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Dr. Julia Wright

My name is Julia M. Wright and I'm a Professor of English. I came to Dalhousie in 2005 as a Canada Research Chair; I already held a Canada Research Chair and tenured position in Ontario, but I moved here, to Dalhousie, to Halifax, to Nova Scotia, and I have brought over a million dollars in federal research money to this province. I'm currently an Associate Dean Research and I was recently elected to the Board of Directors for the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, though I do not speak here as either a university administrator or a Federation Director but rather as a Nova Scotia taxpayer who happens to know a lot about universities.

I want to start by saying that I fully support the title of Bill 100. I work in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Dalhousie, and current estimates indicate my Faculty's operating budget next year will be about a million dollars less than the tuition revenue our programs generate. Our thousands of students won't benefit from the provincial block grant and haven't for a while, and many of us hoped the consultations on universities in Nova Scotia would lead to some accountability from university presidents and boards of governors on matters like this.

But I want to focus today on the requirements of the revitalization plan in section 12(1), and its failure to recognize the statutes and regulations that govern university decision-making, particularly since university governance is a research area of mine.

The Bill as a whole is written as if a university is a blob of professors teaching a blob of students under a blobby central administration, with only collective agreements to define the relationships between them. A university is actually run like a government, on terms you'll all find very familiar: departments, within faculties, within a university, like municipalities, within provinces, within Canada. Governance processes are largely in place via university policies and regulations, but also entrenched in principle in provincial statutes, such as the 1988 Nova Scotia statute beginning, "The internal regulation of Dalhousie College and University is committed to the University Senate."

Changes or additions to university regulations, research centres, and graduate and undergraduate programs must all go through multiple levels. Proposals to alter or add undergraduate programs, for instance, go through committee reviews in the Department and then Faculty, then to Senate, and then, if approved by a full meeting of Senate, to the Board of Governors for final approval. If it's a graduate program, it also goes to the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission or MPHEC—an interprovincial body that is nowhere mentioned in the Bill and is not under the Minister's purview but is "an agency of the Council of Maritime Premiers."

All of these rigorous processes, from departments to the MPHEC, are in place to ensure quality and the international recognition of Nova Scotia degrees: a degree in Chemistry must mean principally the same thing from year to year, from province to province, and beyond, for the degree to have any meaning to employers or other universities. New, innovative programs must go through the same processes as long-established programs to have the same credibility. It is for this reason that, on a regular basis, our departments and our faculties are subject to external reviews, including on-site assessments by academics from other provinces or countries: it is for this reason that tenure and promotion for faculty typically depend on national and international review; it is for this reason that there are best-practices documents on university governance from various national organizations.

Some of the items in section 12(1) ask for extensive analysis, say b and c, and so could be put together by a team of staff in a few weeks or months. But e, g, and i involve students' learning, courses, and programs, and so fall under the responsibility of Senate and the lengthy deliberative processes leading to it. A group can draft a "plan," but the plan is just words on paper until it is broken into program-specific pieces and sent through multiple governance processes within a university, in which various committees can change, approve, or reject, based on their expertise. The revitalization plan process here, bluntly, looks like a massive amount of work that only leads to a meaningless document without any force in a university except as a starting point for years of multi-level discussion and decisions. The hopelessly vague wording in sections 21 and 25 might give some latitude for more draconian measures to circumvent normal university regulations, but doing so would risk the reputation and even credibility of degrees—and, in the case of external accreditation or MPHEC approval, the very viability of degrees.

If the government proceeds with this Bill, at a minimum Section 12(1) and others should be extensively reframed after consultations with people knowledgeable in basic university governance. I would also suggest that language be added to recognize that a significant portion of university programs in Nova Scotia must regularly meet criteria set by out-of-province bodies. John Donne famously declared, "No man is an island . . . every man is a piece of the continent"—well, no university is a stand-alone operation either, but part of a larger academic network and, in the case of some programs, professional bodies as well. Only finances stay within provincial and board responsibility.

The pervasive disconnect between this Bill and how universities actually work, as internally and externally regulated multi-level institutions, simply makes it impractical to implement. It's like suggesting we play Scrabble with Monopoly pieces. I urge the government to rewrite the Bill so that the pieces match the playing board, and with a practical focus on financial accountability and transparency as a regular part of normal university governance.

#### Selected References:

- MPHEC Mandate: <http://www.mphec.ca/about/mandateandact.aspx>
- Dalhousie Statutes (pdf link on this page):  
[http://www.dal.ca/dept/university\\_secretariat/board\\_of\\_governors/statutory\\_provisions.html](http://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/board_of_governors/statutory_provisions.html)
- American Assoc. of University Professors' "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities": <http://www.aaup.org/report/statement-government-colleges-and-universities>
- Canadian Association of University Teachers' "Governance": <http://www.caut.ca/about-us/caut-policy/lists/caut-policy-statements/caut-policy-statement-on-governance>
- Institute for Effective Governance (US): "Best Practices in University Governance" (incl. substantial section on the need for Boards to self-assess, e.g. on their "fiscal oversight")  
[http://www.goacta.org/images/download/best\\_practices\\_in\\_university\\_governance.pdf](http://www.goacta.org/images/download/best_practices_in_university_governance.pdf)
- Some examples of accredited university programs in Nova Scotia (all involve non-NS Canadian or US accrediting bodies):  
<http://www.dal.ca/faculty/healthprofessions/socialwork/about/accreditation.html>;  
<http://www.smu.ca/academics/sobey/sobey-mba.html>;  
<http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/programsdepartments/professionalstudies/appliedhumannutrition/accreditationfordietetics/default.aspx> ; <http://www.stfx.ca/news/view/5831/>