

October 31, 2019

Sent via email: Teri.Balser@dal.ca

Dr. Teri Balser
Interim President & Vice-Chancellor
Dalhousie University

Dear President Balser,

Re: BAC Report LIX

I am writing to express our concern about the quality and accuracy of the document, [Context for the Development of the 2020-21 Operating Budget](#) (BAC Report LIX). This document presents selected information in ways that seem designed to lead readers to specific conclusions (faculty renewal is thriving, students can pay more, etc.), rather than accurately reflect the situation at Dalhousie.

Note, for instance, some curious features of chart design. On page 4, the bar graph “Compensation as % of Total Expenditure by Faculty 2019-20” has 15 blue lines (Fig. 1). First, it is worth noting that, for some time, faculty have been pointing out that an inevitable effect of the annual BAC Cuts is to drive *all* Faculties to budgets that are 100% salary. If BAC keeps cutting muscle, of course it will eventually hit bone.

Secondly, there are fifteen lines. Dalhousie has [thirteen Faculties](#), including the College of Continuing Education (but not Sustainability). Of the fifteen lines, only seven are labelled as representing Faculties. Six Faculties are unlabelled (Architecture and Planning; Continuing Education; Computer Science; Engineering; Health; Medicine); one line is assigned to the College of Sustainability; one line is a mystery (the blue lines appear to be alphabetical, so maybe it’s the Libraries?).

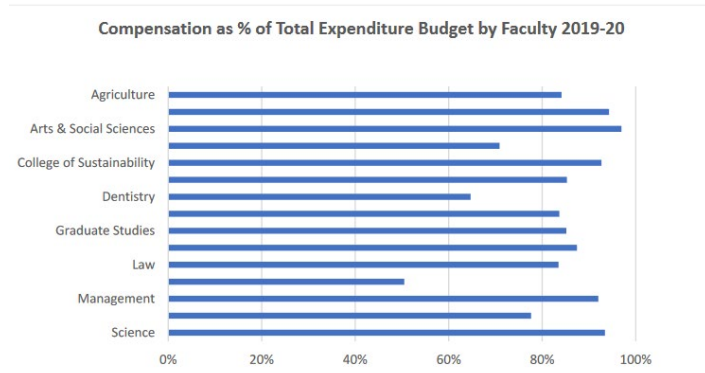


Figure 1: BAC Report LIX, p. 4

As a further oddity, the charts in *BAC Report LIX* all use different timelines. On page 7, a budget chart runs from 2014-15 to 2019-20; on page 14, another budget chart goes from 2015-16 to 2019-20. On page 9, there's a chart on enrolment that goes by calendar year, 2011 to 2018; the next chart on enrolment, on page 10, goes from 2010 to 2018.

A chart of particular concern to the DFA is on page 15: it gives faculty appointments for 2004, 2013, 2016, 2017, and 2018 (Fig. 2). These don't allow year-to-year comparisons in any meaningful way, and also raise questions about why these particular years are being chosen. What stories would other years tell?

We would also like to know how these numbers were determined. For instance, it isn't clear if a 50% appointment is counted as "1" or ".5" or even if librarians and counsellors are included. If one person is hired to teach three courses on CUPE contracts, are they counted as "3" or "1" here—or, say, .5, as a percentage of a normal teaching workload in that unit? Since CUPEs teach per-course, we would also like to know if this data reflects a moment in time or adds together CUPE appointments in all of the terms in each calendar year? Our data suggests the latter. Other numbers here don't line up with those in the DFA office. Our records show 151 LTAs in our Bargaining Unit alone in 2004, for instance, while the chart says the Dalhousie total was 149. Our 2018 figures for DFA Members show a total of 813 tenure-track/continuing faculty, librarians, and counsellors. That leaves a gap of ~~280~~—how much do they teach? Where are they?

correction:
270

The following graph outlines the composition of all paid faculty appointments.

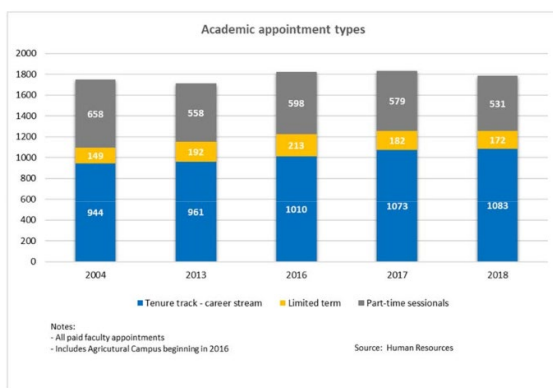


Figure 2: *BAC Report LIX*, p. 15

This chart, moreover, seems to aim to suggest that faculty renewal is thriving—complement has increased, and the number of part-time sessional appointments is the lowest of the five years selected here. That seems counterintuitive given all we hear about workload creep and increasing class sizes, so let's drill down into the numbers.

