

President's Message – April 2013

Colleagues,

Some of you who read the *Leader-Post* after the provincial budget was announced on March 20 may have been a bit perplexed by the statement in one article that “Saskatchewan’s universities are content with the operating grant afforded them” in the budget. Likewise, you may have wondered how the *Carillon* could have reported on March 28 that I spoke “with excitement” about the grant.

Given that the University of Regina faces financial pressures, receiving an operating grant increase of 1.94% as opposed to the 4.8% we required hardly seems reason for contentment, let alone excitement. As I stated in the *Leader-Post* article, “it’s going to be a challenge for us.” From such a perspective, saying that we are content with or excited about the budget is not accurate.

Yet within a wider Canadian context (and also within the Saskatchewan context, where the Government of Saskatchewan made some difficult funding decisions in other sectors to help balance the budget), the *Leader-Post*’s assessment isn’t that far off. And while I don’t necessarily agree with everything that appears in the *Carillon* each week, the newspaper’s characterization of my “measured appreciation for the funding increase” is right on the mark.

Looking at government funding of universities across the country will give an idea why. Leaving aside the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut (which have colleges rather than universities), one can see that reduced provincial funding increases – if not outright funding decreases – have become the norm.

In Atlantic Canada (and perhaps all of Canada), Newfoundland and Labrador is the exception to an increasingly prevalent rule. Although the province posted a deficit budget for 2013-2014, it did not reduce funding to Memorial University, but in fact provided an overall level of funding that Memorial’s president says supports the University’s core mission and allows for investment in areas that are of key importance to the province.

The situation is very different at the University of Prince Edward Island. Having faced a 3% budget cut last year, UPEI received no funding increase in this year’s budget, leading to a \$5 million shortfall. New Brunswick’s recent budget included no increase in provincial funding to Universities, and placed a \$150 cap on any tuition increases. In Nova Scotia, provincial budgets have cut 4% and 3.1% from the province’s 11 universities over the past two years, and all indications are that the forthcoming budget will have a similar impact.

The situation is much the same in central Canada. Funding challenges in Quebec have been well-documented over the past year, with the province’s universities being asked to reduce \$124 million from their collective budget during the current fiscal year. McGill University alone, for example, has identified the need to reduce its expenditures by \$43 million. In its pre-budget submission to the Ontario government, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty

Associations called for a funded tuition freeze as well a minimum additional investment of \$120 million to maintain the current level of per student funding. Neither seems likely to take place.

Looking to western Canada, one can see a similar picture. Manitoba's budget will not be released until mid-April, but with a growing deficit, the province does not appear to be in a position to provide increased funding to universities. The University of Winnipeg has already indicated that cuts to academic programs and administrative services are likely to take place in the coming year. Alberta's universities, which had originally been told to expect a 2% increase in funding, recently saw approximately a 7% decrease in funding from that province's budget. And in British Columbia, the best possible news for the post-secondary sector was that the \$50 million cut announced in last year's budget has now been spread over three years rather than the original two.

Of course, saying that "it could be worse" is cold comfort for all of us at the University of Regina as we work to balance our own budget with as little impact as possible on our academic mission. That process will indeed be a challenging one, but as we undertake it, be assured that I will continue advocating that Saskatchewan follow Newfoundland's lead in the coming years, and resist rather than be part of the national trend of reducing funding for our universities.

Sincerely,

Vianne Timmons
President and Vice-Chancellor