

The Power of *Why* and the Importance of *What* — Melanie Peacock



Melanie Peacock,
MRFA President

The other day I was asked why I became a teacher. This query provided me the opportunity to reflect upon what brought me to this vocation, which I refer to as a calling more than a job. At the heart of it is the desire to share knowledge, create a passion for learning, and have a profound and deep impact on the lives of others. When speaking with my faculty colleagues, similar senti-

ments about supporting students have been shared.

In our work it is important to remember our individual "touchstone" (as I like to call it) that is the essence of why we engage in the work we do. Simon Sinek, a highly regarded consultant and speaker, refers to this as *The Golden Circle* and stresses that the power of *why* we perform our work is much more important than *what* we do.

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The Contract Faculty Commitment to Students — Guy Obrecht



Guy Obrecht,
Contract Member Rep.

One of the more puzzling statistics to come out of CAUT's recent study of contract academic staff was that despite the precarity of their positions and the lack of resources to support their academic interests, they were more likely to agree that their teaching had "positively impacted their career". There's something paradoxical here - why would something so clearly taxing be considered positive? Some might point to this as an example of "cruel optimism", a term that refers to an imaginary understanding that is at odds with actual effects, but I would point to the students.

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Contract faculty are in a dialogue with students about our work and our understanding of the fields we specialize in. Almost all of our work is aimed at giving students the best classes we can, ones that

are calibrated to support individual student learning with ideas, assignments, exercises, and all the other things we offer. It is the moments when students don't understand, or when the classroom switches on and they suddenly begin to listen, or when they extend an idea into an unanticipated area and ideas go live - those are really positive moments. Those are the moments when our own understanding is clarified, challenged, or changed. It is having this opportunity to build and change things, that's, to channel my inner Greek, the mark of the good life.

Positive as it may be, this commitment to our students has its costs. The amount of work that goes into preparing a class, from syllabus to class notes to assignments and exams, has a way of taking as much time as we have to give it. Then there are the students who stay after class to clarify their understanding, the office hours, the emails and phone calls (okay, not so much the phone any more), that fill in gaps for students as they navigate their particular approach and understanding of the course materials. Lastly, there is grading, which pulls us into a temporal vortex and shoots us out into a new semester. This time all adds up, and for contract faculty it essentially dilutes our hourly compensation.

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President's Report (Continued)— Melanie Peacock

To play devil's advocate I'm going to challenge this either-or thinking, especially when examining our role as educators. Recently I saw an impactful video that shared what students would want their faculty to know about them. Quotes such as "I'm working two jobs", "I'm a single parent" and "I'm experiencing test anxiety" were shared. It is important for us to remember the learners' perspective and experiences, but I wonder why we, as educators, are often hesitant to share more about our work, our joys, and our challenges with students? What quotes would we share in a video entitled "I want my students to know that"? As your Association president, and based upon comments I hear from our colleagues, quotes could include "I take extra time to rewrite exam questions, as I want them to be clear", "I hold extra office hours because I care deeply about what my students are learning and want to do all I can to help them", "I'm concerned and lose sleep when students aren't engaged, as I want them to learn the material", "I'm so proud of my students and experience great joy watching them grow and develop as a term progresses" and "I provide numerous hours of service and sit on various committees to help the University function effectively so that students have an effective learning environment".

Students seem to understand that we are passionate educators who are dedicated and committed to our craft, but they do not have full understanding regarding the depth and complexity of our

work. To this end, the Mount Royal Association regularly meets with members of the executive from SAMRU (Students' Association of Mount Royal University) to dialogue, share ideas, and provide updates regarding faculty activities and interests. The Association deeply values these opportunities to work with SAMRU in order to learn more about what matters to students and to ensure their deeper comprehension of the multi-faceted, and often challenging, work that faculty perform.

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In essence, the combination of *why* we value being teachers and *what* we do in this role should be readily apparent to students and I encourage all faculty colleagues to find ways to share this information with your students. It takes courage and vulnerability to do so, but this will deepen students' understanding that our working environment (resulting from both "our *why*" and "our *what*") is their learning environment, which we as their teachers are advocating for and care deeply about.

The Mount Royal Faculty Association provides a collective voice for faculty, promotes tenure and academic freedom, advocates for the highest standards of professionalism in higher education, and upholds the values of diversity, equity and human rights.

