

# University of Alberta for Tomorrow Academic Restructuring Feedback - Alumni

October 20 - November 5, 2020

Below are comments shared by U of A alumni following a [town hall](#) with President Flanagan and Provost Steven Dew on October 20, 2020. All feedback shared through [this form](#) on the UAT website is, and will continue to be, shared with the Academic Restructuring Working Group (ARWG) for consideration as they refine and revise the proposed scenarios. A list of all University of Alberta for Tomorrow (UAT) consultations is available on the [UAT website](#).

Responses to frequently asked questions and comments can be found on the [UAT FAQ website](#), and in regular [UAT Updates](#) from President Flanagan, Provost Dew, and SET Executive Lead Rob Munro.

## Interim Report

It is very general and demonstrates that a decision had been made prior to the creation of the report.

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The report doesn't mention competencies as a factor for the central units. The existing central units often do not have the proper training, supervision, or resources to complete the tasks they have now.

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Provide clear and concrete information. The process, decision-making process, KPIs, and timeline are not transparent because they are obscured by lack of data.

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It seems like keeping Native Studies, CSJ and Augustana as three separate and semi isolated faculties is lacking an opportunity to support them with a divisional shared service model that still lets them keep their unique and location based identities. Why not a blend of b and c.

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Scenario B is illogical and should not be considered. Business and Law would be suffocated if grouped with Social Science and Humanities.

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Scenario B. Just makes economic sense and the faculties have some commonality.

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I think scenario A makes a lot of sense. There are a number of small medical faculties and gathering them together could provide some savings. I do worry about what this might mean for

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the international reputation of nursing and kinesiology (as examples). Their reputations are important to the overall reputation of the U of A.

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B - meets cost savings goal and seems like a single principle option rather than a mish-mash.

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Scenario B: I have a concern with the notion of an executive dean and am concerned that the deans of faculties will not have direct access to the provost. The faculties have been working hard to maintain quality of programming and research. Interactions with the provost and senior administration enable the deans to promote the work and needs of their faculties. With an executive dean, a layer (of management) is added (I find this somewhat paradoxical given what this reorganization is trying to do) and distance is created between the faculties and central administration, potentially impacting the information flow between the two. Further, I don't quite understand how an executive dean can equitably promote all faculties in their division.

I don't see how Education, Business, Law will be well served by the executive dean structure given they are professional faculties, hence have quite different roles, responsibilities and needs. In my experience their work is different than Faculty of Arts. Education and Business have led in course based masters programming for professionals. They do international development work in addition to traditional research.

I also do not buy the argument that there will be ""synergies for interdisciplinary work"". The groups are so large and they will continue to work out of their own buildings. I can't imagine division wide meetings where professors/researchers could learn about each others work and make connections. Further, connections across the divisions are where some very interesting collaborations can happen.

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Scenario C: Bigger decision making units can create less buy-in to decision making, less responsive administration and reduced efficiency. Must retain some type of site based decision making with built in efficiency incentives/rewards.

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Scenario B appears to be the most attractive from a cost saving and qualitative analysis. Perhaps the most disruptive for administration, but probably the most needed disruption. Given decades building a bloated and inefficient bureaucracy, the approach to restructuring should probably now be "go big or go home". Be bold.

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Perhaps the divisional heads should be "divisional vice-presidents" rather than "executive deans", and recruit divisional vice-presidents from business and industry, rather than from government or academia. Many business and industry leaders have experience leading through mergers, restructuring and consolidation and would be leadership assets worth recruiting. I am also concerned that the academic and non-academic unions have been over represented in the town halls, and students, teachers and researchers under represented.

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Scenario A: I want to see more vision of the university as an academic and collegial community reflecting the U of A traditions. I also want to see actual financial justifications for massive restructuring that makes a case for how any of these changes will in fact achieve savings and the much promised interdisciplinarity. These seem like assumptions without adequate substantiation. I also value disciplinarity as much as interdisciplinarity and cross-disciplinarity of many kinds and support solo scholarship as well as team work -- these are not one versus the other so much as a strength in their diversity of knowledges.

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Good to see various scenarios include the Campus St. Jean and Augustana. Whichever scenario prevails, it is important to serve the ongoing Francophone and rural focus of these faculties. CSJ and Augustana are key components of a strong U of A grounded in vibrant communities.

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Scenario C: When you group so many faculties together, you are making it easier for the remaining administrators to make cuts. Marrying Arts to Science is a recipe for disaster.. I am a medievalist. There will not be any left at U of A, and that will be a shame.

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I am unclear why the native studies, campus saint Jean, and augustana have been apparently deemed untouchable. I don't think the university has money to further fatten up sacred cows.

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The restructuring scenarios are a laudable effort to improve administrative efficiencies, but they are routine measures that any large organization needs to undertake periodically.

It seems to me that the financial pressures on the post-secondary system will only increase and that a more fundamental re-think is required. In conversation with friends in academia, I have repeatedly probed the affordability of a university education in the context of the horrendous student debt which is being accumulated, especially in the US. While there are no easy answers, the Covid19 experience presents the need and the opportunity to explore issues such as:

- the balance between undergraduate education and research
- the potential of greater industry involvement and patent rights
- integration with the community college system
- year-round course scheduling
- contract versus tenured professors

The University of Alberta, in my mind, is uniquely positioned to be a leader in ground-breaking innovation and a key contributor to the knowledge economy which has to be the basis of Canada's economic future.

