

Memorial University

Budget Consultation 2017-2018

# What We Heard

March 2018

## INTRODUCTION

The Integrated Planning Committee (IPC) was established in 2016 and is responsible for developing a report to the President to support budget planning. IPC is composed of faculty, staff, and students and is chaired by the provost and vice-president (academic). As part of this process, the committee has been gathering input from faculty, staff, and students to inform the university's budget plan for the 2018-2019 budget cycle and beyond.

The purpose of the consultations was to seek input on the principles that should guide Memorial as it seeks to develop a balanced budget, the challenges that we face, and the opportunities that exist for the university in its current fiscal environment. The information gathered through this process is summarized in this document and is intended to provide an overview of the conversations at the sessions and the input received through our online form.

The committee hopes that this consultative approach to budget planning – the first of what will become an annual process – will result in robust conversations that will assist the university in addressing its current fiscal situation and in facilitating longer-term planning.

## HOW WE REACHED OUT

The IPC set out to reach and consult with members from all of Memorial's campuses through a series of consultation sessions and an online feedback form.

### Consultation Sessions

A total of 15 consultation sessions were held at the St. John's Campus, Grenfell Campus, and the Marine Institute, from December 13, 2017 to February 5, 2018. Sessions were led by a facilitator and included faculty and staff in academic units, staff in administrative units, and undergraduate and graduate students. Approximately 650-700 individuals attended and participated in the consultation sessions.

650-700  
participants

### Online Submission Form

An online submission form was open to the university community from January 31 to February 12, 2018 and promoted through *Newsline* and student email. A total of 214 completed responses was received. The majority of responses were from the St. John's campus (86%). Exactly 50% of the respondents were students and the other half faculty and staff.

214  
respondents

## WHAT WE HEARD

Consultations with the university community generated a large number of perspectives, interesting discussions, and useful feedback.

The principles and messages presented below summarize the input received from the university community from the consultation sessions and the online submission form. We received many consistent and recurring views and recommendations from respondent groups. However, we also heard many differing or conflicting perspectives which are also represented in this report.

### Key Principles

The committee sought input about the key principles that should guide the university as it develops its budget for 2018-19. Many of the guiding principles proposed by respondents aligned with the university's vision, mission, and values (distinguished public university, integrity, collegiality, inclusiveness and diversity, accountability, responsibility to place, responsibility to learners). The most frequently mentioned principles included:

*Academic excellence* - Protecting academic mission, quality, and integrity of programs, both undergraduate and graduate.

*Comprehensiveness* – Many participants believe that comprehensiveness was a key-defining characteristic of Memorial that needed to be protected. Some challenged that notion, wondering if the university can be both comprehensive and excellent in light of fiscal circumstances.

*Student experience* – Ensuring that the academic experience and success of our students is paramount in all that we do.

*Access* – Memorial should remain economically, socially, and physically accessible.

*Serving the needs of the province* – As Newfoundland and Labrador's only university, it is important that the university maximize its impact in the province.

*Transparency* – The university should be open and transparent in its deliberations regarding all matters, including the university budget.

*Unity* – The university community should work together towards common goals.

*Respect* – The university must ensure that a diversity of points of view are respected. It is essential that we are open and honest with ourselves about challenges, opportunities, and necessary actions. People may disagree, but discussion must be respectful.

### Key Messages

The issues raised were similar across the campuses and between the student and faculty/staff sessions. However, there were differing views about some issues and also about the actions that the university

should take to address them. It is not possible to make specific reference to all of the comments that were made, but we have attempted to provide a balanced view of the discussions and the input received online. This report presents a summary of what we heard. It does not provide commentary or analysis regarding the input received.

We also heard many additional ideas for cost efficiencies and/or revenue generation worthy of further consideration (for example: cell phone management, payroll frequency, merit pay, environmental sustainability). Some of these items will be forwarded directly to the appropriate individual or unit for review and follow up with the intention of reporting back to IPC regarding feasibility.

During consultations we were also reminded of the importance of Memorial's commitment to indigenization and decolonization, and of the need to acknowledge our role towards reconciliation.

The following pages outline the key messages emerging from the consultations.

