

Memorial University

Budget Consultations 2018-19

# WHAT WE HEARD

December 2018

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. As part of this process, the committee has committed to gather input from faculty, staff, and students each year to inform the university's budget planning process.

The IPC launched the budget consultation process in 2017-18, holding a total of 15 consultation sessions at the St. John's Campus, Grenfell Campus, and the Marine Institute, and collected additional responses through an online submission form. The result of that process was a summary document titled "What We Heard" which informed a recommendations report to the President. In October 2018, the IPC published an update on activities undertaken across the University that followed from the recommendations report. The annual consultations will help IPC continue to shape the approach to ensure it is effectively fulfilling its mandate.

The following presents the second annual "What We Heard" document based on the consultation process led by IPC during November 2018.

## What We Did

CONSULTATION SESSIONS	ONLINE SUBMISSION FORM
<p>November 5-19, 2018</p> <p>Attendees: 175 in-person + 28 livestreaming</p> <p>Consultation sessions were held at St. John's Campus (3), Marine Institute (1), and Grenfell Campus (1).</p> <p>Sessions were led by a facilitator and included faculty and staff in academic units, staff in administrative units, and undergraduate and graduate students.</p> <p>One of the sessions held on the St. John's campus was livestreamed and available to all individuals with a MUN login.</p>	<p>November 5-23, 2018</p> <p>Respondents: 68</p> <p>The online submission form was promoted through <i>Newsline</i>, student email, and during in-person consultations.</p> <p>The majority of responses were from the St. John's Campus (79%). The following provides an overview of respondent groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty and instructors 28%</li> <li>• Staff 51%</li> <li>• Students 21%</li> </ul>

The IPC asked 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. In what areas do you feel resources are less required at Memorial?
4. Do you have any concerns with the actions the University is taking in response to the fiscal challenges?

# What We Heard

The consultation process resulted in thoughtful, forward-looking, responses with common themes. Below is a summary of the input received through the in-person consultation sessions and the online submission form. Input from all campuses and from all groups is reflected in the themes below; however, an additional section of the report provides a brief overview of the unique feedback provided from the Marine Institute, Grenfell Campus, and the Labrador Institute. This report summarizes only what we heard. It does not provide commentary or analysis regarding the comments received.

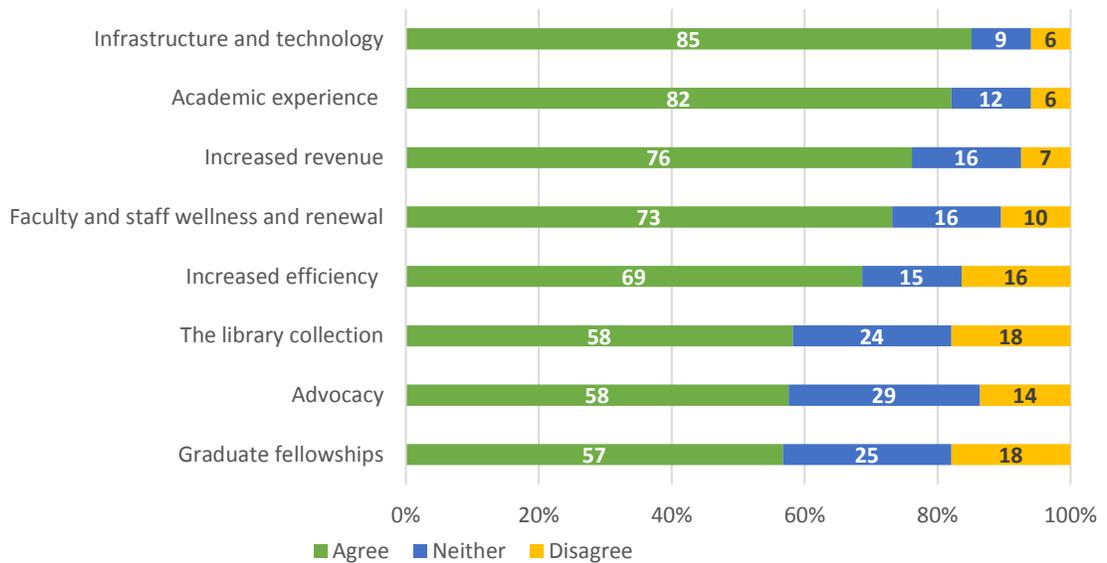
## COMMENT ON 2017-18 PRIORITIES

The 2017-18 consultation process identified the following eight budget priorities areas:

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

Information gathered through the online submission form showed no significant changes in the level of agreement with the priority areas identified in 2017-18. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agree that specific areas should remain budget priority areas. Overall, as shown in the figure below, respondents showed higher levels of agreement for the following: infrastructure and technology, academic experience, and increased revenue. This consensus is reaffirmed through the comments received in-person and online, summarized in the related sections of this report. We also heard continued support for increased efficiency, faculty and staff wellness and renewal, and advocacy, also described in the following section.

