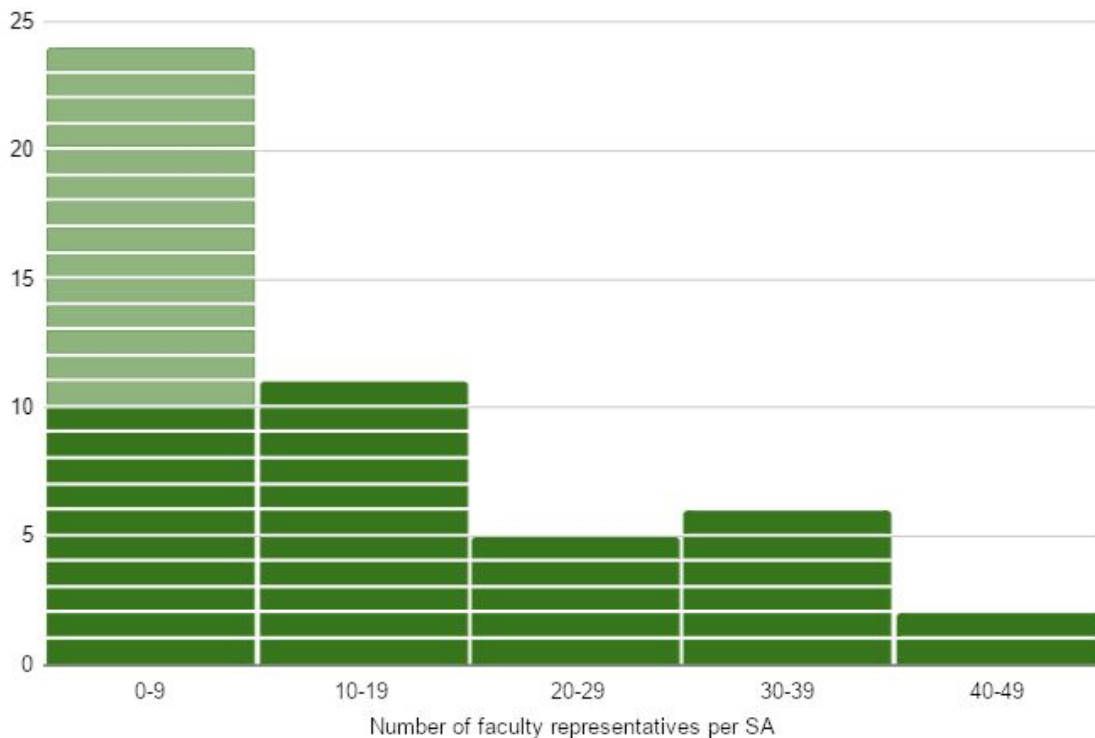
Types of Official

In simplest terms, the vast majority of elected student representatives can be classified as follows:

	Representing/elected by all students	Representing/elected by a subset of students
General portfolio	Students at large	Faculty representatives
Specific portfolio	Executives/commissioners	Community representatives

Faculty Representatives

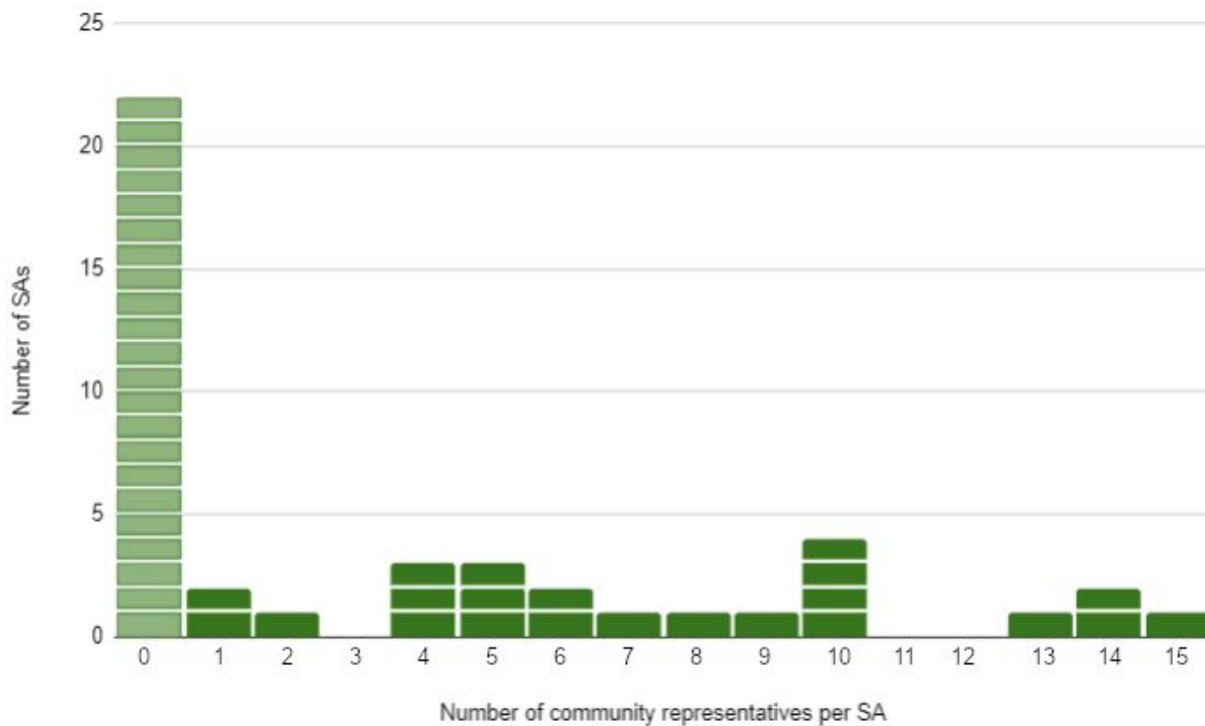
Of the 1,265 representatives we identified, half (630) represent specific faculties or equivalents; they are the most common type of student representative by headcount, a staple of SA council composition. 14 of the SAs we examined, however, had no faculty-specific representatives at all:



