

January 18, 2017

Dr. G. Kachanoski  
President  
Memorial University

Dear Dr. Kachanoski,

Memorial University's Faculty Association (MUNFA) is deeply concerned about the implications of a recent message from the Provost to the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), asking Dean Phillips to "direct" the Departments of History, Classics, and Religious Studies to start collaborating on a plan for integration. We are dismayed by the lack of regard for the principle of collegiality represented by the Provost's action and note that Academic Staff Members (ASMs) from each of the three targeted departments have unanimously expressed their strong opposition to this proposal in departmental votes. We also believe that this move is completely unjustified on the basis of scholarly merit, and question whether there is any reasonable or logical rationale for it.

The Provost's failure to respect the collegial rights of ASMs is especially puzzling against the backdrop of a lengthy period of internal consultation and discussion about possibilities for restructuring. This process included the establishment of a working group made up of HSS faculty volunteers who met over the summer of 2016 and produced an extensive discussion document on the issues as well as an outline of several possible scenarios for reorganization. After some initial resistance from the Dean's Office, this document was released to HSS faculty in the fall of 2016. In December 2016, HSS department heads informed ASMs that any proposal to combine departments was being shelved in favour of curriculum development both within departments and between them, in the form of new interdisciplinary majors. This shift in direction was strongly endorsed by the HSS Heads in a meeting with the Dean of HSS.

As the province's only university, Memorial's core mission includes a special duty to provide a comprehensive university education to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This unique position means that it is particularly important for Memorial to offer a full slate of disciplinary options to students. While the administration claims that it is not eliminating programmes, only departments, we fear that, at best, students will have difficulty finding their way to particular disciplines. At worst, we think that this kind of restructuring will lead to the marginalization and eventual disappearance of entire areas of teaching and research from Memorial. Providing fewer resources to programs eventually leads to their demise. The Canadian Association of University Teachers has been tracking with concern problems resulting from similar kinds of anti-collegial behaviour in other universities.

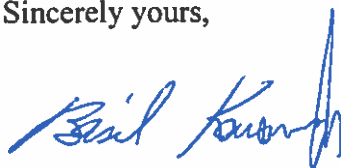
Memorial University is a community of scholars and students that sits at the heart of this province's public institutions. It does not belong to the senior administration. Surveys conducted by MUNFA indicate that ASMs are deeply committed to providing high quality education and research as core public services to this province. These survey results also show that MUNFA members view Memorial as a special place. They particularly value the university's collegial atmosphere.

However, ASMs expressed great discomfort with the current state of university administration and fear that it is putting these central values at risk.

The Departments of History, Classics and Religious Studies are foundational to MUN's historic mission as the province's flagship educational institution. MUNFA members are not opposed to change where it makes good academic sense, as evidenced by the willingness of HSS faculty to contribute to new interdisciplinary programmes. However, the Provost's instruction to merge these three departments is an arbitrary administrative decree, not the considered development of academic programmes. As such, it is in the interests neither of the university nor of the province for the merger to occur.

MUNFA respectfully submits that this merger decision should be reversed immediately.

Sincerely yours,



Basil Kavanagh, PhD  
President, MUNFA

cc. Memorial University Board of Regents  
Memorial University Senate  
Members, MUNFA  
Canadian Association of University Teachers  
Memorial University of Newfoundland Student Union (MUNSU)  
Memorial University Graduate Student Union (GSU)  
The Honourable Gerry Byrne, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour