



February 20, 2020

Dr. Matthew Prineas, Provost
Athabasca University
<via email>

Dear Dr. Prineas,

We, the undersigned professors, wish to express our concern with Athabasca University's proposal to de-designate academic coordinators, professionals, and deans and associated deans. This proposed de-designation will remove approximately 67% of our colleagues from our union.

The current designation policy was established in 1983. Placing professors, academic coordinators, and professionals in the same bargaining unit reflected the integration of our work as well as the small number of AU employees. The inclusion of deans and associate deans in the bargaining unit reflected that these positions are filled temporarily by academics as a form of institutional service.

No clear rationale for this proposal has yet been presented. And none of the historic reasons for having a single AUFA bargaining unit have meaningfully changed.

Breaking up the membership of AUFA will have a number of deleterious effects on AUFA members:

- AUFA members who remain in AUFA will have much diminished bargaining power.
- Academic coordinators will likely end up in the CUPE unit, will be more vulnerable to AU rolling back their terms and conditions of work, and will be ineligible to participate in the Universities Academic Pension Plan (UAPP).
- Professional staff members will likely end up non-unionized, will be more vulnerable to AU rolling back their terms and conditions of work, and will be ineligible to participate in UAPP.
- Dean, associate deans and professionals who are managers or directors will likely end up non-unionized, and will be more vulnerable to rolling back their terms and conditions of work, but will remain eligible to participate in UAPP.

These consequences and the timing of this proposal (right before bargaining) suggest AU is using its designation power to improve its bargaining position. This is an illegitimate use of the designation authority.

Both AU's and AUFA's recent engagement surveys have documented a significant lack of trust between AU employees and the senior administrator. A step towards rebuilding this trust would be for AU to abandon its proposed changes to the existing designation policy.

Sincerely,

Bob Barnetson	Professor
Karen Wall	Professor
Dr. Hussein Alzyoud	Assistant Professor
Jolene Armstrong	Associate Professor
Ingo Schmidt	Assistant Professor
Derek Briton	Associate Professor
Paul Jerry	Professor
Roland Treu	Associate Professor
Paul Huebener	Associate Professor
Dr. Jane Arscott	Professor

Since its inception in 1970 AU has been defined by its people. For today's 43,000 students to grow to 50,000 by 2025 and 100,000 by 2050, the passion, dedication, and labour of its faculty and staff are crucial to bring such ambitious goals to fruition. AU is its people, and its people define AU. OneAU. United in solidarity.

Saktinil Roy	Associate Professor
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For a university like AU professionals and academics have almost equally important roles to play in delivering our services. So, it is for effective collaboration to preserve the quality of our services that I recommend keeping both academics and professionals in the same association. This is very important for AU.

Angie Abdou	Associate Professor
Dale Dewhurst	Associate Professor

It has been, and remains, a major concern to me that AU employees continue to be seen as an expense item in AU's budgets. Instead, AU employees should be seen as what they are - AU's main and indispensable asset. You can not offer high quality education (IMAGINE that) without the combined efforts of AU staff. If AU is challenged to meet certain performance indicators then AU will need the services of a dedicated and engaged workforce. The de-designation runs contrary to AU's professed goals and has a significant negative impact on employee morale. IMAGINE what AU could achieve if it's employees were empowered to bring their highest strengths to their jobs every day; instead of repeatedly having to fight for their continued existence.

