



In an era of heated debates around the purpose, priorities, and payment of senior administrators in Canadian higher ed, relationship management has become a key part of day-to-day life for many institutional leaders. This often takes the form of carefully worded interactions with the media, social media channel monitoring, and face-to-face meetings with important stakeholders.

But there's one major set of opinions that's often missed in all this: that of the students. As the group that feels it has the most at stake when it comes to the public standing of their institution, students are among the fastest to speak out on social media or fill the window of the president's office with poster board when a PR disaster strikes. In their roles as current students, peers, and family members, they also stand to be one of the biggest influencers of a next year's postsecondary applicant pool. As the savviest enrolment and communications staff know, current students are more than a listserv - they're the future of your school.

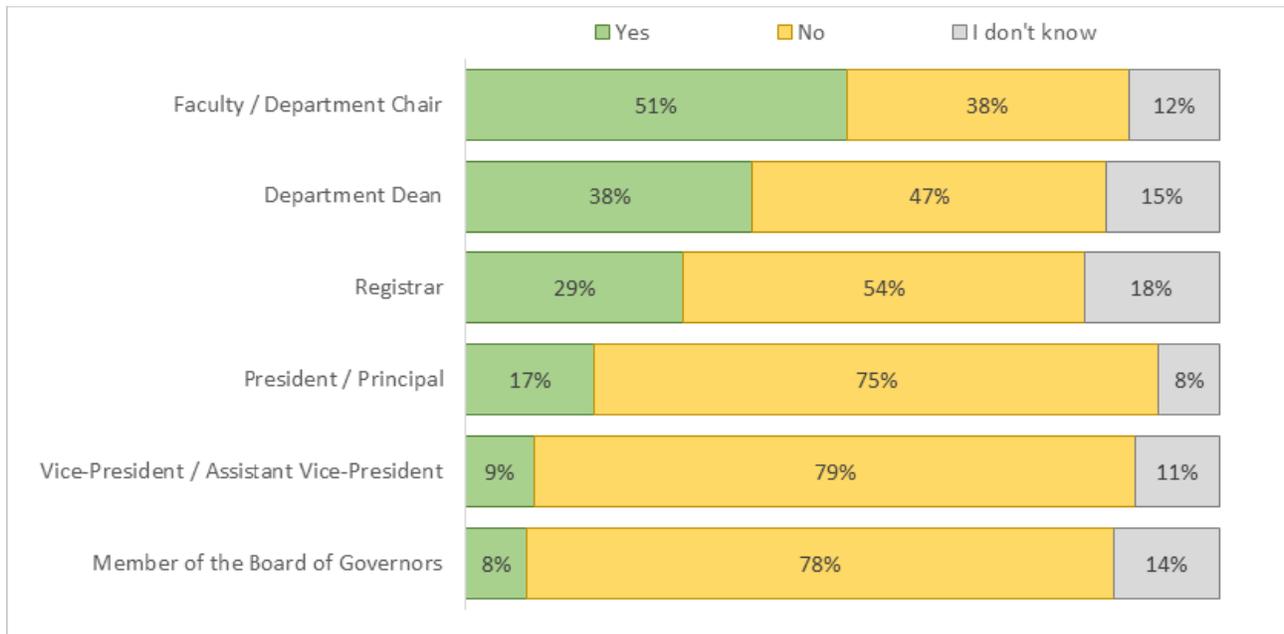
Given this critical positioning, we reached out to over 1,400 students, applicants, and alumni across Canada to see what they thought of postsecondary senior administration today.

Who are Senior Admin?

"I don't think many students know who or what the senior administrators are and what their roles are." - StudentVu Panelist

First of all, we needed to know who students considered to be in the category of “senior administration.” When asked, most respondents said that the category included deans and chairs (73%) and the institution's president/principal (53%). A large proportion also put vice presidents (47%), the Board of Governors (47%), and the chancellor (36%) into this group. To ensure all our respondents were on the same page, we told them that for the purposes of this survey, senior administration referred to a postsecondary school's Board of Governors, president/principal, vice-presidents, associate/assistant vice-presidents (including the registrar), and chairs and deans.

