

President's Message: Winter Weariness

Julia Wright, DFA President, 2019-20

rest I would,
Forget the tangled life, the bad and good,
And everything that has been,—drinking deep
The freshness of regenerating sleep.

--William Allingham, "Sleepy" (1882)

We have a shorter newsletter this month because we know all of you are busy juggling a lot right now. Everyone seems a bit more tired—wary, even—this year. Part of it may be the political climate, as populism and austerity erode the public institutions that improve quality of life and reduce inequality, from education to libraries to healthcare to basic social services. A big part of it is the effect of those erosions on our own lives and our workplace.

Many of us have seen how much our university has changed over the last decade. I miss getting to know most of my first-year students well enough to recognize them when I see them. I miss my colleagues and I having the time to chat in the hallways about what we tried in the classroom, how well it worked, and how it might work better. I miss hearing about what they found in the library or learned at a conference. Instead I hear the same point over and over again: it's hard to excel at our work when we're under-resourced and under-valued.

The under-resourcing is real. If you look at the DFA's last [Review of Dalhousie University Finances](#), you will see the trend that lies behind our low morale: in 2002-03, 73.57% of Dalhousie's overall budget went to what's called "the Academic Responsibility Centre"; since 2009, that share has stayed under 66%, falling as low as 61.89% (Table 3). As the *Review* notes, "Dalhousie would have had an **additional \$43.2 million to spend** on the University's [academic] mission if the percentage had remained the same in 2016-17 as it was in 2002-03" (p. 2).



This gap has profoundly changed Dalhousie. Since 2004-05, according to [administration](#) data, enrolments have increased **26.8%** while faculty complement has increased only **14.8%**. Our students' tuition goes up and up, and graduate-student funding never really improves. The effects of these and other choices lie behind the DFA's ongoing interest in the budget process (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)—and look for more next term).

Study breaks and holidays give us some respite from the relentless pressure to do more with less—a chance to recharge our batteries. But any real remedies are going to be determined through two processes. Early in 2020, the [Budget Advisory Committee](#) will set units' budgets and so play a significant (if indirect) role in determining how many of us there are and so what our workloads look like. Later in 2020, the DFA Bargaining Team will be working hard to negotiate our next Collective Agreement with the Board of Governors. I know how busy all of us are, but please find a bit of time next term to contribute to one of those processes—attend a meeting, ask questions, or think about proposals' impact on your work. Your support and advice are especially critical to our Bargaining Team (see below).

Many winter festivals have roots in concerns about resources—awaiting the return of warmer weather and, with it, food and hope. As a university community in Canada, we have much for which to be grateful. But we can also wish for a return of the recognition of universities as an essential public good that advances knowledge, provides myriad regional benefits, and helps future generations to do the best that they can as members of civil society and in their future careers. The new year

will bring new opportunities to seek this renewal globally—and locally through the restoration of budgetary resources to the academic mission at Dalhousie.

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