

Memorial University

Budget Consultations 2019-2020

# WHAT WE HEARD

March 2020

The Integrated Planning Committee (IPC), established in 2016, is composed of faculty, staff and students and is chaired by the provost and vice-president (academic). The IPC's mandate is to advise the president on Memorial's budget planning. To this end, the committee gathers input from faculty, staff, and students annually through consultation sessions at the St. John's, Grenfell, and the Marine Institute campuses, and an online survey.

The following presents the third annual "What We Heard" document based on the consultation process led by IPC during November 2019. The themes identified within this document form the basis for the "What We Recommend" report submitted to the President.

## Consultation Process

CONSULTATION SESSIONS	ONLINE SUBMISSION FORM
<p data-bbox="203 674 505 705">November 18-21, 2019</p> <p data-bbox="203 739 777 770">Attendees: 175 in-person + 28 livestreaming</p> <ul data-bbox="203 806 764 978" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultation sessions were held at:</li> <li>• St. John's Campus (3), November 19 &amp; 20;</li> <li>• Marine Institute (1), November 21; and</li> <li>• Grenfell Campus (1), November 18.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="203 1012 805 1077">Each session was led by a facilitator and were open to all faculty, staff and students.</p> <p data-bbox="203 1110 797 1209">The St. John's campus evening session on the 19th was livestreamed and available to all individuals with a MUN login.</p>	<p data-bbox="833 674 1263 705">November 18-December 2, 2019</p> <p data-bbox="833 739 1073 770">Respondents: 106</p> <p data-bbox="833 806 1409 905">The online submission form was promoted through <i>Newsline</i>, student email, and during in-person consultations.</p> <p data-bbox="833 938 1406 1037">The majority of responses were from the St. John's Campus (87%). The following provides an overview of respondent groups:</p> <ul data-bbox="883 1071 1295 1169" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty and instructors 27%</li> <li>• Staff 48%</li> <li>• Students 23%</li> </ul>

The IPC asked the following questions during in-person consultation sessions and through the online submission form. These were provided to the University community in advance, for consideration.

1. To what extent do the priorities identified for 2018/19 remain priorities?
2. Are there new or emerging priorities?
3. What else should the university be doing in response to the fiscal challenges?

The consultation process resulted in thoughtful, forward-looking responses with common themes. Input from all campuses and from all groups are reflected in the themes below. This report summarizes only what we heard. It does not provide commentary or analysis regarding the comments received.

