



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Government inflexibility on budget will jeopardize U of A's COVID-19 response and long-term prospects, say campus associations

Staff and student associations tabled a [joint letter](#) at the University of Alberta's Board of Governors' meeting today, warning that the provincial government's inflexibility on the implementation of deep budget cuts to the province's largest post-secondary institution will jeopardize the university's ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in the short-term and damage the University's ability to deliver its mandate in the long-term.

University of Alberta President David Turpin [revealed on Monday](#) that the current pandemic "has not changed or slowed the government timelines related to budget ... To balance our budget as required, we must make difficult decisions and continue to implement plans, even as we are responding to the COVID-19 crisis—a crisis that has no predictable end point."

At its meeting today, the Board of Governors passed a budget that will cut an estimated 635 jobs over the next fiscal year as the university grapples with a \$110 million reduction in provincial funding. These layoffs are in addition to 400 layoffs that have already happened in the university's current fiscal year. Layoffs to IT staff—responsible for moving the university to online learning to help reduce the spread of COVID-19—have already occurred, and the university's cost-cutting plans include reducing cleaning to "minimum required standards."

At a time when governments in Canada are spending tens of billions of dollars to support newly unemployed workers, the provincial government even rejected a proposal from the University of Alberta that could have reduced staff cuts in the coming year by almost 300.

"Everyone working, learning, and doing research at the University of Alberta takes pride in being part of a world-class institution. Severe budget cuts will put that standing in jeopardy. In addition, the government demanding job cuts during an international health emergency is truly heartless."

- Elizabeth Johansson, President of the Non-Academic Staff Association

"Academics we will lose currently fill vital roles in delivery of teaching and research. Their workloads will be transferred to remaining academics, slowing important progress, including by those performing essential research on COVID-19. We may receive a most unwanted outcome, greater loss of life and an even more severe negative economic impact in Alberta. These cuts must be suspended or reversed in the interest of the province, and therefore this government."

- Kevin Kane, President of the Association of Academic Staff University of Alberta

"These cuts are coming at a time when students are bearing unimaginable burdens as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including personal or family illness, loss of income, and challenges associated with the

sudden shift to virtual learning, amongst many other things. COVID-19 represents the worst public health crisis in at least a generation, and we will be feeling its impacts for a long time to come. In the face of these difficulties, the last thing that students deserve are deep cuts which will threaten the support services that they rely on and the quality of the education that they expect to receive.”

- Akanksha Bhatnagar, President of the University of Alberta Students’ Union

“As the representative of graduate students at the U of A, I am most concerned that the quality of the educational and research experience at our institution will suffer as a result of the provincial government’s budget cuts. I am also concerned that the significant increases to tuition that our institution is forced to implement will adversely affect the graduate students that I represent, many of whom are already struggling with severe financial pressures. I urge the government to meaningfully address the concerns of those most affected by the diminishing affordability, accessibility, and quality of our post-secondary education – the students.”

- Fahed Elian, President of the Graduate Students’ Association

“Like everyone in the University of Alberta community, postdocs are facing an uncertain and unsettling time, with questions about whether they’ll be able to continue their research, how long they can count on a paycheque, and whether they’ll be able to return home. At the same time, we’re extremely concerned about the hundreds of layoffs impacting our staff colleagues who provide postdocs with critical support every day. The PDFA feels the role of this university and the provincial government should be to provide as much stability as possible, not make the current emergency worse out of a commitment to balancing the books.”

- Charlotte Heyer, President of the Postdoctoral Fellows Association

Given the unprecedented changes that have occurred in the province and globally since Budget 2020 was introduced, the associations are calling on the provincial government to provide the university with the necessary flexibility to deal with the current crisis—including by putting an immediate stop to additional layoffs until the health emergency has passed—and to revisit its most recent budget to more accurately reflect today’s realities.

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