

MUNFA's Take on *the Premature Departure of Provost Strzelczyk*

What should MUNFA members make of [our new Provost's notice of resignation](#), less than six months into her tenure? If social media and hallway chitchat – now that it's mandated again – are anything to go by, reactions include a mix of eye-rolling, disappointment, anger, and the spins (rapidly revolving doors and all that). Specific responses are conditioned by an ASM's degree of familiarity with senior administrators' tendency to quit before their term is up, compounded by a certain gobsmackedness at the speed of departure in this case.

Some such turnover is inevitable. People retire, get sick, or are called on to care for significant others. But what does it cost us when early departure becomes routine and “senior leadership” positions are seen as waystations for a footloose managerial class with no long-term commitment to Memorial or the people who work and study here?

Those costs must be counted in terms both of resources diverted and institutional disruption – challenging at any time, the more so in the face of the pandemic and austerity budgeting. How many hours do Academic Staff search committee members devote to meetings and bureaucracy that could instead be given to research and work with students – or, if they maintain the pace on scholarship, to having a life outside of work? What does Memorial spend on moving expenses? How much do private sector search firms (“headhunters”) siphon out of our operating budget (and for that matter, the province)? On which points: will Dr. Strzelczyk repay fifty percent of her relocation costs, [in accordance with university policy](#)? Will [Odgers Berndston](#) refund us its [consulting fees](#) for the search?

Some may do the calendar math on the [search at Western](#) – Dr. Strzelczyk's new administrative home—and feel a little betrayed. But let's not personalize it. Extreme as this case is, [more than half of our current deans](#) are listed as “acting,” “interim” or “*pro tempore*.” How did we reach this point, and what is to be done?

[Not for the first time](#), MUNFA calls on the university to stop contracting out to search consultants. Surely, we have the in-house capacity to run a job search. Those firms profit every time they are asked to “support” a new search. They may want to keep the turnover rate below an embarrassing threshold, but beyond that, they gain every time a search is launched.

More fundamentally, to the extent that they epitomize the corporatization of higher education, these firms are both symptoms and agents of a wider problem: the erosion of shared governance of our university. Administrative searches are a governance issue in themselves and as such should be run on the soundest principles, which in the university context centre on [collegiality](#), openness, and accountability to the campus community and its wider publics. As [guidance from the Canadian Association of University Teachers](#) observes:

Searches that are conducted in secrecy undermine shared governance. They reinforce management control and widen the gulf between academic administrators and the collegium. Open searches provide insight into candidates' capabilities, knowledge of the institution, and approach to leadership; meaningfully inform the selection process; and allow candidates to better understand the institution they might lead. They convey to finalists that their role hinges on their willingness to speak, listen, and answer to the campus community. An open search can engender trust in the search process by demonstrating that the search has been wide, thorough, and competitive.

This is not the first time that MUNFA has called for an [end to secret searches](#). But the problem of searches cannot be separated from wider issues of governance and the diminished role of scholars in the university. At Memorial,

these include the complete exclusion of Academic Staff Members from the Board of Regents - the body with ultimate responsibility for administrative appointments - a factor in [CAUT's assessment](#) of Memorial's governance model as among the worst in Canada.

In this context, we call on Memorial's administration to [publish its MUNL Act revisions proposal](#) so that we can see for ourselves how serious our leaders are about *meaningful* inclusion of academic staff in the governing board. Although MUNFA is hopeful that [our recommendations](#) for legislative change will redress this democratic deficit, the administration's refusal to share their own detailed submission to government hardly signals a deep commitment to shared governance.

Administration's [current bargaining proposals](#) do nothing to encourage optimism either. Many of their proposals are designed to further weaken Academic Staff influence: both the role of disciplinary expertise and shared governance of the university. The most egregious is the employer's proposal to [end tenure](#), a fundamental condition for [academic freedom](#), including the [critical right](#) to "discuss and criticize policies and actions of the University," without which meaningful collegial governance is impossible. Meanwhile, many administrators will move along in their journey through the administrative ranks, unfettered by any compulsion to live with the consequences of their "vision" for our university.

What can we as MUNFA members do to protect and strengthen the public university?

- Use existing avenues of shared governance to their potential. That includes asking tough questions and involving ourselves in setting the agendas of collegial bodies, including department and faculty councils, search committees, and Senate. **Remember: the best defense of academic freedom is its exercise.**
- Press the provincial government in its upcoming [MUN Act revisions](#) to democratize the Board of Regents by opening it to the meaningful involvement of Academic Staff Members.
- Use every opportunity to inform the administration that you will fight for shared governance and stand against all attempts to weaken it. Let them know that tenure is non-negotiable and not up for discussion.
- [Support our Negotiating Team](#). They are working hard for [a fair and equitable collective agreement](#), including stronger protections for Collegial Governance and greater openness and transparency from senior administration and the Board of Regents.
- [Get more involved](#) in your union. Instead of asking "What will MUNFA do?" ask: "What will *we* do?" Join MUNFA's working group on governance, put your name forward for the Executive Committee or volunteer for another MUNFA committee ([service to MUNFA is recognized in the CA as academic service](#)).

We are MUNFA.