



Athabasca  
University

# GENERAL FACULTIES COUNCIL (GFC)

## ORIENTATION

February 2016

Updated August 2017

Focused on the future of  
learning.

# Welcome

Thank you for your service on GFC. We hope you find your term interesting and satisfying.

The goal of this orientation is to provide you with a high level overview of governance and of GFC in order to provide you with understanding of the procedures and processes so that you can participate effectively.

# Governance in a Nutshell

University governance refers to the system by which the university is directed and operated.

Governance is about

- Who informs whom
- Who consults whom
- Who decides what

It is also about

- How governing groups interact
- How they relate to constituents
- How decisions are made
- How they render account

# Canadian University Governance Landscape

Complexity

External Pressures

Internal Pressures

Impact on Governance

# Canadian University Governance Landscape

University governance is largely dictated by provincial statute.

As such, post-secondary institution governance varies both within and among provinces.

One significant commonality is the model of collegial/shared governance.

Under collegial/shared governance the Board retains the ultimate responsibility and authority for governance at the University; however, different groups are given primary authority over different areas of expertise and a voice in decisions affecting the university.

# Provincial Legislation

## *Post-secondary Learning Act (PSLA)*

- Associated Regulations
  - Alternative Academic Council Regulation
  - Athabasca University Regulation
  - Campus Alberta Sector Regulation
  - Land Use Regulation
  - Model Provisions Regulation
  - Pension Validation Regulation
  - Programs of Study Regulation
  - Public Post-secondary Institutions' Tuition Fees Regulation

# Publicly Funded Institutions

Accountable to the Minister and governed under the authority of the *Post-secondary Learning Act*

Funded in part by government through operating and other types of grants

May also generate revenue from:

- tuition and fees
- ancillary services
- sponsored research funding
- investments and donations

# How Governance works

Governance depends upon effective structures and processes to exercise power, to comply with legislative requirements, and to honour the University's guiding frameworks.

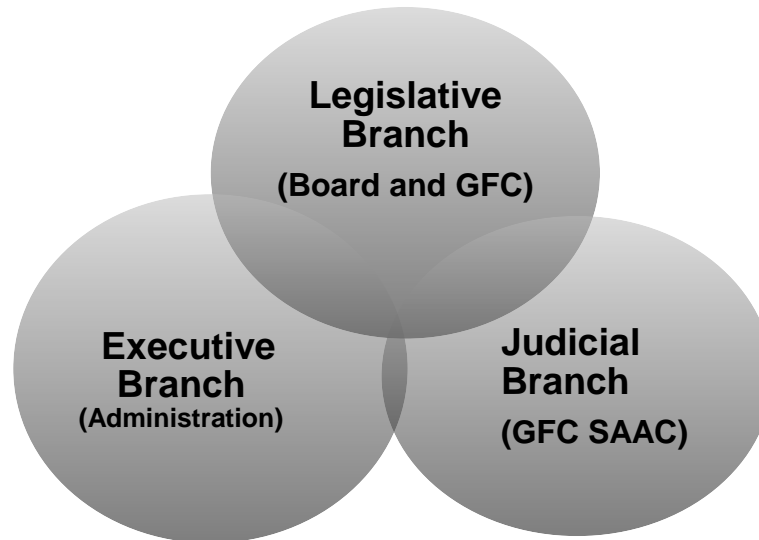


# Why Governance needs you

Governance depends upon effective representatives who participate in the governance process, sharing their perspective on how the interest of the University and its stakeholders can be best served.

# How Authority is Exercised

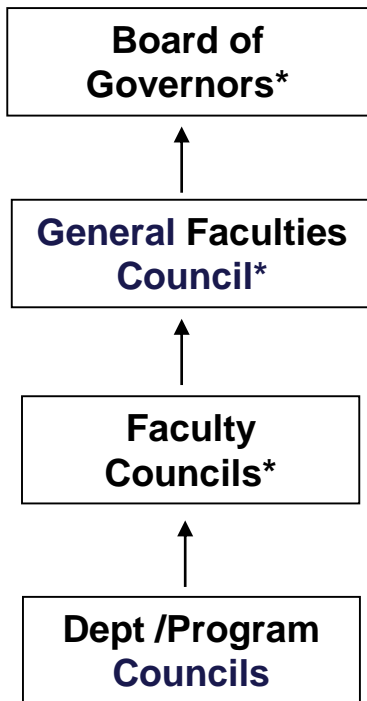
Athabasca University exercises its authority with a governance structure of three branches:



Each branch has its own set of decision-making groups and officers, operates with a set of 'rules', and committees have their own terms of reference.

