

Notes of the Mount Royal Faculty Association
Meeting date: January 31, 2014

Call to order: A General Meeting of the MRFA was held in Mount Royal University, Calgary on January 31, 2014. The meeting convened at 10:05am, President Gerry Cross presiding.

Members in attendance:

115. See attached Attendance Sheets

Order of the Day, 10:00am

Guest, Len Findlay

[Academic Freedom in the Fracked Academy](#)

The idea of a University is ancient, pervasive and persistent. Universities are derived from the desire to know and to control what knowledge can do in various spheres. Given the persistent and dialogic nature of the relationship between knowledge and its uses, it is essential to have reflection within a university and we should be doing it all the time: Universities are a locus of inquiry and should also be the focus of inquiry. We should consider how and why we do things. However, overextension is chronic in PSE in Canada and the effect here is the de-politicization of faculty: they are too busy to be politically active.

University Autonomy - Self governance - is so important to us and to the institution's core values and mission. Yet, apathy, over extension, self censorship, internalizing conditions of exploitation, paternalism, intimidation, discouragement are impediments to autonomy. Donors, accreditation boards, internal mediators &c. also impact and constrain autonomy. A related and concerning trend is the shift away from leadership by the professoriate: this is alarming and regrettable. Someone who has never been in the classroom and never graded is not prepared to make academic decisions. Such decisions are better made by academics in positions of leadership

Different members of the University Community have different interests. When things operate as they should, administrators should facilitate the work of academics: administrators should create conditions for academics to do their work as well as they can. Academics are to work with administrators when possible and affirm the faculty claims to shape the academic agenda of the university. However, 'domain creep' causes things to go badly. This can take a number of forms, such as when Campus Alberta or blundering Ministers intervene, change or remove things, and take control. This forces us to ask whose university is this and who can speak for it? There are a lot of conversations on the expressive freedom of faculty to call things as they see them. Yet, GFC cannot function if it is stacked with administrators and their pets. This is critical language, but the situation is critical. The critical capacity of faculty councils is being subverted and diminished because of who sits on them: they have become more efficient in rubber stamping admin's policies and initiatives. This does not serve the purpose of the faculty collective: Faculty Councils, Senates and GFCs become extensions of the administrative body. Domain Creep is increased in times of crisis. Crisis is often manufactured – it may be real - because it is a time when administrators can circumvent usual processes in the interest of facing an imminent danger. This leads to Managerial unilateralism, lack of transparency, pseudo-consultation, infantilizing the faculty, coercive collegiality, demands for "civility," and misuse of resources to reward "team-players," silence skeptics, and punish critics.

There is autonomy: it is relative and often under siege and. With faculty compliance, neoliberal hegemony, instrumentalization of knowledge, prioritization of programs, externally imposed metrics, directive donors &c. where is there a space for curiosity and free inquiry? How do we operate as academics with KPIs in Alberta? There is also an increase of silencing academics in the name of the brand. Universities are to thrive on difference: they are necessarily democracies, yet we are being forced to clear things by administrators and speak only within our disciplines. The gagging model, the muzzling of government scientists, is being echoed in the silencing of faculty within the academy: yet we do have the right to speak as citizens and as scholars.

Institutional/Collegial Autonomy

Institutional autonomy ought always to function in the service of academic freedom as envisaged by CAUT *and* entrenched in collective agreements. In practice, it does not, and indeed cannot, because, even if collegially driven, it can clash with the rights and responsibilities of individual members of academic staff. If managerially driven, institutional autonomy tends increasingly to become internally limiting and externally abject, both sovereign and for sale.

- Admin refuse to meet with CAUT and they blame CAUT for violating their autonomy while they have been abusing it.

- Individual autonomy of the faculty would guarantee the academic integrity of the university.
- If administrators allow this they would then have to negotiate rather than dictate.
- AUCC updated their statement on academic freedom introducing language that silenced and weakened other provisions: thereby restricting speech, censoring it and making it punishable.
 - o Autonomy has to be close to the CAUT model policy: and it has to be in the CA.
 - o At MRU it is in the institutional policy yet given how key it is it needs to be in the collective agreement
 - o The university may think that academic freedom is couched in institutional autonomy; regardless, it needs to be in the Collective Agreement because it is about the individual autonomy of faculty.

The Metamorphosis of Funding

- No matter how well the province is doing economically they are following the same models to make universities more precarious, compliant and onside.
- The establishment of academic directions need to go through the usual academic decision making process but they do not when large donations dictate what the University does
- Collegial oversight is limited in deficit situations. Faculty are forced to be lean while there is significant administrative bloat. While this happens, academic freedom is constrained or eliminated and programs are lost.

