

2018 Executive Board Nominees and Campaign Statements

President

Melanie Peacock, General Management and Human Resources

Stronger Together



It is an honor to submit my name for consideration to be your next MRFA President. My decision to ask for your support was one that I took seriously and involved a great deal of reflection and research. Over the course of four weeks, prior to submitting a nomination form, I carefully reviewed MRFA bylaws, read current and past collective agreements, and met with trusted colleagues (including Marc Schroeder and Chantelle Anderson) to better understand the position requirements. I also spoke with my family, who are fully supportive of my bid for this role.

As I am in my 15th year at MRU, I have had the privilege of witnessing, and contributing to, the evolution of our organization. I have served on over forty committees across professional, department, faculty and university levels. Specifically, I was a member of the MRFA negotiating committee for 5 years and acquired key strategic knowledge and expertise through this work. Other important highlights have included working within the following groups: MRU Teaching and Learning Standing Committee, MRU Assessment Committee and the University Implementation Committee. These specific service commitments have enhanced my awareness and understanding of the continuing challenges relating to our transition from a college to a university. Further, my commitment to advancing MRU, and skills in dealing with the media, have also been shown as I have taken part in more than eighty media interviews over the past few years. My time at MRU has also allowed me to display my passion for, and dedication to, providing exceptional learning environments for our students. As well, I have substantial research accomplishments as evidenced through the publication of various journal articles, creation of numerous instructor resources, and co-authoring of three text books. (Fourth book is about to be in press.) As such, I have deep appreciation for, and comprehension of, the demands of a faculty role (both from a contract and full-time perspective) due to my work across the areas of teaching, service, and scholarship.

I have served on the Board of Directors for the Chartered Professionals in Human Resources, Alberta (formerly the Human Resources Institute of Alberta), have led various initiatives (both internal and external to MRU) and have managed a staff of twelve people during my prior industry experience. As such, I understand that a leader is only as strong as her team. As President I will rely heavily upon, and work cooperatively with, the MRFA Executive Board who bring a range of perspectives to complement my own. I look forward to drawing from my previous leadership experiences to provide guidance to this team.

Further, as a Human Resource (HR) professional I am well positioned to address the requirements of a diverse faculty group. The key responsibilities of the MRFA President would be supported by my HR competencies and I am confident in my ability to represent and advocate for your interests. Further, my HR background aligns well with our move to the Labour Relations Code and will also assist in recruiting, selecting, and working with the Association's new Labour Relations Officer. The amendments we are experiencing are far from over and my specialized knowledge in change management will also serve to enhance my work as your President. While I believe in creating collegial working relationships with management, I am not afraid to take a stance and defend faculty rights.

In summary, I am excited about the opportunity to be your MRFA President and would be honored to serve in this capacity. Should you have questions regarding my background and experiences please e-mail me (mpeacock@mtroyal.ca) so that we can set up a time to meet and talk. I know that by working as a united group, which includes all classifications of faculty across our diverse and dynamic campus, we can continue to accomplish great outcomes. Together we are stronger.

Vice-President Policy and Senior Grievance Officer

Brady Killough, Mathematics and Computing

It is with pleasure that I am running for the position of Vice President Policy and Senior Grievance Officer. The MRFA undertakes important and varied work on behalf of all members of the academic staff of the University. While this work touches on many areas related to our professional lives, the core mandate of the association remains the negotiation of terms and conditions of employment through collective bargaining, and the enforcement of those terms and conditions through the grievance process.

In past years I have been involved in negotiations, serving for 5 years on the MRFA Negotiating Committee (2011 – 2016), including serving as VP Negotiations and Chair of the Negotiating Committee for the 2016 round of bargaining. After a two year break from active service with the Association I am excited about the possibility of contributing once again. This time in a role focused more on the grievance handling side of the Association's operations.

While serving on the MRFA Executive board as VP Negotiations, I was also a member of the grievance committee. I believe that my knowledge of the collective agreement (gained through negotiating) and my previous exposure to the grievance process (through serving on the grievance committee) leaves me well prepared to transition into the Senior Grievance Officer part of this position.

The other major responsibility of this position is related to policy: monitoring and helping to develop Association feedback on proposed changes to University policies relevant to the Association and the terms and conditions of employment of its members. Though I have less experience directly related to this role, I believe I am still well suited to it. While it is primarily the VP Policy who assists the President in matters related to changes to University policy, these issues are normally discussed by all Executive Board members at Executive meetings. In this context, while previously serving on the Executive board I

contributed to discussions about Association feedback on University Policies (admittedly not in a leadership role). I also have experience reading and commenting on academic policies through participation in Faculty Council (Science and Technology), as well as GFC and TLSC (teaching and learning standing committee). Finally, I like to think that attention to detail and strategic thinking are strengths of mine.

