



March 26, 2020

To the public of Alberta and members of our campus community,

We, the undersigned, have written this letter to express our profound concerns regarding the newest round of cuts to the University of Alberta operational budget. When combined with the October 2019 reductions, these cuts amount to an unprecedented 17.9% total claw back to our operating funds, or \$110 million that has simply vanished. Our institution, the largest in Alberta, has suffered the deepest reductions of any institution in our sector, and as a result the U of A is nearing a tipping point. Deteriorating working conditions for our staff, as well as declining learning conditions for our students are certain outcomes from current layoffs and loss of critical support. This is unacceptable, and demonstrates a lack of understanding in the value we as an institution contribute to our province, both in previous generations and today.

Universities serve important roles in our society, notably to educate their students to better serve the needs of our communities. This is a pressing responsibility for Alberta in particular; we have the lowest post-secondary participation rate in Canada, and are simultaneously on the cusp of a major influx of students from our high schools. We will soon receive thousands more applications to our institutions from Alberta students, over and above the thousands that we must turn away every year due to insufficient capacity. Many parents will have to contend with the reality of sending their children out of province, at considerable expense, to receive a high-quality education that they should be able to receive at home.

At a time when we should be hiring more staff and faculty to boost our capacity and meet demand, we are now faced with a difficult task. We must admit more students despite fewer resources, which will result in larger class sizes and, as a consequence, declining educational quality, while still turning away unacceptable numbers of our own young citizens. This issue is further complicated by precipitous increase in tuition and a hike in the provincial student loan interest rate. Students and their families must now pay more to receive less educational value, while accessibility and affordability will be reduced for those most financially disadvantaged. Families in our province are already contending with significant economic barriers, and these actions will leave higher education out of reach for many of their children.

The U of A has already lost 400 positions, and with the current trajectory another 635 positions will be eliminated before the end of 2020, totalling 1,035 people that previously provided support to students and academic units on campus. The fact that these layoffs will continue in spite of the current pandemic is not only unethical, but will further burden federal aid programs and leave these people with incredible stress in uncertain times. The Ministry of Advanced Education has already rejected our institution's proposal to finance the unforeseen severance costs, which would have saved hundreds of positions at the university.

Demand for a University of Alberta education is well founded; we operate rigorous programs resulting in exceptional employment outcomes, according to the provincial government's own internal documents. The vast majority of our graduates find gainful employment in careers related to their fields of study, producing an educated population to create and operate the economy of the future. Based on a 2012 study, our university's economic impact was estimated to be \$12.3 billion per year between alumni and research activities. There are also clear trends that when the economy is struggling, people go back to school; this is a predictable, common-sense occurrence, through which high quality education revitalizes the economy. With unemployment rates at

unacceptable levels within our province, where one in five young men is seeking employment, the retraining of our workforce should be of highest priority; our university is part of the solution.

Furthermore, the U of A is a global leader in research, evidenced by \$500 million in annual external research grants, in addition to industrial partnerships. Notable achievements abound; the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) initially announced three grants awarded to members of our Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry to support research into better testing methods and antiviral treatments of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Another substantial COVID-19 CIHR grant was awarded to a professor of the Faculty of Arts to assess the cultural and societal effects of the pandemic, highlighting the importance of multidisciplinary approaches to important issues. These grants represent \$2.4 million in essential research, and are only those proposals that were chosen in the first round of funding; the total is now \$5.8 million for eleven separate projects.

Students have also moved to assist, notably the 100+ medical students who volunteered their time to childcare services for frontline healthcare professionals actively dealing with the pandemic, whose children were returned home with the closure of their schools. When our society is challenged with new threats, the first people to step up are our best and brightest researchers, across all fields of study. They deserve the support of a properly funded post-secondary sector to perform their lifesaving, pioneering work.

Aside from timely healthcare breakthroughs, the U of A was instrumental in numerous high-profile achievements across all faculties, including economically-viable oil sands extraction processes, pancreatic islet-transplantation for diabetic patients (the Edmonton Protocol), the only Faculty of Native Studies in the country, and establishing a world-renowned research presence in artificial intelligence, to name but a few examples. It is hard to imagine a better investment in our health, our prosperity, and our education than a university like ours.

Last year, the Alberta Government commissioned and received the MacKinnon Report on Alberta's Finances, in which Recommendation #7 states that the government should "Consult with post-secondary stakeholders to set an overall future direction and goals for the post-secondary system along with appropriate governance models." We maintain that thorough and meaningful consultations on these important issues must occur, including with our university's representative associations as important stakeholders. The future of our province depends on it.

In your service,



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Disclaimer: This letter had been prepared to address the concerns of our associations prior to the implementation of the COVID-19 emergency response. As such, this document represents our views partly in light of the pandemic, but also for when we return to "business as usual," whenever that may be.