

Response and Resolution to the Residence Changes Proposed by the University of Alberta. – University of Alberta Students' Union / Lister Hall Students' Association

This week, the University of Alberta announced sweeping changes to the Lister Hall residence. The Students' Union and the Lister Hall Students' Association recognize that the University has concerns with the current state of the residence and we wish to enter into a collaborative consultative process to address these concerns alongside those of students. This process should be grounded in due process, the rule of law, and evidence-based consideration of the effects of decisions on residents' lives.

In order for this to happen, the current suite of proposed changes must be rescinded immediately. This is necessary in order to produce positive outcomes for all parties.

Students are concerned with the nature of many of the proposed changes and the process on which they are based. The changes affect who can live in residence, who residents can work for, and many dimensions of the residence experience. Students believe that this assortment of changes generally does not flow logically from the concerns identified by the university. Although some may be positive, others pose plausible health and safety risks, while others will unequivocally diminish the value of the residence experience. Others have an unclear impact.

We believe that our concerns result from a stark lack of real consultation, and that they should have been acknowledged, if not mitigated, in the current proposal. It would seem that our concerns – many of which are overwhelmingly recognized by past residents – were not on the radar of the administration until this week. Some seem to remain misunderstood.

To be clear, while we have concerns with many of the specifics, our primary concern rests with the process. We cannot have a real conversation or a complete position on the issues until the process is carefully defined.

Our concerns with the process are as follows. First, the manner in which these changes were presented constitutes a breach of a 2008 Memorandum of Agreement between Residence Services and the Lister Hall Students' Association. The Memorandum was created to prevent a repeat of the lack of consultation that nearly bore similar changes four years ago.

Second, the changes to alcohol policy challenge the University's own governance processes. For one, they should have been brought to the Campus Law Review Committee, as per its Terms of Reference. Additionally, a Board of Governors motion in February 2011 vested authority over residence specific rules in both Residence Services and the Residence Associations. This Board directive has been sidestepped.

Third, the University's actions this week violate GFC Policy 65.3: University of Alberta Student Housing Policy in numerous ways.

Fourth, the manner in which student staff members are being terminated/converted is disconcerting. Although not technically problematic, an ultimatum to either resign from one position or suffer termination without cause from another sends a sharply negative message to the university's own staff. The timeline under which staff have been asked to make a decision affecting their employment, residence and domicile -- six business days -- is unacceptable. It is also unclear whether Residence Services can actually prohibit part-time staff from holding separate, concurrent employment with the Lister Hall Students' Association, and why it should want to so suddenly.

Fifth, The Students' Union is granted responsibility over student affairs by the Post Secondary Learning Act of Alberta. This authority to represent student interests, when it concerns residence-specific issues, is largely delegated to residence associations. The Lister Hall Students' Association has standing to voice student concerns and is therefore more than a mere student group. A unilateral imposition of changes affecting students ignores our statutory role and makes it difficult to honor the spirit of the PSLA.

Sixth, and perhaps most importantly, the process taken ignores the multi- Budget Advisory Committee consultation framework created upon recommendation by the Ministry. The current set of advisory committees were meant to demonstrate to students and the Government of Alberta that the Ministry and the institutions, as agents of the government, would take student consultation seriously. The complete disregard for student consultation in the administration's decision making process is in stark contrast to this principle and the comments of the Minister. Indeed, the Minister himself this week approached the Students' Union to express his concern with the University's process.

In general, the events of this week do not align with the general principles of collegiality and good governance. The Students' Union's confidence in our University's excellence has been shaken.

Because time is of the essence, we are prepared to act quickly to protect the interests of student staff and residents. **The only option to ensure positive outcomes for all parties is to halt all changes, effective immediately.** Moving forward, we must commit to a well defined timeline and process for consultation in good faith. The attached framework is our proposal to do just that.

The Students' Union and the Lister Hall Students' Association reiterate our dedication to the creation of a vibrant, successful residence community that is above all, healthy and safe. Furthermore, we shall now put forth a bold new mission: to make Lister Hall not only the largest, but also the safest student residence in the nation. Together, we can come up with solutions that better target residents' personal and academic success, without risking their health and safety or the core character of this one-of-a-kind community.

Sincerely,

The Students' Union, The University of Alberta

and

The Lister Hall Students' Association