Academic Program Reviews at Nova Scotia Universities: Quality, or Control?

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ANSUT

ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

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The Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers (ANSUT) represents 1,300 faculty at the majority of Nova Scotia's universities. ANSUT's vision is to provide its member Associations with the strongest possible voice on post-secondary education issues in the province of Nova Scotia, and to advance its mission by engaging the active participation of its members, both individually and institutionally, to achieve that end.

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2025, the Nova Scotia government enacted legislation that is now commonly known as Bill 12. In a nutshell, Bill 12 gives the Minister of Education the power to appoint up to 51% of the representatives on university boards of governors, limit funding for research to projects that match government priorities, and force a university into a revitalization process.

The outcry protesting Bill 12 was swift and loud – dozens of people spoke of the dangers of Bill 12 to the Public Bills Committee, over 700 people wrote letters to the Minister of Advanced Education, the Premier and their MLAs, citizens wrote letters to the editor, and protested in front of Province House, and opposition parties suggested amendments to the Bill. These efforts were not successful and the bill easily passed under the super-majority government.

Changes began immediately. New funding agreements were introduced in May 2025, replacing the former single, 5-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with individual, two-year bi-lateral funding agreements for each university. The agreements outlined specific goals for each university, and introduced a variety of financial holdbacks for institutions that did not meet benchmarks set by the government, ranging from housing and health program utilization, to strategic alignment factors and academic program reviews.

This document focuses on academic program reviews (APR), the process the province and university administrators are using to conduct them, and the possible motive behind them. According to the funding agreements, the APRs will evaluate academic programming "for the purpose of modernizing, revitalizing, and rationalizing the programs of the university."[1] But faculty are concerned that real reason is more ominous, and includes corporatizing academic programs at the expense of quality assurance.

This document compiles information and resources about the organizations that lead Nova Scotia's universities, changes to academic program review policies, and the path that has led from the introduction of Bill 12 to the hiring of Huron Consulting Group (the firm hired to conduct the APRs), including their track record, and their business plan that identifies universities as "large favorable end markets" that will feed Huron's long-term growth.

[1] ANSUT

WHO'S LEADING NOVA SCOTIA'S UNIVERSITIES?

Nova Scotia 10 universities are legislated under *Bill 12: An Act Respecting Advanced Education and Research*.[2] Bill 12 amends the original *Universities Accountability and Sustainability Act* introduced in 2015, and provides the provincial government more direct authority over university finances, research priorities, and governance.

Provincial funding for the 2026/27 fiscal year is included in the Department of Advanced Education (DAE) budget, through operating grants to universities totaling almost $387.5 million.[3] The funds are administered through two-year, bilateral funding agreements that are individual to each university. In 2026/27, that funding covers about 33% of the universities' budgets. The remaining 77% is received from student tuitions, donations, student housing, research grants, etc.[4]

The funding agreements outline the province's contribution to the universities' operational funding, including holdbacks to the funding if universities do not meet parameters set out in the agreements. Holdbacks are in place for several categories, including health program utilization, strategic alignment factors, new and existing student housing, and, germane to this report, a comprehensive academic program review.[5] The individual funding agreements can be found here: https://novascotia.ca/lae/highereducation/documents.asp

Details surrounding the academic program review (APR) process were not clear when the funding agreements were introduced in May 2025. Although there was some musing among faculty of how the reviews may be administered, and what their purpose would be, it was not until December 19, 2025, that faculty associations learned, through local media, that Huron Consulting was hired to lead academic program reviews at all ten universities in Nova Scotia. The Halifax Examiner interviewed Dalhousie Faculty Association president, Dave Westwood, who confirmed that Senate and faculty had little knowledge of how the reviews were to be administered, or their objective, even though "program reviews are Senate jurisdiction." The article confirmed that Huron Consulting was hired to perform the reviews, not by the DAE, but by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC).[6]

The contract specifications are unknown, but the article quoted MPHEC CEO Catherine Stewart's explanation of the Huron contract:

- "Develop a program review guide and templates to assist universities in responding to the academic program review requirements outlined in the bilateral agreements.
- Develop a standardized methodology for program costing for use by universities.

[2] An Act Respecting Advanced Education and Research.
[3] Finance and Treasury Board
[4] Office of the Auditor General
[5] ANSUT
[6] Bosquet, T.

- Conduct a province-wide trends analysis to identify gaps and opportunities in the post-secondary sector."[7]

Why MPHEC?

Until 2025/26, funding for the MPHEC was provided from Intergovernmental Affairs to the Council of Atlantic Premiers and then to the MPHEC and other special interest groups that "drive regional initiatives on economic growth, immigration, and regulatory alignment". They include organizations such as the Atlantic Growth Strategy. [8] This meant that the MPHEC, although funded with tax dollars, was arms-length from the DAE. Since the MPHEC was not a government department when the contract was issued in 2025, details of the contract and RFP process were not made public.

In 2026/27, funding for the MPHEC was transferred to the DAE, and is now combined in the Operating Grants to Universities budget line. However, in the 2024/25 budget year, the DAE contracted with the MPHEC to support the academic program review work required under the bilateral agreements (which were introduced in 2025/26).

The grant is effective from April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2027, and totaled $926,454. The Examiner reported that the Huron contract is worth $400,399, which leaves $526,055 remaining.

Clarification with senior staff at the DAE indicated that monies for the contract were included in a "small amount of one-time funding that went to MPHEC to support the bilateral work and flowed in 2024/25." Grant objectives include:

1. "Use of existing data, coordination of data collection (if required), and generating trends analysis reports;
2. Linking academic programs to employment opportunities through linking Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) to National Occupational Classification (NOC);
3. Developing a standardized model for program costing."