What should we be doing?

- Young people are vilified: first for not caring/for not voting, but if they become active and political they are derided as well. Apathy and engagement are equally demeaned in young people. Yet they are a huge ally for faculty if we respect their activities.
 - o At the University of Saskatchewan the students voted unanimously in non confidence against the program prioritization process which was going to exclude students and require their compliance.
 - o Here is a key moment when the students can march at the head of the line as they have a different relation with the public.
- Students interests are better received by the public than the interests of the 'pampered guild' faculty are seen as privileged signifiers. We can show common cause with the students, and administrators would have to tow the line.
- If we do not have new coalitions of concern and exert pressure we will have austerityU
 - o More and more subject to an extractive model tied to a reductive theory of value
 - o Its residual potential subject to pressuring from toxins whose names and nature are withheld for commercial reasons;
 - o And with little heed to knowledge ecologies that have developed complex interconnections and interdependencies over time
 - o And with no Duty to Consult in sight
- An institution with a long history like this one has a lot of organic interactions and dependencies and there is an institutional memory and values. Yet decisions may be made through prioritization to force competition for scarce resources: we may find faculty trashing each other to save themselves. This is a severe blow to collegiality and collegial governance.

There is a duty to consult faculty.

If that duty is abrogated those that lead us lose the right to lead!

Discussion:

Q: Program Prioritization is, according to the provost, coming to MRU. Would Dickeson be used here? Does CAUT have advice on how we can make it work for us or have the odds not so stacked against us?

A: Yesterday when Scott and Gerry met with the Provost one of the items was faculty concerns about Program Prioritization and the Dickeson methodology. Kathy said that this is not what she meant: she is going to stop calling it Program Prioritization. She wants to have a conversation about the types of programs we value. She believes the cuts were made last year without having had the conversation.

- The University of Saskatchewan and the University of Guelph are going to put together manuals of what to do in these cases.
- There is still academic governance and any changes need to be rooted in the collegial process.
- The collegiate are involved in these decisions. The decision and responsibility lies with the faculty

Q: Will Dickeson be coming here?

A: No he is not.

Q: Currently there is a strategic plan being created and it will likely speak to Program Prioritization. How can we affect the strategic plan?

A: The first thing is the composition of the group making these decisions. It is epidemic that these planning processes are done higher up and it is viewed as being always good.

- When it is strategic you need to ask whose it is, what conflict or challenge it addresses and what authority does the plan have in itself.
- Strategic planning entails, in the longer sense, something that we need to question. Are we doing this as an institution to make us as effective as possible at servicing students, the community and research objectives. We need to ensure that the process does not simply duplicate managerial power.

Agenda

Added: Professional Development Committee Report, Rod Corbett

Approved

Approval of minutes:

Motion was made by Gerry Cross to approve the minutes of the November 26, 2013. **Motion carried.**

Officer's reports

1. President's Report

Two surveys will be conducted by the MRFA in the second and third weeks of February. One is the long awaited child care survey. The MRSA will conduct this survey at the same time. We had hoped to do this with the students but were unable to coordinate it. The other is the Task Force on Faculty Leaves survey. This task force is developing a full sabbatical system proposal to submit to the Negotiating teams. A report from the Task Force will be distributed in the first week of February and the survey will follow.

The MRU Coalition, including the MRSA, MRFA and SAMRU, is underway: though it is progressing slowly. We are developing common messages and we will be meeting with Linda Johnson, the Chair of the Calgary Progressive Conservative caucus

2. Awards Committee Report, Elaine Mullen

Last year we put in place the procedures for the MRFA Teaching Excellence Award (TEA). The call for nominations will be sent out after reading break and the nomination deadline is the last day of the winter semester. The awards will be presented at the tenure party. If you have questions contact Elaine or refer to the website: mrfa.net/awards

3. Vice-President Negotiations Report, Karen Manarin

There is a negotiations survey out right now and it closes on February 5. So far, 210 fulltime members have responded and around 70 contract members. If you have already responded please encourage others to respond, especially contract members. We use the results of the survey to shape our positions going into negotiations; so, it is very important for most members to respond.

Thanks to the members of the Negotiating Committee who in the month of January have spent 38-42 hours in meetings not including any research or work.

4. Professional Development Committee Report, Rod Corbett

There are two major PD Events coming up:

- Feb 19 reading week event about being innovative and taking risks in teaching.
- May 12-13 Spring Retreat. Feb 4 is the deadline to submit a presentation proposal

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 11:17am.