

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA Faculty Association

June 3, 2020

Performance Indicators, University Autonomy, and Teaching Online: The Tasks Ahead

Hi everyone,

As your incoming President I want to share my thoughts on some of the issues we all face and the actions we can all take together to work toward solving them.

As we all know the last few months have been unprecedented globally, nationally, provincially and for our University. This challenging time has been exacerbated by the response and actions of the provincial government, both leading up to and during the pandemic.

At University Senate in March, prior to the COVID -19 pandemic, actions to address incursions against university autonomy were already underway: concern was growing as the province shifted responsibility for post-secondary education to the Minister of Economic Development and Training and the Business Council of Manitoba released the [“Horizon Manitoba” report](#). That report signals the government’s first steps toward its stated goal of aligning university programs with labour market needs and tying grant funding to yet-to-be determined performance indicators. The University of Manitoba is a signatory on the report, though to our knowledge it was never discussed at Senate. In response, the Senate passed a statement on the mission of the University that included the following: “We are organized by core principles of autonomy, academic freedom and collegial governance” ([click here](#) for the full motion). AVP of Partnerships Jay Doering was tasked with providing senate an account of how the report came to be, but that presentation was delayed. A short time after that statement was passed, the Pandemic was upon us and the University rapidly moved to online/remote teaching, which saw many of us putting in dozens of hours of extra work to complete our teaching assignments.

During this period of increased workload and stress for UMFA members the government exploited that stress and uncertainty with a demand that the University spend time and energy on an exercise to cut up to 30 percent from the University operating budget. Further, though the administration offered to find the money elsewhere, the government stipulated that carry-over funds and other savings could not be used to soften the blow to our institution: only expenditures in the current year’s operations (government-speak for people’s jobs) could be used. Several of our colleagues have published articles in the press ([click here](#) for a list) pointing out that austerity on the way into a recession is a certain to lengthen and deepen that recession. UMFA, along with CAUT and MOFA (the Manitoba Organization of Faculty

Associations) [began a campaign](#) against these proposed cuts, and MOFA representatives have been in the news, demanding that the cuts be reversed and funding to the province's Universities be increased, and institutional autonomy enhanced.

As this situation continues to evolve, it appears that the net cuts are estimated to settle in the range of 5 percent overall. However, this cloaked governmental concession is based on conditions that further erode the autonomy of our institution and potentially your academic freedom. Government is offering to give back the funding it has cut as a one-time grant contingent on the university submitting a plan by mid-September that outlines how the restored funds will be used: among other things, they expect the university to "orient programs toward labour market demands" and "ensure high quality education for our students through new and enhanced online materials and tools." To that end the government has struck a committee called the "Manitoba Economic Opportunities Advisory Board", [made up of business leaders](#), who are tasked with providing advice on the skills and knowledge employers want you and I to share with students. Of concern is not only the question of the labour market, but also the focus on online learning – the government wants to push ahead without fully considering the implications for independent research, learning, and service to the community.

This assault on university autonomy cannot be taken lightly. It threatens the very essence of higher education in Manitoba. It is just the latest in this governments attempt to erode the autonomy of the U of M.

Unfortunately this forms a pattern that spans different governments: the loss of the Universities Grants Commission in the 1990s, the removal of Council on Post-Secondary Education in 2015, recently making post-secondary education the responsibility of the Minister of Economic and Training rather than the Minister of Education, and now the funding cuts and conditions dictated in the May 25 funding letter from the Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Training: each change is a diminishment of the capacity of the UM to act autonomously, at arm's length from government, as an institution of higher education and research.

As I begin my term as UMFA President I am reaching out the incoming President, Dr. Michael Benarroch, to work with UMFA and all faculty in ensure that statement of Senate is a realized:

"We are organized by core principles of autonomy, academic freedom and collegial governance."

And I reach out to you: **contact your Senator** with your concerns about academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and "Horizon Manitoba"; **come to our soon-to-be announced online 'talk-back' sessions** so we can talk about workload and childcare; **contact Premier Pallister**, his ministers, the oppositions parties, and your MLA and let them know you don't work in an 'ivory tower' and that post-secondary education needs greater investment, not austerity; **let your representative on the UMFA Board** know your concerns about workload, childcare, and other

COVID-related issues, and **contact the UMFA office** whenever you have questions, concerns, or an issue directly facing you that needs to be addressed.

As I close I would like to reiterate what outgoing President Janet Morrill reminded us of last week:

“Instead of diminishing public institutions vital to the economic and social fabric of the province, the government must [increase University funding and autonomy](#).

“The members of the legislature, and we, need to understand what the funding cuts have meant to the quality of education we can offer our students, and how UMFA members have been spending their time during the pandemic to continue their teaching and research, and what resources we need. Please contact your MLAs, and please copy us at umfa-communications@umfa.ca.”

Contact information is below.

Yours,

Michael Shaw
UMFA President

MLA contact info

- **Premier Brian Pallister**
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- **Ralph Eichler, Minister of Economic Development and Training**
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- **Wab Kinew, Leader of the Official Opposition (NDP)**
Wab.Kinew@leg.gov.mb.ca
- **Dougald Lamont, Leader of the Liberal Party of Manitoba**
Dougald.Lamont@leg.gov.mb.ca
- **List of MLAs with contact information:**
https://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/members/mla_list_constituency.html

“Horizon Manitoba” report

- <https://publicsector.caut.ca/pledge>

Economic Opportunities Advisory Board

- <https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/?item=48137>
- https://news.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/newslinks/2020/05/BG-PEAC_Bios_2-PR.pdf

List of Senators at the U of M

- <http://www.umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/senate/members/index.html>

CAUT/MOFA's "Public Sector Works!" campaign and demands:

- <https://publicsector.caut.ca/pledge>

Compilations of News Articles

- <https://publicsector.caut.ca/news>
- <http://www.umfa.ca/news/labour-and-education-in-the-news>

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UMFA Board of Representatives

- http://www.umfa.ca/images/UMFA_BoR_2020-2021_June_1_2020.pdf

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