Recent Strike Votes and Bargaining Updates at Canadian Universities

Athabasca University

"On [January 22] Collective bargaining between AUFA and the Board reached impasse....AUFA's bargaining team has been forced to conclude that no further progress towards a collective agreement is likely at this time", and they are now developing an ESA Agreement as they prepare to move to statutory Mediation.

(<http://aufa.ca/blog/2019/1/23/bargaining-reaches-impasse-what-next>)

UOITFA

Faculty Members at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) have voted 86% in favour of a strike mandate, the highest in their history. Their bargaining priorities include job security for contract faculty and improvements to benefits and pension plans. (More info available here: uoitfa.ca/2019strikemandatevoterresults/)

FUNSCAD

"Members of the union representing Regular Part-Time faculty, Full-time faculty, Regular Prorated faculty and librarians at NSCAD University have voted in favour of a strike mandate. With 97.6% of members voting, 97.5% voted 'YES' in supporting their bargaining team as they head into conciliation [i.e. statutory mediation] this week with the employer. The union has been in negotiations since July and after 18 meetings had hoped to reach an agreement with the employer at the table. Workload, fair compensation, job security and support for caregivers are major unsettled issues....NSCAD teaching staff and librarians have been working under the terms of a contract that expired on June 30, 2018."

The MRFA's Negotiations Committee continues to meet with the Board's Team with the aim to reach settlement.

Recent updates have been provided at recent MRFA Meetings and Fora.

Detailed information will be available soon in the member restricted section of the mrfa.net site. If you did not receive an email in the past week to set up your mrfa.net account, please email office@mrfa.net to have an account set up.

Members are encouraged to submit their input to the Association via the online comment form at mrfa.net.

Faculty Options for Responding to Students in Distress

- Amy Van Deurzen and Mirjam Knapik

There are times when Faculty are faced with students in distress, either because they are directly confronted or because the student exhibits behaviour that suggests they might be struggling. Knowing how to respond can be a valuable means of managing the stress that can come from these interactions.

There are several options available to faculty, and individual preferences for these will vary.

Options without Direct Student Contact

No matter the instructors' preferred style of interaction with students, referral to the Early Support Program is an option. Faculty may inform students of this possibility either in their course outlines or in the first class. This process allows anyone with concerns about a student's academic performance or well-being to go online and report the concern. Someone from the Office of Student Success will check in with the student and explore what additional support and resources might be of help. At the point of contact, the student can choose whether or not they would like to accept support. Please see the [Office of Student Success](#) webpages for more information and to review the Early Support Referral Form.

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For any concerns related to the safety of individuals or the community, the [Concerning Behaviour on Campus Team](#) (CBCT) provides a medium for reporting. Although the way this unit operates has been in flux, the conduit for gathering information has always been Security Services. Peter Davison, Head of Security, chairs this committee, which reviews all reports of atypical, dangerous, or threatening behaviour. This is a confidential resource that students, faculty, and staff can access 24/7.

It should be acknowledged that the processes for responding to the safety of the members of our community requires more conversation. However, if you observe behaviour that poses a significant disruption to the learning, living or working environment on campus, report it to the CBCT by contacting security services at 403.440.5900.

Responding In-Person

It is in one-on-one interactions with students that faculty members have a wide range of preferred styles. In the "Faculty Options for Responding to Students in Distress" workshop, which is offered regularly through the ADC, this topic provides rich conversation and debriefing of specific scenarios. A key challenge is finding the right words to get just enough information to be able to respond, without finding ourselves with information that is beyond our role responsibilities or expertise. It is here that it is important to recognize a range of appropriate responses depending on faculty members' skills, comfort, or stance on appropriate boundaries. Despite variation, there are good reasons to hold to particular role boundaries and to recognize the limits of one's expertise, both for our own and our students' well-being.

For information about how to respond and make a referral, please see the [Mental Help Folder](#). This resource reviews what constitutes concerning behaviour, offers suggestions for making a referral, and lists resources both on- and off-campus.

For a referral to Student Counselling Services, the following is an option.

This sounds like it has been really difficult for you. One of the great things about MRU is that there are counsellors available, free to students, who can assist when students are facing tough challenges. If you would like I can connect you with a counsellor. Would you like more information on this option?

If the person is not in crisis you may provide them with our contact information and suggest that they make contact themselves. If the student would like you to facilitate their attendance at counselling and you are comfortable doing so, you are welcome to call Student Counselling Services and provide some general information to the admin staff so they can identify access options.

