



Greetings everyone.

Welcome back. I hope that somewhere amidst the pandemic you found some time to enjoy a break (although I know some of us were working).

I wish to start by acknowledging that we work and live on the hereditary territories of the Treaty Seven peoples including the Blackfoot Confederacy (the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai) the Tsuut'ina, and the Îyârhe Nakoda, including the Wesley, Chiniki and Stoney First Nations. And, of course, what we call Calgary is also the home of the Métis people, Alberta Region 3.

Let me say too that I am honored to be the 28th President of the Mount Royal Faculty Association and to be the first out queer person serving in this role. Thank you to those who have expressed confidence in my leadership. I will work hard to live up to your hopes and expectations.

Next I would like to thank Past President Melanie Peacock for all her work leading the Association through such turbulent times and equally extend gratitude to the outgoing Executive Board for their hard work. I am confident that the incoming Executive Board is well-positioned to pick up where you left off. (Click here to meet your new Board: https://mrfa.net/2020_2021_executive_board/)

As we head into a new academic year, here is an overview of the four main challenge before us:

- 1) MRU's Pandemic Response
- 2) Association-University Relations
- 3) Budget Shortfalls
- 4) Provincial Initiatives

The attached document provides a detailed look at these challenges and it is lengthy. However, we have much to consider in these unprecedented times and I hope to keep you informed about developments as best as possible.

I realize that while yet another semester of teaching remotely may be daunting and we miss our lives as part of an embodied academic community, I'm confident we'll be back on campus in 2021. Meanwhile, the Association will continue to maintain our important social connections through virtual means such as Friday social events and remote professional development sessions.

For me, I continue to look beyond the pandemic and the challenges beyond. And when I consider our resilient past, I am convinced that, like Mount Royal faculty before us, we will also endure and emerge to build a better MRU and, I believe, a better society. I am eager to get to work.

warm regards

Lee



Welcome Back! (**August 2020 – referred to above**)

Greetings everyone. I want to welcome everyone back (although I know some of us have been working the summer semester) and I hope that somewhere amidst the pandemic you found some time to enjoy the break.

The MRU's Pandemic Response

First, I appreciate all work that faculty have done and continue to do to facilitate our students' learning and success under continuing difficult circumstances. While we have done a great job supporting our students, remote learning is not what our students expect from an MRU education but we will do our utmost to ensure the best learning experience possible.

I also know that working from home places additional burdens on us and that those burdens may fall especially hard on those faculty who are responsible for dependent care and on contract faculty whose unpaid work in preparing for remote delivery remains to be recognized by the University.

I want to assure contract faculty concerned about unsigned contracts that both the Association and the University agree that once an offer to deliver a course is accepted, a contract is in place, signed or not. I also want to remind contract faculty that should a course be cancelled or reassigned two weeks before classes start, Article 13.6.3 stipulates that a cancellation fee must be paid. If you need further details, contact Derrick Antson (dantson@mtroyal.ca).

Here are other key developments that affect faculty:

- Currently, the University continues to limit the number of individuals and the amount of time they spend on campus.
- The University's *People Plan* (<https://www.mtroyal.ca/WelcomeBack/employees.htm>) is guiding the plans for a return to work. Employees are currently working remotely for the foreseeable future and the University is actively monitoring the situation to assess when employees may safely return. No decision has yet been made about when Winter 2021 courses will be delivered.
- Some faculty have been approved to return to work on campus to deliver courses in aviation, athletic therapy, Nursing and massage therapy. Safety measures such as Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), physical distancing and enhanced cleaning protocols are in place. Please contact your supervisor and notify Derrick Antson (danton@mtroyal.ca) or to the Occupational Health and Safety Committee representative, Ed Kemp (ekemp@mtroyal.ca) about any concerns you have.
- The Plan also outlines the protocol for faculty to request either as one-off or continuing access to the campus. Click here for more information related to expectations when accessing campus. https://www.mtroyal.ca/EmploymentCareers/HumanResources/EnvironmentalHealthSafety/_pdfs/Pandemic-Expectations-for-Employees-Rev-02.pdf.