## What We Heard

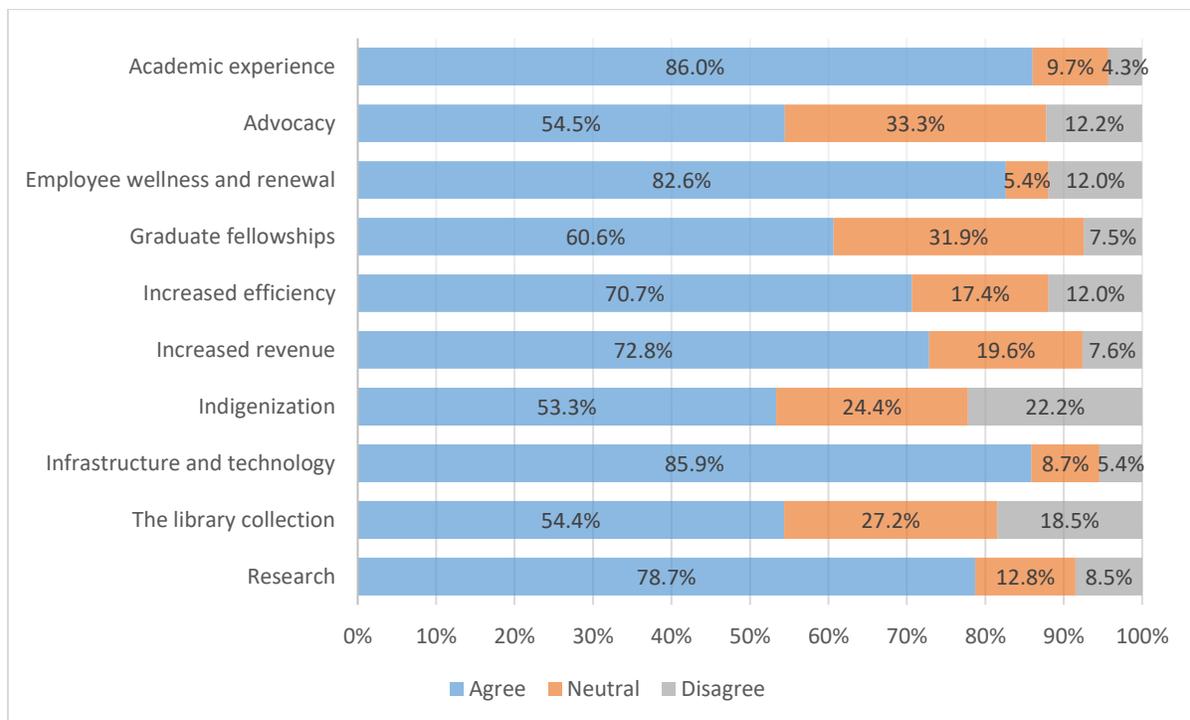
### Comment on 2018-19 Priorities

The 2018-19 consultation process identified the following priority areas:

- Academic experience (student support, wellness, advising)
- Advocacy
- Faculty and staff wellness and renewal
- Graduate fellowships
- Increased efficiency (reduce duplication, align processes, outsourcing)
- Increased revenue
- Indigenization
- Infrastructure and technology renewal
- The library collection
- Research

Participants in the online survey were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each area on this list. Overall, as shown in the figure below, respondents showed higher levels of agreement for the following: academic experience, faculty and staff wellness and renewal, increased efficiency, increased revenue, infrastructure and technology renewal, and research, though all areas saw a majority of respondents indicate agreement.

*Table 1 Agreement with previously identified high priority budget areas*



Several commentators suggested that the list should be expanded to include Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and that teaching and learning or pedagogy be foregrounded in Academic Experience. Conversely, other commentators expressed concern that the long and growing list of strategic priorities was not effective in guiding resource allocation decisions at a time of fiscal restraint. They spoke to a need to consider “rightsizing” the University.

## Key Messages

In-person and online responses have been grouped by major theme and categorized through thematic analysis. Themes represent recurring responses; however, differing views are also noted in the categories below.

Consistent with previous years’ consultations, many participants spoke to issues of program development and renewal, environmental sustainability, reduction of duplication, elimination of waste, and reduction of salary expenditures. The following five sections represent the major themes that emerged this year.

### *The university must replace lost public funding*

After 8 years of cuts, faculty, staff and students are increasingly seeing the varied impacts of the persistent decline in public funding. With limited opportunities to achieve significant cost savings, continued budget reductions will have implications on the core mission of the university and its ability to deliver a comprehensive suite of high quality academic programs and research.

*“It seems that without new sources of revenue, the University will remain between a rock and hard place... I understand that the revenue generation options for the University are severely constrained by the Province, but I really don’t see how any future budget gaps can be met just by looking for efficiencies.”*

*“If tuition cannot be raised, and more funds are not forthcoming, I believe that the university has no choice but to begin to cut programs.”*

Frustration was expressed with the constraints imposed on the institution’s ability to generate revenue to replace the lost public funding. Numerous suggestions were made to generate revenue from the sale of goods and services to the external community, increased emphasis on donor relations and fundraising, private-public partnerships (e.g. an on-campus hotel), and revisions to the parking fee structure.

The calls for tuition increases have become louder and more insistent. While some participants advocated for the continued freeze on tuition these were in the minority; participants cited the need to replace the lost public funding to maintain the quality of the academic experience. Concern continued to be raised that increase in tuition rates would have a disproportionate impact on access to post-secondary education for some segments of the population. Resources should be allocated to student funding initiatives.