The following information about Student Counselling Services may be helpful:

Location: Wellness Services, U216

Call (403) 440-6362 anytime between 8:30 and 4:30 and our admin people at the front desk will field your call.

All services are FREE to students

Services include crisis intervention, personal, career and educational counselling, workshops and groups

Visit www.mtroyal.ca/counselling for information about workshops, groups, self-help information, and the staff at Student Counselling Services.

Walk-in counselling services are available every afternoon Monday to Friday from 1:00 pm to 3:30 pm

If the student is not at risk of hurting themselves or others, and does not want to accept the referral, that is ok. It may be helpful to note that situations that do require calling 911 include:

- Possession of a weapon on campus
- Suicidal actions or threats distinct from having thoughts of suicide
- Acts or threats of violence to self or others

Additional Resources for Faculty

Faculty are welcome to consult with counsellors in Student Counselling Services if there is uncertainty about how to navigate a situation where a student is in distress. If you are interested in attending the "Faculty Options for Responding to Students in Distress" workshop, it can also be booked by request by contacting Student Counselling Services and it typically is run when 6-8 people are interested in attending.

The Contract Faculty Commitment to Students (Continued) – Guy Obrecht

Then there are grade appeals, OSC filings and hearings, letters of reference, and internship reference calls. All these things take place after our contracts end (sometimes we might no longer be considered employees), but we consider them to be part of the responsibility we take on as faculty. We do them for the students.

This "external" work we do is difficult to quantify due to the differing nature of the material and expected outcomes of different courses. CAUT's survey found there is an inverse relationship that shows that the fewer courses one has to teach, the more work one puts in outside of the classroom. On a per course basis, it was found that most contract academic staff (28%) put in 6-10 hours per week per course (the two other largest numbers were 25% putting in 11-15 hours per week and 18% putting in 16-20 hours per week). Those who taught 1-2 courses were more likely to spend more

hours working outside the classroom than those teaching 5-6. This seems slightly counter intuitive but makes sense when we recognize that time is limited, so the more we teach the less time we have to support that teaching.

A more disturbing correlation was that women contract academic staff were more likely than men to work more than 15 hours per course per week, and similarly, racialized contract academic staff were more likely than non-racialized staff to work more. What this suggests is that gendered and racialized inequities persist in unpaid academic work. Because we take care for our students and classes as fundamental to our profession, we allow such inequities to go unchecked. Perhaps a corrective action would be working towards the explicit recognition of this kind of work when we determine how we value, and how we fund, post-secondary education.

Students Appreciate the Little Things

– Cordelia Snowdon, SAMRU VP Academic



Cordelia Snowdon,
SAMRU VP Academic

I often hear from students about our amazing faculty and how you go above and beyond to help students succeed. Your dedication and commitment to the student experience is the best quality that MRU has.

During my time here, I've heard many stories from students about faculty who exceed expectation when it comes to expressing their concern for individual students. I have heard about faculty who stopped their students to ask if they are doing okay, written outstanding letters of recommendation to help with job applications, and invited students to participate in research. I have heard of faculty taking time to sit down with students during exam season, staying exceptionally late to explain concepts, and being available for those last-minute questions before a deadline. More importantly, I've heard about and witnessed faculty who recognize when their students are experiencing anxiety or exhibiting symptoms of depression and direct them to supports available at MRU or to student services like the Peer Support Centre at the Students' Association.

While many of these extra efforts are not expected, they are greatly appreciated.

A few minutes of your time or a kind word can mean everything to a student when they feel like they are carrying the weight of the world, and some of the most meaningful things you can do to support students may seem relatively minor but can have a significant impact.

Showing empathy and compassionate understanding are meaningful ways that you can support students. It is likely that students will face some type of crisis during the semester and

providing flexibility around deadlines and expectations when possible can help students be successful. Respecting student privacy and telling your students that they do not have to give an explanation or disclose their situation to avoid a late penalty removes the stress of talking about what may be a sensitive topic.

Along with this, supporting students with academic accommodations is critical in developing a welcoming class environment. When a student comes forward (with or without an official accommodation letter) the best way to support them is to not say no as a first response. If for any reason you feel you cannot meet an accommodation, saying that you are unsure about an accommodation and that you will contact Accessibility Services prevents students from feeling that they have gone through all the work of getting an accommodation just to be denied.