- The Association will follow the direction of the university and the Faculty Centre remains closed and MRFA staff continue to work remotely until further notice. But you can contact our amazing staff through email and via telephone or through this link <https://mrfa.net/about/contact/>
- The Association anticipates that GFC will play an important role in determining the University's response on academic matters, especially as we look forward to decisions related to course delivery in Winter 2021.
- Note that the University has required all individuals in all indoor public spaces on campus to wear mask. You should bring your own mask, but you can access a free one at the West Gate Security. Masks have been shown to help stop the spread of the COVID virus and the Association supports this measure.

Most important:

- The Association and the University are working to extend the *MOU on COVID-19*, which expired on June 30. Look for an update when the MOU has been signed.

University-Associations Relations

As you are aware, the University appointed Dr. Elizabeth Evans as Interim Provost and Vice-President, Academic in late June. I met with Dr. Evans over the summer and we both are committed to improving communication between the University and the Association. The search for a new Provost is scheduled to get underway in 2020/21. Let me also extend a welcome to Dr. Brian Traynor, Interim Dean of the Faculty of Business and Communication.

Over the summer, I met with President Rahilly who expressed interest in establishing better relations between the Association and the University. The Association is optimistic that this interest will create smoother relations with the University.

Budget Matters

There is some good news: the Province has scrapped the expenditure caps (they call them "targets") and they won't be back. Given the impact of the pandemic on postsecondary education, performance-based budgeting is delayed until next year when the Minister expects to sign Institutional Mandate Agreements. The bad news is that the UCP planned cuts to the base operating Alberta Campus grants remain on track for the next three years.

Meanwhile, the University's budget situation remains difficult. Enrolments are stable, but the University is negatively affected by reduced revenue from ancillary services, such as parking, the campus store and recreation.

More difficult decisions remain ahead. However, The Association expects that if the University plans to address the budget shortfalls through redundancies or program changes, the provisions of the *MOU on Financial Emergencies* will be put in motion.

Of course, we also remain engaged in collective bargaining, which has been disrupted by the pandemic. We are currently at Stage Three (Negotiations) but that could change after the teams meet again in September. Look for more updates from Anupam Das, VP Negotiations. [Click here for more information](#)



about the stages of Collective Bargaining. (<https://mrfa.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Collective-Bargaining-Index-Levels-Website-General.pdf>)

Provincial Initiatives.

On the provincial level, the Ministry has begun its *Review 2030* process, which features a comprehensive review of the Alberta postsecondary system. The government is organizing a number of consultations including round tables, town halls and stakeholder meetings. After some pressure from faculty associations across the PSE sector, both CAFA and ACIFA have been given seats on the Alberta Guiding Coalition, overseeing the review. A report is slated for December 2020. Many believe that this review will provide the government with a rationale to move ahead with the recommendations from the 2019 McKinnon Report.

Elsewhere, the UCP has passed its anti-union legislation Bill-32, which will soon pose dangers to all faculty associations. The MRFA Advocacy Committee will be exploring how the Association can respond to these provincial initiatives.

Looking Ahead

While the pandemic continues to shape our work for the foreseeable future, it's important to keep our eye on the bigger picture at MRU such as addressing issues related to problems of racism and anti-Black racism. The President has indicated that he plans to establish a Presidential advisory group to help guide the University's response. The Association supports this action and is committed to its own review of policies and procedures in our organization. A search for a new Provost is also expected to commence this year.

As you know, Mount Royal has endured a previous pandemic, world wars, the Great Depression, and 9/11 (to name a few of the previous challenges). So while yet another semester of teaching remotely may be daunting and we miss our lives as part of an embodied academic community, I'm confident we'll be back on campus in 2021. Meanwhile, the Association will continue to maintain our important social connections through virtual means such as the Friday social events and remote professional development sessions.

For me, I continue to look beyond the pandemic and the challenges that lies ahead. I am convinced that, like Mount Royal faculty before us, we will also endure and emerge to build a better MRU and, I believe, a better society. I am eager to get to work.

Going forward.

Lee