



April 9, 2013

Dear Members of the Mount Royal University Board of Governors,

The Mount Royal Faculty Association, echoing the concerns of post-secondary educators all over Alberta, is deeply troubled by the Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education's recent efforts to assert a measure of unwarranted and ill-considered control over the organization and operation of Alberta's universities, colleges and technical institutes.

We believe it is important that the Board of Governors understand the nature of our concerns, and we ask that the Board joins us in registering these concerns with the Minister and in encouraging the Government of Alberta to reconsider its plan to "unify" Alberta's system of post-secondary education. We know that this puts Board members in a challenging position and hope that you find the arguments presented in this letter to be helpful.

The Minister, based on his assertion that "the Campus Alberta system needs to align closely with the government's economic diversification agenda," has developed "Letters of Expectation" intended to "define roles and expectation for a more unified post-secondary system."¹ According to the terms of Mount Royal's draft Letter of Expectation, the University shall operate within its approved mandate "as set out in its approved Mandate Statement and Mandate and Roles Document...as well as in accordance with any additional direction provided by the Minister."²

We object to the Minister's assertions on the grounds that: (1) they are not supported by the terms of Alberta's Post-Secondary Learning Act (PSLA), and; (2) they legitimize inappropriate and dangerous infringements upon the autonomy of post-secondary institutions.

- 1) The PSLA specifically invests the MRU Board of Governors with the responsibility to "manage and operate the public post-secondary institution in accordance with its mandate."³ Nowhere does the Act mention either "Letters of Expectation", or the power of the Minister to provide "direction" to the Board. This is not to suggest that MRU, as a publicly-funded university, is not responsible to Alberta taxpayers or to the Minister. We most certainly are, and it is through the government appointed Board of Governors, which is empowered to manage and operate MRU, that this responsibility is exercised. It

¹ "Letters of Expectation", Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education, <http://eae.alberta.ca/post-secondary/letters-of-expectation.aspx>

² "Mount Royal University Letter of Expectation," Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education, <http://eae.alberta.ca/media/letters/Mount-Royal.pdf>

³ *Province of Alberta Post-secondary Learning Act*, 60(1).

is the Board, therefore, and not the Minister, that is responsible for directing MRU's operations in accordance with an institutional mandate that was approved on 10 February 2010 by the then Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.⁴ Moreover, that approved mandate, which appears on the Ministry's website, conforms to our status as a Baccalaureate and Applied Studies Institution, as defined by the Ministry's Roles and Mandates Policy Framework.⁵ Mount Royal University is currently operating entirely in accordance with the terms of the relevant legislation and regulations established by the Government of Alberta with regards to post-secondary institutions. Therefore, the Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education has no grounds for intervening in the operational management of MRU, as his Letter of Expectation attempts to do.

- 2) More seriously, the MRFA regards the Minister's Letters of Expectation to be an inappropriate and dangerous infringement upon the autonomy of post-secondary institutions. The letters violate the Alberta government's own principles regarding institutional diversity and autonomy. Included among the key operating principles of the Campus Alberta Quality Council is a requirement that it "exhibits and promotes appreciation of institutional diversity and respect for institutional autonomy and integrity" among Alberta's degree-granting institutions.⁶ Both this principle and MRU's goal of becoming Canada's premier undergraduate university are threatened by this Minister.

Consider, for example, the problem of resolving the incompatibility between our stated goals as an undergraduate university and the Minister's demands in our Letter of Expectation. Mount Royal University has a long, distinguished history of serving the Calgary community in a variety of ways – many of which are not economically quantifiable – and our programming has in turn reflected this diversity of goals. This important value is expressed in our most recent Academic Plan, which states: "... Mount Royal has a role to play in society beyond producing well-educated workers who serve a developing economy. We will educate and graduate thinking citizens and leaders who will enhance the quality of life and we will be clear that, as a university, our role is to create new ideas and new knowledge and thereby contribute to our communities."⁷

MRU's ability to achieve these goals is threatened by the terms of our Letter of Expectation, which privileges the University's obligation to serve an economic agenda above all else. According to the letter, our programs must be both "in demand by employers and students" and "designed to develop the full potential of learners for our economy and society". MRU's priority must be "to conduct applied research in the context of meeting regional industry needs..." and, as a Government of Alberta institution, we are "expected to achieve focused economic and social outcomes that are of

⁴ "Mount Royal University Mandate," Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education, <http://eae.alberta.ca/media/276839/mru.pdf>

