

VALUES AND THE FUTURE AT MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

AUGUST 2016

In the most recent MUNFA survey, members commented on the broader mission of the university and its future direction. MUNFA members were asked to comment on what, if any, changes they had noticed concerning the operations at MUN in recent years. Members were given the opportunity to discuss the impacts of changes at MUN and visions for the future.



Most common responses and reflections

- University administration is growing and drawing resources out of teaching and research. *This was, by far, the most common change noted*
- In a related point, many members were uncomfortable with the growth of businesslike approaches within the university department heads being referred to as “line managers”
- There is an increased focus on commercialization of research
- There is an increased focus on research (which members have mixed feelings about), but a growing challenge with the “research bureaucracy” within the university
- A loss of collegiality within the university community and a development of “us vs. them” conflicts between administration and MUNFA members

Communication Gap

Comments were not all negative, as some members noted more recent improvements in transparency from administration, while others highlighted the work of support staff in their departments or faculties.

Broadly speaking, the members who responded to this survey did not feel they had a clear sense of where MUN was going, or why the structural changes they had seen were happening. There is clearly a communication gap to address.

Prioritizing MUN’s Mission

When asked to rank the four components of MUN’s mission (Teaching and learning, research, scholarship, and creative activity, service, and public engagement), a clear split emerges between the two priorities that members see as core, and the two seen as more peripheral. The average rating for each element is shown in Table 1, below:

| Table 1: Prioritizing MUN’s missions | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Element of the mission | Average Rank (1 = most important) |
| Teaching and learning | 1.5 |
| Research, scholarship, and creative activity | 1.6 |
| Service | 3.4 |
| Public engagement | 3.4 |

MUNFA members prioritize two elements of MUN’s mission: the teaching and learning and research, scholarship and creative activity.

Priorities for the future

Members responding to the survey also had fairly clear views on what MUN's priorities for the future should be. When asked to rank from **1** (most important) to **7** (least important) a set of priorities, the split was quite clear.

As shown in Table 2 below, members answering this survey strongly prioritize repairs to physical plant, salaries and benefits, and class sizes. Marketing and communications comes in at the bottom of the list – a common theme in much of the open-answer feedback as well.

| Table 2 - Ranking priorities for MUN | |
|---|--------------|
| Priority | Average Rank |
| Replacing obsolete equipment and buildings | 2.1 |
| Maintaining competitive salaries and benefits for members and staff | 2.7 |
| Keeping class sizes small | 3.0 |
| Public engagement | 4.2 |
| Not raising tuition | 4.7 |
| Expanding into new programs and facilities (eg. a law school) | 5.4 |
| Marketing and communications | 5.5 |

There were also a number of write-in priorities here, including

- Maintaining a solvent pension plan
- Reducing the size of administration
- Increasing internationalization

- Supporting research excellence
- Supporting diversity and inclusion, particularly with regards to indigenous students

Of these, research excellence and reduced administration were by far the most common suggested additions to the priorities list.

Concerns for the future

This section of the survey closed with two big questions: what were members' biggest concerns, and what were they most hopeful for in MUN's future?

Members concerns for the future ranged widely, but there were **three clearly dominant themes**. In descending order, they were:

- Insufficient support for quality teaching and research
- The impact of budget cuts and austerity
- The growth of administration and the bureaucratic obstacles that come with it

There is a second group of themes here – cited about half as often as the top 3, but nonetheless frequently. They were: retaining and building a quality members, physical infrastructure (particularly of the St. John's campus), corporatization of MUN's operating model, lack of long-term vision for the university, a focus on student quantity over quality.

Hope for the future

Though MUNFA members were not as hopeful about the future—there were a few clear themes that offered some optimistic insights:

- MUN has young, talented members: many people cited the impressive new crop of MUNFA members recruited in recent years
- Talented students: MUN continues to attract top-quality students from NL, Canada, and around the world
- Change in administration and leadership: while members were, by and large, unhappy with the current administrative and leadership structure, they do not feel that it will be this way forever.



Overall, the survey responses paint a fairly clear picture of members who want to see the university focus in on its core missions of teaching and research, slim down its administration, and rebuild the physical infrastructure needed to support university life.