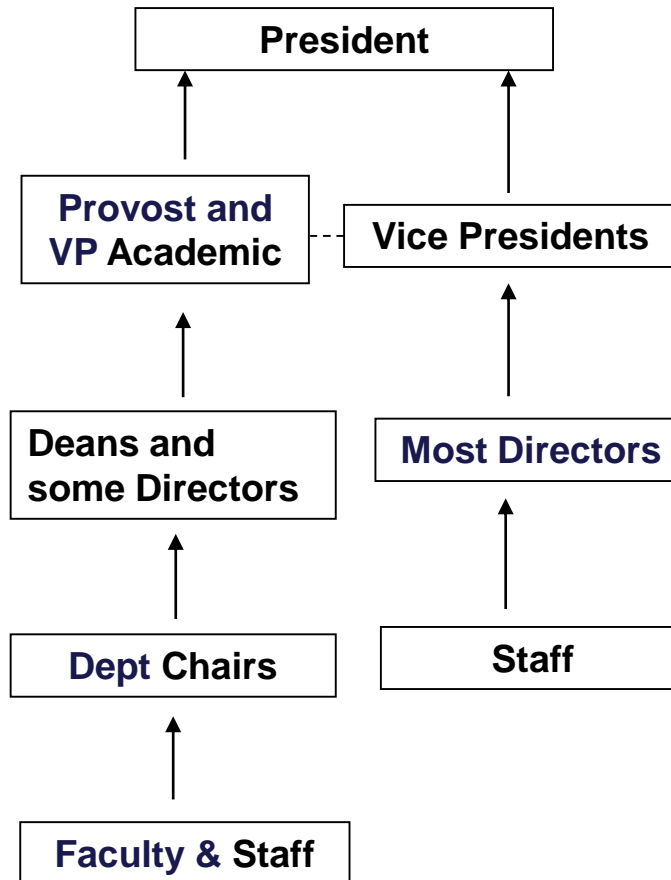
# Branches of Governance

## LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

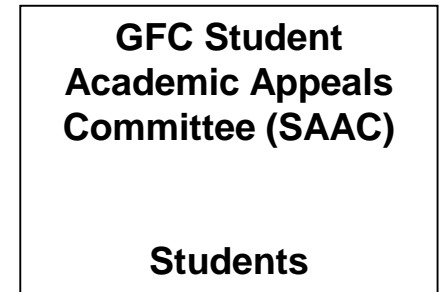


\*Named in the PSLA

## EXECUTIVE BRANCH



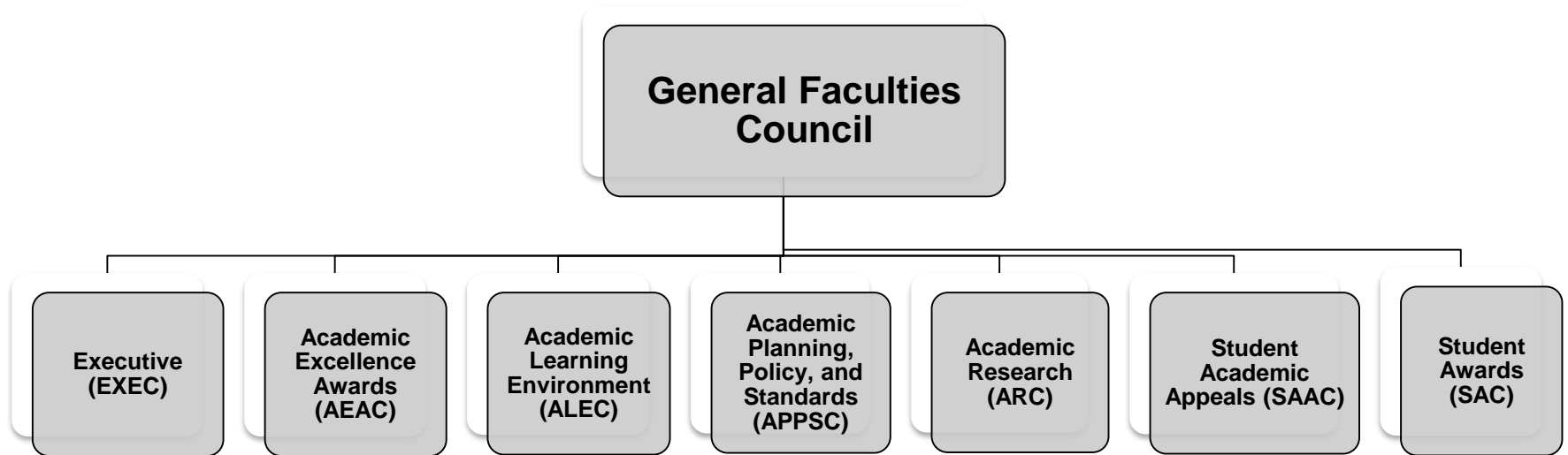
## JUDICIAL BRANCH



# Branches of Governance

<b>Legislative Branch (Board and GFC)</b>	<b>Executive Branch (Administration)</b>	<b>Judicial Branch (GFC SAAC)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board - manages and operates the institution in accordance with its mandate</li> <li>• GFC - subject to the authority of the board, is responsible for the academic and student affairs of the University</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops proposals for legislative branch</li> <li>• Implements decisions of the legislative branch</li> <li>• Develops procedures, regulations, guidelines</li> <li>• Oversees operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deals with matters related to student academic misconduct, adjudicating appeals on penalties of academic misconduct and of policy on procedural grounds when a policy doesn't specify that a University Officer has final decision making authority.</li> </ul>

# GFC & Standing Committees



# GFC consists of 54 members

(set out under section 10, AU Regulation)

- President (Chair)
- Provost and Vice-Presidents
- Dean of each Faculty
- Chair, Centre for Distance Education
- Rep. Centre for World Indigenous Knowledge and Research
- Director, Library Services
- Registrar
- 28 Elected Academic Staff Members
- 2 Non-Academic Staff Members
- 2 Undergraduate Student Members
- 1 Graduate Student Member
- 1 Tutor Member
- 6 Appointed Members

# GFC Standing Committees consists of...

- EXEC - 13 members (Serve on GFC)
- APPSC - 26 members
- ALEC - 22 members
- SAAC - 8 members
- SAC - 11 members
- AEAC - 8 members
- ARC - 8 members

