

Mandating Indigenous Student Representation on University Senates and Boards of Governors

The University Act sets the composition of boards and senates for universities governed by the Act but does not guarantee any designated Indigenous representation in either governing body (University Act, RSBC 1996, c. 468).

The Ask

Amend the University Act and, where necessary, institution-specific legislation to require at least one designated Indigenous student voting seat on the Senate and Board of Governors of each B.C. public university. The amendment would be expected to have minimal fiscal impact. A province-wide guarantee would require legislative change.

Why This Fits the Ministry's Current Direction

- The Minister's mandate letter directs continued work with Indigenous partners to ensure that Indigenous learners can achieve their higher educational goals in ways that reflect diverse Indigenous cultures and values. A guaranteed voting seat would give that direction concrete institutional form.
- The measure would require minimal operating funding, limited mainly to modest supports such as honoraria, onboarding and administration.
- It would be consistent with B.C.'s commitments under the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* by embedding Indigenous participation in public institution decision-making.

The Gap in the University Act

Sections 19 and 35 to 35.2 of the *University Act* set out board and senate composition for universities governed by the Act. None expressly provides for designated Indigenous representation. Senates governed by sections 35 and 35.1 may add members within statutory requirements, but board membership is fixed by section 19. Universities therefore cannot guarantee a designated Indigenous student board seat without provincial legislative change. Equivalent amendments may be required for universities governed by separate statutes.

Precedent in Other Jurisdictions

- **Yukon.** The *Yukon University Act* requires that at least three of the ten government-appointed governors be selected from among persons nominated by at least one Yukon First Nation. It also requires the Senate to establish processes aimed at ensuring that at least 30 percent of its members are Indigenous persons from Yukon or elsewhere in Canada.
- **Manitoba.** The *University College of the North Act* establishes a Council of Elders and requires the Council to create a process for appointing one of its members to the Governing Council and the same or another member to the Learning Council.
- **Ontario.** Algoma University's Board bylaws reserve one governor position for a student elected from among the students represented by the Shingwauk Anishinaabe Students' Association. The seat is established through the University's bylaws under the board-composition authority provided by the *Algoma University Act, 2008*.

No province appears to require designated Indigenous student representation on both governing bodies across its public university system, giving B.C. an opportunity to lead nationally.

Implementation

- Amend sections 19 and 35 to 35.2 of the *University Act*, and any corresponding provisions in institution-specific statutes, to add the designated seats.
- Co-develop nomination and selection processes with First Nations and Indigenous student organizations, drawing on Yukon's nomination model.
- Consider the amendment alongside any governance recommendations arising from the Post-Secondary Sustainability Review.

Sources *University Act*, RSBC 1996, c. 468, ss. 19, 35–35.2; Office of the Premier, *Mandate Letter to the Hon. Jessie Sunner*, July 17, 2025; *Yukon University Act*, SY 2019, c. 15, ss. 13, 32; *The University College of the North Act*, CCSM c. U55; *Algoma University Act, 2008*, S.O. 2008, c. 13; Algoma University, *Board of Governors By-Laws*; Algoma University, *Internal Student Governor Candidate Handbook 2025–2026*.

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