



Dear Members of the Association:

I am writing to you to update you on how the Association has been approaching the issues raised by the actions of the Alberta Government over the last month or so relating to its 2013 budget and its development of what was originally described as “mandate letters” for post-secondary education (PSE) institutions in Alberta. Both the cuts and the letters are deeply troubling to the Association and to others interested in the future of PSE in Alberta. As you read the remainder of this letter please be aware that the Association is in the process of bargaining with the University’s Board of Governors, which impacts my ability to speak as freely and fully as I might like on some topics – it is important that the Association not be seen as bargaining in bad faith.

The 2013 Alberta Government Budget imposed a 7.3% cut in government operating grants to the PSE sector as a whole as well as to the University of Calgary. Given that the U of C (and other institutions) had been promised an increase of 2% for fiscal 2013-14, this is actually a 9.3% cut in operating funding – almost a literal decimation. This unexpected and deep cut makes it exceedingly difficult for the U of C to plan to effectively meet growing enrolment expectations and address priorities, and may prove devastating to the quality of its programs. The PSE constituency most affected by these ill-conceived and unjustifiable cuts will be the students, whose aspirations to gain admission to a wide variety of high-quality programs in subjects about which they are passionate will no longer be achievable in the Calgary region.

In his budget speech, Minister of Finance, the Honourable Doug Horner, also noted that PSE institutions would be given “*mandate letters defining their roles and government’s expectations for a more unified post-secondary system.*” In the days since March 7th these letters have become known as “*letters of expectation*” and the draft letters sent to each of the PSE institutions have become public. The contents of these draft letters, as well as additional comments by Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education, the Honourable Thomas Lukaszuk, raise some very significant concerns for PSE institutions, especially those institutions in the Comprehensive Academic and Research Institution (CARI) sector of what is known as Campus Alberta.

The Association and its sister associations at the other CARIs in Alberta (the University of Alberta, the University of Lethbridge, and Athabasca University) have been working with the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA) to develop a strategy as to how best to respond to these developments which has resulted in the following actions under the CAFA banner:

1. CAFA has issued a press release (see <http://www.ualberta.ca/~cafa/documents/CAFA%20Press%20Release%20April%202.pdf>) that speaks out against the PSE budget cuts and raises concerns with the draft letters of expectation. If you have not seen the CAFA press release (co-signed by me and the presidents of the academic staff associations at the other three CARIs), I encourage you to read it.
2. CAFA President and spokesperson Dr. Rob Sutherland has been widely quoted in the media within Alberta speaking against the cuts and criticizing some of the inaccurate and misleading comments of Minister Lukaszuk and other members of the Government of Alberta.

More locally, TUCFA has met with U of C Provost Dru Marshall and informed her of some of our most significant concerns with the U of C letter of expectation in the hope that these can be addressed in the response that President Elizabeth Cannon is preparing for Minister Lukaszuk (which President Cannon has committed to share with the campus community). As you might expect, the list of TUCFA's concerns is long but in brief some of the most significant include the following:

1. Threats to institutional autonomy.
2. Threats to academic freedom.
3. Failure to recognize the full education and research roles that CARIs fulfil. The U of C aims to produce citizens who are able to critique, question, and think independently, and to be a place where scholarship and research thrive across the full spectrum of disciplines (as well as at and across the boundaries between them).
4. A focus that is far too short-term (e.g. driven by immediate employment opportunities) as opposed to being on the long-term intellectual, social, cultural, and economic development of Alberta and Albertans.
5. Lack of recognition of the value of pure/basic research and scholarship. Applied research is important, but it is not the only thing of importance in the context of the wider search for knowledge and truth.
6. Diminution of the role of academic staff. The Minister appears to see no role for academic staff in institutional planning and decision-making.
7. Failure to recognize that the literal decimation of PSE (i.e. the 9.3% cut in funding from what was promised) will inevitably have serious negative impacts on the quality of programs and on the ability of students to access these programs.

Of course, we will not know the extent to which the U of C administration agrees with these concerns until we see the University's response to Minister Lukaszuk. The Association is especially concerned about academic freedom (item 2. above), and the bicameral governance system (item 6. above), which have also been coming under attack internally as well as externally.

Yesterday, I wrote to Minister Lukaszuk to raise the Association's concerns with both the budget and the letters of expectation. This letter is publically available on the Association's website (<http://www.tucfa.com/?p=2506>) and I encourage you to read it.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the website that the U of C has put in place to gather ideas, and feedback on them, for how to deal with the budget decimation. I encourage you to register on this site (<http://ucalgary.ideascale.com>) and participate in the evaluation of alternative ideas – it is important that your voices are heard.

Sincerely,

Paul Rogers, President