### Agreement with previously identified high priority budget areas



## 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.

### 1. Infrastructure and technology

We heard from in-person and online respondents that infrastructure remains a high priority at Memorial. This is evident from the online survey where infrastructure received the highest level of support with 86% of individuals indicating that they agree or strongly agree that it should remain a priority. We heard concerns about the poor condition of some buildings and spaces, ongoing deterioration and repairs; the need to focus on accessibility of spaces; water quality; and the overall aesthetic appeal of the campus. We heard that the sad physical condition of parts of the St. John’s campus detracts from the fact that Memorial is a warm and welcoming University.

Several respondents recommended improvements to technology infrastructure; specifically, the need to update outdated equipment and purchase new equipment and technology. We also received comments recommending a greater focus on sustainability at Memorial through pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure development as well as a suggestion to pursue enhanced transportation options through Metrobus or other transportation organizations.

## **2. Student experience**

Continuous improvement to the student experience at Memorial remains a priority. Suggestions included a particular focus on student retention; the provision of online orientation; the consolidation of Academic and Career Advising so that students have one point of contact; and a review of the model of support for student wellness and counselling services, particularly in light of the increased demand for mental health services.

Student safety was identified as a priority area, particularly in light of recent concerns regarding hate speech on campus. A recommendation was also made to ensure 24/7 access to campus security.

It was also suggested that Memorial review where and how students reach out for help and whether improvements can be made to ensure students have a central place to direct inquiries, whether it is online or in-person. One respondent explained that the CITL Help Desk fields many non-learning inquiries and redirects students to the appropriate support, perhaps because the Help Desk is well staffed and easily accessible to students.

## **3. Academic programming**

The need for Memorial to remain current among global trends in academia was discussed during several consultation sessions. We heard a number of comments in-person and online calling for increased flexibility and nimbleness when it comes to academic program offerings at Memorial. By focusing on the modern-day needs of learners, we can recognize enormous potential in providing more responsive educational offerings using existing capacity, expertise, and talent at Memorial. Suggestions put forward included: alternative program duration (micro-certifications, such as three-week programs); specialized topics; programs that are co-curricular, cross-disciplinary, or interdisciplinary; hybrid courses and programs; as well as moving away from the traditional semester approach. Many respondents recommended an increased focus on online offerings (courses, certificates, and full programs), potentially providing increased benefit to rural, out-of-province, or working students, as well as possibly increasing enrolment. Suggestions were also made to revisit opportunities for life-long learning offerings, expanding program offerings to even more types of learners and bringing added value to our province.

Other comments focused on the need to re-evaluate existing program offerings, particularly based on student-demand and program quality. We also heard of the need to support faculties and programs in designing, developing, and continuously assessing program offerings to ensure quality.

## **4. Research**

A recurring comment during in-person sessions and through the online submission form was the need to identify research as a budget priority area. Respondents emphasized Memorial's strengths in research and the need to continue supporting research excellence. Research success will help to ensure that Memorial continues to attract quality researchers. Several respondents also noted the importance of research supports.

## **5. Tuition and other revenue generation**

We heard a number of comments regarding tuition, particularly through the online submission form. A few respondents noted that tuition should be decreased, free, or equal for all students. However, as we heard during consultations last year, the resounding theme continues to be the need to end the tuition freeze.

We heard concerns that the University has reached a point where significant revenue is required in order to maintain infrastructure and academic programming. Some respondents expressed that Memorial must reduce its financial dependence on the provincial grant. As one respondent noted, Memorial can raise tuition and continue to be one of the most affordable universities in Canada while improving the overall educational and campus experience. At the least, it was noted that Memorial should raise tuition to account for inflation. Another respondent suggested that tuition for some professional programs should be informed by the increased earnings potential of graduates from those programs. We heard clearly that Memorial must ensure that government recognizes the impacts the tuition freeze is having on the quality of academic experience at Memorial. There were also concerns that developing a reputation for being a “cheap” or “budget” university has negative implications for recruitment and may damage the future and the reputation of Memorial.

Aside from tuition, it was suggested that Memorial seek and establish additional or new sources of revenue to account for reduced government funding. Some suggested a greater focus on large-scale fundraising efforts through the University Office of Development, as well as sustained endowments to support operational projects or infrastructure and technology. We heard of the need to foster an entrepreneurial approach to focus on external donors to fund specific projects throughout faculties and departments, much like the Marine Institute has realized over the years through industry partnerships. A respondent also suggested that employees be offered the option of redirecting a portion of their salary to support the creation of other staff positions.