### *The quality of physical and technological infrastructure is damaging the reputation of the university*

Despite ongoing efforts to address the deferred maintenance issue, participants expressed continued concern with the impact of poor quality infrastructure on the ability of the university to provide a safe and clean environment, high quality social, teaching and research spaces, accessible spaces, and an attractive physical environment for prospective students and faculty.

In addition, concern was expressed that the distribution of infrastructure maintenance and renewal was uneven across units. The Henrietta Harvey building was cited several times as being in a critical state of degradation, with significant health and safety concerns.

*“(The state of) the Henrietta Harvey Building... is so bad that recent MUN alumni who I encountered at a conference this past summer were actively recommending grad students to not go to MUN.”*

Concerns were expressed regarding the addition of new buildings and locations to Memorial’s infrastructure at a time when existing structures are in poor condition. Namely, the new Core Sciences building, the Signal Hill campus, and the Johnson GEO Centre.

*“Yet here I am sitting in my office, where there is a leak above my head, ceiling tiles falling me due to water damage, the wall is damaged, and there is a smell of rot. I have to walk through door ways where plastic bladders keep the water off of my head.”*

As in previous years, several respondents recommended improvements to technology infrastructure; specifically, the need to update or replace outdated equipment and software to support online learning, research management and dissemination, administrative efficiency, reduction in energy consumption.

### *The university must commit to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion*

The need for Memorial to address equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the post-secondary setting came up multiple times through in-person and online comments. Some respondents acknowledged the School of Graduate Studies for taking leadership in EDI by engaging the university community in discussion around EDI-related topics in open lunch and learn style sessions. Other comments referenced Memorial’s participation in the Dimensions program, an initiative which aims to address systemic barriers, particularly those experienced by members of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. The federal pilot program will ensure that Memorial’s research is more inclusive. Through the consultation process it became clear that EDI should be a major consideration during the university’s budget decision-making process as guided by the IPC.

*“With the new Dimensions charter, we at Memorial have both an opportunity and an obligation to change the University environment to be more equitable to all. SGS appears to be leading the way in terms of engaging the University community in these discussions. It should become a University-wide priority.”*

### *The university must invest in Faculty Renewal and Employee Wellness*

There was a great deal of focus on faculty and staff wellness, support and job security. Both academic and non-academic employees raised concerns around morale and support, linked directly to the university's current fiscal situation, general tension related to budgeting, and the need for continual efficiency. Respondents recommended a shift in focus towards employee development; including professional development programming, and solutions to address low morale and overall insecurity among all levels of the university.

*“(T)he belt tightening that has been done with regards to staff has negatively affected morale and mental health of existing staff members. A focus should be on mental health and job satisfaction of employees.”*

Participants spoke to the importance of faculty renewal on institutional governance, program development and renewal, academic rigour, and research success.

*“It is critical that we replace ASMs lost to attrition... students need to learn from, and have access to, faculty members with a long-term investment in the future of the University... [and] whose research defines what will be written in the textbooks ten years from now.”*

### *The university community must speak as one voice in advocacy*

Again this year, respondents called for strong leadership to address a gap in external knowledge of the university's internal circumstances. We heard a renewed call for a united approach to urging government and other stakeholders to consider how the university needs to be best supported from a financial perspective, and how this can be achieved. There was a general call to increase public awareness of the university's complex challenges and crisis situation. It was suggested that the university share more success stories and make its research and people even more relevant to the community.

*“The people of the province need to understand what could be lost if Memorial regresses because the government continues to make cuts. We need to make decisions of what will not be here. A plan for fiscal responsibility needs to be shared with the NL citizens.”*

## **Overarching Thoughts**

The consultation process resulted in a number of messages and themes as described above. Overall, the Committee is concerned with the effect that the continued reduction in faculty and staff complements is having on faculty, staff, and students. The entire university community needs to be speaking with one voice regarding the relationship between funding and excellence in post-secondary education. Commitment to organizational efficiency remains important, but it is now clear, after eight years of budget reductions, that ensuring the continued excellence of the institution depends on replacement of lost public funding or tuition revenue increase.