

## Notes of the Mount Royal Faculty Association

Meeting date: April 3, 2013

**Call to order:** A General Meeting of the MRFA was held in Mount Royal University, Calgary, Alberta on April 3, 2013. The meeting convened at 4:05pm, President Gerry Cross presiding and Kit Dobson, Communications Officer.

### Members in attendance:

See attached Attendance Sheets

**Agenda:** Approved

### Approval of minutes:

Motion was made by Gerry Cross to approve the minutes of the January 29, 2013. **Motion carried.**

### Officer's Reports

President's Report

#### 1. Budget Development and Mandate Letter

The Executive does not come to the membership with any motions or recommendations.

Members discussed the position of Campus and E-Campus Alberta, the expectations letters, the potential for salary cuts, increasing MRFA dues to subsidize the university, drafting an open letter to the public and a letter to MRU's Board of Governors.

#### *Campus and E-Campus Alberta*

Campus Alberta was initially meant to be a transfer mechanism, and E-campus Alberta is connected to it: neither are curricular bodies. Campus Alberta was presented as a philosophical lens through which the ministry would view the 26 post secondary institutions it governs.

Our transfer arrangements in Alberta are already very good. More importantly, transferring students is not as big an issue as Lukaszuk states it is: students tend to finish their degrees at a single institution.

#### *Open letter to the Alberta Public*

A letter should be drafted describing what MRU is. For parents, students and the public to know what is being lost in these cuts, they need to know what MRU does now. They need to know how many students are going to be turned away, that social engineering is not a way to develop Alberta's future, that the program cuts made now will affect the quality of education permanently, and that we are losing invaluable applied programs. To effectively convey this message we need to include as much factual information as possible and have the letter signed by faculty.

Motion THAT the MRFA write an open letter to the Calgary Herald, to be published by virtue of purchasing space, which shall articulate the values of PSE at MRU and provide statistics in support of the message.

Moved: Jane Drover

Seconded: Kelly Hewson

Discussion:

- If we only have money for one then it should be in the Herald
- We do not need to buy a page: we could send it to the Herald and they will publish some of it and it will be linked on their website.
- We need people working on this letter now. It should be sent out by April 8 and April 9 at the latest.
- Who will be involved in the process of drafting the letter?
  - Richard Sutherland (Policy Studies),
  - Janice Paskey nominated (Journalism),
  - David Clemis (Humanities) and
  - One or two members of the Advocacy Committee
- In the long term we need a communications plan to follow and that others could emulate
- The letter will be sent to all local media plus the Globe and Mail

- This is to be an open letter addressed to the citizens of Alberta
- It should include something about how tuition works as the public does not realize that we are limited in our means to generate revenue. The government may revisit the tuition cap framework for 2014-15 but until then we cannot do anything
- Any suggestions and data is to be sent to David Clemis and copied to Gerry Cross
- What is envisioned here is identifying who we are and what we do for students. This is an opportunity to state who we are. There is no harm in this regardless of the budget, and this will give us the most respect and credibility with the widest audience
- We need to also address part of the larger problem which is the artificially constructed deficit based on a regressive taxation system. But, we need to be careful about how we couch this message because the goal of this letter is to build support and to convince Albertans that PSE is inadequately funded and give them the reasons why it needs to be funded better.

Scott Murray: call the question

Vote

Carried

Vote on motion to write letter to the citizens of Alberta describing the value of PSE, particularly in relation to MRU, which is to be distributed to all local media and the Globe and Mail

Carried, one abstention

### *Use of Faculty Salaries to Subsidize the University*

There has been mention around campus of adjusting salary and benefits to help balance the University's budget. While it is too early in the process to make a vote or decision on this, we should discuss it.

To accept a salary rollback, to use faculty members' resources, to assist with the budget situation we may need to open the Collective Agreement, but if we did this we would have no say in how it was used. Alternatively, we could generate money through the dues structure already in place with the MRFA. Members are compelled to pay Association dues: should members decide to increase these dues then members would have to pay them. We cannot save programs with the amount of money we would be able to raise but we can stop the erosion of programs and quality of instruction by sending that money to departments so they can hire enough sessionals to maintain course offerings.

Potential difficulties:

- As we shrink program and course offerings we are shrinking enrollments so there will not be students in classes to be taught.
- If this idea were to be realized then there would need to be a mechanism for the MRFA to get involved in how the money were to be incorporated in operating funds and spent
- We should not downsize the cost of education to faculty salaries; however, using this for stronger political activity would be a good idea.
- We cannot raise enough money to substantially affect the changes we envision as necessary given the budget cuts.
- If we did this we would vindicate the government's statement that faculty are overpaid.
- We need to look at the budget matters, what other savings are possible in the institution and in the government and at developing a progressive tax system.
- Faculty took a 5% salary rollback in 1995 and some are not inclined to do it again.
- Faculty are already going to be taking an additional burden to support these cuts through increased workload.
- We cannot tell the foundation that the money be used only for hiring sessionals.

Supporting Arguments

- This would send an enormously important message.
- If they are going to increase class sizes then they lower the quality of education and increase workload. We could use this money to buy lower workload and better education.
- It would be a powerful political and philosophical position to take. We should raise the money and see if we can spend it appropriately: we can look at that later.
- It would be good to raise a hardship or soft landing fund.

- While cutting salaries may send a message you do not want to send to the populous, we need to consider what you are saying to sessionals. They are very vulnerable, and they have been paying these dues for all this time and have no rights. Many will be gone after having been here for over 30 years.

