

March 7, 2019

OPEN LETTER

Sent via email: Provost@dal.ca

Dr. Teresa Balsler
Provost and Vice-President of Academic
Dalhousie University

Dear Dr. Balsler,

We are writing to express our concern about the proposed budget for 2019-20. In the [DFA BAC submission \(January 28, 2019\)](#), we restated our longstanding concern “about the movement of funds from the Academic Responsibility Centre towards buildings and administrative costs.” We urged the university to restore ARC funding to reinvest in the academic mission without burdening students further with tuition increases. As one of our attached charts shows, there was a steep decline in ARC’s share of the university’s overall budget (from 73.6% in 2002-03 to 64.7% in 2017-18)—more is needed to support research and teaching at a U15 institution. Faculty cannot continue doing more and more with less and less.

We are not persuaded that the selection of comments in the BAC report is an accurate representation of concerns on campus. We surveyed our members in advance of the last round of bargaining, and in large numbers they raised significant concerns about the many years over which their retiring faculty colleagues were not replaced and the consequences in rising workload and weakened program integrity. The proposed budget does nothing to reverse this damage. We hear complaints about buildings too, but try asking a department if it would rather have better wifi or a tenure-stream colleague to partially replace three professors lost to retirement in the mid-2010s.

Faculty renewal was a high priority for the DFA in the last round of bargaining but new Collective Agreement language on replacing those who retire or resign only stops further damage; past damage continues to negatively affect many units on campus. We would note, too, that the lack of faculty renewal has been a matter of concern for some time at Senate because of the impact on academic programs (see [Senate Minutes for January 26, 2015](#) for Senator Stone’s motion on annual reports on audits of faculty complement, unit-by-unit—it was passed by a clear majority, but never implemented).

We are also not persuaded by the chart on page 8 of the new BAC report. Absolute dollars may have gone up because of ERBA and occasional top-ups, but the share of the university's budget that goes to the academic mission has declined. For the last two years ERBA has had the net effect of reducing Faculty budgets even further—a total of \$463,000 was taken out of Faculty budgets from 2016-18 by the ERBA mechanism (see p. 36 of [Supplemental Information to the Operating Budget Plan for 2018-19](#)). Faculty budgets pay for faculty, TAs, and academic units' administrative support, and other mission-critical expenses—university budget priorities should reflect their importance.

The BAC proposal does not indicate whether, and by how much, the Academic Responsibility Centre has been cut further. It does not address longstanding concerns about unit losses of faculty complement due to non-replacement of retirees in the past. We are also concerned about items such as the following:

- a) \$1,000,000 is taken from academic supports and given to buildings under “facilities renewal.” As we said in our January submission, “Now that the building boom is complete, it is time to reinvest in teaching and research—or what are those buildings good for?” It's time for *faculties renewal*.
- b) We appreciate the lowering of PhD tuition, especially for international students, but are concerned about the impact of the loss of continuing fees. Has any study been done of the varied impacts this fee restructuring will have? In programs where a 5th year is often required, the loss of reduced continuing fees at the point when students also lose access to external funding could have significant ramifications for in-program students and program recruitment. In other programs, the tuition reduction may have a greater effect and boost recruitment—but is this aligned with capacity to increase enrolment? We could end up with units unaffected by unreplaced faculty retirements losing PhD students, and units deeply affected by unreplaced faculty retirements turning away more applicants. **The elimination of reduced continuing fees needs further study so that decisions can be made on the basis of evidence that takes into account different programs' capacity and needs.**
- c) The Collective Agreement enshrines the principle of collegial governance (Article 9). BAC consultations before this report did not provide the minimally necessary information for faculty to give meaningful feedback on significant changes—another million dollars to buildings, the loss of continuing fees to PhD students, and **no provisions for addressing past faculty-complement losses that impact capacity for senate-approved programs, including PhDs.**

Budgets are about priorities. The academic mission is our institution's core function, and the Academic Responsibility Centre's share of the overall university budget needs to be restored to reflect that purpose and the needs of our students. Collegial governance, as meaningful evidence-based consultation on specific possibilities, is also crucial to avoiding unintended consequences for research and teaching. We urge a significant re-think of the BAC budget proposal for 2019-20.

We appreciate that there will be further opportunity for the university community to address these changes at BAC consultations on March 12th (5-6pm, Mona Campbell 1110/1111), March 13th (12-1pm, Rm 1004, IDEA Building; 6-7pm, Council Chambers, SUB), and March 14th (4:30-5:30, Program Room, MacRae Library), and look forward to a meaningful consultation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dave Westwood', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Dave Westwood, PhD
DFA President

c. Laura Neals, Director, Academic Staff Relations