

February 9, 2016

Robert Campbell, President  
Karen Grant, Provost and VP Academic  
Hans vanderLeest, Dean of Arts  
Robert Inglis, VP Finance and Administration

Mount Allison University  
Sackville, NB

Dear Dr. Campbell, Dr. Grant, Dr. vanderLeest, and Mr. Inglis,

As members of the Collective for Feminist Action and Research (CFAR), we are writing on behalf of our communities, both within the university and beyond, to express our shared outrage and deep disappointment about Mount Allison's decision to reduce funding for the Women's and Gender Studies Program (WGST). CFAR is a campus-based collective at Wilfrid Laurier University's Brantford campus that advances a broad set of goals around social justice and anti-oppression, works to initiate and strengthen community-university relationships, and fosters meaningful and relevant feminist research, teaching and activism. We have heard from countless individuals in our shared communities that they are shocked that senior administration at a major Canadian undergraduate university would choose to cut funding to a gender studies program, especially in the current context of heightened attention to issues of sexism, racism and violence. The minimal savings gained from these cuts cannot justify the loss of the contributions that WGST makes to academia, to communities, and to society at large. As a Liberal Arts institution that prides itself on the cultivation of analytical and engaged thinkers, the demise of the WGST program would be a significant step backward in the achievement of MTA's goals.

The critical and theoretical contributions of WGST teach students to challenge inequity and support the creation of a more progressive and socially just world. WGST courses teach students to seek responsive and sustainable solutions to everyday injustices, such as racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, poverty and ableism, and their anti-oppressive approaches extend far outside of the classroom and into local and global communities.

MTA's newly minted Strategic Plan establishes the university's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion—principles that are the very foundation of WGST programs. The plan affirms MTA's commitment to community and connection, or, in other words, to teaching students that the personal is political. The plan also speaks to the importance of cultivating dignity and respect in the MTA community. Given the shocking rates of sexual violence on university campuses, WGST provides an ideal environment to engage students and faculty in talking about these complex issues, and for working collectively to develop solutions to sexual violence, including the need for new policies and programs in this area. Yet, despite the complexity of this problem, according to the MTA website, the university employs a single, part-time

employee (the Sexual Harassment Advisor) for supporting survivors of sexual violence, homophobia and transphobia. Students in crisis are urged to seek services in Moncton, 50 kms away and accessible only by car. These policies, alongside the proposed cuts to WGST, undermine MTA's stated commitments to equity and respect.

While we understand that universities are under increasing pressure to reduce expenditures, WGST at MTA requires a minimal operating budget. In fact, given the recent passing of Dr. Marie Hammond Callaghan, who devoted her time and passion to the creation and sustenance of this program, WGST is currently delivered without a single dedicated WGST faculty member. In this light the savings to the university are negligible, especially when compared to the institution's overall budget

MTA administration reports that the WGST program has not been cut, but the fact remains that the program is slated to be precariously funded for 2016-2017. If a program has inadequate funding, it cannot run. The slow hollowing out of a program amounts to the same outcome, just at a slower pace. At a crucial point in this country's history, politicians and citizens alike are turning their attention to Truth and Reconciliation, to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, to Trans rights and to gendered labour conditions. The move to defund WGST is especially regressive given the current social and political climate.

We hope that you will reconsider the decision to cut funding to the Women's and Gender Studies program. We urge senior administration to immediately reconsider their decision to cut funding to the WGST program, and to recognize the program as indispensable to meeting Mount Allison's vision for a more socially just future.

Sincerely,

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