The Dalhousie Gazette reported on the academic program reviews on March 12, 2026. The article included a statement from Chloee Sampson, a spokesperson for Nova Scotia's Department of Advanced Education: "The program reviews are designed to ensure academic programs remain relevant, sustainable and aligned with labour market needs and student demand. The process will include analyzing the occupations students enter after graduating and determining the cost-effectiveness of each program. Our priority remains ensuring students continue to have access to high-quality academic programming while maintaining the long-term sustainability of our post-secondary institutions."[9] This supports the growing concerns of faculty that the reviews

[7] Bosquet, T.
[8] Initiatives
[9] Wood, C.

have more to do with aligning to government priorities and cost efficiency than quality programming.

To learn more, ANSUT searched the Freedom of Information Public Disclosure list. Three requests for information about Huron Consulting and academic program reviews were made under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPOP) in January and March 2026 – two to the DAE, and one to the Finance and Treasury Board. Each reply on the public disclosure list indicated on that "file searches resulted in no records relating to the requests", with one stating that "contracts for these projects are between MPHEC and the proponent hired."[10]

The FOIPOP Act applies to all provincial government departments, agencies, boards, commissions, etc. Since commissions are considered to be public bodies under the FOIPOP Act, one presumes that access to information about APRs would be granted, but those requests would not necessarily be listed on the public disclosure list which is handled by the provincial Information Access & Privacy (IAP) office.

The MPHEC website indicates that minutes of MPHEC meetings, once approved, are available to the public on request.[11] However, repeated requests to the MPHEC for copies of the minutes from 2022 – 2026 have been met with a variety of delays: "protect personal information and other confidential content", copying will be "prioritized within existing work", minutes will be released on a rolling basis, "bring the minutes with recommendations for what is considered personal or confidential information…to the Board's next meeting", and finally, "the Board has asked that we seek legal advice before responding, to ensure we are handling the release of minutes appropriately".

UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to the DAE, the MPHEC, and individual university administrations, it's interesting to note other organizations that play a role in leading Nova Scotia's post-secondary education sector. While these organizations are not necessarily involved with the consulting firm hired, or the APR process, it is common to see university administrators and government representatives serve on more than one organization. The commonalities are illustrated in Table 1, followed by a written snapshot of each organization.

Although these commonalities may be benign, one could logically believe that those who serve on several organizations (highlighted in red), especially the AAU and CONSUP, would be aware that the MPHEC was responsible for leading the academic program reviews and/or hiring Huron Consulting to administer the process. While there are no university presidents currently appointed to the MPHEC, the Provosts from MSVU, Acadia and StFX serve on the MPHEC Board.

[10] Open Information
[11] MPHEC – About: Meetings

Table Illustrating Executive Leadership & Governance in Organizations that Affect Nova Scotia Post-Secondary Education - May 2026

Organization	Executive Staff & Chair	Board Members from NS	Government Representation	Key Structural Notes
Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC)	• CEO: Catherine Stewart • Chair: Jocelyn Yerxa (DAE - Director, Strategy, Partnerships & Innovation)	Appointed by the Minister of Advanced Education: • Dr. Lori Francis (VPA & Provost, **MSVU**) • Dr. Ashlee Cunsolo (Provost & VPA, Acadia) • Dr. Amanda Cockshutt (VP & Provost, **StFX**)	NS Advanced Education staff: • Sheila MacLeod (Exec Dir) • Jocelyn Yerxa (Director, Strategy, Partnerships & Innovation)	Formal regulatory/quality assurance body; includes government + university + public reps. Direct relationship to Council of Atlantic Premiers.
Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU)	• CEO: Ava Czapalay • Chair: **Dr. Andrew Hakin** (President, StFX)	All NS university presidents. Members at Large from NS incl: • **Dr. Kim Brooks** (President, Dal) • **Dr. Joël Dickinson** (President, MSVU)	Indirect via presidents' advocacy	Regional advocacy body; same NS membership base as CONSUP
CONSUP (Council of NS University Presidents)	• CEO: Ava Czapalay • Chair: **Dr. Andrew Hakin** (President, StFX) • Vice-Chair: **Dr. Kim Brooks** (President, Dal)	Members = all NS university presidents	Direct interface with Minister / DAE Staff	Exercise leadership in PSE, conduit to bring issues of common concern to Minister
Research Nova Scotia (RNS)	• CEO: Stefan Leslie • Chair: **Dr. Andrew Hakin** (President, StFX)	Board includes: • **Dr. Kenneth Deveau** (Recteur, Université Sainte-Anne) • **Dr. Joël Dickinson** (President, MSVU)	Advanced Education reps: • Lindsay Wadden (Sr. Exec Director, DAE) • Vicki Elliott-Lopez (Assistant Deputy Minister, DAE) • Jordan Warford (Exec Director, Health & Wellness) • Industry + federal reps	Arm's-length provincial research funder; heavy university + government integration
NS Dept. of Advanced Education	Minister: Hon. Brendan Maguire Deputy Minister: Karen Gatien		Senior staff feed into multiple boards (MPHEC, RNS)	Core policy authority for post-secondary education
Universities Canada		• Director: **Dr. Andrew Hakin**, (President, StFX) • Director: **Dr. Kim Brooks**, (President, Dal) Committee Chair,		Priorities: funding for research and innovation, promoting equitable access to education, &

