

Open letter to the President of the University of Saskatchewan

Many people are concerned about the TransformUS process as a means of *academic* decision making at the University of Saskatchewan. The model on which TransformUS is based is being implemented, or being considered for implementation, at several Canadian Universities and many at those institutions are likewise concerned (<http://ocufa.on.ca/wordpress/assets/Dickeson-Right-for-Ontario-Craig-Heron.pdf>, <http://www.academicmatters.ca/2014/01/doing-the-ppp-a-skeptical-perspective/>).

At the U of S the TransformUS process is about eliminating academic programs and services based on their quintile ranking. The goal is to cut \$20 to \$25 million from the operating budget. The reduction, determined to be necessary because of assumptions made in the Multi-year Operating Budget Framework from the Third Integrated Plan, is being questioned as is the TransformUS process itself.

Appearing in this issue of VOX is an open letter to President Ilene Busch-Vishniac written by a group of faculty and students who challenge the TransformUS process for academic purposes beyond just cost-saving measures for university administration. The people who have signed this letter wish to work towards returning to a collegial process where faculty decide how to deal with budget reductions for academic programs *in a best case worst case scenario*.

Because there are only a few days left to provide feedback on the recommendations of the TransformUS task forces, the Editors made a decision to press ahead with this letter while additional signatories are being sought. We urge readers to consider adding their name to those who have already signed and we encourage you to participate in the dialogue surrounding TransformUS through other means including the TransformUS website (<http://words.usask.ca/transformus/consultation-and-feedback/>) and University Council. You may also wish to email the President directly (president@usask.ca).

Information about the plans for this open letter and how to 'sign on' can be found on page 4.

The Editors

Dear President Busch-Vishniac:

We are writing to express our grave concern about the present state and the future of our university, as a result of the TransformUS process. This letter will present our opinion on this process and its results. We know that we speak for many members of this public institution who are deeply concerned that it is diverted from its true mission.

1) It is the mission of every good university, including ours, that programs align with the needs of education, information, culture and knowledge. These values are superior to the "university priorities" which were pushed through by administrators and do not adequately represent the vision of the majority of faculty and the students, which together compose the University.

2) For centuries, academic programs and achievements have been judged by peer review. This is the only procedure that can assess their quality adequately. In their Principles, the U15 group explicitly endorses peer review! But the results of the Systematic Program Review are bluntly cast aside, apparently because they do not match what administrators want to see. In contrast, TransformUS was not peer review. Most programs had no peers in the Task Force. This is why apples are compared with oranges, leading to false judgement. Moreover, the Task Force members had only minutes to consider any single program. It is absurd to believe that in this way, an informed recommendation can be made. We are sad for our colleagues, well respected scholars, who were given such an impossible task.

3) Contrary to what you have repeatedly stated, the Dickeson model was not adjusted to the reality of our university. There is no service teaching in it, so there was none in our templates. It is also impossible to assess the true costs of programs. When faculty had problems filling the templates, they received advice from the Task Force leaders that amounts to willful falsification (in particular, but not only, in the case of

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service teaching). Therefore, the database is badly distorted, and it is irresponsible to make this the base for any drastic decisions which can have adverse effects for students and faculty. Moreover, "keep with reduced resources" (quintile 3) is a contradiction in itself. Many programs, already starved in the past years, will die when their resources are reduced further. You said recently that all programs in quintiles 3, 4 and 5 could see their resources reduced to zero. So you are even willing to disregard the recommendation "keep" - why don't you convey this message openly to all faculty?

4) Contrary to what you have repeatedly stated, small programs are not necessarily costly, but provide diversity and hence a service to students. This is necessary for our society, and to offer the students the value they are paying (a lot of money) for. In most cases small programs share courses that exist anyway. Small programs are often also elite programs which society needs and which belong to every good (in particular, U15) university. The Task Force report shows a clear bias against them, which you have called "boutique" programs. It is these programs and the exceptionally talented students taking them who have given this institution its reputation for nurturing excellence.

5) A university is a complex organism, its structures have developed over a long time. Trying to influence a complex organism with crude measures never leads to improvement. Evaluation of the merits of academic programs is not within the purview of administration. Administrators have to care for the institution and support its main bodies, the faculty and the students.

6) TransformUS has damaged morale on campus. Successful researchers see their programs recommended for reduced resources. Celebration of success has become a lip service. Administrators have a responsibility for their employees and their workplace. We are appalled by the inhumanity of the "best practices" our administration has adopted. Low morale does not support efficiency. We recommend the "Ant Story" for watching (available on Youtube). The costs of the damage done are immeasurable.

7) Faculty and staff are ever more burdened by "planning exercises" and are thus distracted from their actual duties, teaching and research. Both the "research intense" university and "improving the student experience" have become a lip service of our administrators. Apart from TransformUS, also curriculum mapping is forced upon us, something that departments have always done on their own (but their efforts were cut short by the ever recurring answer from the administrators: no resources). Again, the cost of these activities that do not lead to true improvement are immeasurable.