Dietmar Kennepohl	Professor
Simon P. Sigue	Professor
Dr. Nina Paulovicova	Assistant Professor
Eric Strikwerda	Associate Professor
Dr. Paul Kellogg	Professor

This is quite disturbing. If it is a serious proposal, it is improperly thought through and unreasonable. If it has been suggested in good faith, it should have been preceded by serious consultation with the

Dr. Meaghan Peuramaki-Brown Associate Professor

Dr. Jason Foster Associate Professor

Mark A. McCutcheon Professor

Marc B. Cels Associate Professor

Alexa DeGagne Assistant Professor

Nisha Nath Assistant Professor

Rhiannon Bury Associate Professor

Meenal Shrivastava Professor

Dr. Tobias Wiggins Assistant Professor

Evelyne Gagnon Assistant Professor

Dr. Michael Lithgow Assistant Professor

Archie Zariski Professor

Dr. Vina Tirven-Gadum Associate Professor

Dr. Suzanne McCullagh Assistant Professor

Dr. Anita Girvan Assistant Professor

Virginia Vandall-Walker Associate Professor

Dr. Mark Morpurgo Assistant Professor

several hundred folk affected (AUFA members). There has been no such consultation. If it is simply a "bargaining tactic" to put pressure on AUFA during negotiations, it is unprincipled. United in solidarity. Solidarity forever.

Unilateral and heavy-handed proposals such as this undermine employment relations at AU, provide evidence to the arguments that the senior leadership is out to bust the faculty association, and demonstrate that all of the flowery rhetoric about the AU "team" is a lie.

The proposal of de-designation, which comes out of nowhere, flies in the face of I-Care values created and trumpeted by the AU Administration. It treats academics and professionals with disrespect and as not worthy of the salaries, benefits, terms and conditions that have been negotiated through the collective bargaining process.

The timing of this change contributes negatively to the ongoing breakdown of trust between AU employees and senior administration. As the letter above indicates, abandoning these proposed changes would be a step towards rebuilding this trust and towards (re)unifying our collective interests and responses as an institution to policy changes that are increasing financial pressures, reducing access to education for students, and limiting the development of new programs.

Please reconsider this decision.

In my 15-year history with AU I was expecting (and hoping) that relations between the Executive and staff would improve with new blood at the top, only to see relations at their worst as the President and Executive continue to implement policies and changes unilaterally and undertake extremely aggressive negotiation tactics while simultaneously bloating their ranks along with the IT department. At a time when the President and Executive need support of ALL staff (faculty, professionals, and

support) to implement their vision and plans, the approach taken will continue to create division and the President will continue to lose support across the university. What is to be gained by this current proposal at this time? Nothing. Considering all the effort put forth by all staff in the first year of the new Executive's reign to development and implement IMAGINE, undertake the ad-hoc program review in record time, etc. the Executive says "thank you" by shaking hands with their right hand only to slap AU staff in the face with the left hand repeatedly with every divisive tactic. At a time when trust needs to be renewed, the opposite is taking place and I would implore the executive to reconsider the timing of this proposal and perhaps reintroduce it for discussion and consultation down the road when relations are strong and trust is rebuilt.

David Annand	Professor
Dr. Mihail Cocosila	Professor
Jeff Vallance	Professor
Bangaly Kaba	Associate Professor
Reinekke Langell	Assistant Professor
Helen Lam	Professor
Dr. Jennifer Stephens	Assistant Professor
Anshuman Khare	Professor

With regard to AU's model, we should not proceed.

I support good working relationships between AUFA and AU administration founded in trust.

Please re-consider this decision. At a time AU implements an ambitious strategic plan and transitions to a new ILE, I don't see how this is a way forward.

Dr. Martha Cleveland-Innes	Professor
Dr. Mike Sosteric	Associate Professor

Actions like these undermine the university climate, create an antagonistic relationship between management and staff, undermine creativity, and waste valuable resources and energy.

Lawton Shaw	Associate Professor
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Ramrodding de-designation of professionals is a sure way to worsen morale and erase any good will that employees feel towards senior management. There will surely be a range of negative unintended consequences of this. It is time for a sober second thought before proceeding with this.

Alex Kondra	Associate Professor
Terry Beckman	Associate Professor
Sandra Collins	Professor

One of the things I have greatly appreciated about my 20+ years at AU is the value we place on professionals and the degree to which they are integrated into all of the work that we do. Some of my closest working relationships continue to be with professional staff who have greatly enhanced my academic efficacy, innovation, and creativity. I strongly oppose any effort to undermine their value, contribution, and full participation in our academic mission.

