



19 May 2022

Office of Honourable Jon Reyes
Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration
156-450 Broadway, Winnipeg MB, R3C 0V8

Dear Minister Reyes,

Thank you for meeting with the University of Winnipeg Faculty Association on 13 April 2022. We were pleased to present our concerns with the implementation of Bill 33 “The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act” and with the broader outlook for advanced education – especially University – funding in the province of Manitoba. This submission is on behalf of the University of Winnipeg Faculty Association.

As we made clear when we met, we begin from the premise that the University system in Manitoba, despite year-over-year grant freezes or cuts (accounting for inflation), is performing very well by all measures. Graduates in Manitoba are employed at astonishingly high rates: in 2021, despite the economic woes caused by the pandemic, holders of Bachelor’s degrees over the age of 25 had an unemployment rate of 4% (1/3 better than those with only high school diplomas). People 15-24, a group who typically struggles with full-time employment, also benefited from holding a Bachelor’s Degree; their unemployment rate of 7.4% was again 1/3 better than those with high school diplomas only. Thus, our submission, below, on Bill 33, takes as a given that when it comes to a primary economic indicator of graduate success in Manitoba, Universities and University graduates do extremely well. Indeed, no other certification or qualification so closely aligns with full-time employment over the last 32 years (since Statistics Canada started keeping these statistics). For Universities and university students to thrive, we need stable and increasing funding to address staffing shortages, increased class sizes, capital projects, student access to University, student access to transformative experiences like experiential learning and exchanges, etc. All of these aspects of University education pay rich dividends for the province.

Please find below substantive comments on two aspects of Bill 33 that are found in the language of the bill itself or that were brought up by you, the Deputy Minister, or Assistant Deputy Minister during our meeting. Since Bill 33 does not address specifically so-called “performance metrics,” we have not addressed them in this submission. However, we have grave concerns about the ability of such metrics to capture the variety of student outcomes at Universities and



for how the implementation of such metrics would radically alter and negatively affect some of the reasons that Universities have led social, cultural, scientific, and economic development in the recent past. We are welcome to a meeting at any point to present our concerns with so-called “performance metrics” and the damage they will do to post-secondary education in Manitoba.

Auditor-General of Manitoba, “Oversight of Post-Secondary Institutions”

Several times during our meeting, Deputy Minister Eric Charron brought up the Auditor-General of Manitoba’s report entitled “Oversight of Post-Secondary Institutions.” In addition, during the committee hearings for Bill 33, then-Minister Wayne Ewasko also used this report as a rationale for “a little more oversight over post-secondary institutions.”¹ Having read this report, we are at a loss as to see where and how it offers a justification for some aspects of Bill 33 such as implementing “differential tuition” (an issue that Minister Ewasko did not clarify in the committee hearings despite repeated requests). The vast majority of this report concerns the professionalization of Boards of Regents or Governors and the oversight of employment contracts of presidents of institutions. Moreover, the report explicitly focuses on “the processes that the Department [of Advanced Education] had in place to support, and to provide oversight of, the financial and operational performance of public post-secondary institutions” (p. 28) and “did not include any academic-related matters, nor quality of education issues” (p. 28). It is our firm contention that any implementation of differential tuition from the Department of Advanced Education necessarily affects academic matters and quality of education issues.

Furthermore, and we will touch on it only briefly, while the report acknowledges the legislated institutional autonomy of Universities, it does not consider the ramifications of this autonomy in distinguishing between different types of post-secondary institutions in the province or by comparing Universities, for example, to other board-governed institutions in the province (e.g. at recommendation 14, p. 159).

The Auditor-General throughout does not offer a recommendation about “differential tuition” or make suggestions to centralize tuition fees policy in the Department. There is much about performance metrics and strategies to determine these metrics, yet no information – easily available from Statistics Canada – on the astonishing success of Universities.

Therefore, we contend that the Auditor-General’s report, while perhaps offering strong suggestions on best practices for boards and presidents, gives no sound and coherent advice on how to improve the academic performance of Universities. So-called “skill-matching” with employers, post-graduation employment, program of study prioritization and so on are premised on academic performance and academic planning. These are, by common sense and legislation, the purview of University bodies and the expert administrators, faculty, and staff who serve on them.

¹ 21:20 https://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/42nd_3rd/sed_08/sed_08.html



Differential Tuition

As we made clear during our meeting, “differential tuition” is highly contentious and strikes at the heart of the mission of Universities; moreover, it reveals fundamental issues with understanding the success of students at University and beyond, regardless of major. There is certainly a rationale to permit tuition difference based on program, which already happens at Universities and under their own purview; this is especially the case for programs that come with added cost. Universities, of course, are best suited to determine the relative costs and benefits of each program and therefore to pursue tuition rates for different programs based on their own internal discussions and with proper oversight as indicated in the legislation.

There is abundant research to show that employment and earnings do not fluctuate greatly with field of study. Indeed, one easily available website, www.humanitiesworks.org, offers simple to read graphs and charts (backed up by research) that demonstrate that rates of employment are the same across fields of study. “Underemployment” or issues in matching skills to work can be a challenge for some fields of study initially, but after five years, fields as diverse as English literature and the physical sciences have the same “underemployment” rates. Graduate salaries are similar across majors, with similar annual salaries for those who major in English or Biology; by age 40, in fact, liberal arts degree holders out-perform STEM degree holders. Finally, a variety of media reports and scholarship suggest that a variety of skills –and thus a variety of types of training – are necessary in today’s world. Graduates need to be willing to train and re-train, and, in a knowledge economy, to deploy the so-called “soft skills” of communication, literacy, empathy, and collaboration. These skills are taught across fields of study.² Students are therefore best poised to determine their field of study without artificial attempts by government to predict the skills that employers need or that our society and economy will require.

The issues highlighted here relate only to post-graduation success, since our discussion seemed to be focused on these issues and the Auditor-General’s report discusses “strategic objectives” among other recommendations for post-secondary institutions (p. 158). If the strategic objective of Manitoba Universities is to produce a highly educated, gainfully employed, satisfied, and adaptive and adept workforce, then Universities have more than surpassed that goal. Centralizing tuition – especially differential by program – in the Department would interfere with the student-focused process of determining field of study and interest that is already central to Manitoba Universities.

Conclusion

If the past two years have taught us anything, it’s that it is a fool’s game to predict the future, especially when it comes to employment trends and skills. Manitoba’s Universities have

² These documents relate to the USA, but similar work has been compiled in Canada. Statistics Canada’s surveys on field of study and employment/income show similar salaries and employment rates, though these survey are from 2016.



accomplished a minor miracle by maintaining their incredibly high standards of education and the success of our graduates even amid an unprecedented time of political, social, and economic instability. Graduates in every field from Manitoba Universities are primed to support the social and economic development of the province, and Universities are best suited – per their legislated autonomy – to help students navigate to their preferred field of study through our system of advisors, faculty mentorship, peer mentors, etc.

If *any* government begins to intervene in what fields of study students should pursue, they not only remove choice from the fees- and tax-paying students who attend our institutions, but they curtail the wide range of possibilities for post-graduation work and life for our students. Students do not attend University *only* for economic benefits (though these go with the degree), but also for personal development, interest, and for work in the social development of our province. Students with the help of expert faculty and advisors are best suited to decide on what field of study will help them achieve their personal and professional goals. Any graduate, in any field, greatly enhances our collective quality of life, socially, culturally, and economically. We, therefore, need to ensure equitable access to any and all fields of study in Manitoba's Universities.

Yours Sincerely,

Peter J. Miller, PhD
President, University of Winnipeg Faculty Association