

Canadian Universities: Emerging Hubs for International Parliamentary Research and Training

Canadian universities have recently emerged as important centres in applied parliamentary research and training, joining universities in Australia, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. This article reviews the growth of these research and training programs at three institutions – McGill University, Université Laval and the University of Ottawa – over the past five years. It also points to possible future areas of work, which will allow parliaments elsewhere to learn from Canada’s experience, and vice versa.

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It has long been recognized that, as Lord Philip Norton wrote some 25 years ago, parliaments *matter*.¹ Research has established that effective parliaments enhance democracy,² increase government accountability and reduce corruption,³ encourage peace and development⁴ and thus more generally promote good governance and socio-economic development.⁵

Over the past half-decade or so, Canadian universities have begun to emerge as global players in applied parliamentary research and training, joining universities in Australia, the United Kingdom and elsewhere; see Table 1. Two universities in Quebec – McGill University and Université Laval – and one in Ontario – the University of Ottawa – have recently facilitated global knowledge exchanges and ‘communities of practice,’ undertaken rigorous research on parliamentary oversight around the world and have developed cutting-edge professional development programs for both Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff. In all these endeavours, the universities have developed strategic alliances, both

among themselves, with global organizations (such as the World Bank, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)), with universities outside of Canada (principally, the University of Westminster and the University of East Anglia, in the United Kingdom) and with national organizations (such as the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation and the African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs). A cross-cutting theme of both the research and training is the exchange of experience and lessons learned in Canada with other countries, and vice versa. Parliaments in other countries are learning about Canada’s practices while Canadian legislators and staff are able to appreciate practices in other countries and consider their applicability here. (This is not to diminish the significance of specialized programs elsewhere; the universities of Athabasca and Tasmania, for example, offer specialized programs on legislative drafting; the University of Witwatersrand offers a Commonwealth-wide course for newly elected MPs from around the Commonwealth and the University of Hull offers degree programs in parliamentary studies. Rather, we wish to highlight the integration of more general training for MPs and staff with applied research programs and the development of global parliamentary networks at McGill University, Université Laval and the University of Ottawa). This article reviews the growth of these types of research and training programs over the past five years, and points to possible future areas of work, which – it is hoped – will enhance parliamentary democracy in Canada and abroad.

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**Table 1:
Principal International University Parliamentary Programs**

		Degree Programs ¹	Prof. Dev. Program	Customized Workshops	Research ²	Note
Australian National University	Australia			Y	Y	Centre for Democratic Institutions; appears to be inactive.
Deakin University	Australia			?	?	Annual international PAC workshop discontinued
La Trobe University	Australia			Y	?	Annual international PAC workshop discontinued
Monash University	Australia			?	Y	Longstanding internship program with Victoria Legislature
University of Tasmania	Australia	Y		?	?	Specialized Course in Parliamentary Law, Practice & Procedure
Athabasca University	Canada		Y		?	Specialized Certificate in Legislative Drafting
Carleton University	Canada			Y	?	Internship program with Parliament of Canada; orientation program Canadian MPs
Université Laval	Canada		Y	Y	Y	PD Program for parliamentary staff; research in collaboration with McGill and University of Westminster
McGill University	Canada		Y	Y	Y	PD Programs for parliamentary staff and for MPs, in collaboration with CPA; research in collaboration with McGill and University of Westminster
University of the Witwatersrand	South Africa	?	Y	Y	Y	PD program for MPs, in collaboration with CPA
State University of New York	United States			Y	?	Centre for International Development; funding principally from USAID
University of East Anglia	United Kingdom				Y	Parliamentary research in collaboration with McGill
University of Edinburgh	United Kingdom			Y	Y	Proposed collaboration with McGill
University of Hull	United Kingdom	Y		Y	Y	BA and MA in parliamentary studies
University College - London	United Kingdom				Y	Constitution Unit
University of Westminster	United Kingdom				Y	Parliamentary research in collaboration with McGill and Laval universities