Organization	Executive Staff & Chair	Board Members from NS	Government Representation	Key Structural Notes
		Universities Canada Governance Committee: • **Dr. Joël Dickinson**, (President, MSVU)		enhancing global engagement
Halifax Higher Education Partnership	• Chair: The Hon. Andy Fillmore, Mayor, Halifax Region	• Rev. Dr. Heather McCance, (President, AST) • Prof. William Lahey, (President, UKC) (Incoming President is Dr. Timothy Vine) • **Dr. Michael Khan**, (President, SMU) • **Dr. Kim Brooks**, (President, Dal) • **Dr. Joël Dickinson**, (President, MSVU) Prof. David B. Smith, (President, NSCAD) • **Dr. Kenneth Deveau**, (Recteur, Université Sainte-Anne)		
EduNova	• Pres & CEO: Andrew Champagne • Chair: Dr. Raj Balakrishnan, (Assist. VP, Global Relations, Dal)	• David Dingwall, (President, CBU) • **Dr. Michael Khan**, (President and Vice-Chancellor, SMU)		Focus on recruitment & retention of international students

Table 1

Maritime Province Higher Education Commission (MPHEC)

The MPHEC was established in 1974, and refocused their mandate in 1997. The new Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission Act was proclaimed in 2005, giving full force to the new mandate. Highlights of the mandate can be found on the MPHEC 'About' page, along with nine objectives to "assist institutions and governments in enhancing the post-secondary learning environment". The first two apply to the quality of university programming:

1. Provide assurances that programs developed by institutions within the MPHEC's scope meet agreed-upon quality criteria.
2. Confirm that institutions within the MPHEC's scope have appropriate policies and practices to ensure the ongoing quality of their programs.[12]

[12] MPHEC-About: Mandate

The MPHEC Board is composed of the Chief Executive Officer as well as 20 members appointed by the ministers responsible for post-secondary education in the Maritime provinces.

The Council of Nova Scotia University Presidents (CONSUP)

CONSUP is a group of the 10 Nova Scotia university presidents who meet regularly to address matters of common concern, and meet occasionally with the appropriate minister and/or the premier. The members of CONSUP are also members of the Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) The objectives of the CONSUP are:

- To work for the improvement of higher education in Nova Scotia,
- To exercise leadership in matters concerning post-secondary education,
- To promote cooperation and interuniversity planning among those institutions listed in the membership,
- To be the channel of collective communication between the universities and the government, as well as between the universities and other bodies or individuals.[13]

Research NS

Research Nova Scotia is an independent, not-for-profit corporation that supports, organizes and coordinates research funding in Nova Scotia. Research Nova Scotia reports to the Minister of Advanced Education, with the management and control of the corporation is administered by a Board of Directors.[14]

Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU)

AAU membership includes the 16 universities in the Atlantic region. The group, founded in 1964, represents the interests of Atlantic Canadian universities, and creates "awareness of the role they play in preparing future leaders of our communities, in research and innovation, and in contributing to the economic prosperity of life in Atlantic Canada". The AAU also provides a forum for university leadership to reflect, consult and collaborate on common objectives and positions, develop strategies to promote post-secondary education, and exercise leadership to promote the objectives of the collective. One of the main roles of the AAU is "to create greater awareness and understanding of the important contribution of universities to the social and economic development of the Atlantic Provinces."[15]

Other groups that have input in guiding post-secondary education in Nova Scotia include EduNova, the Halifax Higher Education Partnership, and Universities Canada and are described briefly below. MITACS, the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) and Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC), also influence post-secondary education but are not included in this report.

[13] Association of Atlantic Universities – Council of Nova Scotia University Presidents
[14] Research Nova Scotia
[15] Association of Atlantic Universities – About Us

EduNova

EduNova, located in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is a provincial co-operative association of education providers, whose mission is to "champion Nova Scotia as a leader in the international student experience while advancing social and economic growth in the province." Its members include colleges, universities, language schools and K-12 public and independent schools that work together to bring students from all over the world to Nova Scotia. EduNova collaborates with members and partners to "position Nova Scotia as a priority destination for international students while advancing social and economic growth in our province."[16]

Halifax Higher Education Partnership

In 2005 the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Halifax-area universities, with the Nova Scotia Community College joining in 2006. The partnership does not lead post-secondary education, but shares information and mutual support for initiatives that contribute to the quality of life in HRM. The group refocused in 2014 to include talent attraction and retention, which supports the HRM's Economic Strategy by attracting more people and providing an educated labour force. An additional focus area was added in 2018 with the introduction of an Innovation District in Halifax. Innovation District goals include:

1) Establish and strengthen Halifax's emerging Innovation District through partnerships

2) Fast-track commercialization by connecting universities with Fortune 500 companies

3) Expand the Sell Halifax program to attract greater investment[17]

Universities Canada

Universities Canada is a non-governmental, membership-based organization headquartered in Ottawa. Members include public and private not-for-profit Canadian universities and is governed by a board of directors consisting of university presidents. Priorities include funding for research and innovation, promoting equitable access to education, and enhancing global engagement. Universities Canada is not a national accreditation body, but membership in the association does require universities to meet strict criteria and adhere to principles of institutional quality assurance. These set principles are reaffirmed every five years to reinforce the recognition of the high-quality academic achievement a Canadian university degree offers. [18]

[16] EduNova
[17] Association of Atlantic Universities – Halifax Higher Education Partnership
[18] Universities Canada

ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW POLICIES

Academic programs are reviewed regularly in Nova Scotia through university Senates, using academic program review policies that adhere to MPHEC guidelines for quality assurance. At St. Francis Xavier University, for example, the *Guidelines for Academic Reviews* outlines membership of the Committee for Academic Reviews that includes "the AVP, Dean of Arts, Dean of Science, Dean of Business, Dean of Education, and five (5) tenured Faculty members elected by the University Senate," with the Committee process using MPHEC best practice guidelines.[19]