**147 members of the university community serve on GFC and its standing committees**

# GFC Standing Committees

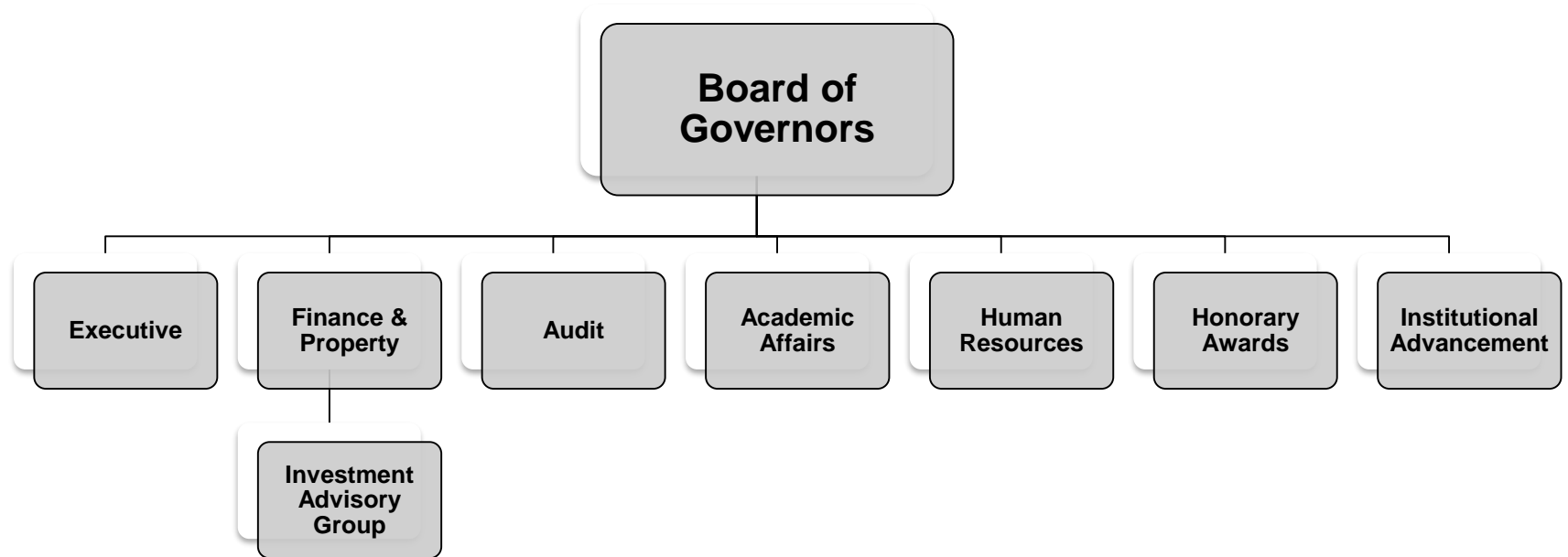
EXEC	APPSC	ALEC
<p>Acts as the executive body of GFC and in general, carrying out the functions delegated to it by GFC.</p> <p>Act on behalf of and with the full authority of GFC on matters that require immediate action.</p> <p>Also oversees and advises on the governance and membership of GFC.</p> <p>Responsible for recommending procedures to expedite GFC's function, including changes to GFC's structure, rules and policies.</p>	<p>GFC's senior committee dealing with academic planning and policy issues.</p> <p>Considers or recommends to GFC on any academic issue, including those issues under the purview of other GFC committees or issues linked to academic service units where those issues have a significant academic impact.</p> <p>Responsible to GFC for promoting an optimal learning environment for students and excellence in teaching, research, and graduate studies.</p>	<p>Responsible for the promotion of an optimal learning environment through the encouragement of innovative design and development, teaching, learning, assessment, resources, and use of technology.</p> <p>Makes rules and regulations for the management and operation of the library.</p>