¹ University degrees in Parliamentary studies; excludes degrees in broader fields such as Politics or Public Policy

² Publicly-funded research, in applied parliamentary studies

Source: internet search (December 10-12, 2017)

Professional Development Programs - Parliamentary Staff

Over the period 2008-10, the World Bank, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and l'association des secrétaires généraux des parlements francophone (ASGPF) undertook a comprehensive needs assessment for parliamentary staff for countries in developing and developed countries alike. They found that there was a patchwork of basic training courses, offered by developed country parliaments to their own staff (although Canada and Australia, in particular, offered places in these courses to staff from developing countries, too) and by various non-governmental organizations to parliamentary staff in developing countries. Around the same time, Joachim Wehner⁶ completed an assessment of organizations

working globally to strengthen parliaments for the UK's Department for International Development. As Table 2 demonstrates, the number of such organizations was rather small, and mainly dominated by international and US-based organizations; the only university listed was the state University of New York. Since the time of Wehner's study, the parliamentary world has evolved: The World Bank Institute has been disbanded, the UNDP has massively cut back on its global program and the US government has reduced spending on development assistance in general and on parliamentary strengthening, in particular. At the same time, both CPA and IPU are expanding their collaboration with universities around the world and new actors, such as International IDEA and Greg Power and Associates, as well as McGill University and Université Laval, have emerged.

**Table 2:
The Activity Portfolio of Organizations Implementing Global Parliamentary Strengthening Projects**

Improving Information Access	Technical Assistance in legal reform	Budget Training	Study trips, conferences, network-building	Physical Infrastructure	Analytic Work
NDI SUNY-CID UNDP	SUNY- CID UNDP USAID WFD	CPA IPU NDI PC SUNY-CID UNDP WFD	CPA IPU NDI SUNY-CID UNDP	SUNY-CID UNDP	CPA IPU NDI PC SUNY-CID UNDP USAID WBI

CPA= Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; IPU= Inter-parliamentary Union; NDI= National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (US); PC= Parliamentary Centre (Canada); SUNY-CID= State University of New York – Centre for Democratic Institutions (US); UNDP= United Nations Development Program; USAID= US Agency for International Development; WBI= World Bank Institute; WFD= Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

Source: adapted from Wehner (2007)

The ASGPF-CPA-World Bank study further found that there was substantial overlap between courses offered, with one African committee clerk from Kenya stating that: “You [foreign organizations] all offer the same thing: four or five days intensive training, going over the same materials as the others use.” What was needed, respondents said, was “a higher level, university-certified program that went ‘beyond the basics’.” As a result, the World Bank and CPA collaborated with McGill to develop such a program for English speaking countries while the World Bank and Quebec’s National Assembly collaborated with Laval to develop a similar program for French speaking countries. These universities have sought to address the need for Canadian and international parliamentary training using a blended learning

methodological approach including traditional face-to-face training, web-based learning, video conferencing and online discussions. While an increasing number of parliaments have established their own training institutes, these programs’ multi-organizational approach complement other established programs with the required academic rigour and pedagogical support, while seeking to minimize overlap and duplication.

In 2012, the first professional development program for parliamentary staff was conducted at McGill University under the direction of Rick Stapenhurst, former head of the World Bank Institute’s parliamentary program and currently Assistant Professor in the School of Continuing Studies. Some

two-dozen high potential, mid-level parliamentary staff from countries as diverse as Ghana, South Africa, Bangladesh, Trinidad & Tobago and St. Helena, as well as from Newfoundland and Labrador, attended the program⁷. The program currently comprises a week-long residency at McGill, during which the basics of parliamentary administration are reviewed, five e*learning courses which go into greater depth in selected areas and personal mentoring by McGill faculty and former Canadian and other parliamentary staff. Over the past seven years, some 150 staff (including from Newfoundland & Labrador, Ontario, the North West Territories and Saskatchewan) have attended the program. Throughout, the CPA has been a strong partner, sponsoring participants from around the Commonwealth and offering advice on program content. Participants exiting the program have highlighted its ability to give them a better understanding of the broader nature of parliamentary work in the context of society and citizen expectations and to refine skills that help them excel on the job.

Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy at the University of Ottawa

In 2016, a new institute was created with a mandate to focus on public finance and institutions. With Ontario government support, the institute is an independent, non-partisan organization 'led by Kevin Page, who is the Institute's President and CEO, and Sahir Khan, Executive Vice President. Leveraging existing international relationships and partnerships with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Budget Partnership, and the United States National Governors Association, the institute is able to connect Canadian leaders and decision-makers with students and researchers and share the strengths of Canadian values and democratic institutions abroad.

While not solely focused on parliaments, an important component of the institute's work concerns the role of parliamentary oversight and scrutiny in the budget process.

Université Laval's International Parliamentary Training Program is similar. It is a joint-initiative between the Chaire de recherche sur la démocratie et le parlementarisme (CRDP), Professor Eric Montigny, along with Professor Louis Imbeau and the National Assembly of Quebec to support parliamentary staff from francophone states. In its fourth year and offered in Quebec City, it comprises a longer residency than McGill (10 days, of which five days are in the National Assembly) but no additional e*learning courses⁸. The program has the financial support of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) and the Organisation internationale de la francophonie (OIF). While there is no formal agreement between Laval and McGill, there is considerable informal collaboration: both universities were founding members of the Global Network of Parliamentary Training Institutes (GNPTI) (see below), they share a number of common resource persons and typically a member of Laval's faculty is invited as a guest speaker to the McGill program, and vice versa.

One interesting development has been the emergence of international collaboration between McGill University and Kenya's Centre for Parliamentary Studies and Training (CPST), and between Université Laval and the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal. Driven by the desire to enhance sustainability and impact – and by the delay by immigration authorities to grant visas to program participants – the goal is to offer joint programs with, respectively, McGill and Laval lecturers and recognized local trainers and guest speakers.

Professional Development Programs - MPs

While many of the non-governmental institutions noted above offer seminars and workshops for MPs, until now the only university programs that offered training for MPs were in Australia. These included the now defunct programs at La Trobe University and Deakin University for members of Public Accounts Committees and at Australia National University's Centre for Democratic Institutions for MPs from South East Asia and the Pacific.

McGill University, in collaboration with the CPA, ventured into this territory in 2017: professional development for newly elected MPs from small-jurisdictions in the Commonwealth. The CPA had long recognized the reality that parliamentarians come to their jobs with little to no formal training. This is particularly an issue in small states where the number of MPs may total only a dozen or so



MPs from small Commonwealth states at the McGill University residency, along with university faculty and staff, and former McGill faculty and staff, who are now MPs in the Canadian Parliament.

and where the needs of parliamentarians skilled in parliamentary governance are perhaps the highest but where training opportunities are virtually non-existent⁹. Twenty-three MPs from small jurisdictions from around the Commonwealth (including from Canada's Northwest Territories and Nova Scotia, the Caribbean and Pacific, British islands including the Isle of Man, Jersey, and Guernsey and Australia's Capital Territory and Tasmania) attended a week-long residency in Montreal, which included presentations by Senator Wade Mark from Trinidad and Tobago and Glenn Wheeler, from Canada's Office of the Auditor General and a visit to Quebec's National Assembly. The residency also offered roundtable discussions where parliamentarians could share challenges as new MPs. To help ensure impact, participants were asked to identify three areas which they would recommend for change/improvement to their parliamentary leaders. Proposals ranged from introducing written guidelines for Public Accounts Committee (PAC) operations and strengthening the committee system more generally to refurbishing and providing public access to the parliamentary library, and seeking to improve parliamentary research by developing a partnership with a local university