⁵ "Roles and Mandates Policy Framework," Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education, <http://eae.alberta.ca/post-secondary/policy/roles.aspx>

⁶ "Operating Principles," Campus Alberta Quality Council, <http://www.caqc.gov.ab.ca/about-the-council/operating-principles.aspx>

⁷ "Inspiring Learning": *Mount Royal University Academic Plan, 2012-2017*, Mount Royal University p. 6.

most value to Albertans.”⁸ While we do not dispute that publicly-funded post-secondary learning must, among other things, make important contributions to Alberta’s developing economy, this single purpose must not be allowed to supersede all others, as it does in MRU’s Letter of Expectation. We are deeply concerned that the immediate, instrumental needs of the economy are always listed first.

The Minister’s “direction” to Alberta’s universities, colleges and technical institutes via the Letters of Expectation seriously endangers the autonomy that these institutions require to genuinely serve the diverse interests of Albertans.

For the reasons given above, the Mount Royal Faculty Association believes that the Letter of Expectation lacks legitimacy and should not be signed. However, if the Board feels an obligation to sign, then we urge that this not be done until unless at least the following changes have been made to the draft letter:

1. Delete the final clause in the third paragraph on page 1 (“...as well as in accordance with any additional direction provided by the Minister”) and the third point under Governance on page 3 (“Review your Mandate and Roles Document to ensure it is aligned with this letter.”)
2. After the introductory paragraph in the Mount Royal University Responsibilities section on page 1, and before the pledge of allegiance to Campus Alberta, insert descriptions taken from our Academic Plan about the type of education that Mount Royal University provides. In particular, the unrelenting focus on serving the economy must be countered; for example, with the above quote from the Academic Plan.
3. Rewrite the “demonstrate a 10 per cent increase in the development of seamless learner pathways” point in the Learners section on page 2. We cannot agree to an arbitrary 10 per cent increase. Instead, specific objectives must be identified in consultation with our partners in the post-secondary system. The value of our collaborative degrees should be described, and any potential expansion of them noted. It should be observed, at least in conversation, that the cuts which have been imposed on the system by the government tend to reduce transfer because they force institutions to focus on their core and, in Mount Royal’s case, to consider cutting university transfer programs and diploma programs which have block transfer agreements.
4. In the Collaboration section on page 2, add facts to tone down the duplication rhetoric. A diversity of programs is a strength. There is no more reason for all education degrees in Alberta to be the same than there is for Calgary to have only one pizza chain franchise. Engineering diplomas at technical institutes have totally different objectives than engineering degrees at universities. Senior courses in degree programs are built upon faculty expertise, and so should not be expected to be the same at all universities.
5. Also in the Collaboration section, state that we will use the Campus Alberta logo only on correspondence related to Campus Alberta; we will not use it on all institutional

⁸ “Mount Royal University Letter of Expectation,” <http://eae.alberta.ca/media/letters/Mount-Royal.pdf>

correspondence. We are an autonomous university governed by our Board of Governors and our General Faculties Council. This system of bicameral governance isolates universities from political interference and permits them to strengthen our society and economy by developing new knowledge and providing education that produces graduates who are thoughtful citizens able to solve new problems and seize new opportunities.

6. Modify the Research section on page 3 to include “scholarly research related to approved programs of study provided by the institution that lead to the granting of baccalaureate degrees,” as authorized for institutions in the Baccalaureate and Applied Studies Institutions sector by the PSLA⁹. In addition to this discipline-specific research, include reference to the key themes in Mount Royal University’s Strategic Research Plan¹⁰; namely, undergraduate involvement in research, community-engaged scholarship, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and collaborative research.
7. Incorporate in the Accountability and Outcomes section on pages 3 and 4 an acknowledgement that some of the most valuable student development outcomes are difficult or impossible to quantify. Include a statement that institutions must be able to define their own targets in order to best measure their distinct roles and mandates. Add accessibility, quality and affordability as essential outcomes.

In closing, we wish to say that we are gravely concerned by the meaningless slogans sprinkled throughout the letters of expectation. Their bland uniformity exhibits a lack of understanding of the rich diversity of Alberta post-secondary institutions.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the MRFA Executive and all members of the MRFA,

Gerry Cross
President, Mount Royal Faculty Association

⁹ *Province of Alberta Post-secondary Learning Act*, 102.3(2)

¹⁰ http://research.mtroyal.ca/documents/policy/mru_srp_2012.pdf