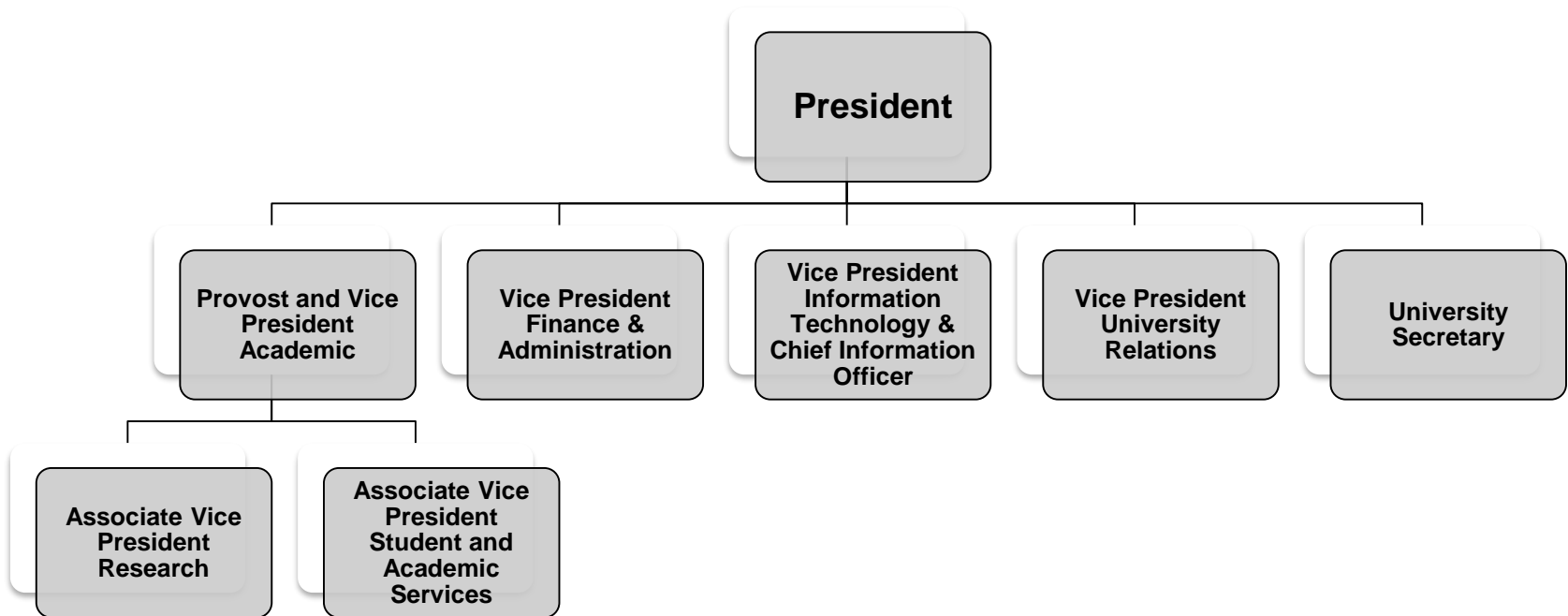
# GFC Standing Committees

SAAC	SAC	AEAC	ARC
<p>Responsible for dealing with matters related to student academic misconduct, adjudicating appeals on penalties of academic misconduct and of policy on procedural grounds when a policy doesn't specify that a University Officer has final decision making authority</p>	<p>Responsibility for dealing with all matters related to student awards, including approving new student awards, approving the minimum value of an award and making recommendations on any new policy or revisions to existing policy governing awards for undergraduate and graduate students.</p>	<p>Adjudicates the AEGSS, CCMATE, PARSE, PATME and any other relevant awards.</p> <p>Responsibility for reviewing academic excellence awards policies and criteria, and recommend to the APPSC revisions to policies governing these awards.</p>	<p>Advises on the overall research goals of Athabasca University, the distribution of designated or allocated research funds, and recommends on research policies and procedures.</p>

# Board and Standing Committees



# Executive Group



# Roles...the Board of Governors

Oversee the management and operation of the University's business and affairs

# Roles...GFC

Academic oversight and responsibility (subject to the Board)

Responsibilities:

- Academic quality (pedagogy, learning and scholarship/research)
- Curriculum and program quality
- Recommendations to the Board on matters of academic import
- Academic perspective through input on non-academic matters
- General supervision over student affairs, particularly those aspects of student life which relate to the education process
- Policies within its role or authority (academic affairs, student affairs, etc.)

# Roles...Executive Group

Day to day management of the operations

Responsibilities:

- Propose and develop strategies, plans and policies for Board and GFC approval
- Lead implementation of Board and GFC policies, strategies, plans and direction
- Direct and carry out the operations of the university

## **Roles...Other Governing and Representative Groups**

### **Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU)**

- All undergraduate students are members
- Represents the interests of undergraduate students
- Governed by a student legislative council comprised of student leaders who are elected annually

### **Athabasca University Graduate Students' Association (AUGSA)**

- All graduate students are members
- Represents the interests of graduate students, graduate student teachers or research assistants
- Governed by an annually elected GSA Executive under the direction of the graduate representative council comprised of representatives from all departments

## **Roles...Other Governing and Representative Groups**

### **Athabasca University Faculty Association (AUFA)**

- Represents the collective interests of academic and professional staff members

### **Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE)**

- Represents the interests of support staff

### **Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)**

- Represents the interests of tutors and academic experts



## Roles...Other Governing and Representative Groups

### Deans' Council

- Comprised of the President, Provost and Vice Presidents, Deans and others designated by the council
- Acts as an advisory body to the President, Board, and GFC
- Has the powers, duties and functions that are delegated to it

