

WLU F A D V O C A T E

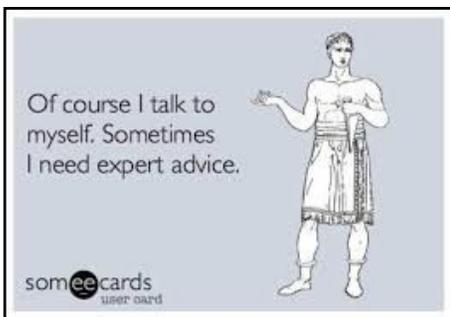
Building community through dialogue, discussion, and debate.

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The President's Open Letter: A Dramatic Monologue in Sixteen Parts

"The scientific mind does not so much provide the answers as ask the right questions."

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Mythologiques* (1990)



President Max Blouw organizes his Open Letter to the Laurier Community as a Q & A. This approach allows the President to create the illusion of his being in an open "dialogue" with critics of the Administration's financial management (whose voices presumably supply the questions). Meaningful, substantive, dialogue, however, is clearly not the President's intent. Not only do the answers provided tend to obfuscate rather than clarify, but the questions themselves often miss the mark. Only when the Administration provides clear and direct answers to some of the following questions, can it truly claim to be talking with – not at – its critics.

The Money Questions:

The President points to the structural deficit that he says "has existed for years," but . . .

Where did that deficit come from? Enrolment has only just begun to fall, while tuition and BIU funding have been steadily growing in the past years. And since faculty growth has not kept up with student enrolment growth, who or what precisely is responsible for this deficit? Who made the spending decisions to put us in deficit?

The President emphasizes that certain provincial money is earmarked for capital spending, but . . .

Have any of Laurier's revenues from tuition and BIUs gone toward renovations and new buildings? If so, how much? And was the decision to do this made with careful consideration of Laurier's Academic Mission? How does spending on buildings and renovations instead of putting money into keeping class sizes small, expanding the ranks of permanent faculty to teach students, and ensuring adequate staffing of programs and departments help fulfill Laurier's Academic Mission?

The President says Laurier "has been able to maintain expenditures below the provincial average," but . . .

How are those expenditures divided between meeting frontline student

services and funding upper management positions? The President offers percentage growth of the *number* of management, staff and faculty positions, but what is the percentage growth of the *cost* of those positions? Similarly, total expenditures may be below provincial averages, but is the *increase* in total expenditures *also* below provincial averages? How does the growth in these costs shift the ratio of spending on management, staff and faculty?

The President insists that "CAS members are a highly valued and integral part" of Laurier, but . . .

Will the Administration acknowledge that the University's growing reliance on the precarious conditions in which Contract Faculty work is a huge social and ethical problem? Will it acknowledge that these precariously-employed professors have played a central role in allowing Laurier to continue to grow and service its students for the last decade? Will it advocate for higher pay and more job security for CAS in the next round of bargaining? Will it, in other words, use the Collective Bargaining period next year *to lead the province* in

addressing this system-wide scourge? Will it put its money where its mouth is?

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place”.

George Bernard Shaw

The Enrolment Questions:

The President points to demographic factors and changes in student preferences to explain falling Arts enrolment, but . . .

Why is the Administration only acting now to address demographic changes that it has known for years were on the horizon? What did it do to plan for it? How has its recruitment strategies shifted? Why wasn't it on top of shifting student preferences and putting plans in place to *support* departments in an effort to change and take advantage of these

shifting preferences? Why, instead, did it insist on cutting back courses, laying people off and, in effect, limiting the ability for programs in the Faculty of Arts to become more competitive?

The President notes that student enrolment in Business and Science has been growing, while enrolment in Arts is falling, but . . .

Does the Administration acknowledge that Laurier is still primarily an “arts” university filled primarily with tuition-paying arts students? Have the reductions in Arts funding been proportional to the shift of students from Arts to these other faculties? Have the cutbacks and layoffs accounted for the tremendous service teaching Arts programs and departments take on so Business and Science students can complete their degrees?

The President suggests that a new campus in Milton (“the only census region in Ontario that will see steady growth in the university-aged demographic”) is necessary to sustain en-

rolment numbers, but . . .

What evidence does the University have that potential Milton students would not otherwise attend one of Laurier's other campuses? Imagine that instead of spending untold figures (that's another unanswered question, how much *has* it spent?) on promoting a Laurier campus in Milton, the Administration focused on the following three priorities: strengthening and expanding Laurier's offerings on existing campuses, lobbying for an effective public transportation link between the 905 region and Laurier communities, and intensive marketing to recruit Milton-area students. Wouldn't that ultimately be more ecological and far more inexpensive for the University and the province? And wouldn't the Administration have enjoyed greater support from Faculty, staff and students because of it?

The above questions represent only the beginnings of what we, as faculty members here at Laurier, hope to have answered as we move into the upcoming months. As WLUFAs begins to negotiate the terms of a third-party review of the University's finances, we want to know what questions you, our Members, want answered. Please send your questions about this and about the Open Letter to Larissa at lbrocklebank@wlu.ca. We will post them on our [Members' Comments](#) page and use them as a resource as we move into the financial review.

“Ask the right questions if you're to find the right answers.”

Vanessa Redgrave, [Interview with Wallace Shawn, 1997](#)

For other questions and some of our answers about the ways in which the Open Letter skews the implications of data on Faculty salaries, see the WLUFAs Advocate supplement, [Fact Check: Are Fulltime Faculty Salaries the Problem?](#).