

Demanding more from Senior Leaders (Who Are Always Demanding More From Us)

Maggie FitzGerald, Associate Professor

Department of Political Studies

At University Council on Thursday, March 19, 2026, I made the request that senior leaders begin explaining and justifying their decisions, especially around budgetary allocation. This is the lightly edited 'speech' that I prepared and read at Council – please bear with the colloquial tone:

Hello everyone, Maggie FitzGerald, Political Studies and General Member. I wanted to make a comment – or actually a request, picking up on what Nadeem [Jamali, Department of Computer Science and Member of University Council] said at our last [University Council] meeting:

Faculty do not see a financial crisis, we see decisions.

This does not mean that we don't understand that we are operating in a context of scarce resources. Indeed, public institutions are always operating in such a context, and while sometimes resources are more scarce or less so, the fact of scarcity – the fact that there is not enough money for everything – is neither new nor a crisis.

It is, instead, the context in which every public institution operates. And within that context, as Nadeem said so beautifully last time, decisions are made about how to allocate those resources, scarce though they may be. Decisions like using funds to hire a third party firm to conduct a (poorly designed) survey of faculty and staff rather than using those same funds to hire and train graduate students to do that work in house. Decisions like having (by my last count) an associate vice provost and nine associate vice presidents and yet not having enough custodial staff to empty the garbage and keep our workspaces liveable. Decisions like having enough funds for food at university council meetings or money for regular breakfast meetings instead of having chalk in our classrooms.

All leaders must make these types of decisions – that is inherent to the job. And as Nadeem said last week, we know those decisions are difficult. But good leaders explain their decisions. And explaining your decision does not mean pointing to the context. We already know the decision is being made in a situation of fiscal constraint. That is not the same thing as explaining why you made that decision within that context. It also does not mean holding a financial town hall a few times a year – this task is important, but it is something different.

Explaining your decision means acknowledging the stakes of the decision and clearly articulating and justifying the good to be found in it, and doing this in an ongoing way, in real time, as you make and implement those decisions. So, this would look something like,

“We know that our decision to change garbage management means that faculty and staff now have to use work time to do this; we know your time is already overstretched, and we estimate a loss of X productivity hours a year because of this change. However, this decision allowed us to save X number of dollars a year, even accounting for buying all of the new garbage bins, which themselves cost X amount of dollars. Ultimately, we made this decision so that we can reallocate the saved money to hire a faculty for a unit that would otherwise have not been able to maintain its programming, or to service a deficit”, or whatever.

Acknowledge the cost, explain the good, justify the decision, and do this in a timeframe that corresponds to the implementation of the decision.

There are only two real reasons that leadership in an institution like this would not want to explain their decision to their people.

The first is because they can’t.

They do not in fact understand why they are making these decisions; they are throwing darts in the dark, chasing buzzwords, playing follow the leader with other U15 universities, and so they just simply are unable to justify. This is also called incompetence.

The second reason is that while they do have a rationale for the decision, they do not believe it will stand scrutiny. They know it will not be justifiable within the mandate of the university and so they do not wish to expose themselves.

This is making decisions in bad faith – this is mismanagement.

I do not wish to believe that our senior leaders are making decisions that are either incompetent or in bad faith. However, I also have no evidence to the contrary, as no senior leader has ever actually explained and justified a decision involving budget allocation to me. Yet my colleagues and I must always live and work with the consequences of those decisions.

So that brings me to my request.

Please, senior leaders, start actually explaining and justifying your budgetary decisions, and do it in an ongoing way that aligns with implementing those decisions. Acknowledge the costs, account for the good in the decision, and do it in real time.

Thank you.

I have received a slew of feedback from colleagues about this commentary – some negative, but most supportive, including numerous people who encouraged me to submit my ‘speech’ to VOX for further dissemination.

Thank you to everyone who engaged with me; self-governance is about us doing this type of critical dialoging time and time again as we strive to execute our mandate of teaching and researching.

Although I generally wish to let what I said stand on its own, I have one brief addition. We have just been informed that as of May 2026, we will also all be individually responsible for picking up our students’ AES tests and exams from the Williams Building. Evidently, this trend of inefficient and unexplained decision-making continues to escalate.

While this trend is disturbing on many fronts – including the ways in which many of these decisions involve telling faculty to do work that, in fact, falls within the purview of other unions (e.g., waste management) – I think what is most worrying is that it reveals that senior leadership has forgotten that this uni-

versity does not, and cannot, run without faculty doing our actual jobs. And our actual work is teaching, researching, and administrating.

Clearly, these decisions impact our teaching and researching (that is a subject for another VOX article).

For now, I will focus instead on administration, for I suspect this is how senior leaders conceive of this endless downloading of work, i.e., they are just adding another task for us to carry out as part of our administrative duties.

Importantly, however, the 'administrative' part of our work is a very particular type of administration. It is, first and foremost, occupying the various self-governance committees that conduct the business of the university, such as Faculty Councils, University Council, and Academic Program Committees.

I wonder what will happen when – after being buried with delivery work, waste management, and the endless nightmare of navigating systems like ConnectionPoint and Concur – the important work of these committees comes to a standstill. I wonder what will happen when these key administrative tasks are no longer completed, as faculty no longer have the time, nor the capacity, to populate those committees. What will happen when graduation lists, for instance, are not approved by Faculty Council, because quorum is not achieved at these meetings? What happens if no policy changes are approved, no review committees meet to conduct salary review and tenure and promotion processes, and no academic programs are updated because there are no faculty to administrate these crucial tasks? Or, what happens when faculty increasingly take short- or long-term leaves to due to physical and mental well-being illnesses catalyzed by overwork?

While senior leadership ignores the reality that the university simply does not run without us doing our actual jobs, we cannot afford to do so. Must this campus come to a halt to make the point?

By way of conclusion, I invite you all to ask our senior leaders to start explaining and justifying their decisions. Submitting questions to University Council is a wonderful avenue for this. If you are uncomfortable doing so, for whatever reason, I would happily ask on your behalf. Please do not hesitate to reach out.

It is time we demand more of our senior leaders. They certainly have no problem demanding more, and more, and more of us.

VOX is published periodically on demand as a forum for the expression of opinions of members of the USFA on topics of interest to the membership. Submissions to be considered for publication may be sent to the USFA office or usfa@usaskfaculty.ca to the attention of **VOX**.

Articles should be about 1000 words. Letters to the Editor, commenting on previous articles, should not exceed 200 words. The Editor reserves the right to determine the suitability of all articles and letters for publication in **VOX**.

All opinions expressed in **VOX** are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the position of the USFA or the Editor. All articles and letters remain the property of the authors, and permission to reprint them should be obtained directly from them.