8) Administration has not provided verifiable information about the size and origin of the proclaimed debt. The truth seems to be that it stems from the large projects pushed through by administrators as well as the growth of administration itself, at the expense of the classical duties of a university. In this time of crisis, even more such large projects are forced upon us, with financial sustainability as doubtful as it turned out to be already for the existing ones. Moreover, why are the few costly and already rich programs in quintile 1 even getting richer? We have noticed the puzzling statistical correlation between these programs and the representation of their members on the Task Force.

9) We call for open discourse and honest answers. Statements do not become true by being repeated often. TransformUS has not been widely endorsed by faculty, it was forced through Council. The public has been given the impression that there were serious problems with our university

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and that now it will be saved. The problems were forced upon this university not by its faculty and not by its traditional structure. TransformUS will not save this university which is about to lose its great potential and its variety of programs and research offered for the benefit of the province and the country.

10) We call for transparency about the financial situation and about the TransformUS process and how its results were achieved. We are led to the conclusion that either administrators themselves do not know what exactly the financial situation is, or that they are withholding information from the public because of a hidden agenda. In addition to the inadequacy of the TransformUS process, we are appalled by the so-called "best practice" of forcing Task Force members to destroy notes and other material that would give information about the details leading to their results. Such practices are unacademic and don't have any place in a university. (It is already sad enough that they have been adopted elsewhere in our society.)

We call on the administration to acknowledge the failure of the TransformUS process due to its numerous well-documented deficiencies. We ask for a new transparent and independent review process to uncover the true origin and amount of the debt and develop academically defensible solutions.

Signed:

Clayton Beish, Instructor, Religion and Culture

Yelena Bird, School of Public Health

James Brooke, Professor, Department of Mathematics and Statistics

Luis Buatois, Professor, Department of Geological Sciences

Claire Card, Professor, Theriogenology, Large Animal Clinical Sciences

Dave Cazakoff, B.E. Chemical 2009, M.D. Candidate Class of 2017

P. Jorge Chedrese, Professor, Department of Biology

Gyula Csapo, Professor, Department of Music

Patricio Desjardins, Alumnus, PhD UofS Geological Sciences 2010

Christopher Dutchyn, Associate Professor, Department of Computer Science

Cristina Echevarria, Professor, Department of Economics

Alexander Ervin, Professor, Department of Anthropology

Len Findlay, Professor, Department of English

Mary Jean Hande, elected U of S member at large senator

Eric Howe, Professor, Department of Economics

Richard Julien, Associate Professor, Religion and Culture

Franz-Viktor Kuhlmann, Professor, Department of Mathematics and Statistics

Tracy Marchant, Associate Professor, Department of Biology

Terry Matheson, Professor Emeritus, Department of English

Dianne Miller, Department of Educational Foundations

Emer O'Hagan, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy

Rodolfo Pino, Instructor: Sociology, Native Studies, Religion & Culture, Political Science, Anthropology, and Spanish, U of S, FNUC

Monte Pishny-Floyd, Emeritus Professor, Department of Music, Composer/Performer/Writer/Music Consultant/Producer, President, Saskatoon Composers' Performance Society

Peter Purdue, previously Associate Professor, Department of Art & Art History

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Annette Rahm Floyd, (musician: performer and private teacher), former sessional lecturer at U of S Music Dept., former teacher at Prairie Spirit School Division

Elizabeth Schatz, MSc in Geological Sciences 2012, now at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Dept. of Earth Sciences

Satya Sharma, Department of Religion and Culture

Satoshi Shibata, Former President of international students and member of Board of College President (BOCP), University Student Council (USC). BA International Studies 4yr, 2011

Kathleen Solose, Department of Music

Artur Sowa, Associate Professor, Department of Mathematics and Statistics

Jacek Szmigielski, Professor, Department of Mathematics and Statistics

Rachelle Ternier, alumni

Wayne Toews, alumnus; former sessional lecturer and ensemble conductor

Julio Torres-Recinos, Associate Professor and Chair of Spanish Studies, Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultural Studies

Pat Tymchatyn, BA Pub Admin Cert 86 MBA 94

The open letter along with a list of those who have indicated a willingness to be a signatory will be delivered to the President this Friday, January 31, the last day for feedback on TransformUS. It will also be submitted through designated TransformUS feedback options.

To sign on to the open letter go to <http://freeacademiausask.blogspot.ca/> or send your name to OpenLetterUSask@gmail.com before noon on Friday, January 31, 2014.

The unsigned letter is available online at:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8Dpj3AX2L2EczNVcGdvUTYxM093LXIJRnVkZVZjZVZPMnJN/edit?usp=sharing>.

A continuously updated, signed letter can be found at: <http://freeacademiausask.blogspot.ca/>.

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