



SUBJECT	Administration of Board Correspondence
SUBMITTED TO	Governance Committee
MEETING DATE	June 2, 2025
SESSION CLASSIFICATION	Recommended session criteria from Board Meetings Policy: OPEN
REQUEST	Action requested - Recommendation to Board for approval IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED that the Governance Committee recommends that the Board of Governors approves the guidelines for the administration of correspondence to the Board of Governors as set out in the briefing.
LEAD	Karen Hakkarainen, Board Secretary
SUPPORTED BY	Elana Robinson, Governance Coordinator

PRIOR SUBMISSIONS

The subject matter of this submission has been considered in 2018 and the following was determined:

1. Letters addressed to the Board of Governors are forwarded immediately on receipt to the Board Chair, and are circulated to all Governors at the next Board meeting, as per a November 2003 Board of Governors resolution. The Board Secretary may, at her/his discretion, refer letters that have been inappropriately addressed to the appropriate person or authority.

This subject matter was also considered by the Governance Committee in closed session in March 2025 and it was recommended that the Board Secretariat office recommend updated guidelines for reporting Board Correspondence.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Correspondence to the Board of Governors is received by the Board Secretariat Office on behalf of the Board of Governors. In accordance with a 2003 Resolution, correspondence is provided to the Board Chair upon receipt and circulated to all Governors at the next Board meeting. The Board Secretary has discretion to re-direct correspondence that has been inappropriately addressed to the appropriate person or authority.

At issue is the question of what qualifies as “correspondence” to the Board. The Secretariat Office receives a large volume of correspondence directed to the Board of Governors; however, the majority of that correspondence is not related to matters that are in the mandate of the Board. This briefing outlines a classification system for all correspondence received by the Secretariat Office and recommends guidelines for the administration of each classification by the Board Secretary. The objective is to provide the Board with correspondence that relates to the Board’s mandate while redirecting other correspondence to units in the university more appropriate to the issues raised in the correspondence. This briefing also addresses the requirements for information access, privacy and confidentiality outlined in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

ISSUE

From 2018 to 2025, with advances in technology, the amount of correspondence received by the Secretariat Office has increased significantly and changes in the nature of correspondence have been observed. There has been a significant increase in the amount of correspondence related to topics under debate in the public domain and that are the focus of social media campaigns such as the Climate Emergency, Land Use Plan, geopolitical conflicts, and calls for divestment. In a recent example, the Board received a large volume of emails regarding the participation of veterans of certain countries in the Invictus Games events held at UBC facilities and, in 2024, the Board received in excess of 1000 emails on the topic of divestment.

All correspondence received are reviewed and considered for circulation prior to distribution to the Board Chair. Correspondence can be classified as follows:

- 1.) Subject matter is in the purview of the Board: correspondence in this category comprise a small minority of the correspondence received at the Secretariat Office.
- 2.) Subject matter is in the purview of the Administration: correspondence in this category comprise a large proportion of correspondence received in the Secretariat Office; the Secretariat Office is routinely copied onto matters that are addressed to or more correctly directed to members of the administration for their action, for example, to student services or human resources.
- 3.) Subject matter is a topic in the public domain: over the last 2-3 years, the volume of correspondence in this category received by the Secretariat Office has increased dramatically; the emails may number in the 1000s and frequently follow a common template that express views on a matter in the public domain.
- 4.) Subject matter is not related to the Board's mandate or academic mission of the University: correspondence in this category may focus, for example, on matters of federal or provincial jurisdiction or world affairs.

As UBC is a public institution, the collection, disclosure and use of personal information obtained in the course of business is regulated under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The Office of the University Counsel clarified that UBC is under obligation to ensure that personal information is shared only on a "need-to-know" basis. Occasionally, the Board Secretariat Office receives correspondence that includes personal information and that are about matters in the purview of the administration. If members of the Board of Governors do not need to know the personal information of correspondents in order to fulfill their duties, then the information must not be shared and the Secretariat Office is obligated to withhold this information from distribution to the members of the Board.

RECOMMENDATION

Considering the categories noted above, correspondence in category 1 qualifies as correspondence to the Board. All other correspondence could be considered as not meeting the threshold for correspondence to the Board, including correspondence that contains personal information that the Board Secretariat is obligated to withhold from members of the Board of Governors. Therefore, the following guidelines to guide the Board Secretary in administering correspondence to the Board of Governors are recommended:

- Correspondence related to matters that fall in the purview of the Board: provide to the Board Chair on receipt and provide to the Board with the meeting package for the next Board meeting.
- Correspondence about a matter that is the responsibility of the administration: direct to the appropriate administrative unit without reporting it to the Board.

Correspondence under the purview of the Administration but of interest and relevance to the Board due to identification of potential impact on the university: direct to administration and report to the Board (personal information redacted for privacy if necessary).

- Correspondence that is about a matter in the public domain: provide the Board with a summary of the number of pieces of correspondence received and a sample of the correspondence.
- Correspondence that is not related to the Board's mandate or the university's mission: do not report to the Board.