

March 20, 2019

Jeff Leclerc
University Secretary
312 Administration Building

Dear Jeff and members of the Presidential Search Committee,

An open letter to the Presidential Search Committee

Thank you for extending the invitation for us to meet with the committee last week to discuss the characteristics we would like to see in a new president. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this stage of the process.

As we discussed, we at UMFA believe that the following characteristics are essential for the incoming President of the University of Manitoba.

The President leads Senate, exercises general supervision of academic staff, is an ex-officio member of all Senate committees, and has the power to call and preside over any meeting of the council of every faculty, school, and department. They can deny or grant tenure and promotion. They can also recommend to the Senate or Board any project they see as advantageous to the University. The UM needs a President whose central concern is fortifying the academic work of the University, someone who understands the challenges of teaching, research, and service and will act in service of the academic community by helping us contribute to the cultural, social, and economic well-being of the people of Manitoba, Canada, and the world. We need an academic dedicated to enriching the lives of community members by supporting all of our academic work. We need someone who will build the University's reputation by building its research and teaching capacities rather than authoring PR campaigns. **We need someone with a strong academic background who loves research and teaching as much as we do, and will do everything they can to improve our ability to share our talents with our students and the community.** This means a scholar who is committed to:

1. Academic freedom, collegial governance, and the autonomy of the University;
2. Publicly funded teaching and research;
3. Working with, rather than against, labour unions on campus;
4. Making the administration's financial decisions more transparent;
5. Making our institution more equitable and accessible.

1. Someone who is committed to academic freedom, collegial governance, and the autonomy of the University

A University needs to be accessible to the community it serves, but free from the undue influence of business, politics, and popular opinion. This is a difficult balance to strike, and we need a President dedicated to academic freedom and publicly funded education and research to achieve it.

The University of Manitoba is affiliated with Universities Canada (UC), a voluntary body composed of

University presidents from across Canada. Part of the criteria for Membership is conforming to UC's statement on Academic Freedom. This *sounds* great, but that statement conflates university autonomy and the academic freedom of the individual researchers, teachers, librarians, and archivists at the university.

The issue, from the perspective of independent teachers and researchers, is that Academic Freedom means more than autonomy from special interest groups, government, and the like – it also means that individual academics are free from similar pressures *from their own administration*. Unlike other employees, we have the right and duty to make critique of our employers. We also have the right to freedom of extra-mural speech (exercising our civil rights to speak in our own names without threat of sanction from our employer) and the freedom to serve the community as we see fit (for example, sharing our academic expertise with civil society groups, whether they're controversial or not).

Universities Canada doesn't recognize this, and it has real effects: not long ago, in the name of institutional integrity the Principle and Vice-Chancellor (the highest academic post) of McGill removed the head of a research institute who was exercising his academic freedom (see the end of this letter for a link to the CAUT report penned by U of M's Dr. Mark Gabbert). We've faced similar challenges here, and there are 3 CAUT academic freedom reports from the last decade to prove it. Whether or not they agree with what we say, **we need a president who will advocate for our Academic Freedom both inside and outside the University's walls, and build a workplace that promotes the exercise of that right.**

We also need a President committed to collegial governance. While the University has to contend with the realities of economics, we don't need someone who will run the University as one might run a business: directing the operations of the University to service the labour market and the perceived needs of business, failing to see the social and intellectual importance of 'unprofitable' research and education programs, partnering with for-profit academic institutions, treating academics like employees rather than colleagues, or embarking on capital-intensive projects only marginally connected to the institution's mission. We need someone who is willing to build a vision of the future with us rather than impose their vision on us. This means someone whose primary goal is to empower the Senate as the key policy driver of the University, and work with the Board of Governors to make that vision a reality.

A University's Board of Governors serves an important function: composed of community Members, it can organize the financial and human support needed to carry out the academic work of the University. It does so with an eye to the needs of those the University serves. Since the 1990s, however, University Senates have been increasingly subordinated to their Boards of Governors rather than supported by them. This is in part the result of cuts to Federal transfers wrought by the Liberal government in the 90s, but also the rightward shift of the provincial government. This is made clear in the University's strategic plan devised under the leadership of President Naimark in 1994 ("Plan 2000"):

The Board of Governors has concluded that changes are needed in its role and *modus operandi* to bring them in line with current challenges and needs. In particular the Board has concluded that its stewardship must embrace, more fully than in the past, the whole of the University's mission, including its academic aspects.

That change in orientation had no small part in precipitating the longest strike in the University's history – just over three long weeks – as the Board of Governors insisted the administration be given the ability to declare academics redundant in the face of budget shortfalls. This was a threat to academic freedom, and the administration was eventually convinced it had erred in jeopardizing it. A similar threat faces us now, with the past New Democratic provincial government eliminating COPSE – the arm's length body that provided some

distance between Manitoba's universities and its government – and the current Conservative government directly intervening in the bargaining efforts here at the U of M, this time precipitating another long strike. The University deserves a president that will push back against these currents and assert the autonomy of our institution.

Our Senate suffers from the 'stagflation' of longer agendas and shorter meetings, leaving little time for contemplation and debate of the University's academic direction. **We need a university president who will empower Senate by both encouraging discussion and debate, and work with the University's Board to make Senate's vision a reality.** We need a president who will impress upon Board Members the importance of pure and applied research, Academic Freedom, and the University's role in the community as a thought leader that must stake out unpopular positions and state uncomfortable truths.