Larbi Esmahi Associate Professor
 Zengxiang Wang Associate Professor
 Jon Dron Professor

All AUFA members have similar needs and interests in research, teaching, and service. Teaching, in particular, is a highly distributed activity with a fuzzy separation of roles. At least some professionals and coordinators are more prominent researchers than at least some professors, and they need to be more than ever if we are to continue to lead the world in online learning. I am proud to publicly proclaim our (mostly) equal treatment of professional staff as an example of best practice and would be ashamed if this were to change. We should celebrate and, if anything, bolster it, not diminish it.

Dr. Walid Belassi Associate Professor

I urge AU executives and board to reconsider the de-designation proposal. The unity of our academics and professionals is the best asset to count on for moving AU forward.

Dr. Lorelei Hanson Associate Professor
 Dr. Wendell Kisner Assistant Professor

It is unclear why the de-designation of well over half of our members is being proposed, and why it's being proposed so suddenly without consultation. Given this, how can faculty possibly be expected to support it? In its "Message from the President and Provost," the IMAGINE strategic plan states the following: "The work of many hands, Imagine builds upon the strength and spirit of our entire Athabasca University community." The communal spirit is a prominent theme running throughout the plan, and community is an integral part of its "I-CARE" values. As the IMAGINE plan avows, "Grounded in equity, we are committed to a cohesive community that shares the responsibility for the success of our University," and, "Reciprocity is the equitable maintenance of harmony and balance in the exchange of knowledge, ideas, services, and support between peoples, the land, and all our relations, including creatures and plants" (<http://imagine.athabascau.ca/>). But rather than fostering "the strength and spirit of our entire Athabasca University community" with "I-CARE" values and reciprocity, this proposal can only undermine them. How can persistence in this course of action do anything other than belie the IMAGINE plan and irreparably damage institutional morale? For all these reasons, I respectfully urge the Athabasca University Executive Team to reconsider its de-designation proposal.

Dr Norman Temple Professor
 Dr. Ana Azevedo Associate Professor
 Dr. Maiga Chang Professor
 Lorna Stefanick Professor

Please reconsider this decision.

I have watched this administration slowly dismantle the fragile trust it built up within the AU community in its first few years, but I'm not confused by why they

Mark Crawford Assistant Professor

are doing it. For anyone wondering what is going on, this is how senior executives advance their careers. They weaken the rights of workers by attacking their unions, create chaos by bargaining in bad faith, and then leverage the chaos to drive a hard bargain. They can then sell themselves internally, or better yet, externally to other institutions as courageous red tape cutters and budget balancers who show strong leader in the face of opposition. Who needs to consult with the "team" when you have all the answers yourself? Make no mistake, this is a strategic move. First they go after the professionals, then they go after us. United in solidarity.

2 brief comments: (1) I am disappointed that this Leadership group, which had initially done quite a bit to restore an atmosphere of optimism, trust and consultation, has once again seen fit to dissipate their own accomplishment. (2) For my first 5 years or so at AU (2007-2012) I was actually inclined towards shifting the University and its operations to Edmonton and to separating the teaching/academic and professional staff in their union designations. Ironically, on both these scores I used to agree with you (somewhat). But I have come around to the view that in the online environment course teams and course production will become more ongoing and more integrated with academic functions and have similar needs to do research and skill upgrading etc as well as sharing a common concern with online pedagogy. Morale and university community, both in Edmonton and in Athabasca, as well as greater buy-in to IMAGINE, would be better served by showing some flexibility and reconsidering this decision.

Bob Heller Professor

The results of the recent engagement survey appear to have been forgotten by the executive group. The de-designation proposal put forward will only further disengage staff from executive messaging. At this point in time, it is critical for the executive group to demonstrate real leadership and withdraw this irrational proposal.