### **Administrative and Academic Efficiency**

The need to engrain the search for institutional efficiencies as part of Memorial's operational culture was raised at nearly every session and through online feedback. Better use of technology could decrease costs and improve the productivity of some of Memorial's routine daily processes (e.g., payroll/financial system, paperwork, room bookings). Greater standardization of processes across units, and even campuses, could reduce duplication of effort and increase productivity. Some internal processes were thought to be over-regulated and unnecessarily complex--for example, processes regarding research funding administration, tendering requirements, and expense approvals. The amount of paper that moves through the university on a daily basis was thought to be excessive and unnecessary. It was suggested that the university also take measures to reduce waste and to promote sustainability, such as shutting off the lights during evenings and weekends. Overall, there was a belief that university had "to do better with less".

The size and salary level of administration also came up in most consultation sessions and the online submission form. There were suggestions that Memorial review organizational and salary structures, particularly with regard to senior administration.

We also heard differing views around rethinking and restructuring the way we deliver services and supports at Memorial. Some participants encouraged the university to consider outsourcing some services. Others believe that units are opting to avail themselves of external services, at a higher cost, in order to obtain service at a faster rate even though internal capacity exists. At the same time, there were recommendations to centralize some services and to maintain services in-house in order to achieve cost-savings. Decentralized support services have led to duplication and some think the university can no longer afford it. Others suggested that decentralizing some functions would help Memorial become more responsive in some areas.

Organizational silos across campuses and units and even within units was a recurring comment among faculty and staff. Many administrators, faculty, and staff spoke of the opportunities to increase the sharing of resources such as equipment and expertise across units through formal and informal partnerships.

While most comments were about the need for administrative efficiency, there were suggestions that the university could make more effective use of its academic resources as well. We heard that demand for programs and courses should be evaluated, particularly in areas where there is declining enrolment. Increasing on-line offerings could reduce pressure on infrastructure. Smaller units, such as academic units within faculties, could be amalgamated. Faculty complement levels should be more directly related to enrolment trends. We also heard calls for review of faculty workload practices across the university to ensure the best use of our academic staff.

## **Student Experience**

Ensuring that budgetary impacts on the student experience are minimized was a recurring message in most sessions. We heard that Memorial needs to ensure that students have a positive experience that starts when they are recruited and extends across the student life cycle and beyond. The classroom experience and instructional technology, access to library resources, and help centres were considered key elements in the student experience that the university needs to make a high priority.

Access to funding is also important. Graduate students stressed the need for enhanced fellowships and work opportunities. Undergraduate students spoke to the need for increased opportunities for employment, which included MUCEP jobs and co-op placements. Both groups spoke of the need for enhanced career counselling.

Student wellness is no less of a priority. Students told us about the impact of stress on their academic experience because of existing and potential tuition increases and having to work multiple jobs to afford to come to Memorial. A consistent recommendation was the need for increased student supports, particularly supports for groups such as LGBTQ2S+ students, international students, Indigenous students, students with disabilities, and others. Participants across many sessions stressed the importance of ensuring all students have a positive experience at Memorial, in light of the many barriers that students face today. Specifically, we heard of the growing need for mental health support, the increasing demand for the services of the Blundon Centre, the need for on-campus space dedicated to Indigenous students, the growing demands on the Internationalization Office, and the importance of student help centres.

## **Tuition**

Tuition was raised in every consultation session and through the online submission form with two opposing views emerging. There was widespread support among faculty, staff, and some students for an increase in tuition. Respondents believed that an increase was needed to maintain the quality of the institution, particularly given the current fiscal circumstances facing Memorial. A belief was expressed that many citizens of the province can afford to pay tuition fees that are more in line with Canadian averages. There were also concerns that prospective students associate low tuition rates with low quality in terms of the institution and the academic experience. It was noted that, should tuition be raised, increases should apply to all students to ensure that international students do not bear the brunt of increased fees. The idea of differential fees for professional schools was raised in some of the sessions and online.

Most students that participated in the consultations advocated to maintain or lower tuition levels. They highlighted the impacts of increasing tuition on some students' ability to afford their education, which creates uncertainty and increases stress. This was especially true for international students whose tuition has increased in recent years. Students indicated that low tuition is a big selling point for Memorial and increases would have an impact, particularly on out-of-province and international enrolment.

Students, faculty, and staff all agreed that ensuring access was critical, regardless of economic status, ethnic background, and geographic origin, in keeping with Memorial's special obligation to the province. There were also calls for better student financial support. Some believe the current student loan system is antiquated and ineffective and the government needs to rethink how to best support students who struggle to afford a university education. The idea of a needs-based system was raised during several consultation sessions and through the online submission form.