The MPHEC recently mandated an external quality assurance review at Acadia University,[20] so it is likely that all NS universities were required to complete a similar review in late 2025. Most APR policies refer to the MPHEC quality assurance/best practice guidelines (2016), and are administered through the university Senate. Read those of ANSUT member associations here:

- Acadia University
  - https://academicplanning.acadiau.ca/academicreviews/overviewofprocess.html
- Atlantic School of Theology
  - Not found
- Cape Breton University
  - https://www.cbu.ca/wp-content/uploads/QA-Framewok-2025.pdf
- Mount Saint Vincent University
  - Private
- Nova Scotia College of Art & Design
  - https://nscad.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/NSCAD_Academic_Plan_2020-2025_FINAL_ISSUE_11-18-20_sm.pdf
- St. Francis Xavier University
  - https://www.stfx.ca/media/1806/download?inline
- Université Sainte Anne
  - Not found

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), a national voice for over 75,000 academic and professional staff at more than 130 universities and colleges across Canada, advocates for the assessment of academic programs by "academics for academic reasons." The CAUT policy statement on the assessment of academic programs acknowledges that this may include accreditation assessment of professional programs by recognized professional organizations but is clear that program reviews "undertaken for financial reasons, or as part of priority exercises, should be rejected." The policy advises faculty associations to include clearly defined "parameters and limits

[19] Committee on Academic Reviews
[20] Acadia Senate Agenda

of all program assessments" in their collective agreements, to ensure the process allows "full participation by members of the program being assessed, and all other relevant academic staff," and to protect academic diversity and academic freedom. Program assessments should be grounded in collegial decision-making principles."[21]

Read the policy here: https://www.caut.ca/policy-statements/assessment-of-academic-programs/

NS universities appear to be administering the current APR process in a variety of ways. Anecdotally, some have bypassed Senate, using the argument that it is a bilateral agreement issue, not a Senate issue. Others have assembled committees within their Senates. Some have assigned the work to one person, with little input from faculty, or created a new administrative position to work on program reviews.

HURON CONSULTING GROUP

Founded in 2002, Huron Consulting Group is an American management consulting firm that serves the healthcare, energy, finance, manufacturing, public, life sciences, technology and higher education sectors. Huron's founder, Gary L Holdren, began the company with 24 employees who left the accounting firm of Arthur Anderson when it was embroiled in an accounting scandal with one of its clients – Enron.[22]

Huron is headquartered in Chicago, with offices in 10 US states. Huron expanded to India and Southeast Asia in 2009, and opened Canadian offices in Toronto and Montreal in 2014.[23] The company currently has more than 24 global locations, employs 7,400 employees, and declared first-quarter revenue of $443.7 million in 2026, a 12.1% growth over 2025. Projected total revenues in 2026 are $1.78 to 1.86 billion.[24]

Huron's web presence promotes the company's approach as a blend of "deep industry and technical knowledge with data-informed insights and practical, proven experience," and asserts that they engage stakeholders throughout the process with "agility and transparency" to find effective and sustainable solutions while "fostering trust, encouraging collaboration, and focusing on measurable outcomes" helping their clients to address immediate needs, "build resilience and own the future."[25]

Although a mission and vision statement are not easily found on their website, the most recent annual report advises stakeholders that Huron helps clients "put possible into practice" using "sound strategies, optimizing operations, accelerating digital transformation, and empowering businesses to own their future," which creates "sustainable results" for their clients.[26] The report lists integrity and humility, as well as

[21] CAUT Council
[22] Pritchard, A. & Young J.
[23] Huron - Locations
[24] BusinessWire, May 5, 2026
[25] Huron Consulting Group, About us.
[26] Huron 2025 Annual Report, p. 3

collaboration, impact, excellence, inclusion and intellectual curiosity as the company's core values.

Yet the firm's business strategy is far from humble. Huron applies an aggressive business model that combines traditional consulting with digital transformation projects, and recurring solutions that require financial commitments in software and analytics. To this end, Huron acquires companies that provide the type of services they advise their clients to use, in areas such as student recruitment and retention, philanthropy, and financial reorganization. Clients are frequently advised to adopt "multi-year digital transformation programs (e.g., cloud ERP, planning and budgeting systems), which frequently "extend into recurring support and managed services, creating a predictable revenue base uncommon in traditional consulting."[27]

One example of this is Huron's acquisition of Shorelight Holdings LLC, the parent company of Shorelight Education, whose focus is on the online recruitment and retention of international students.[28] Huron CEO James Roth, confirmed the "strategic" investment, acknowledging that "Shorelight's primary market focus has significant overlap with Huron's existing client base," allowing Huron to "provide strategic synergies to our higher education clients as they face economic and competitive pressure to manage costs and enhance the quality of academic offerings."[29] Similar strategic acquisitions in the post-secondary education sector include:

- Whiteboard Higher Education Services - student enrollment advisory firm that helps colleges and universities with recruitment initiatives and financial aid strategies (2021)[30]
- GG&A - philanthropic strategy, major gift fundraising, and advancement leadership (2024)[31]
- Advancement Resources - research-based, philanthropy-focused professional education services (March 2025)[32]
- Halpin Partnership – U.K.-based management consultancy specializing in higher education fundraising, governance, and strategy (2025)[33]

The firm's reputation is not pristine. Following a lengthy investigation into its accounting practices, Huron faced charges from the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) when it was accused of overstating "pretax income from 2005 to early 2009 by failing to account for costs connected with its acquisitions of four firms as compensation expenses." The scandal caused a drastic 69% drop in shares in a single day. Without admitting guilt, Huron settled the charges by paying a $1 million fine, and reaching a

