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October 14, 2020

To: NASA members and AASUA members

As the unions representing University of Alberta support staff and faculty, NASA and AASUA have always worked hard to ensure our members' interests are represented. Over the years, we have generally had a cordial and collegial relationship with university administration, and feel that both our members and the university have benefited greatly from this relationship.

Last fall, when the provincial government announced the extreme and unprecedented budget cuts to the university, we knew we were heading into a difficult period for labour relations. We recognize that the university is grappling with funding cuts the size and speed of which are unprecedented globally. We also know that a large portion of the university's budget is the salaries of the people delivering and supporting the institution's teaching and research mandate. As such, we recognize that jobs will inevitably be lost as a result of the provincial government's funding cuts.

Nevertheless, there are many details involved in how the cuts will be implemented, and the two campus unions have a key role to play in sharing member concerns, knowledge, and ideas with administration, and in providing feedback on proposals being considered. To this end, NASA and AASUA have made multiple formal and informal requests over a period of many months to be included on the two U of A for Tomorrow (UAT) restructuring committees. We have made requests both separately and jointly. We have attended meetings, talked to our contacts in university administration, and used every cordial and collegial avenue available to try to gain recognition of the important role that the unions should be playing in conversations and decisions around restructuring. Despite the extreme impacts that the decisions made at these committees will have on our members, university administration has denied all our efforts to gain access to these committees.

One of the arguments justifying our exclusion is that NASA and AASUA have representatives on the General Faculties Council (GFC) and Board of Governors (BOG). While the individuals holding the seats reserved for the campus unions on those bodies have been working hard, they are also bound by rules of confidentiality and cannot share with us information from closed-session meetings. In addition, the time allocated for questions and discussion of these major changes at those governing bodies has been extremely limited. Furthermore, GFC will not even be given the opportunity to review or make recommendations about administrative restructuring—what the university calls the Service Excellence Transformation (SET)—prior to the BOG voting on its implementation.

It is true that in response to widespread criticism about our exclusion from the process President Flanagan and others in leadership have recently begun scheduling one-on-one meetings with union representatives, but those are short, informal meetings where no detailed or in-depth information and data about scenarios, options, and financial impacts is shared or discussed.

It is impossible for NASA and AASUA to properly represent our members through the current restructuring if we are excluded from the tables where proposals are being discussed and the full information informing decisions is shared. This exclusion not only makes it impossible for us to properly fulfill our rights and obligations in representation of our members, it risks diminishing the value our members place on their unions.

As a union in Alberta, when we feel that the employer is acting contrary to the rules, denying us our rights, or bypassing us to negotiate directly with our members, we have access to the complaint mechanisms of the Alberta Labour Relations Board (ALRB). The ALRB hears complaints, passes judgment on those complaints, and has the power to order the employer to stop, reverse, or change its behaviour.

Given the university leadership's repeated refusal to allow us to represent our members in the academic and administrative restructuring process, we have taken the step of filing a formal complaint with the Alberta Labour Relations Board and asking the board to compel the university to include us in the consultations and bargaining occurring with regard to the restructuring. We do not take this step lightly, and have tried all possible other avenues before reaching this step.

We have been and will continue to utilize all available avenues to inform, influence, and impact the restructuring process. We will continue to gather information from you, our members, about your issues and priorities so that you can trust that what is coming from your unions truly represents the concerns of you, our members on the ground.

In solidarity,



Elizabeth Johansson  
NASA President



Ricardo Acuña  
AASUA President