

# WLU FADVO CATE

Building community through dialogue, discussion, and debate.

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## Divide and Conquer - The Unmaking of a University



Look at almost every piece of promotional material for our university and you'll see the same word used over and over again – *community*. It's in our Statement of ["Values, Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles."](#) It's on the promotional ["Why Choose Laurier"](#) page of our website. It's in [youtube videos](#) that promote the university to prospective students. The President even used the idea of WLU's spirit of community [to defend our reputation as a "party school."](#) The idea of an intimate Laurier "community" – the *meme* of it – is so pervasive in our university history that most of us have tended to believe in its truth, and have worked towards fostering and promoting it.

And it's the strength of this idea that likely explains the repeated use of words like "betrayal" and "broken trust" at last week's meeting of the University Faculty Council (UFC). The evidence of our crumbling community has been made visible and tangible to us, through the newly-emptied spaces in our departments and buildings. How very far away from "close-knit" we've become.

Yet, while the Administration eagerly embraces the "community" brand, its management-by-stress approach has mostly sown seeds of division.

From the first moments of Dr. Blouw's presidency, Faculty have been pushed to innovate in a bid for more students – to scurry willy-nilly to keep up with what seem to be ever-changing expectations, a revolving door of programs to meet "current demands" and "now you see it, now you don't" funding. Many departments have been encouraged to expand their graduate programs even though the resources to ensure their health are simply not available. Meanwhile, untold dollars have been poured into ventures that have yet to yield WLU any return: the possibility of a medical school and a giant stretch of dirt called "the Milton Campus," to name just a couple.

***Faculty have been paying the price of a management-by-stress Administration, which does more to break, than make, community.***

All this came to a head in the [IPRM](#) process. Among other things, IPRM managed to officially place the "problem" of a small university stretched to its limits at the feet of the departments and programs that have only ever tried to just keep up with the changes this Administration has demanded. And when Faculty pointed to the non-collegial (and faulty) mechanisms directing the IPRM, and raised cautionary notes about how divisive the budget model that IPRM has instituted is, they were first ignored, and then admonished for being – you guessed it – divisive.

The divide and conquer strategy must be working, however. For now the divisions are real enough that Dr. Blouw feels confi-

dent to use them to his advantage. As Faculty at the UFC pointed out, the President's [Open Letter](#) to the Laurier Community identifies Arts as the problem child, suggesting that the shortfall in students at Laurier stems (at least in part) from a failure of Arts to innovate (like Brantford). This is hardly community-building rhetoric.

Dr. Blouw's Administration set out to "Envision Laurier." If its "vision" was to chip away at the spirit of collegiality smaller universities can foster, it has succeeded. It's sett faculties and programs against each other in a war over financial table-scraps. But, as Faculty and staff here at Laurier, we know administrations come and go. We are, and will continue to be, Laurier. In the coming months, we hope to remind a few people about that.



Please send your questions or comments to Larissa at [lbrocklebank@wlu.ca](mailto:lbrocklebank@wlu.ca) and we will post them on the website at [Laurier Layoffs](#).