The commitment to collegial governance must also be extended to our faculties and departments: they are the ones with expertise in their academic fields and thus must have central involvement in the multitude of decisions that impact how the university will fulfill its mission, and who will execute it. Our next President should make a commitment to increase the power of these local Councils.

2. Someone who will advocate for publicly funded teaching and research

The University of Manitoba is operating in a challenging political environment where funding to the University is decreasing, post-secondary education is becoming less affordable and accessible, and provincial governments are violating the autonomy of the university by interfering with operational and strategic decisions. We need to select a President who strongly believes in the autonomy of the University and publicly funded teaching and research, who understands these challenges, and who we know will navigate the landscape effectively both behind closed doors and in the public eye.

The Manitoba Organization of Faculty Associations (MOFA) has recently released research showing that increasing students' tuition decreases access to those who are least able to afford the costs of a University education, and diverts students from vocations that have lower salaries but address important social needs. We need a president who either already has, or will make, strong links to communities all over the province – with parents, aboriginal communities, and civil society groups – and build the political will to fund a University that is both accessible to all the bright minds that wish to join us and supportive of all the academics and forms of research, teaching, and community service that make the UM happen.

3. Someone who will work with labour unions, rather than against them

While we have a great deal of freedom in our work, when it comes down to it the majority of academics at the U of M are unionized employees subject to the direction of their employer, the University administration. Many of the freedoms we have – to teach and evaluate students in the best way we know how, to research topics that we think are important, to offer our expertise to the community at large – exist in our Collective Agreement and we work hard to maintain them. In the last decade or so we have gone to the Manitoba Labour Board with complaints three times and come back with three decisions in our favour. We have also had a three-week long strike that could have been avoided had the administration shown greater resolve in pushing back against government directives and bargained more freely on issues of collegial governance. As a democratic organization made up of the University's full-time academics, the Faculty Association isn't an impediment to the wellbeing of the University – it's a resource for its improvement. It should be treated as one.

Ours is not the only union on campus, as a whole host of the University's workforce is unionized. Part-time

academics, administrative assistants, library assistants, technicians of all kinds, IT personnel, power engineers, tradespeople, caretakers, residence staff, groundskeepers, truck drivers, food service workers, the bus drivers that bring us to campus, and more all make this campus run, and many of them are in labour unions that fight for safe and healthy workplaces. Every worker at the University – unionized and non-unionized – contributes to make the UM happen and **we need a President who will work with campus unions and other employee groups to ensure *all* university workers are part of accomplishing the University’s mission.**

4. Someone who will make the administration’s financial decisions more transparent

I have some experience with this, as I am a trained accountant who teaches and researches here at the UM. While the administration often claims that cuts to faculty budgets are necessary to make up for shortfalls in funding, operating revenues greatly exceed operating expenditures and surpluses are principally diverted to capital projects. The administration has also embarked on a new budget system that will affect the resources available to individual academic units, affect incentives, and expose units to greater uncertainty. My own research shows that the administration has altered the way it reports the University’s finances in response to various questions put to it by the Faculty Association, thereby making it more difficult to assess the administration’s resources. **We need a University President who understands the advantages and disadvantages of their budgetary systems, and who will adopt measures to reduce those disadvantages where possible. We also need a University President who prioritizes the academic mission, is transparent about resources, allows members of the Board of Governors and other financial committees to communicate with their constituencies, and is conscientious about resources allocated to non-academic expenditures.**

5. Someone with a strong record of making institutions more equitable and accessible

With over 5,000 employees and almost 30,000 students coming to campus each year, the University is a microcosm of society. As such, while concentrating many of society’s strengths the University also embodies many of its weaknesses: sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia, the legacies of colonialism, and economic elitism darken our campus as they darken our world. Students coming to campus will learn lessons that they’ll carry with them for life, but they also bring with them a wealth of experience and ideas. We need to learn from their experiences while we offer our own.

As teachers and researchers we need the freedom to explore and teach difficult, and sometimes offensive, ideas and truths. Ultimately this is done in service of the community, and we need institutional links to the community to ensure that we’re responsive to their concerns and needs. This means having difficult conversations about structural barriers that prevent full participation in University life. **We need a University president who will work with marginalized members of the community – on and off campus – to ensure that the University not only improves itself, but also points the way forward to others. Further, we need someone who has a track record of success in making this kind of change.**

These are just some of the qualities we need to see in our next University President and we thank you for the opportunity to express them. We regret that our involvement in the remainder of this process is limited, but we hope that you will be able to gather sufficient information to make the right decision on behalf of this institution, about which we all care deeply.



Dr. Janet Morrill, UMFA President

P.S. Here are URLs to some of the documents I've mentioned:

[Report on the Implications for Academic Freedom in the Case of Andrew Potter at McGill University \(CAUT, November 2018\)](#)

[Rising Tuition: Implications for Access and Career Choice for Manitoba Students \(CCPA/Hajer and Saltis, May 2018\)](#)

[Report of the Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee Into the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Manitoba \(CAUT February 2015\)](#)

[Report of the Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee Into the Department of Economics at the University of Manitoba \(CAUT January 2015\)](#)

[Report of the Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee in the Situation of Dr. Larry Reynolds at the University of Manitoba and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority \(CAUT, 2010\).](#)