## **6. Faculty, instructors, and staff**

We received numerous comments in regards to the ongoing commitment and support for faculty members, per course instructors, and staff. Faculty expressed particular concern with faculty renewal and the need to ensure quality teaching and research. The Voluntary Retirement Program has resulted in an increased number of vacancies, critically impacting the delivery of some programs. Respondents urged for the renewal of faculty positions, particularly within programs and departments that may lose a large proportion of positions required to maintain programs. Other comments also suggested the need to ensure equal faculty workloads across the University and the importance of providing competitive faculty compensation packages in order to continue attracting high quality faculty.

Concerns were raised regarding the precarious nature of employment for per course instructors who are hired at lower salary levels than instructors at other institutions in Canada, and lack long-term job security. However, they play a critical role in ensuring the delivery of quality programs. Several respondents called for improved terms of employment for instructors.

A focus on staff support was consistently identified as a priority. Both academic and administrative staff noted that the cumulative budget cuts have placed strains on workload. Several respondents spoke of tension, low morale, and concerns regarding staff retention. Staff also expressed particular concern with the lack of professional learning opportunities as well as the elimination of the funding program to cover non-credit course registration. In the absence of ongoing professional learning opportunities or training, it is challenging for staff to remain current, or to be leaders in their field, thereby undermining efforts to serve students. Respondents urged the University to consider ways to demonstrate support for staff, particularly regarding continuing professional development.

## **7. Administrative and academic efficiencies**

In light of the number of comments we received last year and the number of changes that have since been implemented, as identified in the October 2018 [Update Report](#), the message we heard during recent consultations was that the focus on administrative efficiencies should continue. Specifically, administrative processes should be reviewed continually to eliminate unnecessary red tape, identify whether processes can be improved, and to consider the best practices of other post-secondary institutions. Suggestions included the review of course registration processes (Memorial requires students to register prior to each semester whereas other universities have one registration period for all semesters) and travel claim approval requirements (the number of people required to review and approve each claim).

A recurring suggestion was to incentivize efficiencies, particularly to encourage front-line employees to review processes and identify innovations or improvements based on their day-to-day, first-hand experience. We consistently heard of the need to increase collaboration among units as many continue to operate in silos. Respondents noted that opportunities exist to further align processes and reduce duplication through productive synergies. We also heard calls for the need to review the number and salary levels of administrative positions, particularly those of senior administrators.

Specific to academic efficiencies, we received a few comments suggesting that the University should explore the consolidation of some units.

## **8. Indigenization**

There was a general consensus that indigenization must be a priority at Memorial. The University is currently in the process of developing an indigenization strategy, through widespread consultations, to be finalized in fall 2019.

We heard of the importance, not only of resourcing the indigenization strategy but also of:

- Memorial's role in renewing and strengthening relationships with Indigenous people in the territory in which they are located
- Building on Memorial's special obligation to the program by developing Indigenous studies or programs
- The need for more Indigenous people at Memorial, such as students, faculty, or elders in residence

- The need for increased support for Indigenous outreach and support, such as the construction of the Aboriginal House

## **9. Advocacy**

We heard of the need for strong leadership, increased lobbying, and a united front to place increased pressure on government to effectively support post-secondary education in the province. We heard continued support for increased and ongoing advocacy. Comments focused on the need to communicate to the provincial government Memorial's real and significant challenges as a result of decreased funding. Respondents noted that they did not think government truly understands the real impacts that reduced funding are having on the University. Although some respondents did not anticipate that former funding levels would be reinstated by government, the overall message we heard was that the government simply cannot cut funding to Memorial any further than it already has without recognizing the significant impacts on teaching and research, and certainly without allowing us to increase revenue.

We heard that more must be done to protect Memorial's reputation and image. The University should invest in increased public awareness regarding Memorial's contributions to the province and our role in the province as a leader, particularly in academic and research excellence, and in bringing economic value to Newfoundland and Labrador.

## **10. Sustainability**

We heard some comments calling for greater focus on sustainability and the implementation of environmentally-focused changes (eliminating the wristband entrance system at The Works; eliminating single-use plastics at food vendors, dining hall, and campus events; compost receptacles, etc.). Many respondents suggested increases to parking fees, not only to offset the use of green space and encourage alternative modes of transportation, but also to cover the cost of maintenance for parking spaces.

## **KEY MESSAGES BY CAMPUS/LOCATION**

It is also important to note that some key messages were specific to Memorial's campuses and locations. Through in-person and online responses, it became evident that the uniqueness of campuses and locations should be captured separately to reflect these differences.