[27] Trading View
[28] AAUP-TNS
[29] Custer, S.
[30] Bovis, A. & Kelly, J. (2021)
[31] Bovis, A. & Kelly, J. (2024)
[32] Bovis, A. & Kelly, J. (2025)
[33] Bovis, A. & Kelly, J. (2025)

$38 million settlement to resolve shareholder litigation. Two former executives paid large personal fines, and the entire senior management team was replaced.[34]

A number of the Huron executives donate regularly to Republican party candidates, including Mike Pence, Mitt Romney, The National Republican Congressional Committee, George W. Bush and Ted Cruz.[35] While making political donations is not illegal, The New School Chapter of the Association of American University Professors makes the point that "Huron's investment portfolio reflects its values, the world it advocates for, and helps others build through its consulting services."[36]

"Large, Favorable End Markets" – Huron's Higher Education Practice

Huron became publicly traded on NASDEQ in 2004, enabling the company to diversify into improving healthcare performance and advising the higher education sector. From 2013 -15, Huron expanded its services in higher education to include enrolment strategies, organizational restructuring, research management, digital transformation, student lifecycle services, and athletics.[37]

The education sector currently provides 30% of Huron's total company revenues – approximately $500 million in annual revenue in 2025, an increase of 5.5% over the previous year. Sustaining strong growth in healthcare and education is a key pillar of Huron's growth strategy. While Huron recognizes that political, legislative, and regulatory influences are causing ongoing pressures for the higher education sector in Canada and the US, they also acknowledge that these the factors present opportunities for growth. They address the potential for opportunity in their annual report to stakeholders, reporting that "large, favorable end markets facing structural challenges…will continue to drive strong demand for our offerings and serve as the foundation of Huron's long-term growth strategy."[38]

Huron frames the services it offers to universities as a path to reimagine "the student experience and adopting AI, to uncovering new revenue sources, strengthening advancement, and accelerating research growth" and claims to "deliver innovative, data-driven strategies that achieve measurable results and build lasting resilience".[39] But the reality of this 'reimaging' is often the same – a troubling pattern that faculty at American universities have identified by watching it play out in real time: "closed-door engagement with senior administration, exclusion of faculty governance bodies from substantive deliberation, recommendation of immediate layoffs and program closures, and the strategic invocation of "financial exigency" language to clear contractual

[34] Stempel, J.
[35] Dhillon et al
[36] AAUP-TNS
[37] Porter's Five Forces
[38] Huron 2025 Annual Report, p. 6
[39] Huron Difference

obstacles to terminating tenured faculty."[40] Examples of these layoffs and program closures begin in the section titled "Huron at American Universities."

But Huron is not shy about framing their business model in a positive light:

- *Academic programs and opportunities:* (Peter Stokes, Managing Director of Huron's Higher Education Practice). In the 2026 article, Stokes & Cogan write about "opportunities for colleges and universities to think creatively about innovative and fiscally efficient ways of delivering quality education and research." He outlines the framework Huron developed to help universities evolve during the recent pandemic and current economic decline.[41] The framework is detailed in the article, but includes: Improving and innovating online delivery, which includes "shifting resources to achieve stability"; positioning academic programs for the future, which includes "understanding the cost to educate by academic discipline"; and adapting the academic portfolio to become a "steadying force" by "establishing key metrics to maximize academic quality and efficiency".[42] Stokes also supports the "unbundling" of faculty roles within universities. He notes that courses are created and presented by authors, designers, assessors, and instructors, and that redesigning this "labor model can create (cost) efficiencies."[43]
- *Assessing the true costs of the academic portfolio*: (Andrew Laws, Managing Director of Higher Education). This article supports the trend that faculty have identified in Huron's philosophy for reorganization of the higher education sector. Laws promotes Huron's formula for "cost management diagnostics" as a solution to addressing the need for "knowledge of the true cost of delivery across the portfolio" of academic programs. "Cost management diagnostics" are identified as part of a "collaborative approach" and include: ensuring financial stability, fulfilling strategic priorities, strengthening market differentiation, aligning student outcomes with market needs, and assessing and implementing technology options. Laws says "academics remain at the core of each institution's operations", but Huron's "analytical approach" considers the intersection of competitor programming, market demands, program economics, academic policies, program structures, and academic offerings to help inform decision making.[44]

And while Huron is entitled to praise their process while faculty across Canada and the US criticize it, the method through which Huron 'guides' universities under the guise of saving money and ensuring quality, and the resulting reports are often unnecessarily confusing, leaving many faculty (and possibly administrators) wondering what they've achieved.

[40] Salvio, P.
[41] Stokes, P. & Cogan, M.
[42] Stokes, P. & Cogan, M.
[43] Blumenstyk, G.
[44] Laws, A.

For example, University of New Hampshire (UNH) administration engaged Huron to help them become more efficient to "achieve a Top 25 goal" and perform an "in-depth review of revenues and costs across all academic and administrative areas at the university" in 2019/20. The $600,000 contract was expected to yield $12 million in savings over 2 years. The result included faculty mix changes, cuts to research and library functions, and adjustments to facilities and maintenance staff, but the total savings was not reported.[45]

The subsequent report on resource assessment and academic program cost prepared by Huron is not only difficult to follow, the process was largely unnecessary, according to the Association of American University Professors – University of New Hampshire Chapter (AAUP-UNH). Reporting on how the process affected UNH, the AAUP-UNH assessed an independent financial analysis of the university finances, a public record of Huron's engagement at UNH, and methodological concerns about Huron that have been raised by faculty associations across the US. The conclusion: "that Huron's recommendations cannot be treated as neutral, evidence-based, or aligned with AAUP-National principles of shared governance."[46]

The process appears similarly complex in Nova Scotia. Our 10 universities are currently in the middle of the APR process Huron is contracted to conduct, and faculty and administration are struggling with the program costing methodology they are being asked to complete.

