

Tuesday, August 4, 2020

Dr. Christine Watson
Vice-President, Academic
Red River College

Dear Dr. Christine Watson,

On July 8, 2020 Red River College (RRC) announced that it was suspending 6 on-campus programs offered to students, including the popular Library and Information Technology (LIT) program that, according to the 2017/2018 Graduate Satisfaction and Employment survey, highlighted a 100% employment rate of responding graduates from the LIT program. As library professionals we would like to iterate our support for the program.

This announcement has caused concern for the Manitoba Library Association (MLA), as this decision creates an adverse impact upon many MLA members. While MLA recognizes the financial hardships RRC is currently facing, especially in light of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, MLA also recognizes that RRC's decision to suspend the LIT program is detrimental to the whole library profession in Manitoba.

The primary concern MLA has regarding the program suspension is the greatly diminished educational opportunities library and information professionals in Manitoba will be able to access. RRC's LIT program is the only in-person, library-focused program in the province. Many educational institutions and library systems in Manitoba utilize the talents LIT graduates bring to their respective employers, and with the suspension of the program potential employees of these organizations will now be more inclined to leave the province for this education that provides them career opportunities in the library and information profession.

While MLA appreciates the efforts being undertaken by RRC to ensure students currently in the program will be allowed to finish it in a timely manner, MLA also wishes to express concerns about the in-person program; that currently only one instructor, who also acts as the program coordinator, will be available to instruct the remaining students in the 2nd year class. This seems to be a drastic reduction in the resources available to current students to complete the program, which may compromise the overall quality of their education.

The LIT continuing education program appears to be the only option for future students to take to pursue an LIT diploma after 2021. The LIT continuing education program has not previously had enough faculty to allow students to graduate within a two year time frame, as many courses become unavailable to students due to low enrolment or lack of available faculty, forcing students in some cases to take four years or more to graduate. MLA would like to seek clarity on if further changes or adaptations are planned for the LIT continuing education program in light of the full time on campus program being discontinued.

As with any other skilled work profession, LIT graduates need to have the requisite skills and knowledge necessary to operate in 21st century work settings, and this requires a strong, dedicated program backed by the appropriate resources of its institution. MLA asks RRC to harness the LIT program advisory committee to ensure proper resources and industry expertise are best utilized so as to retain the high quality of education and graduate success the LIT program is known for.

MLA wishes to reiterate our support for the LIT program and underline the importance of this program to local communities, educational institutions, and the citizens of Manitoba. We thank you for your time and consideration in reading our concerns. MLA looks forward to hearing how RRC will address these concerns, and wishes to express our hope RRC will keep MLA informed on the future development and plans for the LIT program.

Sincerely,



Ms. Melanie Sucha, MLIS
Vice-President
Manitoba Library Association

cc: Lisa Jamieson, Chair, Creative Arts LJamieson@rrc.ca