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Advocacy Matters: Unpacking Alberta 2030

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Advocacy Matters is a new feature of the Weekly Bulletin. At least once a month, the MRFA Advocacy Committee will share a short article that focuses on a PSE advocacy-related issue. This fall, installments are focusing especially on the Alberta government's plan for transforming PSE: Alberta 2030.

On April 29 Jason Kenney's UPC government formally unveiled its plan to thoroughly transform the system of public post-secondary education that Albertans have, for over 110 years, been working together to build. Entitled [Alberta 2030: Building Skills for Jobs](#) and identified by the government as one of its "[key initiatives](#)", the plan is presented as a ten-year strategy for building a new PSE system out of the old: one in which the overarching, single-minded goal will be the realignment of institutional priorities according to the interests of employers and industry. Aspects of the plan include the following:

- Introducing mechanisms for constraining decisions about institutional program offerings and curricula so to privilege the demands of markets and private interests, and where students are recast as future workforce, to the detriment of a fuller set of considerations vital to education for the public good;
- In the context of dramatic increases in tuition, exploring the "modernization" of student aid for reasons that include supporting "the needs of the economy", potentially leading to student aid being used as a lever to steer students toward those programs of study preferred by industry and government;
- Prioritizing industry-serving micro-credentials and the shift to online learning, with the potential that forthcoming provincial frameworks may divert scarce resources and undermine academic freedom and shared governance;
- In the face of the move by government to withdraw public funding, requiring institutions to demonstrate greater reliance on private sources of revenue, exposing them to market forces, economic shocks, and private interests;
- Prioritizing research that is valued by industry for its perceived commercialization potential, i.e., for profit-making;
- The implementation of an intellectual property framework that may threaten the intellectual property rights faculty currently have over their teaching and scholarly works;
- A "flagship initiative" to adopt "faculty promotion and tenure policies to incentivize faculty to pursue entrepreneurial activities";
- Anticipated changes to the PSE governance model that threaten to further erode meaningful shared governance of post-secondary institutions.

Taken as a whole, the components of Alberta 2030—including the cross-section summarized above together with the plan to cut about 20% in total from provincial PSE operating grants between 2019 to 2023, to leave a significant portion of the remainder “at risk” according to government-set performance-based funding metrics, and to subject students to steep increases in tuition—threatens to further the corporatization of post-secondary education, render Alberta’s PSE institutions subservient to instrumental objectives and private interests, and to erode student choice, institutional autonomy, and the academic freedom of faculty.

This short article begins the process of unpacking Alberta 2030 by surveying the political project a high level, with an emphasis on how components are interrelated and are consistent from an ideological perspective. Subsequent articles will drill down into individual components. Ultimately, faculty at Mount Royal and across the province must be prepared to articulate and stand behind a better vision for PSE in Alberta. Nevertheless, we must begin by understanding the details of the current plan and what’s at stake.

If you have ideas about advocacy-related topics that you’d like to see us dig into, including issues related to the Alberta 2030 initiative, please don’t hesitate to contact the Advocacy Committee via facultyrelations@mrfa.net.