I would be honoured if you would allow me to serve in this role and contribute to the important work of the Association. Please consider voting for me as your next Vice President Policy and Senior Grievance Officer.

Contract Member Representative

Guy Obrecht, General Education

Coming into this role I wanted to address three things for contract faculty: finding job security, supporting professional development, and building community. I was lucky to be sitting on an executive board that had three contract members and full time members who were sympathetic to these concerns. Contract faculty issues and concerns have been a focus for the MRFA, and in our new labor code environment they should be. We need to continue to work together towards these goals.

To job security, I now add pay equity to my list. Through looking at past collective agreements I have created a chart that reveals a steady increase in the difference between what full-time and contract members are paid for teaching. Equal pay for equal work is a pretty fair idea and I hope all members believe in it. As a start, I want to create a plan to progressively reduce the differential in pay for contract faculty.

I think there are several ways that we can increase job security for contract faculty. For starters, minimize or end the use of SPOT assessments in the reappointment process. Student opinions do not equate to good teaching and learning. Secondly, I want to continue to work towards more processes that lead to continuing contracts that don't require semesterly application and hiring decisions. This would lead to more secure employment and enable more commitment to professional development and increased access to health and retirement benefits.

I think that job security and pay equity will increase community through explicitly recognizing a commitment to and from the University. But I also want to experiment with more events that are directly related to the challenges faced by contract faculty: perhaps an end of term grading event for contract faculty to drop in and grade, or otherwise commiserate. I also want to continue hosting the social events for contract faculty as a way to keep in touch with the diverse concerns and interests of our membership.

Thank you

Communications Officer

Brenda Lang, General Management and Human Resources

I have served as the Communications Officer on the MRFA Executive Board for the past two years, and I previously served as the Contract Faculty Representative for four years. Both positions have allowed me to bring the contract faculty perspective to Executive Board discussions in the service of all MRFA members.

As Communications Officer, I have chaired the Communications Committee, which is comprised of members from various Faculties. This committee is responsible for overseeing the Association's internal communications, with primary focus on the regular *News to Use* newsletter. The committee was tasked with the redesign of the MRFA website, a project that started in spring 2017 and was successfully completed at the end of the fall 2017 semester. It has been my distinct pleasure to work with this talented and dedicated group of individuals these past two years to deliver important information to members.

As Communications Officer, I have coordinated the Department Communicator network and led the Department Communicator breakfast events at the start of each semester. The Executive Board relies on this network to engage and inform members of the various Association meetings and important undertakings, such as the annual member census. I have enjoyed getting to know this group of members and supporting them in their communicator roles.

Currently, the Communications Officer is required to be a member of the Advocacy Committee, so I have worked with the previous and the current Advocacy Officers on this committee. The Communications Officer's role on this committee has been to ensure the Advocacy Committee focuses on external communication and engagement (i.e., to advocate for MRU and post-secondary education with external audiences), and it has been enlightening to work with members who are passionate about MRU and PSE and demonstrate creativity to develop events to promote this work.

As a member who is passionate about and understands the importance of the work of the MRFA, I'd like to continue to serve members as the Communications Officer for the next two years, and I'd appreciate your support.

Treasurer

Rafik Kurji, Accounting and Finance

I am delighted to put my name forward for the position of Treasurer of Mount Royal Faculty Association for a two year term. It is with a deep sense of humility that I ask for your support.

I am an associate professor in accounting, in the Bissett School of Business and Communication Studies. I have been a very active member of the MRFA for many years and have served on various committees of

the MRFA. I have served on the MRFA executive in the past as Treasurer and have also served as a member on the negotiating committee in the past.

I bring to this position my many years of training and experience in the field of accounting and business. I am very familiar with the operations of the MRFA having served as treasurer in the past. I am requesting your support for my nomination and am looking forward to your vote.

Member at Large

Jennifer Solinas, General Education

Dear MRFA Members,

I begin by stating my intention to run again for the position of Member at Large on the Executive Board of the MRFA. My first term afforded me excellent exposure to the faculty voice in the shared academic governance of MRU, to elements of collective bargaining, matters related to accessible and affordable post-secondary education, as well as academic freedom, equity, diversity, inclusion and human rights. The first term is much about the learning curve; my second term will be about digging in.