The 14 SAs without faculty representatives typically rely on elected members at large and community representatives to fill the bulk of their governance roles.

Community Representatives

These students are typically elected by equity-seeking groups or other groups with special interests and needs (e.g. students in residence or first-year students). We identified 160 community representative positions. Most SAs that include community representatives have several of them (7.4 on average).



Even SAs that do not rely on community representatives may have a few, typically for Indigenous or international students. Examples include USSU at the University of Saskatchewan, the UBC AMS, and UOSU at the University of Ottawa. Indigenous community representatives featured in two out of five of the SAs we examined.

TYPE	NUMBER OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES
Indigenous	19
Racialized*	7
Women/Gender Minorities/LGBTQ2S+	27
International	18
First-Year	14

Residence	19
Disabilities/Accessibility	9
Miscellaneous Others**	47

***Racialized students' is the most commonly used term in this context, though this wording is considered outdated in broader discourse.*

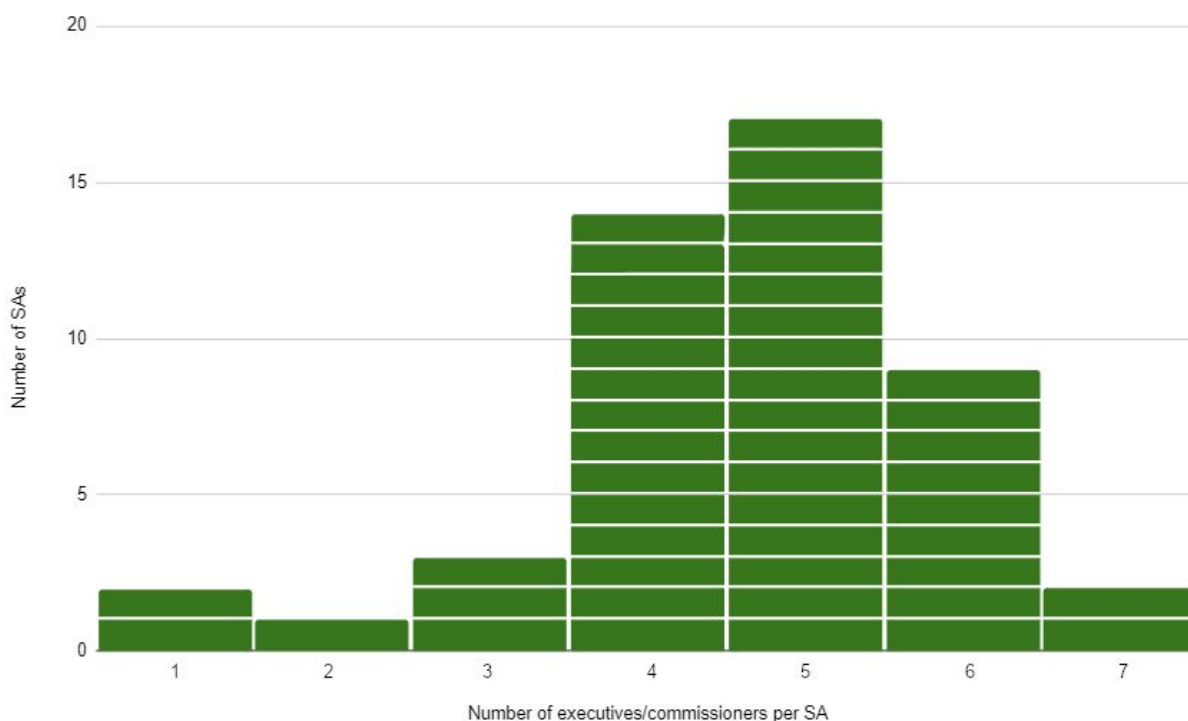
***Interesting elements in the 'miscellaneous' category include positions with broad equity or sustainability portfolios.*