If we use BAC's figures here, tenure-track/career-stream and limited-term appointments totaled 1,093 in 2004 and 1,255 in 2018, an increase of 162 or **14.8%**. About half that increase was due to the merger with Agriculture in 2016: it added approximately 90 full-time faculty to Dalhousie University (it varies year to year). The merger with Agriculture also added students, so let's look at total enrolment numbers for Dalhousie. In 2004-05, total enrollment was 15,814 (see p. 7 of [a 2006 Board report](#)); in 2018-19, it was 20,051, so a **26.8%** increase. If we take BAC numbers at face value, then faculty

complement that had kept pace with enrolment increases would be 1,386—**131 more** than in the latest bar in this graph.

Let's look at another graph that speaks to Board spending on the core, academic mission of the University—the Faculty budgets that pay for professors, instructors, teaching assistants, and staff in academic units (Fig. 3).

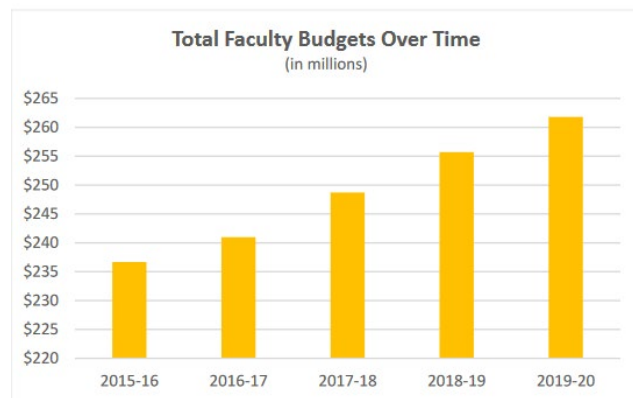


Figure 3: BAC Report LIX, p. 14.

Obviously the steepness of the climb depicted in this chart is driven partly by the decision to use this scale—start at \$220m, with \$5m increments. No source is given for this data either and the numbers are inconsistent with Dalhousie's publicly available [Annual Financial Reports](#). In [2015-16](#), total "actual" spending on the [thirteen Faculties](#) was about \$217m (see page 13); in [2018-19](#), it was around \$211m (see page 18). That's approximately a **\$6 million dollar loss to the academic mission**, and in a fairly short period of time.

There's a larger academic envelope in the *Reports* for the Faculties plus the Libraries, Sustainability, a Co-op office, Academic initiatives, and so forth—in 2015-16 that was \$236m (close to the corresponding bar in the BAC graph) and in 2018-19 it was \$235m. No visible up-ticks here, either. So, which are we to believe? The *Annual Financial Reports* or *BAC Report LIX*?

The experience of DFA members and our students—of workload creep, of growing class sizes, of cuts in faculty complement and academic-unit office staff—suggests the *Financial Reports* may be closer to the truth. According the *Annual Financial Reports* I cite above, between 2015-16 and 2018-19, FGS's "Actual" operating budget dropped from \$2,106k to \$1,638k—a drop of nearly half a million dollars. The Faculty of Science dropped from \$35,438k to \$33,387k—a drop of over two million dollars. The Faculty of Medicine saw its budget drop from \$46,343k to \$42,876k, a loss of about 3.5 million dollars. Law dropped from \$11,511k to \$9,115k—that's a loss of over 20%.

These are the cuts we see all around us on the academic ground. If we are going to have a meaningful BAC Consultation at Dalhousie this year, we need credible figures and useful charts. BAC's 59th *Report* does not provide the sources of its data, and it is significantly out of step with other available sources.

This is a university. Citing sources and ensuring accurate and fairly presented information is fundamental to what we do. Budget decisions are mission-critical, especially with so many academic units struggling to maintain their programs. We need to have a meaningful, evidence-based discussion.

Dr. Teri Balser
October 31, 2019

We need better evidence than this. We need this *BAC Report LIX* withdrawn and reissued after it has been thoroughly fact-checked and revised.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'J. Wright', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Julia M. Wright, PhD, FRSC
DFA President

Cc: Candace Thomas, Chair, Board of Governors
Ian Nason, VP Finance
Aisha Abawajy, DSU President