



Canadian Association of University Teachers
Association canadienne des professeurs et professeurs d'université

January 6, 2021

BY EMAIL: uofapres@ualberta.ca

Dr. Bill Flanagan
President and Vice-Chancellor
University of Alberta
2-24 South Academic Building
Edmonton, Alberta
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Dear President Flanagan:

On behalf of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), I am writing to express our concerns about the state of academic governance at the University of Alberta.

As you are aware, academic freedom and collegial governance are the foundational values of our colleges and universities. They allow our institutions to fulfill their mission of preserving, disseminating, and advancing knowledge.

The modern understanding of collegial governance in Canada was first established in the early 1960s when CAUT partnered with the forerunner of Universities Canada to establish the Duff-Berdhal Commission. The Commission's report strongly endorsed bicameral or shared governance in which institutions would operate under the general direction of a board of governors that is only minimally involved in academic planning. A Senate or General Faculties Council (GFC), comprised of a majority of academic staff, was seen as the central forum for debating and developing educational policy for the institution. In short, the Commission concluded that academic staff should have primary responsibility for academic matters because their judgment is central to ensuring the right academic decisions are taken. This principle has since become a widely recognized pillar of sound governance in universities and colleges.

It is therefore deeply troubling to learn of recent academic planning decisions taken by your Board that are contrary to recommendations of the GFC. It is my understanding that at its meeting late last year the Board decided to disregard a critical GFC recommendation concerning the new college model that was being proposed. Specifically, the GFC recommended against the creation of Executive Deans or any other additional layer of academic administration under the new model. The Board's decision to disregard the recommendation of the GFC and to create new positions of "College Deans" clearly violates fundamental principles of shared governance by undermining the authority of the GFC over academic matters.

Consistent with established principles of university governance, the GFC must remain the primary forum where academic decisions are made. I therefore urge you and the Board of Governors to re-

January 6, 2021

commit to the principle of collegial governance by fully respecting the authority of the General Faculties Council.

Given that this matter implicates important principles of collegial governance and academic freedom, CAUT, in cooperation with the AASUA, will monitor the situation closely and, subject to any additional information you may provide, will consider appropriate actions to take.

Sincerely,



David Robinson
Executive Director

cc: Brenda Austin-Smith, CAUT President (president@caut.ca)
Alison Hearn, Chair, CAUT Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee (Chair-AFT@caut.ca)
Ricardo Acuña, President, AASUA (racuna@ualberta.ca)
Kate Chisholm, Chair, University of Alberta Board of Governors (boardchair@ualberta.ca)