Alex Usher, president of the consulting and research firm Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA), offers his perspective on why Huron's process for Nova Scotia's APRs is fundamentally flawed. First, Usher declares his bias: HESA is his firm. He acknowledges that HESA bid on the Nova Scotia contract, but was unsuccessful. This is surprising, given that Huron's bid was "four times higher" than that of HESA, but Usher was told the American company would "understand Canadian higher education and costing exercises better than we do."[47]

Usher goes on to describe the incredibly detailed and complex process that Huron developed. His 2-part blog (Garbage in, garbage out: Nova Scotia edition) explains it in detail, and is worth a read. He concludes that Huron's process, which analyzes costs one way, and income another, is setting universities up to fail. Usher predicts that the results of a review conducted in this manner will make departments with few majors (he uses English as an example) appear that they don't earn sufficient income, when that may not be accurate.[48]

Usher addresses possible motives for why the Nova Scotia government may have chosen this consultant, and this process. One is that they don't fully understand the process and are being hoodwinked by the large, American consulting firm. The second

[45] Salvio, P.
[46] Salvio, P.
[47] Usher, A. (May 19, 2026)
[48] Usher, A. (May 20, 2026)

is worse – that the current NS government fully understands, but is determined in their belief "that degrees should be tightly linked to careers, and therefore things that help universities offer "breadth" are ipso facto a waste of money," and that Huron's methodology will fit "pretty nicely with that point of view."[49]

The amount and depth of work universities are being forced to do, such as the manipulation of data in ways universities are ill-equipped to manage, is costing NS institutions "tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars of effort each," Usher writes.[50] To help, Huron is following their business model of providing "recurring solutions" (page 13) by suggesting the schools pay Huron to complete the work (that Huron created) on the university's behalf. This, says Usher, "might be the least ethical thing I've ever seen a higher education consulting company do."[51]

Unethical? Possibly. But the examples listed above (and in the sections below) appear to align closely with Huron's business model, relegating Nova's Scotia's unique, renowned, and much-loved universities to nothing more than those "large, favorable end markets" that feed Huron's long-term growth strategy.[52]

HURON AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire

- Date: 2019
- Catchphrase: "Building-Financial Strength"
- Focus: Efficiency framing to achieve Top 25 goal; In-depth review of revenues and costs across all academic and administrative areas at the university to achieve cost savings.
- Contract Cost: $600,000
- Financial Goal: $12 million in savings over 2 years anticipated; 2% of operating budget
- Results: Faculty mix changes, cuts to research and library functions, adjustments to facilities and maintenance staff[53]
- Of Note:
    - Huron Report: University of New Hampshire Huron executive summary: Resource assessment and academic program cost. (2019). Huron Consulting Group.
    - University statement: "building financial strength must be one of the university's top priorities."[54] An important metric used in academic efficiency studies is Credit Hour Production (CHP) per faculty member as

[49] Usher, A. (May 20, 2026)
[50] Usher, A. (May 20, 2026)
[51] Usher, A. (May 20, 2026)
[52] Huron 2025 Annual Report, p. 6
[53] Salvio, P.
[54] Donahue, H.

this measure provides Deans and Chairs with information necessary to maximize pedagogical outcomes.

- Faculty Association Response: Draft Report - Assessing Huron Consulting's Credibility in light of UNH's Invocation of Article 14. (May 2026) Print Only.
- Media:
    - UNH planning layoffs. (January 27, 2020). Foster's Daily Democrat.
    - Huron's financial guidance to help UNH reach top 25 status. (February 12, 2020). The New Hampshire.

American University, Washington, D.C.

- Date: 2024
- Catchphrase: "Strategic Workforce Assessment"
- Focus: "Improve how AU works to cultivate a work environment that enables our faculty and staff to thrive", "Holistic assessment of our workforce strategy"[55]
- Contract Cost: Undisclosed
- Financial Goal: Overcome $33 million deficit form 2023/24
- Results: Undisclosed
- Faculty Association Response:
    - American University Chapter of the AAUP Statement on Huron Consulting Group. (December 7, 2023).
    - "I'm first and foremost worried about staff, but really they shred these communities in ways that don't leave them as healthier thriving places," "When they leave, they leave anger and mistrust. Broken communities are weak." Sam Sadow, at-large representative for AU's staff union, Visual Resources Curator, Art Department[56]
    - "If you impact staff, you're going to impact faculty and students." "When you don't have shared governance, worse decisions happen. It may be faster and more efficient, but the decisions are worse — you need a broader group of minds, especially at a university." John Bracht, Associate Professor, Biology, Secretary-Treasurer, AAUP-AU Chapter[57]
- Faculty Response:
    - "The University is an ecosystem, and it takes a number of stakeholders to make the University work, and while I appreciate trying to find out where we need more staffing, better staffing, how staffing may be reimagined … it does give me pause that folks who are running the University think that this would not have an impact in some way on academic programs." Amanda Choutka, Senior Professorial Lecturer, Literature Department[58]
- Media:

[55] Pritchard A., & Young J.
[56] Pritchard A., & Young J.
[57] Pritchard A., & Young J.
[58] Pritchard A., & Young J.

- AU working with Huron consulting, faculty and staff express concern at group's reputation (February 19, 2024). The Eagle.