Dr. Farzad Alvi Assistant Professor

Manijeh Mannani Professor

Dr. Sabine Graf Professor

Dr. Michael K. Mauws Professor

Dr. Xiaokun Zhang Associate Professor

Andrew Chiarella Assistant Professor

Merlyn Foo Assistant Professor

Dr Saud Taj Assistant Professor

Dr. Carolyn Greene Associate Professor

Cheryl Kier Associate Professor

Aris Solomon Associate Professor

Martin Connors	Professor	Since 1988 I have closely observed AU in various employee positions, as a full-time academic since 1996. My observation is that improving management efficiency would mobilize the abundant talents that are resident in AUFA members, allowing AU to thrive. As a gardener I nurture my plants. The only plants that thrive in harsh conditions are weeds. Union busting is an easy way to look tough but ultimately will backfire.
Dr. Harris Wang Joseph Kelly	Associate Professor Assistant Professor	When I see this I think of Trump's "Peace" Deal of Century announced yesterday, which many are calling a win-win for one side alone. Implementation of this unilaterally imposed policy of de-designation is, in spirit, like the "Peace" Deal of Century which scraps negotiation and consensual decision-making as the basis of a co-operative relationship between contending parties.
Faria Sana Davina Bhandar	Assistant Professor Assistant Professor	As a relatively new member of AUFA and the AU community I am gravely concerned that such a proposal has been made by the senior administration of this University. It is clear from my limited experience of this very unique institution that the connections between academic, teaching and professional staff is paramount to how course delivery, development and student support happens. In solidarity for a OneAU.
Kai Lamertz	Associate Professor	I urge the university administration to deal with the faculty association in good faith.
Simon Nuttgens Dr. Tony Simmons	Associate Professor Assistant Professor	After almost 40 years on the job, I really can't recall the relations between staff and the senior executive group sinking to a lower nadir than today. And God knows we've been through some turbulent times in the past. But the apparent failure of this administration to respect the close teamwork that has always existed between academic and professional members, a teamwork which is necessitated by the work we do, and by the composite nature of the courses we produce: (academic content from the faculty, literary oversight from the editors, graphic representation from the visual designers, pedagogical principles from the instructional designers, as well as copyright officers, web developers, among others, etc.). This teamwork has remained an important aspect of AU which has always distinguished it from conventional college campuses where the instructor delivers their classroom lecture without the assistance of professional colleagues. And an important political and occupational confirmation of this teamwork remains our equal representation within a single bargaining unit. To threaten this historical partnership with any proposal to of de-designate our

professional colleagues – especially while at the same time endlessly celebrating, in speech and text, the distinctive and unique institutional mandate and profile of our university– can only appear, even to the most passionate advocates of AU, as callous, cynical and profoundly hypocritical. Let us all hope that such a shameful day never comes to pass.

Dr. Shabnam Inanloo Dailoo	Associate Professor
Dr. Douglas MacLeod	Professor
Dr. Georgia Dewart	Assistant Professor
Dr. Shawn Lewenza	Associate Professor
Constance Blomgren	Assistant Professor
Dr. Luisa Barton	Assistant Professor
Dr. Mike Gismondi	Professor

I see teaching and education at AU as a commons in which we all collaborate as peers unlike the faculty at other universities. I stand with my colleagues. I encourage my VP Academic to represent this perspective.

Dr. Kam Jugdev	Professor
Dr. Hugh Notman	Associate Professor

This de-designation guarantees that AU faculty will not engage in (ie., volunteer for) administrative service roles in the future. Associate deans and chairs are roles attached to academic positions, NOT salaried jobs/positions. It's important that these roles remain open to AU faculty and not always be tendered out externally.

Rory McGreal	Professor
Dr. Nathaniel Ostashewski	Associate Professor
Dr James Greenwood- Lee	Assistant Professor

What makes AU unique is our collaborative nature across our workforce - de-designation would be detrimental to this and our institution overall.