### **Marine Institute**

Through the comments received specific to the Marine Institute (MI) it was evident that the campus has been impacted differently by the provincial fiscal challenges. Not only has MI experienced budget cuts like the ones at Memorial's other campuses but the campus has also felt the impact of a \$4-5 million decrease in industry funding.

One of the greatest challenges noted by respondents on campus has been the need to focus on retrenchment in response to multi-year budget cuts while trying to respond to significant opportunities drawing on our expertise and capacity. Such opportunities include the Ocean Supercluster, Ocean Frontier Institute, partnerships with Nunavut regarding the Arctic region, and international program opportunities. Ongoing budget cuts have afforded limited opportunities for strategic growth.

A particular priority on campus continues to be technical infrastructure including IT infrastructure, equipment, and technology renewal. We heard the importance of providing students with up-to-date technical training, which includes the need for proper equipment, to ensure they remain competitive in the field in meeting industry standards.

MI has also focused on academic and enrolment planning in light of decreased funding. Increased enrolment at MI has meant increased resource needs (more technology requirements, space, instructors, parking, graduate fellowships, etc.) in the absence of increased funding. The campus is facing the imperative to identify the optimal point where enrolment and resources are balanced while ensuring quality education and programs. Enrolment planning will be particularly important as the campus moves forward in identifying enrolment targets to support overall resource planning.

We also heard that MI has recently concentrated on reimagining programs, rather than simply cutting programs. The campus has concentrated on student, market, and industry needs and, as a result, made significant adjustments to programs. Other programs, despite their historical success, have been cut completely. MI continues to review programs, with a particular focus on student demand.

It was recommended that other campuses, faculties, and units at Memorial place increased focus on an approach like the one MI has taken in the absence of funding; that is, seeking external donors to support programs as well as technical and infrastructure needs, even in the form of donated equipment.

## **Grenfell Campus**

Comments received from the Grenfell Campus generally echoed the key messages heard across all campuses. Respondents noted that research excellence and recruitment should be identified as emerging priorities; and infrastructure remains a key priority. There must be a continued focus on wellness (for faculty, staff, and students), particularly during challenging fiscal times.

We heard that increased online offerings (for example, an online MBA) would benefit Grenfell students in particular and may increase enrolment as some students have obtained online degrees from elsewhere in order to remain in the area. Currently only the Business program and Tourism Studies offer online courses.

We also heard questioning of the need to maintain the tuition freeze and the extent to which tuition would need to increase in order to improve the current fiscal situation at Memorial. It was noted that perhaps public perception has been that Memorial has been able to absorb recent budget cuts without significant difficulty. It was suggested that communications to the public

should demonstrate the real challenges facing Memorial (the true extent of infrastructure and deferred maintenance challenges, as well as the fact that academic programs are closing).

## Labrador Institute

Comments received from the Labrador Institute stressed that the University must maintain its commitment to the site to develop a campus in the region, complete with programs available to students of Labrador as well as others interested in studying in Labrador.

A Memorial location in Labrador presents many benefits to the University, including opportunities for research; however, we heard that little benefit has been returned to the region. A respondent expressed the concern that Memorial's reputation with the people of Labrador is at stake as citizens hold the belief that the University has not met its commitment to that region of the province.

## OVERARCHING THOUGHTS

The consultation process resulted in a number of messages and themes as described above. However, we also received a number of comments regarding Memorial's overall approach to fiscal challenges. A recurring theme was that the *status quo* is no longer sustainable, given the sustained cuts to the operating budget since 2012. It was recognized that budgets simply cannot be cut further. Staff and units are facing real challenges and stress, with levels of services and supports anticipated to be compromised. Moreover, respondents expressed concern with Memorial's ability to showcase our excellence when significant efforts are directed towards budget cuts.

We also heard during several in-person sessions that an alternative approach may be needed to help the University move forward towards the difficult questions and answers regarding the future of Memorial and what it should look like in five, ten, or fifteen years. Several respondents suggested the need for a higher-level visioning process. Specifically, a suggestion was made to hold a moderated event, open to the public, in order to engage all stakeholders. Other respondents suggested an exercise to better identify the link between short-term and long-term objectives so that the budget planning process is more strategic (linking decisions regarding infrastructure, academic programming, etc. to enrolment and university planning).

## EMERGING PRIORITIES

The IPC aims to continuously reassess the budget priority areas at Memorial through the consultation process. This year it was evident from the comments we received that, in addition to existing priorities, several new areas emerged: **indigenization, academic programming that is more flexible and responsive, and research.**