Networks and Communities of Practice

Global Network of Parliamentary Budget Offices

In 2009, in light of the research that a strong independent budget process is central to accountable governments, the OECD encouraged the formation of the Network of Parliamentary Budget Officials. This network brought together parliamentary budget office staff to share practices, challenges, institutional arrangements and improve scrutiny of the budget process. In 2013, building on the importance of budget analysis and extending the reach to non-OECD members – the OECD network cannot invite PBO staff from non-OECD countries –, McGill University's Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID), supported by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), partnered with the World Bank Institute (WBI) to host a seminar on Open Government, Information and Budget Transparency. The seminar welcomed Parliamentary Budget Offices (PBOs) and parliamentary experts from around the world. Through this forum of knowledge exchange, participants agreed to form a Community of Practice named the Global Network of Parliamentary

Budget Officers (GNPBO); subsequently, the University of Ottawa has hosted an annual GNPBO Assembly, providing a forum for face-to-face sharing of experiences, professional mini-courses for PBO officials and a complement to both the GNPBO e*platform and the World Bank's online, open access course for PBO staff. At the 2017 Assembly, discussions focused on PBO relations with the media, expenditures and strategic allocation of resources, and Clerk-PBO relations.

Global Network of Parliamentary Training Institutes

Building on the experience of the GNPBO, McGill University's School of Continuing Studies hosted an international forum of parliamentary training institutes, again with support from SSHRC. At the initial forum, which took place in Montreal in the summer of 2016 and was attended by representatives from parliamentary institutes from across Africa and Asia, it was clear that there was a need for greater collaboration and sharing of knowledge and experiences among parliamentary training institutes. In January 2017, the Kenyan CPST hosted a second forum, and the Association of Parliamentary Training Institutes was born. One concrete outcome is a Memorandum of Understanding between McGill University and the CPST to undertake joint parliamentary training and research.

Research

McGill and Laval have recently completed a major piece of research, examining the strengths and weaknesses of parliamentary oversight in francophone countries. It had been noted that, up until this project, virtually all research on oversight had focused on Public Accounts Committees (PACs) and other mechanisms found in 'Westminster' parliamentary systems, and that little was known about oversight in francophone countries. Working in collaboration with ASGPF, and supported by SSHRC, researchers were able to construct an index of *Commissions des Finances* - the francophone equivalent of PACs - and highlight both good and bad practice in francophone parliaments. Importantly, the researchers also highlighted those areas where francophone parliaments could learn lessons from Westminster parliaments, and vice versa. For example, commissions were found to have more powers (e.g. to call officials to account, sanction errant public servants and follow-up on recommendations made by the commission), while PACs tended to be stronger in terms of public engagement, outreach and communications. These and other findings will be published in a scholarly book (in French) by Les

Presses de l' Université Laval. An English language practitioner's book, summarising the research project and presenting a number of country case studies, is available in electronic format on the website of the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation: <https://Université/www.caaf-fcar.ca/en/parliamentary-oversight-resources/external-publications>.

In 2015, Université Laval won a major competitive British Academy grant, funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) as part of the Anti-Corruption Evidence Program. Partners include the University of Westminster in the United Kingdom and the African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs in Ghana. Noting the importance of curbing corruption in order to achieve sustainable development, DFID sought to encourage innovative, evidence-based research to guide its support for anti-corruption efforts globally. Laval's project - one of only eight awarded - is examining the role of parliaments in curbing corruption at the national level; research is being conducted in Grenada, Ghana, Myanmar, Nigeria, Tanzania, Trinidad & Tobago and Uganda. Findings underscore that to build capacity in parliaments it is necessary to abandon the 'one size fits all' and 'this is how we do things in Australia/Canada/United Kingdom' approaches so common in parliamentary strengthening projects and focus instead on in-depth country analysis. In Grenada, for example, not one opposition member was elected to the lower house, and with only 15 MPs in parliament, the Westminster guidelines that 'the chair of the PAC should be from the opposition party' and that 'ministers should not be committee members or chairs' is clearly inappropriate. These and similar issues are faced in some of Canada's smaller provinces and territories - and some of the innovative approaches being considered, such as nominating prominent citizens, who are not MPs, to sit on parliamentary committees, may be applicable here.

