

## A Message from USFA Chair Doug Chivers

*Dear Members:*

*There is much discussion with respect to opinions being expressed about TransformUS and the action, or inaction, of the USFA. Based on the many emails I have been receiving from members, I think it is clear that there are a few misconceptions.*

*First let me say that the Board of Governors and Senior Administrators can mandate any scheme for reviewing programs they choose. Over the years we have seen many. All have been controversial.*

*When it comes to the current scheme, TransformUS, the USFA Executive is actively supporting members in their role to participate in the dialogue and decision-making associated with the process. Provincial legislation puts academic matters under the auspices of University Council and Council under the auspices of the General Academic Assembly. With the exception of a handful of academic administrators, a few representatives from federated or affiliated colleges and student representatives, both of these bodies are comprised of academic employees of the U of S – you.*

*It is the role of University Council to make decisions about the academic directions of the U of S. Council determines whether or not schemes such as TransformUS are academically sound and, regardless of process, it is the role of Council to decide whether or not academic programs are discontinued, for any reason whether it be academic or financial.*

*The Executive has made a very conscious decision to separate Council issues from collective bargaining issues. In fact, just last month I wrote to the President and Provost chastising them for not ensuring that their representatives do the same.*

**Would you like a representative from the USFA to attend your department or college meeting to discuss the USFA role and what you can do?**

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*The USFA position to separate council and bargaining issues is consistent with the way we dealt with issues in College of Medicine last year. We deliberately did not step in and make pronouncements about the College of Medicine restructuring plan. This is the job of faculty. Our job was to support the efforts of faculty through an education campaign to engage our members and get them to understand the role of University Council and the General Academic Assembly.*

*The dialogue around TransformUS is important but this dialogue should not be routed through the USFA. If it is, then it*

will be considered as just another bit of USFA propaganda and thereby more easily dismissed by Senior Administrators and others. Now more than ever, those of us involved in delivering academic programs need to pose questions and offer perspectives in order for informed decisions to be made. There needs to be freedom of discussion and the ability to offer dissenting opinions and criticisms.

Whether it takes the form of speaking at University Council, providing feedback in response to task force reports or an open letter, we should not be afraid to voice our opinions and express our concerns about TransformUS. Academic Freedom is a fundamental principle protected by Article 6 in our Collective Agreement. It states that all USFA members, “whether tenured or not and regardless of prescribed doctrine, are entitled to the exercise of their rights as citizens and to freedom in carrying out research and in publishing its results, freedom of discussion, freedom to teach the subject assigned in classes, freedom to criticize the University and the Association without suffering censorship or discipline.”

The USFA Executive is committed to upholding the rights of members to exercise their academic freedom, including their right to participate fully in collegial decision-making, and any statements to the contrary are simply false.

It is the role of the USFA to enforce our Collective Agreement and support our members in exercising their academic freedom and collegial responsibility. We have had a large presence in TransformUS by encouraging our membership to become educated and involved in the decision-making processes of Council and debunking the need to have Council eliminate academic programs because of a financial crisis. We remain of the view that it is highly unlikely that there will be a deficit at the U of S to the tune of \$44.5 million in 2015-16, because the assumptions on which the deficit is based no longer hold true.

In keeping with my promise to provide members with updated financial information, I need to correct a mistake in our December 19 issue of Collectively Speaking. In that issue we incorrectly stated that “The 2012-13 Operating Budget outcome appears to show a \$2.4 million surplus and not the projected \$6.0 million deficit included in the 2012-13 Operating Budget Summary.” In discussions with the VP Finance and Resources and AVP Financial Services to better understand the available financial information and the structural deficit, we have learned that the Operating Budget surplus for 2012-13 was in fact \$13 million.

TransformUS is predicated on assumptions that lead to a \$44.5 million deficit by 2015-16. So, why isn't anyone talking about the budget?

