



## Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Office of the Dean  
St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7  
Tel: 709 864 8254 Fax: 709 864 2135  
hss@mun.ca [www.mun.ca](http://www.mun.ca)

To: ASMs and Heads in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
From: Jennifer Simpson, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Date: April 23, 2020  
Re: The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences: Headships, Background and Context

The below memo addresses questions regarding headships in HSS and details an opportunity for ASMs to contribute to a discussion about this topic. I am calling a Special Meeting of Faculty Council for May 6 from 1:00 – 2:00. The objectives of this meeting include a) developing a shared understanding in HSS of challenges related to headships and b) providing me with a stronger sense of the Faculty's priorities going forward.

---

At MUN, the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Science, and Engineering rely on departmental structures. Since my arrival in October 2017, two departments in the Headship search process have requested a Head from outside of their unit. At least one Head in HSS has noted that such a request is a possibility in their unit as well. Whatever the reasons for such requests, they open up HSS to possible questions regarding our ongoing interest in departmental autonomy and whether it is necessary for departments to maintain their status as separate governance units.

As Dean, I am required to act on recommendations from Headship Search Committees. When these committees recommend a Head external to the unit, and I approve of this recommendation, I am potentially opening up the Faculty to questions about departmental autonomy and self-governance. Given current headship searches and future headship searches, I am interested in:

- a) ensuring that ASMs and Heads in HSS have a stronger and shared understanding of possible outcomes in regard to appointing a head from outside the unit; and
- b) gaining a stronger sense of the priorities of ASMs and Heads in relation to the possible appointment of external heads.

At MUN, and in departmentalized Faculties, Heads serve critical and formalized roles: they enable a department to participate in the consultative process of making faculty position requests, and oversee the constitution and work of essential committees (Promotion and Tenure, searches, etc.). A Head is necessary to ensure attention to routine and important decisions and to formal and informal processes.

### Policy-Related Information

There is not a document at MUN that thoroughly outlines Heads' responsibilities. Two points from a [document](#) addressing the appointment of heads are pertinent.

- The document notes that the Dean determines if the "search [for a Head] shall be opened to candidates from outside the University" (page two).
- The document also notes that "The Dean shall recommend only individuals who have been recommended for appointment in the report of the Search Committee" (page two).

Regarding the first of the two points above, I do not think it serves the Faculty well to request new positions for the role of Head, related to both the current budget reality and the process by which HSS identifies faculty request priorities. I am not convinced that it is wise or appropriate to recommend appointing a Head from outside of MUN. In connection with the second point, it is my responsibility as the Dean to review recommendations from

Headship Search Committees and make a recommendation to the Provost's Office. I can only recommend the appointment of an individual to Head if that individual has been recommended by the Headship Search Committee.

### Current Context in HSS

Most departments in HSS continue to identify Heads from within their units. In the past two years, a small number of departments have raised the question of the possibility of a Head from within HSS and from outside of their unit. In these departments, there are ASMs appointed at all three ranks. ASMs have asserted that other service obligations, their own research, and/or the difficulties associated with performing the role of Head take precedence over the need for a Head from within the unit.

To date, after extensive consultation with members of Headship Search Committees, Heads, and ASMs, I have not been convinced that the research, service, or teaching obligations of a unit's members justify a unit seeking a head from outside of their unit (particularly in the current departmental governance model in HSS). All departments in HSS are grappling with filling essential service roles, and rely on faculty from within their units to perform that service. ASMs in all units are keen to work on their research and take leaves, and to perform service other than the role of Head.

It is worth noting a few of the starting points that inform the long-standing practice of appointing a Head from within the unit. To my knowledge, none of the below practices are policy-driven.

- Departments have historically been self-governing units, based on a presumed need for and the importance of disciplinary autonomy and knowledge within the unit. The Head is recognized as having integral knowledge about the discipline (knowledge that a Head from another unit would not have), and that knowledge is understood as critical to the oversight and success of the unit.
- Given the above, there is to some degree an informal understanding that collectively, ASMs in the unit will identify a Head. Departmental self-governance and autonomy are norms within departmentalized Faculties. These norms result in units identifying a Head internally.
- Typically, I would prefer not to accept a recommendation for an Assistant Professor as Head in order to protect that ASM's progress toward promotion and tenure.

### Next Steps

As Dean, I have given considerable thought over the last two years to requests for and possible implications of the appointment of a Head from outside of the home unit. Decisions that ASMs in HSS make now related to Headships will likely bear on the Faculty going forward. Likewise, even one or two departments in HSS opting to move away from the norms noted above open up the Faculty, including units that rely on a Head from within their unit, to questions about the Faculty's continued interest in and commitment to disciplinary autonomy and self-governance.

I understand this as a significant issue for the Faculty. I am also committed to finding a way forward that supports a collegial and productive relationship between the Dean's Office, Heads, and ASMs, and that serves the Faculty's interests. There will be a Special Meeting of Faculty Council on May 6, 2020 from 1:00 – 2:00 (conducted via audio/video conferencing). Please see the memorandum on HSS and Headships, [Process for Consultation and Decision-Making](#) for further information about this meeting and next steps.