## Academic Restructuring

Operate more like a business when it comes to commercially viable technologies you find and help develop. Then use those funds to finance the academic pursuits of those with talent and vision. Seems like U of A, like most post secondary institutions is too focused on being sensitive rather than practical. I was very impressed initially with the background of the new President and Vice Provost, but quickly became disillusioned with the description of what needs to change. It's not about organizational structure or protecting the interests of those who want status quo. It's about taking a look at the educational market and acknowledging that you're losing ground to new offerings like Udacity and their nano degrees (not to be confused with Nano Technology). I was hopeful. There were a few moments you talked about leading the academic world, but it was just a poorly disguised attempt to raise funds from alumni. Ironic since most of the questions addressed during the "town hall" were clearly coming from academics who were clearly focused on maintaining the status quo, and not future growth. Very short sighted.

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Of the anticipated 1000-1100 positions being cut, how many are teaching/research positions and how many are academic/administrative positions? Has any time and effort been spent on replacing administrative "manual labor" heavy positions with virtual or online technical services? Take advantage of online technical services as a means of reducing labor costs.

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Listen to student concerns. Listen to researcher concerns. The change management and retraining required appears to be a large undertaking in a compressed timeframe, especially during a pandemic, how are you going to prevent staff burnout and quality problems and world class people from leaving?

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What metrics are being collected to guarantee the student experience doesn't decrease?

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How will any of the proposed scenarios promote the "diversity of opinion" needed for freedom of speech and academic freedom on campus? In recent years there have been well documented cases of the U of A administration suppressing free speech and academic freedom. The Alberta Court of Appeal recently ruled against the U of A use of prohibitive "security fees" to prevent events that included unpopular speakers. Furthermore, the U of A administration failed to take

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action against students guilty of non-academic misconduct when they shut down the expression of views they disagreed with. More recently an Arts faculty member lost an admin appointment because of her views as a gender-critical feminist (or Marxist feminist). The U of A appears to have a hostility toward intellectual diversity, with only "correct" opinions being allowed. This is not "excellence".

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Well it is disconcerting that any educational institute has to go through this kind of budget restructuring. The U of A has done an amazing job to figure out how to navigate these troubled waters.

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Keep as many course offerings as you can. This is what helps to attract students to the U of A.

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I wonder about eliminating some obsolete programs at the U of A and eliminating the corresponding faculty positions (and not moving them to other faculties). I worry that non academic staff take the brunt of the cost cutting. I am wondering about how the restructuring serves the goal of (new) revenue generation? New dollars generated will help the bottom line but these are not discussed. I am wondering about endowments, endowment lands, donor dollars... how do these things fit into the U of A for tomorrow?

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Expect Campus St. Jean to have even less profile than it does now. Don't see how the plan will address any of CSJ needs that have been ignored for years. Alberta is in desperate need of French teachers and can't count on other provinces to meet our needs.

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Cutting 1000 jobs is significant. If maybe 15% are tied to duplication/improved efficiency, wondering what the impact of the other cuts will be? Do we know the breakdown between academic and non-academic?

Reorganization will consume most leadership resources for a few years and will have long-term effects on staff morale; better get it right once and avoid ongoing restructuring.

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Seems that we are focusing mostly on the management structure. This is only one part of reducing costs. What is being done to address academic inefficiencies and cost structures (salaries, benefits, class size, teaching load, etc). This is a significant part of the puzzle and perhaps more relevant than the administrative structure.

Assuming that research is self-sufficient, why is it that K-12 instruction can deliver instruction over a much longer day, much longer year, much smaller classes, for about \$13,000 per student all in. Where does post-secondary become less efficient?

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The Restructuring should be Provincial as there are many overlaps across the Province. It would be Ideal to have Provincial University Presidents Consult or at least discuss it with each other. All Provincial Universities seem facing budget cuts. Furthermore, with so-much free on-line Materials & now ! courses available worldwide! even from high-powered! Universities ! It is better to Concentrate on Essential Hands-on Disciplines conducive to High-Power Research & Contribution to Alberta, Canada & World Health, Science & Economies.

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Collegial governance is essential and must be better reflected in ongoing UAT changes going forward. Rushing changes through GFC and a lack of formal ASSUA representation at the UAT table signal to Alumni that U of A no longer truly values and works in a collegial governance model. It sets a poor standard rather than a rich engagement to honour the governance system and traditions of the University of Alberta. Disappointed to see U of A sinking into neoliberal models of universities as machines rather than the rich classic traditions of liberal education and discovery work that built a great university to support a strong Alberta. The Board of Governors must be more accountable to uplift all the people and ensure the continuation of the U of A as a great university does not fall under the bus, which is currently the case in UAT and SET as much as the general state of public sector across Alberta. The public sector changes of 2020-2021 wrought by UCP government are appalling, including the Titanic upending of the U of A. This is a full frontal attack on democratic public institutions that belong to the citizens and people of Alberta who have supported them as an intergenerational trust for the public good.

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Really need to close low enrollment programs and majors. I realize that is easier said than to do.

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