Potential challenges include:

- Enumerability - deciding whether someone is qualified to run or vote for a given position, and determining whether the SA should or could make those decisions.
- Multiple counting - deciding whether a given student can equitably vote for more positions, potentially many more, than their peers.
- Council expansion - adding more and more community representatives.
- Shifting responsibility - tacitly making other elected officials feel less responsible to represent a given community group.

Executives and Commissioners

All SAs rely on generally-elected senior representatives with specific portfolios, called executives or commissioners. The typical leadership team has four to six executives. Their relationships to, and accountability to, other elected officials can vary widely, as does their level of involvement in staff operations.



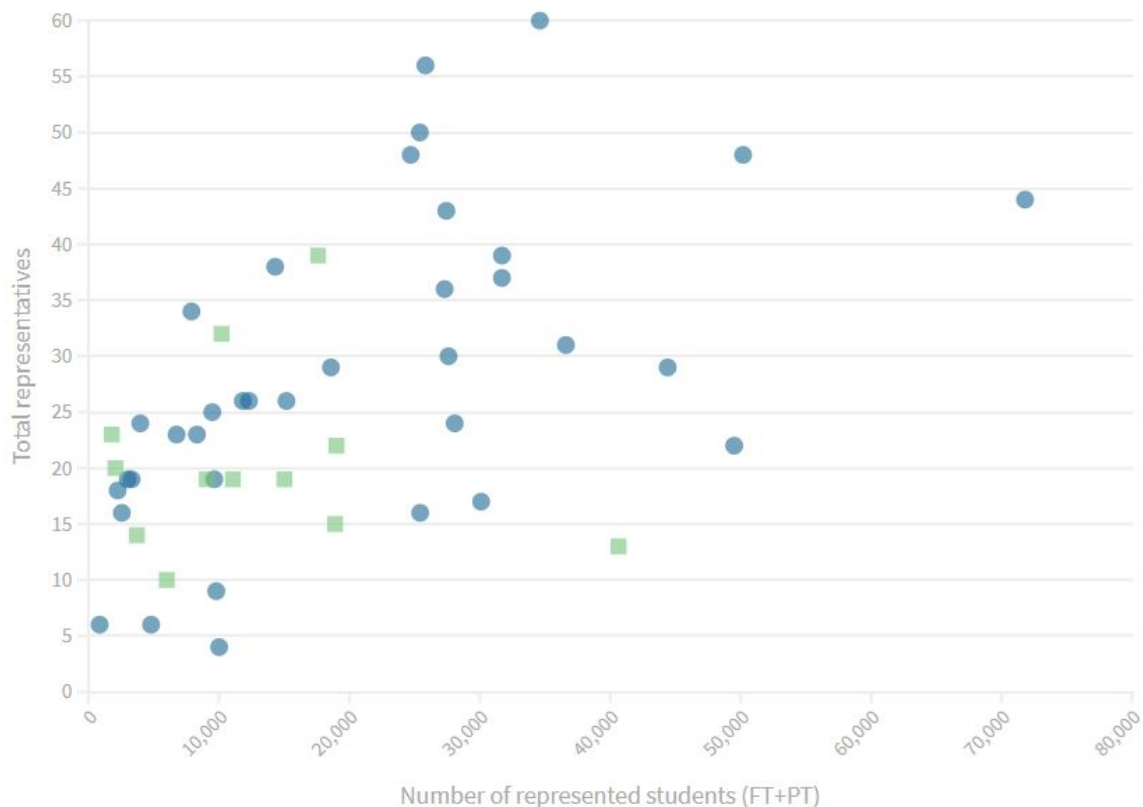
At the high end of the spectrum, SAs may have dedicated executive roles for operations, Francophone affairs, student services, advocacy (sometimes divided into university and government relations positions), equity, student life, communications, and community engagement.

We noticed that very large executive teams and very small ones can both be associated with a high level of involvement in staff operations. For example, a standalone president might serve some of the functions typically associated with a general manager (and in at least one case we noticed, the president also serves that role). Meanwhile, a large executive team might be embedded in functions that other SAs assign to staff, such as events planning or communications.