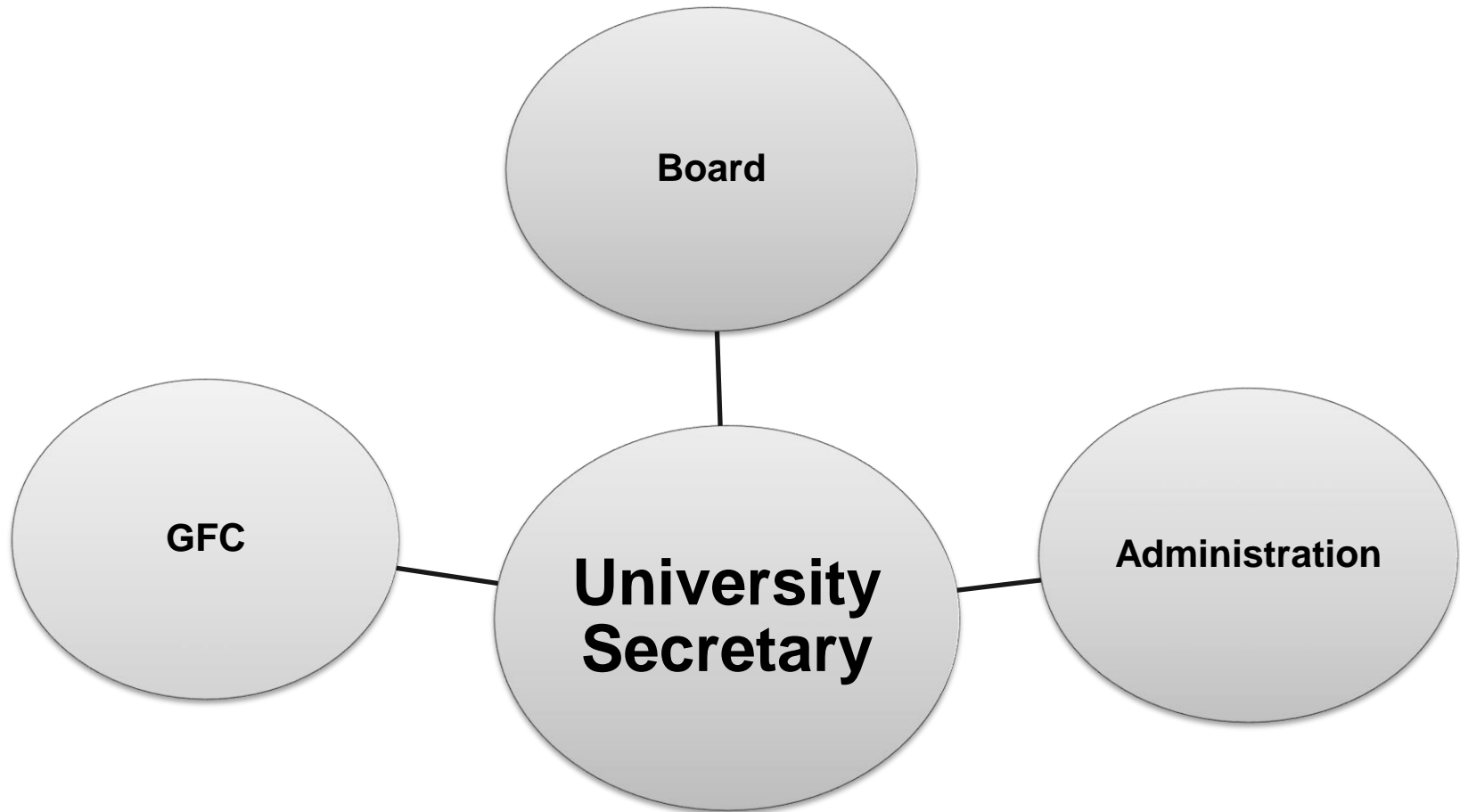
# Roles...Other Governing and Representative Groups

## Faculty Councils

- Each faculty at the university has a faculty council (5 in total) (s. 28(1) PSLA)
- Comprised of the Dean, President, all full-time academic staff of the faculty, professional association representatives and others appointed by GFC (s. 28 PSLA)
- In respect of the faculty
  - Determines the programs of study
  - Appoints the examiners for examinations in the faculty, conducts the examinations and determine the results
  - Provides for the admission of students to the faculty
  - Determines conditions for withdrawal or continuation in a program or students in the faculty
  - Authorizes the granting of degrees

subject to any conditions or restrictions that are imposed by the GFC (s. 29, PSLA)

# Role of University Secretary



# University Secretary cont'd

- Gateway and facilitator for communication among the Board, GFC, senior management and other constituents
- Provides leadership and expertise to ensure effective operation and administration of the University's collegial system of governance (the Board and GFC) as set out in legislation
- Most senior advisor and counselor on governance related issues and the associated legislative and administrative policy and procedures
- Leads a varied portfolio that includes governance, legislative compliance, FOIPP, University policy management, Ombuds, and legal issues

# Determining Authority and Responsibility

## Considerations:

- Legislation
- Assignments or delegations
- Roles
- Legal agreements
- Other factors, such as: expertise, affected groups, conflicts of interest, historical practice, accepted norms, culture, governance principles

# Information for GFC Members

# GFC Rules

The GFC Rules set out the terms of office for and responsibilities of members, rules of order for meetings, GFC's standing committees and their membership composition.

