

This article was sent to us before interim president Gordon Barnhart addressed the University on September 9. Nevertheless, it raises serious questions that continue to be relevant.

First, it reveals some very disturbing issues with the development of what is supposed to be a prestigious element of the University. Moreover, it leads to some critical questions, such as what is the role of Big Science in the "research intensive" University? How much funding should and does go to such projects, and how transparent are these transactions? Why is there no funding allotted to other researchers, especially those with equally if not more sterling research records? Are the research activities relegated to some sort of "little science" of minor import to the future of the University? Why are already established facilities—ones that took millions of dollars to create—now abandoned in terms of continued institutional support? In what ways do the mega-projects deprive other teaching departments of resources? Are teaching and learning not an integral part of the University's mission?

Information on the USFA's website <http://www.itsaboutchoice.ca/> demonstrates just how complex the budgeting process at the U of S is!

So many questions remained about TransformUS and the extent to which elements of this discredited process would have been applied. How would departments in the humanities be affected, for example? And how democratic would have the consultation process been, which had been promised with faculty? All of these questions are worth asking of ourselves, our colleagues, and of those in managerial positions—especially because TransformUS may surely raise its head once again.

*The Editors*

## What the University of Saskatchewan should aim for: a Faculty's perspective

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I have been on the faculty of this university for 27 years as an immunologist in the College of Medicine. My main academic activities have been in research and teaching, though I have also had some administrative experience. Teaching and doing research are the central activities that the administration needs to foster in order to realize the University's mandate. Recently reported events, initiated by the firing of Robert Buckingham, have been disturbing, and more broadly reflect how we have been unable to work together to realize our common aspirations and mandate. However, on the positive side, I believe they offer an opportunity for everyone to recognize that collectively we have lost our path, to take stock and to foster our strength and resilience to rededicate ourselves to our primary mandate.

I am writing this with the idea that a description of some of my experiences may be helpful in a public discussion of both what has gone wrong at the University and how the University might regain its inspiration to realize its mandate, and to thereby contribute to society, particularly to the people of Saskatchewan. Given my primary activities of teaching and research, I admit that my perception of the administration's impact on our academic mandate is made without a complete access to and knowledge of the facts. I have not been in a position to know many of these facts, as we do not have an open administration, as I shall illustrate. Nevertheless, I will suggest that even a partial account of my experiences provides a basis for diagnosing some of our problems and for seeing ways of overcoming them. I would like to add that I have tried, to the point of losing my spirit, to work constructively within the system. I have never gone public before, even though I am a senior member of the faculty beyond the "normal" retirement age. I hope this initiative will contribute to worthwhile discussion.

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Our administrators have explained that a projected annual deficit, of over \$40 million by the year 2016, means prudence requires that targeted savings be realized. Hence the process of TransformUS was launched. Two main questions arise in the context of this radical situation.

The first is financial. Is there really such a projected deficit and, if so, what is its basis and how has it come about? The second is related to academic values and collegiality. If cuts must be made, does the current process of TransformUS involve the input of faculty, in a manner to minimally affect, or perhaps even enhance, our primary academic mandate, and so serve the best interests of the University and the people of our province? I consider these two questions in the light of my own experience as a faculty member. I think a knowledge of particular circumstances is essential to an appreciation of what is transpiring at the broader scale.

As we all know, a proper cure can only come after a valid diagnosis. I therefore illustrate first how I have come to realize the nature of the problems at the University, before I consider what constructive steps we might take. I think it is helpful if I state here, before I start on the diagnostic process, that I do not think our, the University's, problems are of recent origin. I will

argue that there have been decades-long decisions and processes during which the faculty's collective aspirations have been un-

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dermined. More recently, the process has reached a breaking point, leading to overt destruction, which is on-going. I do not think our university is unique in its evolution. Indeed, it reflects tendencies in many universities in Canada and the USA. So, in facing the situation and attempting to realize our joint aspirations, we may be making a small contribution at a broader level.

The events I describe are illustrative, not exhaustive. They involve several events concerning a particular situation in which I was involved, and it is my view that it is symptomatic of the larger issues we face.

I became aware a number of years ago that there was an initiative for developing a quite expensive facility on campus, where research could be carried out to study the infection of animals with highly pathogenic organisms. This facility now exists and is called INTERVAC or VIDO/INTERVAC. According to the website, this facility cost \$140 million. I would like to describe some of my experiences as a faculty member related to the realization of this major project, and its overall impact on the University. I ask for the readers' indulgence as I describe details of events that singly might seem unimportant; altogether they illustrate a predic-

ament, I believe, for the University as a whole.

The Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO) has very strong ties to the University. At the time when I first heard of this initiative, perhaps 8 years ago, the director of VIDO was Lorne Babiuk. I have friends and colleagues who work at VIDO. I do not want to be misunderstood when I describe the events surrounding my perception of the processes that led to the INTERVAC facility. Rather, I raise questions concerning the processes that officials high in the administration implemented.