Students at Large and Other Elected Officials

We used this category for miscellaneous elected representatives who may or may not have full, voting council seats (e.g. representatives at large elected by the entire student body, or representatives on a school's Board of Governors who also hold seats on a council). These positions vary considerably. Around one quarter of the SAs we examined fill the bulk of their councils with students at large alongside, or instead of, faculty representatives. This model is typically found at small schools.

Green = more misc. reps (primarily students at large) than faculty reps



Non-Elected Council Members

We identified 28 cases where unelected non-students hold seats (almost always non-voting seats) on student councils. By far the most common form this takes is when the council includes the general manager/executive director (found in 12 out of our dataset's 48 SAs, including UASU). Other major or noteworthy examples:

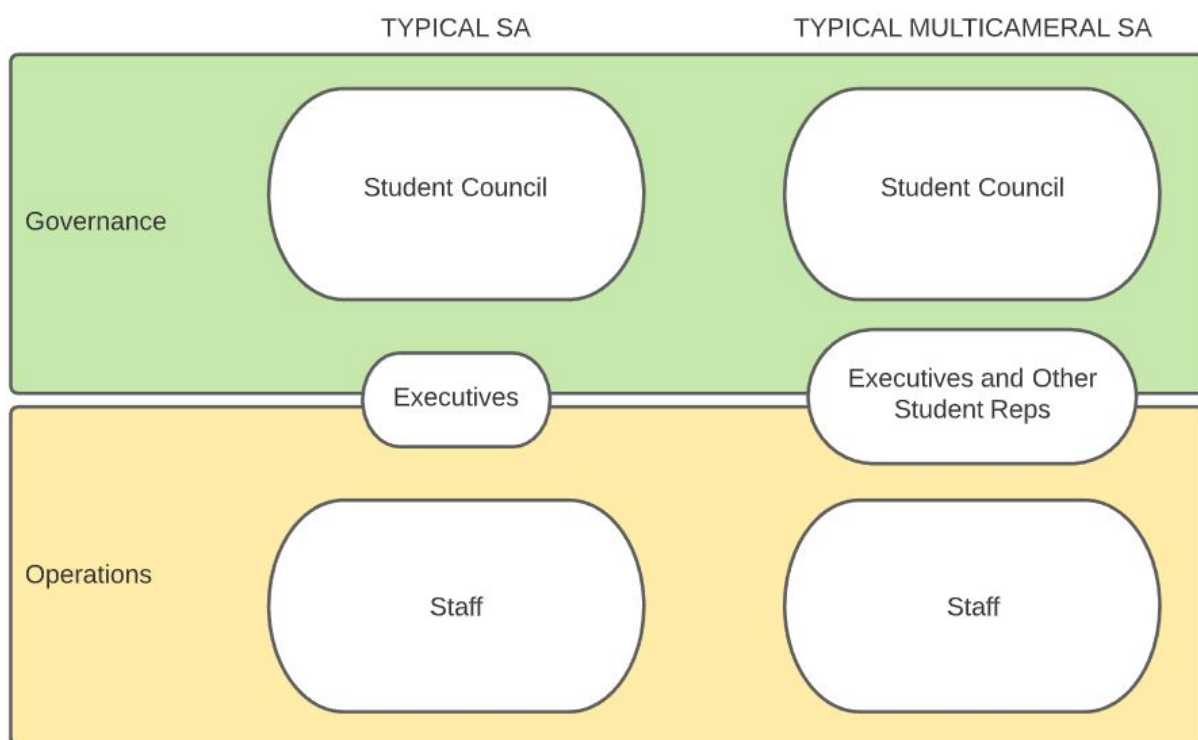
- Governance staff/executive assistants
- Student services managers
- Marketing/communications managers
- University representatives
- Graduate student association representatives

Multicameral Systems

In a multicameral system, responsibilities are divided between two or more representative bodies. Six of the SAs we examined have some variant of a multicameral system (beyond the typical differentiation between councils and executives). While there is a great deal of variation, we noted some more or less common features:

- Faculty representatives dominate one body, while students at large often dominate the other.
- Executives may hold seats on both bodies.
- Direct democracy mechanisms (cases where all students are technically members of one of the representative bodies, and may vote as part of that body at annual general meetings).

One body often holds powers and responsibilities that are more usually concentrated in just the executive team and/or the general manager (e.g. strategy, finances, and human resources). While a body like this typically includes executives and the general manager, its membership also includes other elected student representatives of various kinds. An extremely simplified view:



In effect, this means that most multicameral systems are not very different from the bulk of the SAs in our dataset: where most SAs have a large student council and an executive team, most multicameral systems augment the executive team with other student representatives.