

Open Letter

DFA Calls for a Return to Open Searches for Senior Administrators at Dalhousie University

September 16, 2026

Dr. Kim Brooks
President, Dalhousie University
Via email to president@dal.ca

Dear President Brooks,

One of the foundational provisions in the DFA-Dalhousie Board of Governors Collective Agreement specifies, “the Board acknowledges the importance of participation by Members and other academic staff in the collegial process, including the internal regulation of the University and the selection of academic administrators” (Article 9).

In recent years, “participation” in “the selection of academic administrators” has been unusually constrained and opaque: vague surveys before a search have taken the place of faculty participation in the selection process itself, with little indication of the surveys’ significance or how survey results bear on a selection process and its outcomes.

“Open searches” used to be the norm. In an open search, all Dalhousie faculty are invited to attend presentations by short-listed candidates, ask questions, and provide informed assessments through a confidential process. The open search process is inclusive, transparent, and allows meaningful discussion that draws on a wide range of expertise and experience across the university. Moreover, the process builds trust, both in the appointment process and in its outcomes, which provides leaders with the legitimacy that is critical to building successful collaborations across Dalhousie. “Closed searches” treat a university appointment like a state secret, involving only a small group that handles the entire selection process behind tightly closed doors. The “[Costs of Closed Searches](#)” have been well-documented globally for years, including some high-profile scandals in the United States.

What has been the result of closed searches at Dalhousie? Over the last decade, Dalhousie has averaged nearly one new provost appointment per year (*see footnote 1 on page 3*), if we include acting and interim positions—which are currently outpacing regular provost appointments. In that same period, Dalhousie has had six presidents (*see footnote 2 on page 3*) half of them acting or interim. Dalhousie has also seen significant turnover among deans and other senior roles. Closed searches are part of a story of volatility not stability, undermining collegial governance and, with it, accountability, transparency, and the collaborative, evidence-informed problem-solving that is fundamental to academic work.

Senior academic administrative roles are complex, requiring working with colleagues across staff and academic units, under numerous policies and procedures customized to Dalhousie’s circumstances and the

needs of its unique suite of academic programs and research activities, as well as the larger provincial, national, and international landscapes. Five-year terms are typical because it takes time to develop an understanding of that complexity and to build the relationships and collaborations necessary to move forward effectively. Five-year terms also recognize the benefits to the university of having stability in its academic staffing, at every level, particularly given the long view that any university must take if it is to fulfill its responsibilities to the public, to the research community, and especially to its students.

A usual rationale for secrecy in these selection processes is the need for confidentiality. Entry-level faculty positions include public presentations, with materials held confidentially somewhere so that faculty members can access them. While confidentiality is important to protect applicants, it should not come at the expense of meaningful faculty participation. Many leading universities have successfully balanced these competing interests by maintaining confidentiality during the early stages of recruitment while allowing short-listed candidates to engage openly with the university community before a final decision is made. Why should academic administrative appointments not follow this standard practice? The procedure behind those appointments must balance the privacy of candidates with meaningful faculty participation. A process that maintains confidentiality until candidates have been short-listed, for example, strikes a balance between the values at stake.

This is not just a matter of collegial governance but also the core academic principle of accepting the expert scrutiny of our work: our research is subject to peer review and then read by other experts after publication so that the larger research community can apply, benefit from, as well as assess our work as we all strive to find solutions. Add to that peer-evaluation of teaching, tenure and promotion processes, and so on: scrutiny by other academics is integral to academic work. Why would candidates for roles as senior academic administrators shy away from this core academic practice—and what does it tell us about them if they do?

Surveys with general questions about the characteristics of potential appointees are insufficient, even misleading. They drive us towards the general, the vague and the superficial when we need context, rigour and nuance. These are tough jobs that require skillsets—including the capacity to stand up to normal academic scrutiny.

We urge senior administration to work collaboratively with faculty to rebuild trust and move forward on a more stable, transparent, and informed footing. The Board can help begin that process by immediately directing a return to open searches at Dalhousie.

Sincerely,



DFA President, 2026-2027

On behalf of the DFA Executive Committee and the DFA Collegial Governance Committee

DFA 2026-2027 Executive

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Amy Birchall
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DFA Collegial Governance Committee

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Parisa Ghanouni
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Kathleen Kevany

Chiranjeev Sanyal
Dominic Silvio
David Westwood
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Footnotes

1. Dalhousie Provosts Since 2016

PERIOD	PROVOST
July 2016–July 2018	Carolyn Watters
August 2018–October 2018	Chris Moore
November 2018–June 2019	Teresa Balser
July 2019–December 2019	Chris Moore
January 2020–May 2020	Teresa Balser
June 2020–December 2022	Frank Harvey
January 2023–August 2023	Kim Brooks
August 2023–June 2024	Frank Harvey
July 2024–December 2024	Marty Leonard
January 2025–July 2026	Wanda Costen
August 2026–September 2026	Heather Bruce
September 2026–	Brenda Merritt

2. Dalhousie Presidents Since 2016

PERIOD	PRESIDENT
July 2016–December 2018	Richard Florizone
January 2019–June 2019	Peter MacKinnon
July 2019–December 2019	Teresa Balser
January 2020–December 2022	Deep Saini
January 2023–August 2023	Frank Harvey
August 2023–present	Kim Brooks