

March 4, 2020

Budget Message to our Campus Community

Over the past several months, the University of Lethbridge has implemented a number of budget strategies to position the institution for an expected, and now confirmed, reduction to its 2020/21 Campus Alberta Grant. Despite utilizing a number of different strategies, a reduction of our work force was inevitable, and over the past week, the U of L laid off 19 employees across several different departments, plus 23 confirmed retirements and resignations for 2020/21, a total of 42 positions.

These were not easy decisions. Our staff and faculty are committed and driven individuals who have created one of the best student and academic cultures in the country. However, because salaries and benefits make up most of the University's operational expenditures (83 per cent), layoffs were unavoidable.

At this point in time, the University has put a pause on further rounds of layoffs for the next few months while we work with government to understand the new budget model and the performance based metrics. During this period, we will continue to explore revenue-generating opportunities and continue our discussions and review of our workforce planning.

Throughout the budgetary process, every effort has been made to identify actions to minimize employee layoffs.

At its February 13, 2020 meeting, the U of L Board of Governors voted to increase overall tuition by seven per cent as well as increase various fees. These increases challenge our value of access, however are necessary to maintain quality and capacity at the U of L.

We also asked units like Ancillary Services and Campus Mobility Services to contribute additional revenue to the University's operating fund, and challenged our domestic and international recruiters to continue to increase our student enrolment.

One of the strategies utilized to balance the 2019/20 budget was the elimination of positions through attrition and retirements. It's a strategy that will continue to be used this coming year and beyond. The University has repurposed a number of positions to maintain capacity for key functions.

In all instances, we have tried our utmost to afford the respect and dignity the departing employees deserve upon leaving the institution, as well as ensuring the directives in our collective agreements and employee manuals are met. All our employees have been given access to resources to assist them during this transition. We appreciate greatly the service and contributions these individuals have provided the U of L. We hope members of our community will reach out to affected individuals and offer them support.

If you need support through this time, please access the University's Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) – a confidential and free resource provided to help faculty, staff and family members in their work and personal lives. Support services are available also by calling Homewood Health 1-888-713-8623 (24 hours).

Additionally, the University has arranged for an on-site counsellor to be available for individual appointments on the following dates/times listed below. The counsellor will have an anonymous sign-up sheet outside each of the identified rooms, or individuals can call Employee Wellness at 403-382-7187 or 403-332-5217 to book a 30-minute appointment.

- Friday, March 6 from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. – Markin Hall M1088
- Friday, March 13 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. – Markin Hall M1080

I know many of you are concerned about what a reduced workforce will mean to your individual workloads. We encourage employees and managers to have the necessary conversations to ensure teams are prioritizing their efforts and that employees have the time and resources to fulfill their roles. There are also a number of unit/department/functional reviews that are being undertaken on campus to ensure optimization of our limited resources. It is also important to note the University is not implementing a hiring freeze and that positions will be filled in high-need areas.

It is also important to understand that while some business units on campus are transitioning through this change, they will be challenged to deliver on traditional levels of service.

We will continue to consult with our community on budget issues. Further, we will seek your input as we undergo the necessary transformation that will allow us to deliver on our mandate and vision in the decades ahead.

We will also continue to advocate to the Government of Alberta the importance of a strong post-secondary sector in the province. Our activities are key in supporting strong and vibrant communities and a resilient province. We will continue to keep our community stakeholders apprised about the impact of our reductions and the important actions we are undertaking to adjust to this challenging situation.

I know these budget decisions, coupled with two recent departures of our senior leadership, are concerning to members of our community. However, one of the legacies left in part by our former provost is the emergence of new leadership across our University. Our institution has developed talented individuals at many different levels, across many different departments. The fact that other institutions in Canada recruit our administrators, staff and faculty speaks to the U of L's ability to develop its people.

Our faculty and staff are unparalleled. It is through your collective work the U of L is an internationally respected, destination university. The fiscal challenges we currently face are significant. However, because of you and through you, I am confident the University will continue to provide the outstanding student experience for which it is known and make its mark in communities throughout the world.

Mike Mahon,
President and Vice-Chancellor