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Little Rock, Arkansas

- Date: September 2023
- Focus: Resource Optimization Committee works to find ways to grow revenue or cut expense
- Contract Cost: Undisclosed
- Financial Goal: Projected budget shortfall – $30 million
- Results: Lay-off of 51 employees; "dramatic cuts to contract labor costs"[59]
- Media:
  - UAMS eliminates 51 jobs. (August 29, 2023). Beker's Hospital Review.
  - AU working with Huron Consulting, faculty and staff express concern at group's reputation. (February 19, 2024). The Eagle.

The New School, New York City, New York

- Date: 2020
- Catchphrase: "Reimagining"
- Focus: Restructuring
- Contract Cost: "Hundreds of thousands of dollars"[60]
- Financial Goal: Projected budget shortfall of $130 million
- Results: 122 employees laid off, many from essential positions including health services, departmental administration and student advising. More than a third of those employees were union members. Layoffs estimated to save $12 million per year. [61]
- Faculty Association Response:
  - Huron Fact Sheet (September 20, 2020)
  - Joint Statement from the Ad Hoc X-Divisional Covid-19 Committee and the AAUP-TNS Chapter on the convening of the task force to explore new models for liberal arts at The New School (August 23, 2020)
  - "Similar language and processes have been employed at The New School (as at other universities) and it remains to be disclosed by the administration how much Huron is being paid for what appears to be cookie-cutter approaches to restructuring."[62]
  - Concern from union members re union busting given the new (university)president's stance on unions.
- Media:
  - Corporate Consultants set their targets on American Universities (October 23, 2020). The Nation.

[59] Kayser, A.
[60] Dhillon, J. et al.
[61] Pritchard, A., & Young J.
[62] AAUP-TNS

University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin

- Date: 2019 - 2023
- Focus: "Cloud-based technology system" to "standardize finance, human resources and research administration processes at every university—with the goal of refocusing staff time on our missions of teaching, research and outreach." Workday, the platform suggested by Huron, describes itself as "The AI platform for HR and finance."[63]
- Contract Cost: $51 million over 5 years at 13 institutions, calculated from open records requests. Includes $47 million for "the rollout of a new system-wide workforce technology program called Workday. "[64]
- Financial Goal: $5.3 million budget gap at one university; various budget shortfalls reported
- Results: University of Wisconsin-Parkside – 50 jobs via layoffs or voluntary retirements comprising 10% of the school's workforce[65] University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh — 140 layoffs in October 2023[66]
- Of Note: Huron does not own Workday, but is a "a trusted full services Workday Services, Adaptive Planning, Extend and AMS partner."[67]
- Faculty Association Response: Some campuses are currently organizing AAU Chapter.
- Media:
    - AU working with Huron Consulting, faculty and staff express concern at group's reputation. (February 19, 2024). The Eagle.
    - Report: U of Wisconsin system paid Huron $51M from 2019-2023 (December 17, 2024). Inside Higher Education

Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

- Date: October 2025
- Catchphrase: "Resilient Cornell"
- Focus: Reduce costs across all campuses through a restructuring of the University's workforce and operations. Two leadership committees will drive the workforce design and cross-campus operations. The main principles guiding the work include:
    - Prioritizing academic excellence and research
    - Thoughtful, data-informed decisions with input from across the university
    - Bold strategies for reimagining operations and improving efficiencies
    - Creating lasting change that will support a strong Cornell for generations to come[68]

[63] Quinn, R.
[64] Quinn, R.
[65] Pritchard, A. & Young J.
[66] Quinn, R.
[67] Workday
[68] Cornell University

- Contract Cost: Undisclosed.
- Financial Goal: Undisclosed. Faculty Association says rationale/messaging for goal seems to change – from governance and funding to expanding financial aid, now to building resources, although no dollar amount is given.
- Results: Indefinite hiring freeze, limiting discretionary spending to "improve efficiencies by avoiding duplication of work." Resilient Cornell formalizes these efforts into a unified program to achieve "lasting change that will support a strong Cornell for generations to come."[69]
- Of Note: An April 2025 article indicates the US administration cut or froze $1 billion in funding from Cornell pending investigations involving grants and contracts with the departments of agriculture, defense, education and health and human services. Cornell administration had not been notified of the freeze at the time the article was published.[70]
- Faculty Association Response: No official response. AAU Chapter hadn't heard of Huron before ANSUT spoke with them, but were aware of 'Resilient' Cornell and the fallout from an austerity budget – no contract renewals for some staff (communications, IT, etc.), increase in denials of 3rd and 5th year (pre-tenure?) contracts – now offered as 1 year, consolidation of administration, decline in janitorial and maintenance workers. There is talk of consolidating programs but has not happened yet. Program cuts are anticipated by faculty. Research priorities are cut. No collective agreement so there are few process protections in place because this has not happened before.
- Media:
    - Trump administration freezes more than $1 Billion in funding from Cornell (April 8, 2025). The Cornell Daily Sun.
    - University launches 'Resilient Cornell' initiative to cut spending, Overhaul Operations. (October 31, 2025). The Cornell Daily Sun.