Additionally, providing content in an accessible format is extremely helpful to students. While incorporating Universal Design for Learning into courses takes time, every step towards making materials more accessible makes a difference. Providing resources in advance or incorporating different methods of engagement makes it so students do not have to disclose their personal struggles in order to be successful in your class.

Lastly, in order to most effectively support your students, it is important for you to take care of yourself. Access resources, talk to colleagues, and take time to focus on your own well being. We are often so worried about supporting others that we sometimes forget to make sure that we feel supported as well.

Thank you for everything you do to support students.

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Your Questions

Is Salary a key Issue in Bargaining?

No, salary is not one of the key issues that faculty are standing for at this point. Faculty recognize the current socio-economic context and understand the inability of the University to provide a real increase to faculty salaries. However, since the University received the 2% inflationary increase to its operating grant from the province for 2018-2019, the faculty should receive from the University their corresponding inflationary / cost of living increase which is part of that "operational expense" of the University. Without cost of living adjustments, faculty lose real wages over time.

If you have questions related to the current state of collective bargaining, please visit the MRFA website (<https://mrfa.net/jobactionfaq/> or "Collective Bargaining" pages) for information.

*We welcome your questions for upcoming issues of **News to Use**.*

Please submit your questions online via the link provided on the Communications Committee webpage on mrfa.net or directly at <https://goo.gl/hz7VUg>

Did you Know you Have this Right....?

File a Grievance

You have the right to initiate a grievance at Step 1. If you believe the Collective Agreement (CA) has not been followed, you must provide written notice to your dean within 15 days of becoming aware of this possible contravention of the CA, with a copy of the notice to the MRFA (**Article 20.2.1.**). If you're unsure that you have a grievable situation, you should contact the MRFA's Labour Relations Officer, Derrick Antson, at LabourRelations@mrfa.net or 403-440-6198 to discuss your situation.

It's important to know that grievances are used to bring clarity to the language in the CA and to ensure consistent interpretation and application of the various articles within the CA. The right to grieve belongs to all members of the Association.

We Must Advocate for #ABPSE in a Climate of Economic Misinformation

- Michael Truscello

As the provincial election in Alberta approaches, the consequences of that election are becoming clearer. As I write this, documents have surfaced in Ontario suggesting the PC government of Doug Ford has an aggressive plan for privatizing health care. Similar proposals have been mentioned for implementation in Alberta (i.e. cutting public sector spending by 20%) which could potentially hold catastrophic consequences such as job loss for many of our colleagues.

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As the provincial election approaches, then, it is essential for MRFA members to advocate for a strong public sector. We cannot assume the general public understands the social and economic value of publicly-funded post-secondary education in Alberta, for example. To that end, this past week the MRFA Advocacy Committee mailed to every MLA in Alberta an outline of the member-approved model for post-secondary education in Alberta; we are also calling on members to publicize this vision of #ABPSE.

The MRFA wants:

1. At least two-thirds of PSE funding to be accomplished through provincial operating grants; currently, grants cover only about half of university operating costs;
2. Increases in operating grants that are never less than the rate of inflation, with supplementation when tuition is frozen, and with “lights on” adjustments accompanying capital projects;
3. Tuition and fee increases that are never greater than the rate of inflation, and that market modifiers are not used to circumvent tuition regulation;
4. PSE funding that must be decoupled from unstable revenue sources such as resource royalties;
5. A multi-year funding cycle to be implemented.

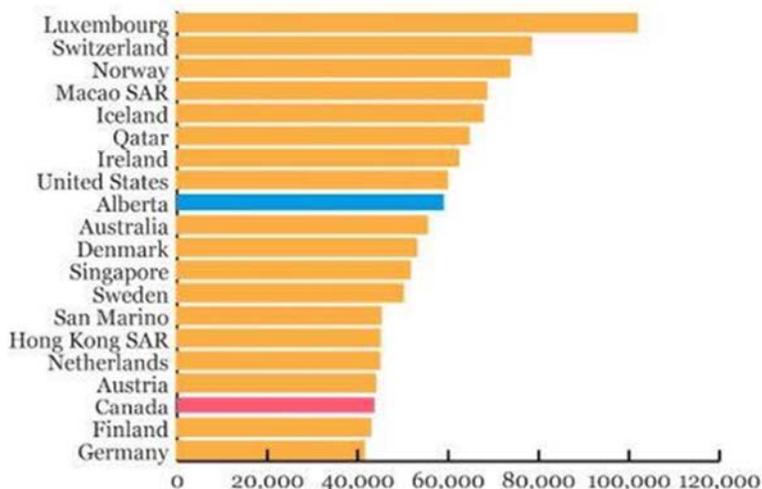
The provincial political parties have accepted or promoted a narrative about our economy that is simply untrue and which makes arguments for funding public services more difficult to maintain. As a recent public opinion survey from UofC demonstrated, most Albertans think the economy is much worse than it is; in fact, the Alberta economy, according to the IMF, ranks ninth-best in the world in terms of GDP per capita, but, according to the public survey, older, more conservative Albertans are convinced that the provincial economy is collapsing and in dire need of dramatic cuts to public spending.

