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Concordia president provides update on VDP and budget compressions

Alan Shepard calls on Concordians to be united as university faces challenging fiscal environment

Dear colleagues,

I am writing to provide you with an update on the Voluntary Departure Program (VDP) and the budget compressions at Concordia that have been necessary because of reductions in our government funding.

Voluntary Departure Program

Deciding to leave the university or to retire is a major life decision. I would like to thank the 90 employees who submitted an application to the VDP. I also want to acknowledge those who took the time to consider the program, but decided this was not the right option or time for them.

On November 26, the university community will be recognizing and celebrating the contributions of our colleagues who have opted to participate in the Voluntary Departure Program.

At Concordia, we have nearly 2,000 members of our administrative, professional and support staff who will continue to make an enormous difference in the life of the university and the education of our students. I would also like to thank all of you for the work you do to advance our mission every day.

Budget compressions

There's no question that Concordia and all universities are operating in a tough environment in terms of resources. I continue to be amazed by the quality of the education, research and services that we offer.

But there's no question that the cuts over the past two years make our efforts much more difficult.

Just to recap: In December 2012, we learned that the government would reduce our operating budget by \$13.2 million. Initially this was expected to be a one-time-only event, but then it was made permanent.

In the summer of 2014, we learned that the government would reduce our operating budget by an additional \$13 million, and would not allow the \$2.7 million deficit we had planned, which meant reducing our budget by another \$15.7 million.

Last week the government announced a further round of cuts. For us, we expect this to be about \$1.5 million, in addition to the \$15.7 million we were required to cut from our original 2014-15 operating budget.

It is, of course, a difficult environment for the government generally, and compressions have been announced across the public sector. It's my understanding that our sector has had fewer across-the-board cuts than other sectors.

Nevertheless, we are reaching a level of compressions that threatens the vitality of our university.

I have shared my serious concerns with several high-ranking government officials many times.

Especially I have warned that the repeated and cumulative financial constraints we are facing, if maintained in the future, will affect our capacity to sustain quality education and research. These are great strengths of Concordia University, and these strengths matter to the future of our community as well as to Montreal, Quebec and the world.

Next steps

We have already reduced our expenses for such items as desktop computers as well as the CFO's contingency fund, and we will continue to make adjustments to various funds in the coming weeks to meet the mandated reductions.

Beyond the Voluntary Departure Program, we are temporarily putting a number of vacant positions on hold while we assess our next steps.

Following on the Voluntary Departure Program, we had planned to hire a modest number of staff in key positions, and those decisions will be announced in the coming weeks.

During the fall semester, Provost Benoit-Antoine Bacon and CFO Patrick Kelley made 14 budget presentations to the community, outlining how we intended to respond to these compressions. I appreciate their leadership on these difficult dossiers. If you attended one of these sessions, thank you for your engagement.

With my colleagues at other Quebec institutions, I will continue to press for adequate and stable funding for Concordia and the university sector.

Thank you

At Concordia, we have developed great resilience across many decades. We will be stronger if we stay united and resourceful, nimble and creative.

We have a noble mission, to be pursued even in difficult circumstances. I would like to express my gratitude for your ongoing dedication to Concordia.

Alan Shepard
President