### *Revenues*

The administration needs to focus more on increasing revenues than on making cuts. There are a lot of classrooms empty and there are programs that students want. We could increase capacity or we could go to a trilateral model using the building all year round. We do not need to increase the fixed costs of the institution to do these things. We could also increase offerings of language/ESL courses.

### *Letter of Expectation (mandate letters)*

#### Responses:

- AUFA wrote a letter to the Board of Governors at Athabasca University requesting that the Board not sign the letter of expectation. AUFA argued that this letter undermines the university, disadvantages students who need help, and that eliminating duplication will increase costs to students.
- David Docherty is planning to rewrite the letter since it was sent out as a draft. He will talk about the kind of University Mount Royal is. He will draw from the institutional and academic plans and describe the virtues of the collaborative degrees we have. The revised letter may include a response from the MRFA as well.
  - In responding to the draft expectation letter we legitimize its existence.
    - This could be the substance of the MRFA's response.

#### Function and validity of the letters:

- What is the legality of the letters of expectation? It is concerning that we can so easily lose our autonomy: we should not need to express the government's interests in our classrooms through commercialization and directed research.
- Nothing can better invalidate the purposes of these letters than the fact that they are so similar. Aside from a single paragraph referring to research, they are five pages of identical documents other than the amount of the grant.
- There is a possibility that the Ministry does have a long term plan, though it is currently not apparent, because PSE did take a disproportionate cut in the provincial budget. This indicates a larger agenda around PSE going forward.

Gerry will suggest that David refer the question of the legality of the mandate letter to the University's legal staff.

### *Letter to the MRU Board of Governors*

There is no reason for the faculty to remain silent with the MRU Board of Governors, and it would be good for us to send a letter to them. They are well intentioned: they want to do the best for MRU but they do not have the level of information we have.

Motion THAT the MRFA draft a letter to be sent to the MRU Board of Governors outlining some of the faculty concerns with the letter of expectation and the University's budget plans.

Moved: Roberta Lexier

Seconded: Kelly Hewson

#### Discussion:

- o This should be sent before April 11
- o This letter would become part of the public record and this is an opportunity to say different kinds of things in the two letters
- o The letter would be addressed to the board chair copied to members of the board.

Vote

Carried Unanimously

### *Rally Supporting Post Secondary Education*

The Student Empowerment Committee has organized a rally on April 10 at 10:00am. This rally will occur at the same time as others around the province. Faculty are invited to participate in the rally and are asked to encourage their students to participate.

- The MRFA will provide resources to make picket signs
- The MRFA Advocacy Committee will inquire about the costs for the students involved in this student group and may make a recommendation to the MRFA Executive Board that the MRFA help them pay for some of the expense.

Also, there is a meeting on Friday April 5at 1:30pm in the Faculty Centre to talk about strategies we as a faculty may want to attempt.

## 2. ACIFA Survey Results

The survey results are be posted online. Response rate has gone up to 22%: this is the same level as it was in 2002. Nothing else in the survey increased. Rankings all dropped a little or a lot other than for the Negotiating Committee.

## 3. LAPP Report

Our pension plan is in good shape compared to all other Alberta pension plans, but we still have a deficit caused by the market collapse in 2008. Now approximately 30% of our contributions are now going toward reducing the unfunded liability. This is a problem because it means that people working now are paying the pensions of people who are retired. LAPP's goal is to have the plan being fully funded in the next 15 years. To do this, LAPP will need to consider removing some or all of its current subsidies

- o When someone leaves the plan before 55 they get to take money out. It is a present value calculation and a certain rate is used in this. The rate is either too high or too low right now and it costs LAPP 700\$ mill a year.
- o Early retirement is retirement before 65. If you do this your payment is reduced by 3% a year whereas CPP is 6%. LAPP members are subsidizing this.

## **Committee Reports**

### 1. Organization Committee

- Some changes will be proposed at the AGM pertaining to the VP Policy position.
- We are also considering changing the relation between the Negotiating Committee and the Executive Board.
  - o We have not had a chance to discuss it as an Executive.
- The Executive has been monitoring hours to determine if the reassigned time is appropriate
  - o We may be coming to the members at the AGM with recommendations for changing the amount of reassigned time provided for MRFA Service.

### 2. Awards Committee

The MRFA had a committee chaired by a member of the Executive Board that has developed two teaching awards: one for full time and one for contract faculty. The committee has, also, developed a formal procedure for the DSA. We were going to discuss these tonight before they come to the AGM for approval.

The documents are available online.

### 3. Child Care Committee

The committee developed another survey to assess child care needs and we ran out of time to administer it. We wanted to take our survey to the staff and students and work with them in modifying the survey but still collecting the same data. With the budget it is not the right time to do this survey and it has been deferred to the Fall.

## **New Business**

### 1. Contract Faculty PD Claims:

The contract faculty PD fund is made up of funding from the unspent list A, which is not much, and 50% of the unspent individual PD allocations. We did see an increase of 63% of spending over the two previous years but this is still 50% of 2009-2010 amounts. We want to see higher use of this fund. If you can spread the word among contract faculty. The form is available on the website and it lists all the eligible expenses.

2. Funding for advisors and coordinators

There is money in the Collective Agreement for advising and coordinating which comes out of List A and some faculty are being told not to use it or that it is to be reduced.

- We should not cut front line student centred activities.
- We need to have a bigger discussion about this.
- If faculty or chairs are being asked to cut this you need to fight this: it is protected in the Collective Agreement (14.9.1.4).

Members expressed sincere appreciation for how Gerry Cross has been representing faculty at MRU.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 6:06pm.

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Communications Officer  
Mount Royal Faculty Association

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Date of approval