



December 11, 2020

Kate Chisholm
Chair, Board of Governors
University of Alberta
3-04 South Academic Building
Edmonton, AB T6G 2G7

Sent via email to: boardchair@ualberta.ca

Dear Board Chair Chisholm,

As the unions representing academic and support staff at the University of Alberta, AASUA and NASA have always been staunch defenders of the academic ideal of collegial governance. Our bicameral structure ensures that decisions about academic oversight, programs, and structures are arrived at through careful debate and deliberation by academics themselves through the General Faculties Council. The role of the Board of Governors has historically been to make decisions with regard to the University's administrative and management budgets and structures, but to defer to the recommendations of GFC on academic matters.

We were dismayed and disappointed, therefore, at the board's decision to disregard the GFC recommendation of a college model that would function collegially and without the imposition of anything resembling an Executive Dean or an additional layer of academic administration. The board's adoption of a college model that creates a position called "college dean" is a direct contradiction of the spirit of GFC's recommendation—a recommendation that was arrived at after careful and extensive consideration, deliberation, and debate—and an affront to the principle of collegial governance.

We are especially concerned by the repeated assertion by numerous members of the Board of Governors that, because of their experience in the corporate sector, they have a better sense of what will serve the academic mission of the university than do the members of GFC. Members of GFC are immersed daily in supporting and delivering the university's academic programs and research, and are in a better position than anyone else to determine what models and structures will best facilitate and enable academic excellence across campus.

The University of Alberta is an institution of higher learning and advanced research in the public interest, not a corporation whose goal is the maximization of profit and share value. That public interest mission demands an understanding of teaching, learning, research, and collegiality that goes far beyond the standard top-down hierarchical models of the corporate sector. This decision by the board marks a significant step backward in that sense.

Finally, we express our assertion once again that to create and fund three new high-level and highly paid senior leadership positions at a time when the university is eliminating an estimated 1,100 frontline positions in the name of cost savings sends a very negative message about who and what the university's leadership and governors support and value. Despite President Flanagan's assertion at the start of today's meeting, there has been no evidence presented to the University of Alberta community that a model with Executive or College Deans will yield more savings than one without them. This decision, therefore, can only be understood as an ideological preference for upper-level leadership positions rather than for positions on the frontlines of teaching, research, and support.

We call on the Board of Governors to reconsider its decision, respect collegial governance and bi-cameral decision-making, and approve the recommendation sent to it by the General Faculties Council.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Acuña', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ricardo Acuña
President, AASUA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Johansson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Elizabeth Johansson
President, NASA