

## Media Release

### CAFA's Concerns with AU's Presidential Appointment Process

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(Edmonton) Furtive secrecy is the antithesis of strong leadership. But time and again in Alberta's post-secondary institutions we are seeing our most senior leaders selected through processes that are opaque and exclusive, without input from faculty, students, or the community in which the institution is located.

"CAFA has high hopes for the presidency of Dr. Alex Clark at Athabasca University, first and foremost we believe that their leadership will bring some long overdue stability for our dedicated colleagues in the Athabasca University Faculty Association," said Dr. Jon Doan, CAFA's president and Associate Professor in the Department of Kinesiology & Physical Education at the University of Lethbridge. "But the process, more lack thereof, of Dr. Clark's selection and former president Dr. Peter Scott's removal has us deeply concerned for the state of collegial governance at Athabasca University."

In this circumstance, the questions abound – Which AU Board of Governors members did and did not have an opportunity to discuss Scott's performance and ultimately firing? For those that did get to vote, were they voting to remove with or without cause? And which voices on the AU Board, in the community of Athabasca, and in the government had input on Dr. Clark's promotion to President of Athabasca University? And which voices are consistently underheard for decision making at and about Athabasca University?

Unfortunately, we know the answer to the last one – Athabasca University Faculty Association members. With a Board of Governors stacked with appointed public members and leadership search committees with no representation from AUFA, meaningful contributions from faculty members to leadership decisions are impossible.

"Most presidential searches are dominated by the use of a headhunting organization," said Dr. Doan. "By using these companies, it increases the secrecy of the process by limiting open searches, gives the third-party company too much latitude on making the short list, and allows these private corporations to recycle candidates over and over without any campus community knowing about them."

A better process exists – it is neither novel nor earth-shattering, but rather it is a return to how universities used to interview prospective leadership candidates. CAFA is calling for all future presidential searches in Alberta to be truly open searches—where those short-listed should visit the campus or virtual campus commons, make public presentations on their vision for the

institution, answer questions at this forum, and meet with a diversity of campus and community groups. The search committee should be a joint committee of both the Board of Governors and the General Faculties Council (the two bodies of the bicameral university structure) and should still have the final say on which candidate to hire, based on what they see and hear from candidates during their public lectures and engagements. Candidates who refuse to participate in a truly open and accountable search may not be the best candidate to run a publicly funded and accountable university.

“CAFA believes that using this open process would have avoided many of the problems that have occurred with AU leadership in the last year,” said Dr. Doan. “If Dr. Scott and the other candidates had given a public lecture on their vision for the university, then the government, the town, and the campus community would have been all aware of his plans to completely implement the near-virtual strategy and move all remaining jobs away from the town of Athabasca.”

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*Media Enquiries: Lori Morinville, Administrative Officer, CAFA Tel (780) 232-6812 e-mail lmorinvi@ualberta.ca*