The GFC Rules are available at:

<http://ous.athabascau.ca/general/documents/gfc-rules.pdf>

# GFC Webpage

<http://ous.athabascau.ca/general/index.php>

The webpage contains information such as: GFC Rules, meeting agendas and minutes, membership lists, meeting schedules, Standing Committee Terms of References and links to the *Post-secondary Learning Act* (PSLA) and AU Regulation.

The full academic calendar of all GFC and GFC standing committees meetings is approved annually and is available at:

<http://ous.athabascau.ca/general/documents/gfc-meeting-schedule.pdf>



# GFC Webpage cont'd

Home
Governance
Board of Governors
<b>General Faculties Council</b> ▾
Academic Excellence Awards Committee (AEAC)
Academic Learning Environment Committee (ALEC)
Academic Planning, Policy, and Standards Committee (APPSC)
Academic Research Committee (ARC)
Executive Committee (EXEC)
Student Academic Appeals Committee (SAAC)
Student Awards Committee (SAC)
Meeting Agendas & Minutes
Governance Documents
Advisory Groups
Policy & Procedures
Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP)
Contact Us

## General Faculties Council (GFC)

The General Faculties Council (GFC), subject to the authority of the board, is responsible for the academic and student affairs of the University. The powers of GFC are set out under section 26 of the [Post-Secondary Learning Act](#) and section 13 of the [Athabasca University Regulation](#), and include granting degrees, approval of academic programs, academic policies, academic awards and the University Calendar.

The [GFC Rules](#) (pdf) set out the terms of office for and responsibilities of members, rules of order for meetings, GFC's standing committees and their membership composition.

- [Meeting Agendas & Minutes](#)
- [Meeting Schedule](#) (pdf)
- [Membership List](#) (pdf)

### Forms:

- [Outline of Issue Form](#) (word)
- [Completing an Outline of Issue Form](#) (pdf)
- [Table of Amendments Template](#) (word)
- [Table of Amendments Samples](#) (pdf)

### GFC has seven standing committees:

- [Academic Excellence Awards Committee](#)
- [Academic Learning Environment Committee](#)
- [Academic Planning, Policy, and Standards Committee](#)
- [Academic Research Committee](#)
- [Executive Committee](#)
- [Student Academic Appeals Committee](#)
- [Student Awards Committee](#)

GFC has delegated to each committee responsibility and authority to make decisions on its behalf as defined in the terms of reference for each committee.

# GFC Handbook

- The GFC Handbook is available on the University Secretariat website.
- The GFC Handbook is not an officially approved GFC document. It is a compilation document, referencing GFC rules and generally reflecting practices, and is intended to serve as a resource for GFC members.
- The GFC Handbook contains information such as: the role and responsibilities of GFC, membership, rules of quorum and voting and GFC standing committees.

# Responsibilities of Members

- Act honestly and in good faith with a view to the best interests of the University
- Exercise care, diligence, and skill that a reasonably prudent person would exercise in comparable circumstances

(GFC Rules, PART II, B. Responsibilities of Members)

# Expectations of GFC Members

Members are expected to:

- Familiarize themselves with the GFC Rules, GFC's role in governing the University, and the GFC Handbook
- Make an attempt to attend each scheduled meeting

(Note: a person shall cease to be a member after missing three consecutive meetings, except for ex-officio members. The position shall be declared vacant. (GFC Rules, PART II, A. Membership, provision 5.6))

# Expectations of GFC Members cont'd

- Come to meeting prepared to engage in respectful, meaningful discussion, provide considered, constructive and thoughtful feedback and commentary, express opinions, and ask questions to enable GFC to exercise its best judgment in decision-making
- Report to, and (as much as possible) consult with, the group they represent
- Act in the best interests of the University

