

***Developing Research at Université de Saint-Boniface: An
Institutional Capacity Challenge***

**Brief submitted by Université de Saint-Boniface to the
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Background

The only French-language university in Western Canada, Université de Saint-Boniface (USB) offers college and university programs that help students develop their full potential, while contributing to the advancement of knowledge and the vitality of the Francophone community in Manitoba and elsewhere.

USB typically receives more than 1,400 students in its credit programs from the Manitoba Francophone school system, the immersion system and 25 countries abroad. As a result, USB is the second largest Francophone university in a minority setting in Canada.

USB's mission is necessarily twofold, as it is both academic (teaching and research) and social (teaching and research as contributors to the development and vitality of Manitoba's Francophone community). Such a mission is the hallmark of any Francophone postsecondary institution in a minority setting. USB thus makes three major contributions to society:

- It offers the only range of French-language university and college programs and non-credit training in Manitoba (12 undergraduate and two graduate university programs, as well as 10 college programs), while providing the only formative student experience in French; it therefore produces the vast majority of postsecondary graduates in Manitoba who are trained to be both formally and professionally bilingual (French/English);
- It participates concretely in the advancement of scientific knowledge in a number of fields through the results of research programs conducted by its researchers primarily, but not exclusively, in French;
- It contributes to the social, economic and cultural development of Manitoba society, particularly the Francophone community. *The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act* (2016) recognizes USB as one of the important institutions of Manitoba's Francophone community.

In 2022–2023, USB has an operational budget of \$34.9M. Recurring provincial funding is \$18.4M, while annual federal funding is \$3.5M.

USB has 91 regular faculty members (university and college programs combined). While faculty members have been active in research for some 30 years, this research has been developing more significantly since USB achieved university status in 2011. Through the work of its researchers over the years, as well as the institution's efforts to support research development, USB is making a tangible contribution to the advancement of scientific knowledge, in Manitoba and both nationally and internationally.

In October 2019, the USB Senate adopted a new Strategic Research Plan for the 2020–2025 period. The Plan confirms the institutional strategies that USB will implement to strengthen its research capacity and identifies areas of excellence where USB makes its most significant contributions to knowledge advancement:

1) The Francophonie of the Americas and beyond:

USB researchers regularly publish the results of studies on the following aspects of the Francophonie: Francophone migration to and within North America; issues of immigration, health and education in minority settings; literary expression; linguistic variation; intercultural interactions; Métis studies and the status of people with disabilities in Francophone contexts; and issues related to citizenship, pluralism and inclusion in Francophone settings. The research program of the Canada Research Chair in Migrations, Transfers and Francophone Communities, Tier 1, is fully in line with this broad field and is USB's most significant research achievement. The Canada Research Chairs Program has renewed the Chair for a second seven-year term (2020–2027).

2) Humanities and social sciences:

Our researchers make regular publications as part of research programs with significant impact in fields such as education, history, literature, philosophy, psychology, political science and translation. Within these different disciplines, they examine a wide variety of topics, including decolonization, minority groups, metaphysics, social media, transnational migration, inclusive instructional practices, international relations and representation. The most important research that USB researchers conduct in the humanities and social sciences is often multidisciplinary in nature.

3) Genetics:

With a level 2+ containment laboratory and successful collaborations with the National Microbiology Laboratory and *Genome Prairie*, for example, USB stands out in the field of genetics. USB awarded the 2020 edition of its Research Excellence Award to one of its microbiologists.

4) Mental health and wellness:

USB is conducting important research in this area, particularly with respect to the mental health and wellness of youth pursuing postsecondary education in Francophone minority settings.

5) Mobilization of scientific knowledge in French:

USB is a major actor in the mobilization of scientific knowledge in French. The only university press in Western Canada, the Presses universitaires de Saint-Boniface (PUSB) is recognized for the quality of its catalogue of publications. PUSB also publishes *Cahiers franco-canadiens de l'Ouest*, the only French-language scientific journal in Western Canada.

Often resulting from external grants and large-scale inter-institutional and university–community collaborations, the researchers' publications advance scientific knowledge in

Manitoba, as well as nationally and internationally, both in the areas cited and in other fields of research.