The Executive is deeply concerned about the financial crisis announced by senior administrators and the Board. There is a very common strategy being used to effect managerial change in public institutions right across North America, if not the world. Using the framework of austerity, institutions announce large structural deficits which produce fear and anxiety amongst those within the institution with the intention of softening resistance to organizational change. As a consequence, management can impose significant institutional redirection with little, if any, resistance or challenge. All this is done when in fact the so called financial crisis is constructed from choices about future spending rather than

*a lack of resources to continue the funding of ongoing activities. It is a deliberate management strategy borrowed from the corporate world in order to allow management to control the agenda. This approach is simply unnecessary and unacceptable within a University environment.*

*Is the structural deficit announced by the University Saskatchewan any different than those being used elsewhere to achieve organizational change? So far, the Executive does not think so. To date, we remain unconvinced that the structural deficit is anything more than a convenient manner for senior administrators and the Board to wrestle the academic agenda of the institution away from faculty and University Council. I want to highlight this point again and outline how the institution arrived at the structural deficit.*

*When the budget for the third integrated plan was developed, senior administrators made some assumptions about government funding for the period 12/13 through 15/16. They assumed that increases to the base operating budget from the provincial government would be 5.8% for 12/13, 4.5% for 13/14, 4% for 14/15 and 4% for 15/16. In total, they assumed that increases to the base operating grant received from the provincial government over the 4 year period would be over 20% compounded.*

*Based on those assumptions, senior administrators developed an equally generous budget with several new initiatives involving a significant amount of base budget (permanent) funds to support those initiatives (e.g., academic priorities fund of \$10-12 million per year, student related enhancements of \$10-13 million per year and capital renewal at \$5 million per year). The proposed budget for the 3rd integrated plan is very aggressive especially in its target to place millions of base budget dollars in the hands of PCIP to presumably invest in integrated planning and the accelerated research agenda of the institution.*

*Just prior to the budget request to the provincial government by the University for 12/13, senior administrators learned that they could expect at most a 2% increase to the operating budget per year over the entire period of the 3rd integrated plan. The difference between the actual government funding versus the funding assumed by the multi-year operating budget for the 3rd integrated plan produces a \$44.5 million structural deficit in the operating budget by 15/16. In other words, the financial crisis results from the fact that the unrealistic assumptions of government funding over the 3rd integrated plan cycle are not going to happen. And, instead of going back and revising the multi-year budget and its generous allocations to new initiatives to fit the financial reality of government funding, senior administrators and the Board are content to claim a projected structural deficit and work towards significant reductions in the salary and benefits budgets to support their new initiatives! You should not accept a strategy to eliminate the jobs of long term employees and quickly eliminate academic programs on the basis of the multi-year budget.*

*Notwithstanding these points, the Executive has undertaken the task to understand the financial situation of the institution by consulting with forensic accountants and meeting with senior administrators. What is very clear, so far, is that the budget of the institution contains many choices about spending. We believes that these choices are unnecessary, and that other choices could reduce or eliminate any*

*need for job loss or the closure of academic programs. We will continue to meet with senior administrators in order to better understand the financial situation of the institution, but to date, we can see no reason for involuntary job loss or the elimination of academic programs as a solution to the finances of the University.*

*The University is an ever-changing place and there may be good reasons for Council to consider eliminating academic programs for sound academic reasons. However, based on my understanding of the financial situation at the U of S, there is no reason to eliminate programs on the basis of a financial crisis at this time.*

*The way to change the outcome of TransformUS is for faculty to stand up and exercise their collegial governance rights and to have the USFA stand up and say the premise of TransformUS, the closure of programs because of a financial crisis, is wrong. We have done the latter and we will continue to do so. If you have done the former, keep it up. If you have not, now is the time for you to become engaged and express your opinions, whatever they happen to be.*

*In solidarity,*

**Doug**

*Doug Chivers,  
Rawson Professor of Biology  
USFA Chair*

**University Council meets monthly at 2:30 p.m. in Room 241 Arts (Neatby-Timlin Theatre). Anyone may attend Council and you do not have to be a member of Council to speak.**

**Upcoming meetings are scheduled for:**

**February 27**

**March 20**

**April 17**

**May 22**

**June 19**

**The annual meeting of the General Academic Assembly will take place on April 9, 2014 at Noon in Convocation Hall**

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