A related SSHRC funded research project at McGill's Desautels Faculty of Management, where researchers from Canada, the United Kingdom and Africa are looking at the supply and demand sides of corruption in Canadian mining projects in Africa is on-going; but like the other projects there is a particular focus on practical, as well as scholarly, outputs. Already it appears that in both host and home (Canadian) parliaments, parliamentary oversight of the implementation of anti-corruption legislation is weak and could be improved. This is perhaps all the more pressing in Canada, since in some countries Canadian mining companies shape public perception of Canada.

Conclusions and Future Plans

Several issues have emerged as the three Canadian universities have worked separately and together to build their parliamentary training and research programs. First, bringing a Canadian parliamentary perspective to the training and research programs has been important. The Quebec National Assembly and British Columbia's Legislature have provided support and encouragement to the programs, and the National Assembly and the Canadian Parliament have generously welcomed visits by participating parliamentary staff and MPs to their precincts. The universities appreciate this interaction and hope to extend their collaboration to other provincial and territorial legislatures across Canada. Second, collaboration with partners is important. Teaming up with universities in the United Kingdom (University of Westminster and the University of East Anglia) has broadened the scope of activities, as has collaborating with international organizations like the World Bank, the CPA and the ASGPF and national organizations such as the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation, Kenya's CPST and the African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs. And third, additional research and expanded collaboration is still needed. Some proposed additional research programs call for new partnerships with, inter alia, the Westminster Foundation, the University of Glasgow, the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi, and the IPU. One such research project, which will examine the problems of parliamentary oversight in small jurisdictions, could be especially relevant for Canada's territorial and smaller provincial legislatures.

Current global networks and communities will continue to be supported and promoted, while current professional development programs will be further refined and stream-lined. For instance, McGill's two programs have recently been certified by the University Senate, which enable graduates to earned 'continuing education' credits in both.

By promoting evidence-based research on parliaments, researchers are able to identify 'good' practice and, in collaboration with practitioners and parliamentarians, determine 'best fit'. In this global focus, Canada's legislatures have a lot of knowledge and expertise to contribute – and also the potential to benefit from the research, programming and information exchanges that will result.

Notes

- 1 Philip Norton. *Does Parliament Matter?* Harvester Wheatsheaf: London, 1993
- 2 M. Steven Fish. *Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracy*. *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17 (1), 2006, pp. 5-20
- 3 Riccardo Pelizzo and Rick Stapenhurst. *Democracy and Oversight*. Paper Presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, United States of America, Aug 31, 2006; Rick Stapenhurst, Thomas Eboutou and Kerry Jacobs (forthcoming). *Assessing the Power of the Purse: Developing an Index of Ex-Post Oversight*.
- 4 Mitchell O'Brien. *Parliament as Peacebuilders: The Role of Parliaments in Conflict Affected Countries*. World Bank Institute Working Paper 37250. Washington, DC: World Bank
- 5 Rick Stapenhurst, Riccardo Pelizzo and Kerry Jacobs. *Following the Money: Comparing Parliamentary Public Accounts Committees*. Pluto Press: London, 2014.
- 6 Joachim Wehner, "Strengthening Legislative Financial Scrutiny in Developing Countries: a Report prepared for the Department for International Development" London School of Economics, 2007
- 7 Vienna Pozer "An Innovation in Parliamentary Staff Training" *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Winter 2012, pp. 1-4.
- 8 Initially, on-line courses were offered in French by the World Bank, but budget cuts and new strategic priorities meant these were cut.
- 9 The CPA is also collaborating with the University of Witwatersrand on a similar program for other (larger) Commonwealth countries.