## **Revenue Generation**

There was general consensus that Memorial needs to become more efficient and actively pursue opportunities to reduce expenditures. However, there are also calls for the university to further diversify its revenue streams. In addition to calls for increased tuition, some specific examples that were mentioned included increasing parking fees, seeking adjustments to existing food service agreements, and charging overhead on research contracts consistently.

The university needs to be more open to innovative ideas and approaches to revenue generation and create an environment where these activities are encouraged, recognized, and rewarded. There were suggestions that Memorial should seek corporate partnerships, funding and in-kind support from private industry, and federal government funding. It was noted that this would need to be done with care to ensure integrity of the institution was not compromised.

## **Infrastructure**

In every consultation session, and across online feedback, university infrastructure was identified as a high priority area. The need to invest heavily and immediately in Memorial's existing facilities, equipment, and technology infrastructure was clearly and repeatedly articulated as critical. The university footprint has continued to grow which has led to increased operating and maintenance costs.

The physical state of the university is a major concern and significant investment is required to address the issues identified. Staff, faculty, and students spoke about holes in the walls, asbestos, leaks, areas that are no longer usable, and concerns with laboratory space and equipment. It was noted that we cannot have students, faculty, or staff working in unsafe environments. Several participants stated that the physical state of the campus has an impact both on our ability to attract students and on our brand.

The need for up-to-date teaching infrastructure and equipment was raised multiple times. Participants stated that the ability to deliver quality academic programs and partake in quality research are dependent on infrastructure. Investment in technology and technical infrastructure was identified as a

priority area and it was suggested that a technology renewal budget be developed. Technology renewal was particularly emphasized at the Marine Institute where programs require training be conducted on equipment that is comparable to what is being used in industry. There were a number of suggestions from students for increased common areas and study spaces.

Despite the growth of Memorial's footprint, there are still space shortages that have resulted in people being required to share or wait for space. There were calls to start making better use of existing space by better rationalizing its allocation. It was suggested that alternative work arrangements could be implemented, such as working from home where feasible. At the same time, there were suggestions that Memorial lease unused space to external sources or potential collaborators, especially in the summer months.

## **Faculty and Staff**

There were many comments, especially from staff, about increased stress brought about by the current fiscal environment and being asked to do more with less. We heard clearly that the university has to ensure it is doing all it can to care for its faculty and staff in terms of physical and mental health and wellness and providing a safe work environment.

Efforts need to be made to ensure that staff are well supported and recognized for their efforts so that morale is maintained in light of successive years of unit budget reductions. It was suggested that an annual staff professional development conference be held to bring people together to share ideas and learn about new ways of doing things.

With regard to faculty, participants thought that the university needed to ensure that it was able to attract and retain new academic staff members. Key issues raised included start-up funding for research, professional development opportunities, laboratory space, and mentorship. Maintaining library resources and ensuring the quality of the academic experience were also raised across sessions and online feedback.

Succession planning was also identified as a priority area. As more people reach retirement age, there is concern that significant knowledge gaps could emerge in the coming years. There were also suggestions that the university look closely at developing incentives to encourage people in the latter stages of their careers to retire or ease into retirement over the course of a couple of years. This would facilitate faculty and staff renewal.

## **Communication/Advocacy**

A consistent message that came out of the sessions and the online feedback is one of concern about the impact that funding reductions are having on Memorial's brand, reputation, and the overall quality of the institution.

Communication emerged as a key issue. While the consultation process was generally appreciated as a good first step, there were a lot of people who believe that the university needs to do more to get its message out to the university community, the general public, and the provincial government. Since its inception, Memorial University has played a transformative role in the province's development and prosperity. This impact continues today, but we heard again and again that our ability to make this impact is diminishing, while at the same time we fail to communicate the importance of the university to the future of the province.

Many expressed hope that the government understands the value of the university to the social and economic well-being of this province, and it is important for Memorial to tell its story more effectively. Across all sessions and the online feedback, people consistently called for the university to more loudly, clearly and effectively demonstrate how essential Memorial is to the province and our collective future and to advocate strongly to the provincial government for improved university funding in order to support and serve our students.

We heard from many respondents that a united front was necessary with faculty, staff, students, and alumni speaking up on behalf of the institution to augment the efforts of senior administration.