There came a time when the university had to formally consider whether to go ahead with this clearly major project. As part of this process, an across-the-campus committee was struck, and I was asked by my department head to represent our department. The committee consisted of about ten individuals, most being faculty. The chair of the committee told us we should develop an academic plan for the envisaged facility, and that our plan would be considered by the Board of Governors in their deliberations on whether or not to go ahead with the facility. Our mandate was academic, not financial. However, we could not help but be aware that such a facility was not only going to be very expensive, but extremely expensive, to run. I was asked to write a new vision for the research trajectory of our department, so that it could embrace the new facility. The academic

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plan envisaged positions for new faculty in our department and who would use the facility.

The Board of Governors decided to go ahead with INTERVAC. However, the faculty of our department had no way of knowing how the plans for INTERVAC were progressing, nor was our input sought. Many of us were aware that running such a big and complex facility as INTERVAC would be very expensive. We made a bad and what we liked to believe was a flippant joke: when the white elephant INTERVAC started running, the University would have to close down the College of Medicine to balance the books! When I was persuaded by my colleagues to undertake the service of becoming department head in 2009, I was concerned about the relationship between our department and INTERVAC for two reasons. We had been promised, in a collegial but not legal sense, that new faculty positions would accrue and faculty would have access to the INTERVAC facility. We were given the go-ahead to hire an immunologist. However, as it transpired, it was unclear on what terms faculty, old and new, could gain access to the resources INTERVAC was acquiring. Many attempts to clarify this for more than a year were unsuccessful, including a joint letter by all the department heads of the basic science departments to a senior administrator, which was initially ignored. With persistence, we had a meeting and we were promised that steps would be taken shortly to define the

terms; we are still waiting to hear what these terms are. I had to go forward with the process of recruiting an immunologist for a new faculty position without indicating if the successful candidate could use the INTERVAC facility. I ask, how professional and proactive is that? Similar events surrounding other issues led me to recognize that senior administrators of the University treat faculty insincerely and with disdain, rather than treasuring them as the cornerstone of the University. My role on the committee that drew up the academic plan for INTERVAC made me feel, in view of subsequent events, betrayed and used. I also think the process similarly betrayed the good intentions of the Board of Governors.

As head of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, I was concerned with both the efficient use of the INTERVAC facility and the financial impact of INTERVAC on the University as a whole. I was allowed to look at a very fat folder on INTERVAC in the office of the Dean of the College of Medicine two or three years ago in my capacity as department head. I recall from memory that the initial estimate to run INTERVAC, that is to say to turn on the lights as it were, was about \$5 million per year, while a

later estimate was upwards of \$11 million per year. INTERVAC is now “running.” I do not know who is currently using INTERVAC and if it is living up to its promised potential. We have no access to the facility, despite the vision and promise expressed in the academic plan. I would imagine that the annual cost of running INTERVAC is now above \$11 million, but where this money comes from, I have no idea. Is it part of the anticipated more than \$40 million deficit? This example illustrates the deficiency in the openness of the budgetary process. Moreover, I know of other expensive new initiatives in the area of my discipline that are being carried out, which I imagine are also going to contribute to the projected deficit, but I am unsure whether these are academically worthwhile. I next address why I think this is so important.

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The five basic science departments of the College of Medicine are absolutely essential to the biological/medical research undertaken by faculty of our University, and for the students entering medical school. As is well known, our medical school is under probation in terms of its accreditation. Both the former president, Dr. Ilene Busch-Vishniac, and the former president, Mr. Peter Mackin-

non, made it clear that supporting research, particularly medi-

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cal research, was among their highest priorities. However, their support for these basic science departments has been, and still is, lacking, as illustrated by the facts described above concerning INTERVAC. The basic sciences were anticipated to collectively get less support if the TransformUS process had gone ahead. The senior administrators planned new, not-well-considered projects at the expense of core departments. We now have an administrator termed "Vice-Provost College of Medicine Organizational Restructuring", whose discipline is Law and who has no background whatsoever in the medical sciences or the medical profession. I have felt over the years that senior administrators do not appreciate what I consider is valuable in our university culture as it pertains to my

area of expertise. In fact, their actions seem to be made on a very different, corporate style basis, with little regard for those on whom they will impact.

I would feel remiss if I failed to express solidarity with my faculty colleagues across campus, in the Arts and Humanities and elsewhere. It is sometimes said that this administration supports science at the expense of the arts. This is not true from my perspective. They are destroying basic science, at the expense of poorly thought-out adventures such as INTERVAC and other targeted initiatives where the money lies.

What lessons do I draw from my 27 years at this university? There are simple truths behind all these events. The faculty is the core of the University. When

faculty are treated insincerely and with disdain by senior administrators, rather than treasured, individual aspirations to achieve our collective academic goals become corroded and the university community disintegrates. Engagement of faculty requires open access to information and the sharing of a vision, and the excitement of realizing together this shared vision. I hear as I write this that the President has been fired by the Board of Governors. Surely this is the cue to make information on major projects, such as INTERVAC, available to the university community as a whole, so that we can collectively decide on whether such projects serve to realize or undermine the mandate of the university, and so that the people of the province are the true benefactors. I am still waiting.

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