By way of the MAL position, I sit on the Faculty Centre Management Committee, as well as the Professional Standards and Ethics Committee (PSEC). Through the latter, we hosted a well-attended session on professional teacher-student boundaries which will also be an upcoming retreat session. In addition, I was appointed to sit as the MRFA representative on a sub-committee of PEC called the Employee Initiatives Working Group, with a mandate to reevaluate all employee appreciation initiatives institution-wide and create a better sense of belonging, recognition and inclusion to match MRU's motto, "You Belong Here."

Recently, however, I have become keenly interested in the very real issues concerning strike/lock out scenarios. I attended the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA) Labour Conference to learn more about preparation protocols, post-secondary unionization, Bill 7, and mobilization and communication during bargaining. The messaging coming from our senior administration is not positive, and we ought to be prepared for such an eventuality.

Lastly, as a contract faculty member, I wish to continue to support pathways to regularization through our bargaining team's efforts. We have been fortunate this round to have three contract faculty members sit on the MRFA Executive Board, and I wish to remain one of them.

It has been a great privilege to work with Marc Schroeder's leadership, and I will equally support the new MRFA President as we move forward. In sum, there is more work to be done, and I ask for your vote so that I can stay in it and keep my sleeves rolled up.

Thank you kindly,

Jennifer Solinas

Michele Holmgren, English and Languages

I have been a faculty member, first as a sessional starting in 2002, and then as tenure-track from 2010. I have served on many MRFA committees, including Professional Development, Social, Communications, and Faculty Evaluations. I have also served on many department committees as MRU evolved from a college to the university. I have also chaired a scholarly association, which gave me voting privileges with the FHSS, and I continue to serve on boards and executive for community organizations in Calgary. I have a good understanding of and commitment to the activities and goals of the MRFA.

Committee Chairs

Diversity and Equity Committee Chair

D.A Dirks, Humanities

My name is D.A. Dirks and I am running for the position of Chair of the MRFA Diversity and Equity Committee. My interest in serving in this role is inspired by the hope that the MRFA Diversity and Equity Committee can model to MRU what it means to have policies and practices that do more than pay lip service to diversity, equity, and justice. My own research in the area of equity for minoritized populations on university campuses has shown that well intentioned policies most often situate minoritized individuals and groups as outsiders or as problems. We need to find new language and policies that imagine a truly equitable and just MRFA and campus community.

I am a contract faculty member in the departments of General Education and Humanities and I teach courses that discuss diverse genders, sexualities, and identities. I have a B.A. in Art History and an M.A. in History from the University of Calgary; and an M.A. in Higher Education and Student Affairs, and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Western Michigan University.

Prior to working at MRU, I was as a Senior Academic Planner at the University of Wisconsin System Administration in the office of Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, and Student Success. Other work experience includes serving as the Coordinator of Student Organizations for Social Justice & LGBT Resource Center at Northwestern University, and Coordinator of LGBT Student Services at Western Michigan University.

I have also served as Education Chair and Co-Chair for the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals and I am currently serving a term as Past Co-Chair of that organization. I have also served on the Positive Space committee at MRU. I have facilitated workshops on LGBT2SQ civil rights, racial justice, and social justice at universities, high schools, and non-profit organizations. When not advocating for justice, I run with friends and rescue cats, but not simultaneously.

Faculty Evaluation Committee Chair

Bob Uttl, Psychology

I am a professor at the Psychology Department with main research interests in memory, ageing, assessment, and psychometrics. I have accumulated lots of personal experience with evaluation of faculty both at MRU and elsewhere, including with Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) ratings. I have served as a member and later a chair of promotion and tenure committees at MRU, and as a co-chair and later chair of MRFA Faculty Evaluation Committee (FEC). As a result of these experiences, I have long-standing interest in the uses and misuses of SET ratings in evaluating faculty, and my students and I have published several peer-reviewed papers showing that, contrary to widespread beliefs, SET ratings do not correlate with student learning (Uttl, White, & Wong Gonzalez, 2017) and are substantially influenced by teaching effectiveness irrelevant factors (TEIFs) (e.g., Uttl & Smibert, 2017). As the chair of the MRFA FEC, I would use my experiences and expertise to work towards objective, transparent processes and standards for evaluating faculty members; to increase opportunities for our faculty to learn about proper evaluation procedures in high stakes personnel decisions; and to work towards giving SET ratings only minimal or no weight in summative personnel decisions given that (a) students do not learn more from more highly rated professors, and (b) SET ratings measure students' satisfaction, that is, "a happy or pleased feeling because of something that you did or something that happened to you" (www.merriam-webster.com).