



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

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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: HSS and Headships, Process for Consultation and Next Steps

This memo addresses questions regarding headships in HSS and provides information about an opportunity for ASMs in HSS to contribute to a discussion about these questions. 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.

As noted in a [memo](#) addressing the background to headships in HSS, when a headship search committee recommends a head from outside of the unit and I approve of that recommendation, this opens up HSS to possible questions regarding whether it is necessary for departments to maintain their status as separate governance units. In connection with headships, I am seeking a formal recommendation from Faculty Council that identifies a way forward to which the Faculty (including the Dean's Office, ASMs, and heads) is committed, and that outlines the responsibilities of ASMs, heads, and the Dean's Office. It may be useful to have a general discussion of the issues at the May meeting, and to meet in June to discuss HSS's preferences moving forward.

In my mind, there are at least four ways forward (see below). I offer these as a starting point. Our discussion may point to ways to bring two approaches together, etc. There may also be other ways forward. If any ASM or head has suggestions for approaches other than those noted below, I would ask that you send a one to two paragraph summary of that approach to Charlene Burke (charlenes@mun.ca) by April 30 so that I can review and consider it for discussion at the Special Meeting. All approaches we address at the Faculty Council meeting must be realistic and achievable (particularly related to university policies), must in the long run serve the interests of the Faculty, and must be an approach to which the Faculty as a whole is willing to commit.

When a unit makes no recommendation, this creates an impasse (as I can only act on a recommendation). When a unit recommends an ASM from another unit to serve as head, and I approve of this recommendation, I am in effect opening up the Faculty to questions regarding departmental governance and autonomy.

Given the discussion about possible reorganization in HSS before my arrival in October 2017, I am aware that there may be strong resistance to addressing this topic. (I provide further thoughts on this [here](#).) At the same time, I will suggest that to the degree that the process is collegial and that there is clear attention to the interests of the Faculty, such a discussion might serve the Faculty's interests. Similarly, to refuse participation in such a conversation primarily or only because of the difficulty of the conversation that took place before my arrival might be understandable. Such a refusal may also hurt the Faculty in that it closes off options that might be in our own interests and which we might do well to consider through a collegial process.

One option I do not explore below is the possibility that in the absence of a unit identifying a head, the Dean's Office takes on the responsibilities of the Headship for the unit. I see this option as less viable than the options below as it removes all responsibility for department oversight from the unit.

Option A

- *Approach.* The Headship Search Committee recommends a head from within the unit.
- *Implications for organization of HSS.* This approach largely leaves existing practices related to governance, decision-making, and departmental autonomy intact.
- *Responsibility of Dean's Office.* Oversee constitution of Headship Search and Review Committees; support work of these committees, including consultation with committee or department as requested. Act on recommendation of Headship Search and Review Committees.
- *Responsibility of ASMs.* In this approach, units must commit to identifying a head from within their unit, requiring an ASM from within the unit to serve as head.

Option B

- *Approach.* The Headship Search Committee does not recommend a head from inside the unit. Units that choose this option will then engage in a conversation, facilitated by the Dean's Office, that addresses possible reorganization with another unit(s) in HSS. If this approach is adopted, there would be explicit discussion of the process for such conversations at Faculty Council.
- *Implications for organization of HSS.* The department that has opted not to identify an internal head will automatically be engaged by the Dean's Office in a conversation about reorganization. The Dean's Office will initiate a conversation with other units in the Faculty as appropriate.
- *Responsibility of Dean's Office.* Oversee constitution of Headship Search and Review Committees; support work of these committees, including consultation with committee or department as requested. Act on recommendation of Headship Search and Review Committees.
- *Responsibility of ASMs.* ASMs in all units must be willing to engage in discussions regarding reorganization (whether or not they are in the unit that has opted not to identify an internal head).

Option C

- *Approach.* Faculty as a whole proactively considers question of reorganization. If this approach is adopted, a timeline and process would be voted on at Faculty Council. Procedures would follow existing university policy (such as the policy in Memorial's University Act which stipulates that changes to departments must go through Senate).
- *Implications for organization of HSS.* This would allow the Faculty as a whole to consider an optimal structure going forward, rather than doing so on a unit-by-unit basis.
- *Responsibility of Dean's Office.* Oversee consultation and process. Communicate regarding timelines, procedures, etc. Ensure, with collegial support from ASMs, that the best interests of the Faculty as a whole are served.
- *Responsibility of ASMs.* Participate collegially and constructively in the process, and in ways that focus on ways to move forward. Agree to identify heads internally until this process of consultation comes to a close (approximately one year from the decision at Faculty Council).

Finally, I will make a few brief points about collegiality and the ways I hope we will engage with each other on the above issues.

- Conversation about the above issues at Faculty Council will be focused on moving forward with realistic attention to how the Faculty can best a) serve its academic mission and b) build on its teaching and research and creative activity and academic strengths.
- I will ask that we are generous with our colleagues. This means that we start from the understanding that we are all doing our best in terms of shaping opinions, providing comments, and asking questions.
- I will also emphasize the important role of questions in better understanding our colleagues' comments.

I look forward to a productive conversation.