# Expectations of Members cont'd

- Ensure all confidential GFC records and information remain confidential, even after the member ceases to be a member of GFC
- Disclose a conflict of interest with respect to a matter that comes before GFC when speaking to the matter at a GFC meeting  
(Note: the member shall be recused from voting on any motion to which the conflict related. (GFC Rules, PART II, H. Conflict of Interest))

# GFC Meeting Procedures

Calendar meeting invites are sent for all scheduled meetings to all members. When you receive the calendar meeting invites, **please respond (accept, decline, tentative).**

Approximately one week prior to each meeting, the agenda documents are attached to the calendar meeting invite and the meeting invite is 'updated'

Occasionally, a document will be revised or added after you have received the agenda documents; if this occurs, you will be notified.

# GFC Meeting Procedures cont'd

When you arrive at a meeting, please pick up your name plate. If you are teleconferencing, please announce your name and mute (\*6) your phone to ensure all members can hear the discussion of the full council.

All meetings of GFC are open to the public unless...

It is understood members may need to arrive late, leave early or slip out if the need arises.



# GFC Meeting Procedures cont'd

If someone wishes to introduce business, a request should be submitted in writing to the University Secretary and include:

- background information on the issue
- commentary on the importance and impacts of the issue, and identification of possible conflicts
- clear indication of what the champions wish GFC to do, preferably including draft wording of any motions to be considered

The University Secretary, through the Chair will bring the request to the GFC Executive Committee for consideration and possible recommendation to GFC or its standing committees.

# GFC Meeting Procedures cont'd

- GFC operates under Robert's Rules of Order.
- A majority of members, excluding vacant positions, shall constitute a quorum at any meeting.
- Each member present, including the chair and ex-officio members, is entitled to one vote. Only members present may vote on any question.
- Abstentions are not counted.
- Voting by proxy is not permitted.
- Members may not send alternates to meetings.

# GFC Agenda

A typical GFC agenda is broken up into the following sections:

- Approval of the agenda, including the consent agenda
- Declaring conflicts
- Business arising from the consent agenda
- Approval of the minutes from the last GFC meeting
- Business arising from the minutes
- Reports from Executive Officers
- Reports from GFC Standing Committees

Note: Action items being forwarded to GFC by a GFC standing committee are listed under that standing committee.

# GFC Minutes

Minutes are approved by GFC at the next meeting

Errors in the minutes should be reported to the University Secretary or Governance Coordinator, ahead of the meeting if possible, so that the errors can be corrected and reported at the meeting rather than using time at the meeting for this.

Advance notice of questions regarding the content of the minutes is also appreciated whenever possible, and the appropriate officer will raise and address these during the meeting.

Once approved, the minutes are posted on the GFC webpage.

# Actions Items

Action items are proposals that require GFC approval or recommendation by GFC for final approval by the Board.

Examples of action items approved by GFC:

- Policy documents
- Proposal to terminate an academic program
- Proposals for changes to existing program regulations, if in the opinion of the VPA, APPSC should recommend to GFC

Examples of action items GFC recommends final approval by the Board:

- Proposals to create new programs
- Proposals to create new faculties or departments

# Information and Discussion Items

GFC receives reports from the chairs of its standing committees to allow for awareness of what happens at these meetings.

GFC receives reports from Executive Officers (President and Provost and Vice Presidents).

Some items come before GFC for information and discussion only, such as:

- Enrolment Update
- Strategic Enrolment Management Plan Update
- Graduate Outcome Survey
- Student Enrolment Profile

# GFC Appointments and Elections

The Executive Committee has responsible for encouraging nominations for vacancies on GFC, its standing committees, and other bodies requiring representation from GFC or the academic community.

Elections are held every Spring, and as needed.

Notices and call for nominations are made to appropriate bodies, for example:

- Positions to be filled by full-time academic faculty members – notices are given to Deans
- Positions to be filled by student associations – notice is given to the student association

# Questions?

If you ever have any questions, please contact the University Secretariat:

Carol Lund, University Secretary

Eileen Hendy, Governance Coordinator

Or, visit the Office of the University Secretariat website at <http://ous.athabascau.ca>