

## OPEN LETTER

STUDENTS URGE THE GOVERNMENT TO EASE THE  
COMPENSATION MANDATE ON THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



Monday, November 9, 2020

**To the Honourable Brian Pallister, The Honourable Scott Fielding, The Honourable Ralph Eichler, and Colleagues,**

In the ongoing labour dispute between the University of Manitoba and the U of M Faculty Association (UMFA), the University of Manitoba Students' Union (UMSU) has been encouraging both parties to return to the bargaining table in the best interest of the institution's central stakeholder - students. In particular, we have been calling for both sides to enter binding arbitration in order to protect students from being caught in the crossfire of potential job action, a prospect that became all the more likely about a week ago, when UMFA officially announced its potential strike date as November 16.

With a resurgent pandemic in Manitoba serving as the backdrop to wage negotiations, the prospect of a strike and further academic disruptions is frightening for students. In times like these, it is easy to point fingers, to call faculty at the University of Manitoba tone-deaf and uncompromising. However, students are of a different mind: the transition to online learning would not have been possible without the hard work of our faculty. UMSU members take pride in the ability of academic staff to adapt, evolve, and continue our education amidst unprecedented world-wide challenges.

While our instructors have stepped up to educate Manitoba's next generation of doctors, nurses, social workers, and more, it becomes equally as tempting to point the finger at the U of M administration. Their 0% offer in this year's reopener can seem unreasonable - especially when the reopener was meant to rectify, in part, the harms of the unconstitutional Public Services Sustainability Act, a piece of legislation that subjected faculty to unfair labour practices due to actions taken by the Government of Manitoba.

However, students can see through all of this. It is not faculty nor university administrators who must ultimately stand to answer for why the situation has deteriorated - it is the Province of Manitoba. What began in 2016 as unlawful interference in the collective bargaining process continues to create impasses in 2020, given the highly inflexible 0% mandate presented to the U of M Bargaining Team by the Province.

Let us be clear: moving forward in a spirit of leniency is **not** an affront to Manitobans in the COVID-19 era, but leaving instructors with no option but to go on strike is. We urge the Government of Manitoba to **give our University the tools it needs to negotiate**, and **ease the 0% mandate**.

## OPEN LETTER

STUDENTS URGE THE GOVERNMENT TO EASE THE  
COMPENSATION MANDATE ON THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



---

**Without meaningful action from the Government, 29,000 of Manitoba's best and brightest will be left to self-educate**, seeing their grades, mental health, and pockets suffer as a result. As a government who keenly values graduation time-to-completion rates, and a highly skilled labour force to meet the needs of the labour market, the prospect of job action should frighten you, just as much as it frightens us.

Unfortunately, the collective bargaining negotiations between the U of M and its faculty represent **the last straw in a long list of decisions by the Province of Manitoba** which have harmed post-secondary students.

While the creation and implementation of a COVID-19 Transitional Support Fund and Student Wage Subsidy do not go unnoticed, these measures do not mitigate what appear to be **counterproductive core commitments by this Government**: persistent cuts to post-secondary education and governmental overreach into labour negotiations between **what is supposed to be an autonomously-governed institution and its faculty**.

To name but a few examples:

- Research Manitoba - the body that coordinates research activities in the province - in 2018/2019 saw its previous budget of around \$15 million slashed by 20%;
- International students had their health care coverage taken away in 2018, and have subsequently been forced to purchase private insurance based on a 200% non-resident surcharge;
- The Province recommended tuition be increased by an average of 3.75% amid a global pandemic; and,
- Bill 33 - The Advanced Education Administration Amendment Act - was introduced in the Manitoba Legislature this fall, the contents of which threaten the existence of independent student organizations, the long-term viability of student-funded services on campus, and an attack on student-driven advocacy.

Today, and with over 25,600 undergraduate students, we urge the Province of Manitoba to **start doing the right thing** - and that begins with the U of M Collective Bargaining negotiations.

Sincerely,

## The University of Manitoba Undergraduate Student Body

Over 25,600 students represented by the [University of Manitoba Students' Union \(UMSU\)](#)