

President's Update

FOR AFTERNOON OF
October 24, 2023

Auditor General Report Answers the Question: Whose University is this Anyway?

Yesterday's release of the [Auditor General's report on Memorial University](#) confirms much of what the MUNFA Executive has been sounding the alarm on for years – Memorial needs to refocus on its core mission, stop the trend of shrinking faculty to further administrative bloat, and commit to genuine transparency and authentic collegial governance. In sum, this public institution is not being run with its students, faculty, or staff as its priority and enough is enough.

These issues are not new to MUNFA members, having been notably raised as early as 2019, ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)) and collegial governance was a key issue of the most recent job action. While our members were on the picket line for better working conditions, job security, and governance structures, this report has found grossly misused funds and wastage on external hiring firms and senior administrators with no long-term approach to bettering this institution.

During this period of administrative bloat, faculty positions were gutted, leaving programs to wither on the vine with diminished course offerings for students. As was the case for many staff on campus, MUNFA members saw a pay freeze. Staff support that our members rely upon was cut. There was only one type of admin – the senior type – where numbers and salary grew. Meanwhile, senior admin and the Board of Regents approved a tripling of tuition. As the MUNFA Executive [predicted](#), harms to the university's core mission and its students, such as food and housing insecurity, resulted and Memorial's enrolment dropped. There are two worlds at Memorial: the upper echelons of senior administration who enjoy access to baubles and bonbons, and the rest of us. Those of us in the trenches experience increasingly large classes with insufficient individualized attention for students, underfunded crumbling, and leaking physical infrastructure, and increasingly precarious working conditions that betray the very idea of a strong, comprehensive public university.

[Following job action](#), MUNFA has continued pushing forward on collegial governance issues. In May, our advocacy led to modifications to the *Memorial University Act* and the MUNFA Executive laid out our [agenda for reform](#) – calling for public reinvestment in post-secondary education, collegial governance, and an end to external executive search firms. These issues have been consistently raised in [meetings with Memorial University's senior administration](#) and significant concerns with the [Board of Regents' structure and processes](#) continue to be examined in detail. Now that this report validates what our members have known to be true, where do we go from here?

It must be emphasized that these problems will not be solved solely with leadership changes or a scapegoating of individual and current or former Senior Administrators. The problems MUNFA has been highlighting for years are not about individual personalities. They are about structures and systems. Systemic, structural change that enables [genuine collegial governance](#) to flourish is what is needed. Changing the names or imprecise duty descriptions of various boards and groups that have the same

people and operate in the same echo chambers while doing nothing to include those who would hold senior administration accountable in those decision-making processes *is not change*. Nor does that increase transparency or facilitate rebuilding trust. These are structural issues that require large-scale structural changes, including, a full revision of the Memorial University Act that centres the input, work, and labour of Memorial's faculty, students, and staff.

For years now, faculty, students, and staff have been told they must wait until the release of the Auditor General report for real action to be taken. Neither senior administration nor the provincial government wanted to budge on their respective positions until the release of this report. Well, the report is here now, and it confirms what we have all known to be true about our university for far too long. MUNFA is demanding the meaningful involvement of academic staff members, students, and our staff colleagues in the paving of a way forward. Our input cannot be an afterthought.

As the MUNFA Executive discusses our next steps and continues our advocacy for a better, genuinely collegial, transparent, and accountable Memorial, I want to keep members informed that we see how stark the differences are between the university Senior Administrators' working conditions and the university MUNFA members work in everyday. This is OUR university.

We are MUNFA.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lepawsky". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Josh Lepawsky
Professor of Geography and MUNFA President