“Seriously what is a provost and what does that word even mean.” -StudentVu Panelist

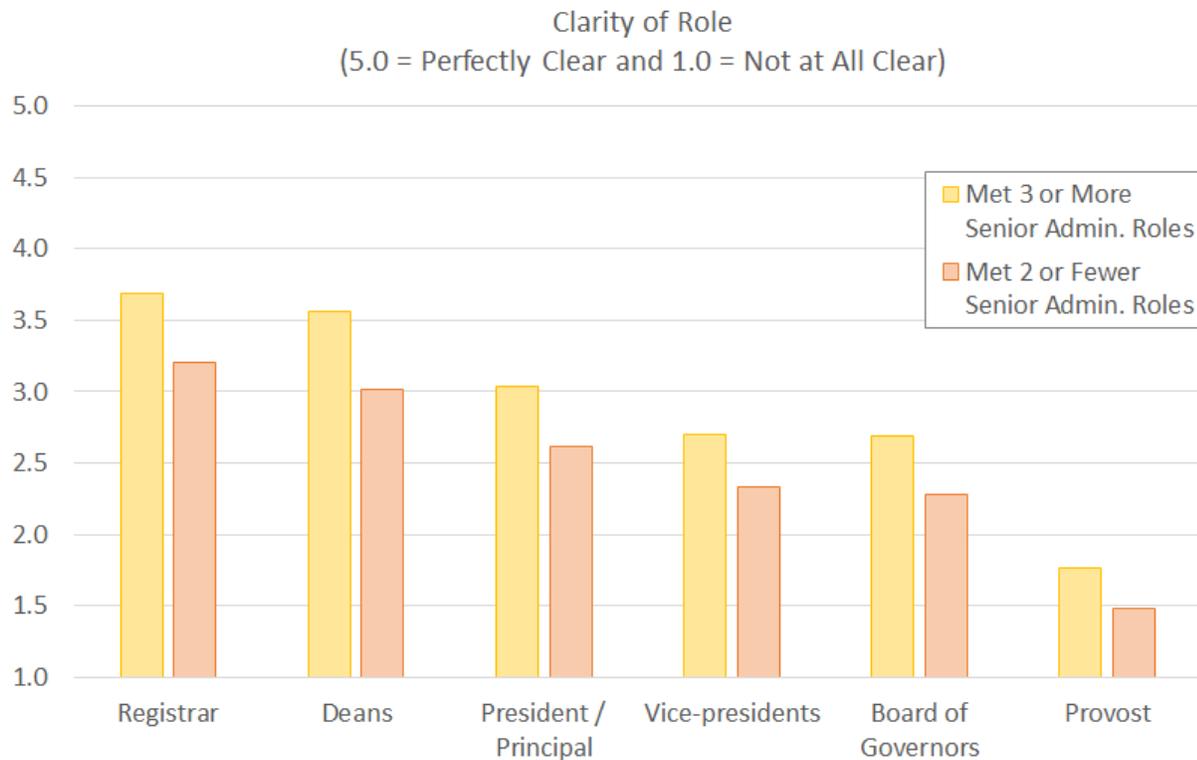


About half of respondents had met their faculty or department chair (51%), and nearly two-fifths said they'd met their department's dean (38%). Just under a third had met their registrar (29%), while half had not (54%). Over three-quarters of respondents had not met their institution's president or principal (75%), a vice-president or assistant vice-president (79%), or member of the Board of Governors (78%).

A number of respondents commented further on their interactions with senior administration. While there were those who'd had negative experiences with senior administration - including being talked down to or only interacting when there was a problem - many spoke to very positive experiences working alongside, volunteering with, or speaking to administrators whom they hadn't previously met. One respondent in particular pointed to the benefit of getting to interact with senior administration through volunteer opportunities:

“I volunteer in committees where senior administration is present and it made me realize how little I knew about them before my volunteering. I think students are 100% out of touch with the governing bodies of their school and it's a shame.” - StudentVu Panelist

Those who were more familiar with administrators also had more clarity around what these people do at their schools. When comparing the results of panelists who said they'd met at least 3 different types of senior administrators to those who had met 2 or fewer, there was a distinct and significant difference in the perceived clarity of what each type of senior administrator did at the school.

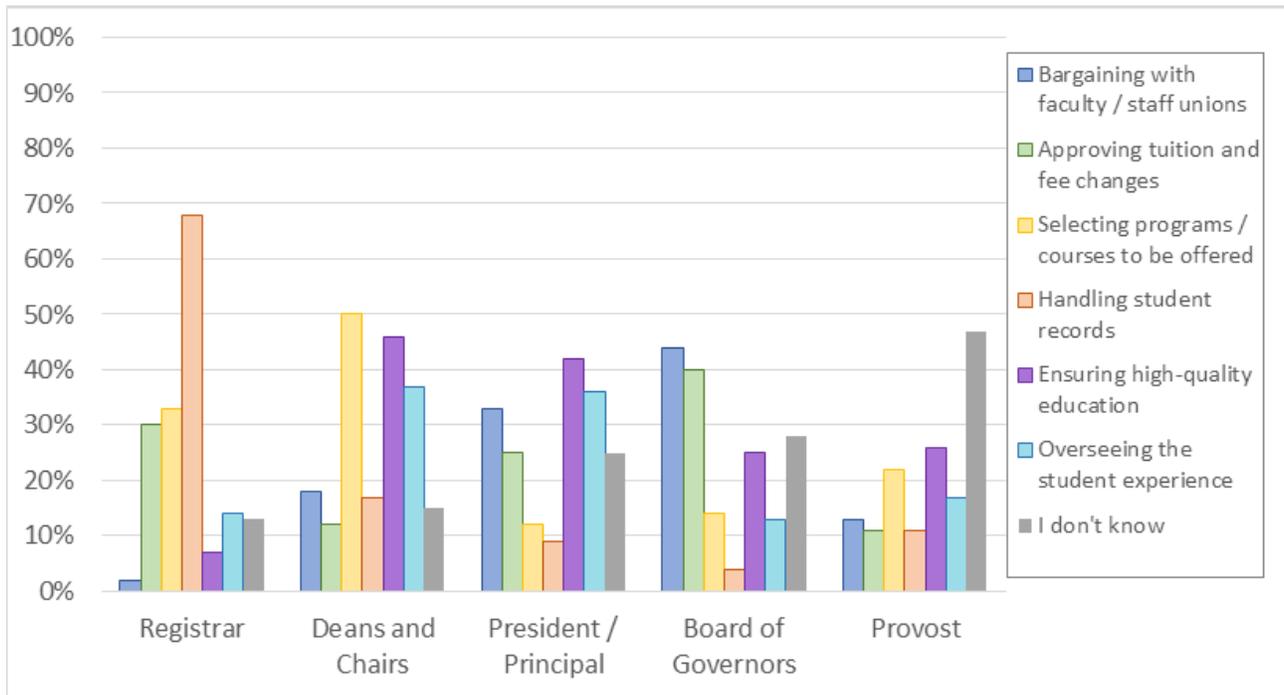


But did students' reported sense of clarity actually reflect reality?

While this was not always the case, it was clear that the roles respondents were most familiar with - registrars and faculty/department deans and chairs - were also the roles that respondents were most likely to associate with key responsibilities from a list provided by the survey (Note: While this list is far from comprehensive, it summarized some of the fundamental responsibilities that directly impacted students' lives). The majority of our panelists believed that registrars were primarily responsible for student records (68%); a third believed that the registrar also played a role in determining the programs and courses that would be offered (33%), tuition, and fee changes (30%). The latter likely relates to the way that the registrar's office supervises and supports the distribution of financial aid at many institutions.

Students believed that deans selected the programming to be offered that year (50%), ensured a high-quality education (46%), and oversaw the student experience (37%). Only 15% of respondents said that they did not know what deans did.

On the other hand, those roles that saw lower levels of interaction with respondents also saw a generally lower understanding of their responsibilities. Panelists most commonly said that they did not know what the provost did (47%), and about a quarter of respondents were unfamiliar with the roles and responsibilities of the board of governors (28%), and/or president (25%).