HURON AT CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario

- Date: 2015 and 2022 (2 contracts)
- Catchphrase: Unknown
- Focus: Financial Review
    - 2015 – New Budget Model Review (NBM) Committee reviewed principles, objectives, and processes of the NBM and issued recommended modifications for 2017-2018 budget. Huron hired to complete an "objective third-party assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of both the NBM itself and the associated processes to assure that they support each other and meet the originally agreed objectives."[71]

[69] Wiser, R.
[70] Kiviat, M.
[71] New Budget Model Review Committee

    - 2022 – "Assess Queen's budget model and propose next steps to best align the model to the University strategic framework and engagement go-forward principles. Engagement Go-Forward Principles include:
        - Incentivize and support growth in research and graduate student programming
        - Increase funding to support pan-university strategic initiatives
        - Encourage collaboration across Faculties/Schools/Shared service units
        - Reduce duplication of shared services
        - Assess the distribution gap between Faculties/Schools
        - Decrease the complexity of the allocation model[72]
- Contract Cost:
    - 2015 – Undisclosed – 6-week contract
    - 2022 – Undisclosed – 6-month contract (January-June)
- Financial Goal: Undisclosed.
- Results:
    - Review of Queen's New Budget Model. (January 2016). Queen's University.
    - Budget Model Assessment. (January 2022 – June 2022). Huron Consulting.
- Faculty Association Response:
    - Queen's University Faculty Association was not consulted by Huron, but essentially agreed with their final report.
    - University finally releases budget model report. (June 6, 2024). Queen's Coalition Against Austerity.

HURON AT NOVA SCOTIA UNIVERSITIES

- Date: 2025 - 2026 - current
- Focus: Academic Program Review (APR) will
    - Modernize and enhance program design and curriculum, ensuring contemporary pedagogy and technology integration.
    - Revitalize programs to improve enrolment, graduation outcomes, and labour market alignment, particularly where demand in the labour market for graduates— from specific fields of study/programs—is high.
    - Rationalize programs by discontinuing or reducing those with low labour market need, low utilization, high costs, or misalignment with strategic priorities.
    - Identify opportunities for new programs based on emerging trends, gaps in the Nova Scotia university system, and institutional competitive advantage.[73]
- Contract Cost: $400,399[74]

[72] Huron Consulting – Queen's University
[73] MPHEC – Initial Program Categorization Guide
[74] Bosquet, T.

- Financial Goal: Undisclosed. Goals include aligning academic programs with government priorities and creating cost efficiencies.
- Process:
    - Initial Categorization – "the first chapter of a comprehensive Academic Program Review Guide". The categorization guide provided to universities by MPHEC indicates that "Workstream A" includes "Program List Approval, Initial Assessment and Program Categorization"
        - Each program must be categorized as "To be modernized, to be revitalized, to be rationalized or requiring no change".
        - The guide states that "Relatively few programs will likely require no change." [75]
    - Complete Academic Review Guide – describes a multi-step process that "outlines expectations, procedures, and strategic intentions" described in the bilateral agreements. A few of the APR elements include a detailed program costing analysis, documenting methodology and insights, analysis and development of narrative content by program.[76]
    - Program Costing Methodology – includes 7-step overview of methodology
- Key deadlines include:
    - Program list approval, Initial Assessment and Program Categorization – January 30, 2026
    - Program Costing Analysis – May 30, 2026
    - Additional Analysis and Development of Narrative Content by Program Category – May 30, 2026
    - Synthesis, Strategic Prioritization and Implementation Planning – August 30, 2026
    - Final Report – October 15, 2026
- Faculty Response:
    - ANSUT
        - Nova Scotia universities required to justify each program for continued funding as international student enrollment drops. (October 6, 2025). The Chronicle Herald.
        - University professors' association pushes back against government bill. (March 5, 2025). The Chronicle Herald.
    - Mount Saint Vincent University
        - Bill 12 misses the real cost crisis in Nova Scotia Universities. (January 22, 2026). Halifax Examiner.
    - CoCoGov (Dalhousie University)
        - Provincially mandated program reviews are 'problematic,' says Dal faculty. (March 12, 2026). Dalhousie Gazette.

[75] MPHEC – Initial Program Categorization Guide
[76] MPHEC – Complete Academic Program Review Guide

        - "Schedule H" provincial program reviews: What you need to know. (January 2026). Contact CoCoGov.org for pdf.
            - Concerns include: reviews are not evidence based, no objective, expert analysis, Senate's role is minimized, approach is politically and ideologically based.
        - A close look at Schedule H: Provincially mandated annual program reviews. (December 24, 2025). CoCoGov.org
- Media:
    - A firm with a reputation for recommending deep cuts and layoffs has been hired as a consultant to review Nova Scotia's universities. (December 19, 2025.) Halifax Examiner
    - Why we still need ivory towers. (December 19, 2025). Halifax Examiner.

MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

The struggle with political interference in Nova Scotia's post-secondary education sector continues. From a faculty perspective, it appears that academic program reviews are just one of the tools being wielded with a heavy hand to erode collegial governance and the quality of education for which Nova Scotia's universities are well-known. The deadline for data collection for the APRs is set for October 15, 2026, with no timeline for Huron's final report, or hint as to what the report may recommend. As such, there is no conclusion to this document. If anything, this compilation of information on university leadership, academic program reviews, and a consulting firm that views universities as "large, favorable end markets" raises more questions than answers.

- What did the proposal to hire the consultant include?
- Why was the MPHEC tasked with hiring the consultant?
- Why won't the MPHEC share minutes of their meetings?
- How/why was Huron chosen over other consultants with lower bids?
- Was Huron's business model and track record considered before they were hired?
- Was Huron's business model and track record the reason they were hired?
- Why would the MPHEC approve a costing methodology that significantly deviates from their own quality assurance process?
- What is the DAE's motivation in creating a cost profile of academic programs, thwarting the rigourous quality assurance process that is already in place?
- Why would the MPHEC approve a costing methodology that analyzes costs one way, and income another?
- How will the remaining $500,000, received from the DAE, be spent by the MPHEC?
- Why aren't university administrators raising red flags about this flawed process?

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FURTHER READING

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