The perception of the Alberta economy, and the subsequent claim that public spending must be cut, is completely divorced from the economic data. Alberta has the highest GDP per capita in Canada. Alberta leads Canada in GDP growth and had new highs in retail growth last year. Alberta has the highest average wages in Canada. Alberta has by far the lowest net government debt-to-GDP ratio of any province.

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Twenty richest economies in the world

Gross domestic product per capita, \$US, 2017



Source: International Monetary Fund and ATB Financial Economics Team



atb.com/theowl

ATB Financial

Despite overwhelming economic data to the contrary, the political rhetoric from all parties laments a dire economic situation and an “ailing” oil industry. According to a report from Parkland Institute and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Big Five oil companies in the oilsands remained “incredibly profitable” and paid out \$13.5 billion to shareholders in 2017. Yes, thousands of jobs in oil and gas have been lost in recent years, but the province remains the richest in Canada, and its government does not have a spending problem.

As we advocate for better funding of #ABPSE, we must confront the prevailing narrative of economic doom. This narrative, echoed by conservative Postmedia publications, is designed to prepare the groundwork for a UCP policy of hard austerity. If enough Albertans continue to believe propaganda instead of facts, many of us may be out of work within a year.

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MRFA’s Provincial Affiliation

It was announced at the January Regular meeting that the MRFA has joined the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA) - cafa-ab.ca. This membership, in addition to our membership in Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) - caut.ca and the CAUT Defence Fund, provides the opportunity for us to work with colleagues provincially and nationally on issues of common interest. These memberships will, also, provide support for our Association when needed.

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Information for Instructors About the Office of Student Conduct

Like most Universities, MRU has a 'Code' of Student Conduct Policy, and an Office of Student Conduct (aka OSC) to administer the policy. The original intent of the 'Code' was to make sure academic and non-academic community standards of behavior were clearly defined for all MRU students regardless of their program of study. The creation of a central repository for student conduct would go a long way to ensuring all MRU students are consistently treated equally and objectively. The mandate of the 'Code' and of the OSC is to be educative, not punitive.

Karen Parsons, Manager of the OSC says its understandable instructors may be reluctant to report an infraction when misconceptions may exist about what the OSC does. Parsons says, "I've seen genuine surprise from many of my faculty colleagues when they learn what the OSC actually does".

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If an incident report is submitted to the OSC there are various ways it might be handled. Sometimes all that is required is a conversation between the OSC staff and the student, particularly when the student has agreed he/she needs help learning, for example, how to cite an academic assignment properly. Students are often directed to attend one or more workshops offered by Student Learning Services (SLS) including, but not limited to: Paraphrasing Not Plagiarizing, Planning Papers, Time Management, and the various referencing styles --- APA, MLA, Chicago.

If either or both parties involved in an academic or non-academic infraction are unable to find mutual resolution, the OSC may recommend that a Panel Hearing be convened. These Panels are made up of trained MRU faculty, students and staff, who will make a decision on behalf of the MRU community as to whether misconduct happened or not, and if it did, what is a reasonable, educative consequence? Panel hearings are not at all like a court of law. A meeting takes place around a table, with everyone getting a chance to explain their version of the event from their perspective. Those participating in a Panel Hearing are encouraged to bring a support person/s with them. MRU faculty, students or staff members are welcome to become involved and participate in these hearings.

As with any large organization, there are occasionally some serious incidents of student misconduct that may require intervention by Police, and may result in criminal charges. In those types of cases, a Panel Hearing may also be required to determine the student's status at MRU.

Fortunately, Parsons says *most* incidents of student misconduct are managed quickly, fairly and always with learning being the goal. "I have the privilege of watching valuable life lessons being learned every single day.

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