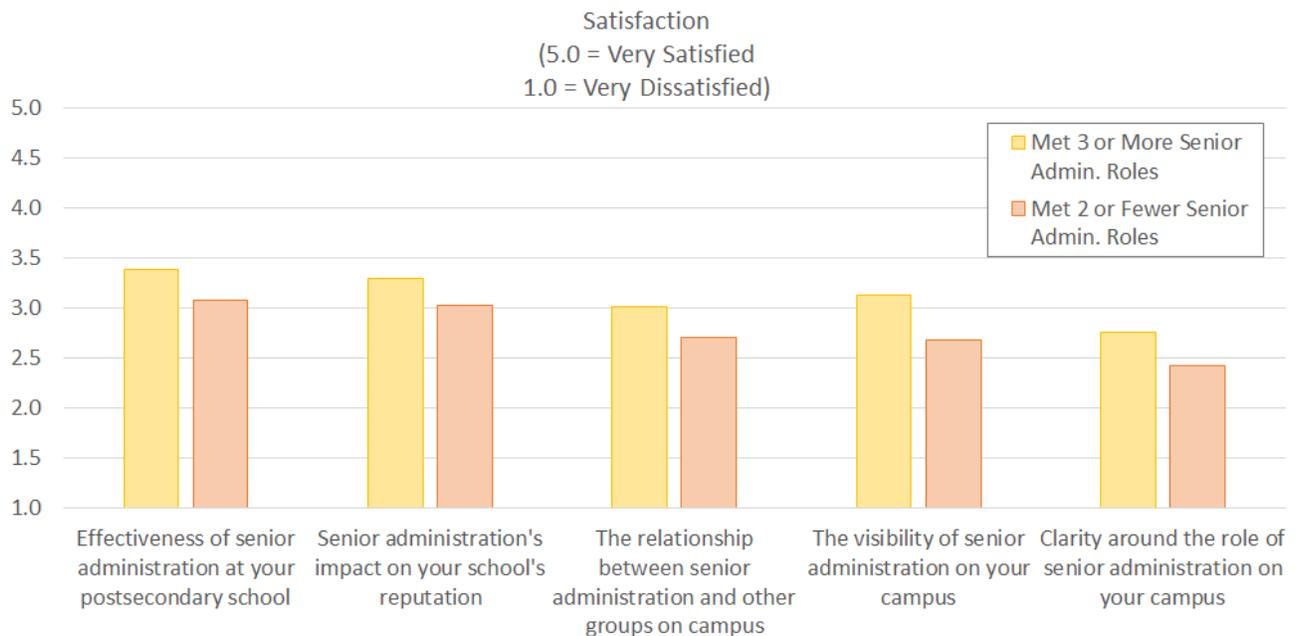
“Personally, at my school most students feel as if the administration cares more about upholding the reputation and public image of the institution than they do about the needs of the students. They do not advocate on our behalf and would rather cover up scandals than address [them] properly.” - StudentVu Respondent

Half of our panelists felt neutral towards senior administration (51%) while the rest were divided between positive and negative feelings. They generally agreed that these administrators play an important role at Canadian postsecondary schools (4.0 out of 5.0), but also stated that administrators were out of touch with students (3.7) and that administrative bloat posed a serious problem at their school (3.6). This finding did not vary much between those who had personally met administrators and those who had not.

“I don't think senior administrators are as out of touch as other people say they are. They probably know what the issues are and can only fix so much at a time.” - StudentVu Panelist

Among current PSE students, there was not a terribly strong sense of satisfaction with their institution’s senior administration’s effectiveness (3.1 out of 5.0), impact on reputation (3.1), relationships with other campus groups (2.8), or visibility (2.8). Being informed about what senior administrators do scored the lowest satisfaction at 2.5, a finding that was echoed in many students’ comments.

“I think students would be more comfortable to get the most out of their education if they knew who was running their institution and who to approach when an issue arises.” - StudentVu Panelist



It's important to remember, though, that there was much higher satisfaction on all counts among those who had personally met three or more different kinds of senior administrators than those who had not.

From these results, it appears that the relationship between students and their senior administrators is not as dismal as many might fear. However, there remains plenty of room for improvement in the relationship between these two groups. Furthermore, the data points to the value of taking the time to connect personally with students on campus through initiatives, events, and other opportunities.

Takeaways: Senior administration and PSE students often occupy opposite sides of the PSE sphere, so opportunities to connect can be few and far between. However, giving students the opportunity to meet and interact with senior administration can have a positive impact on perceptions of admin and student satisfaction.

Analysis notes:

This survey was run between May 11 and May 31st, 2018. Data was weighted by gender as per StatCan data. 1,412 responses were included in the final analysis, 971 of whom were current students who saw an extra subset of questions about senior administration on their own campus.