Main institutional challenge with respect to research: institutional capacity limited by chronic and significant underfunding

USB researchers are clearly advancing scientific knowledge and the dissemination of knowledge in French in original and important ways in multiple fields, and the institution takes great pride in this. Unfortunately, there are serious constraints that prevent USB from developing research more fully.

The main constraint—and by far the largest—is the significant underfunding that USB has always encountered as a postsecondary institution in a Francophone minority setting. It is therefore fundamentally a challenge of institutional capacity that limits research development in minority settings.

While the various postsecondary institutions and faculties in minority settings across the country each have their own specific characteristics, USB is of the opinion that its situation of underfunding, and thus of limited institutional capacity, is far from unique.

We consider it important to explain this situation, at least as it relates to USB, because until it is understood and addressed, efforts to develop research in minority settings will not be directed towards the primary challenge.

A brief analysis of USB's limited institutional capacity

As stated previously, USB's mission is twofold, as it is both academic and social. Teaching must necessarily be the priority activity in the institution's efforts to achieve this mission, because USB is part of an educational and community continuum focused on the instruction and development of students. The vitality of the broad French-language education continuum (early childhood education, FL1 and FL2 programs and postsecondary education in French), as well as the retention of students along this continuum, depends significantly on USB's ability to offer credible postsecondary programs that engage youth. However, given the nature of USB's academic and social mission, research is also of paramount importance.

To achieve its social mission, USB must therefore strive to offer as wide a range of programs of study as possible, because no other postsecondary institution in Manitoba will offer them in its place. The vitality of the French-language education continuum and of Manitoba's Francophone community is at stake.

With this strategic commitment to French-language education, USB (for over 200 years), along with the Franco-Manitoban School Division (DSFM) (since 1994), has been the backbone of Manitoba's Francophone community. This contribution supports not only the development of Manitoba's Francophone community—one of the most vibrant minority communities—but also the social, cultural and economic development of

Manitoba as a whole. We invite Committee members to consult, as an example, the analysis of the economic contribution of bilingual Manitobans by The Conference Board of Canada in its 2018 report entitled *English-French Bilingualism Outside Quebec: An Economic Portrait of Bilinguals in Canada*.¹ Highlights of the report for Manitoba include:

- 1) The average annual salary of bilingual Manitobans is 5% higher than that of unilingual Manitobans;
- 2) The unemployment rate for bilingual Manitobans is one percentage point lower than for unilingual Manitobans;
- 3) The labour force participation rate is 5.5 percentage points higher among bilingual Manitobans than unilingual Manitobans;
- 4) Bilingual Manitobans contribute 5% more per capita than unilingual Manitobans to the province's gross domestic product.

When interpreting these figures, it is important to keep in mind that, as Manitoba's only French-language postsecondary institution, USB is the only postsecondary institution that consistently seeks to produce graduates who are officially bilingual at a professional level.

In addition, according to this year's Statistics Canada study *Language used at work by graduates of English, French or bilingual postsecondary institutions*,² half of the Francophone graduates of USB work *primarily* in French following their studies. In this report, Statistics Canada points out that these findings with respect to USB graduates stand out at the national level. It is clear that USB's programs of study meet a real need for bilingual graduates.

Moreover, USB provides both levels of government with the bilingual graduates they need to deliver key services in French, such as nursing, school education and government services. This makes USB a strategic asset—particularly for Manitoba, but also for the region and the rest of the country. The return on provincial and federal investment is therefore unique, undeniable and very significant.

This return is all the more impressive given that USB is seriously underfunded. According to the *Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne*, for every dollar that both levels of government spend on postsecondary education in majority institutions, there is a need to invest \$1.30 to provide education of equal quality in minority settings. This need for an additional 30% investment can be explained by the lack of institutional economies of scale, the necessarily small size of the student body and the special and supplementary supports that an institution like ours must provide to its student population—three factors that are unique to postsecondary education in a minority setting.

¹ See: https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/82563990-6d94-48ae-9485-42e993ebeb2b/10054_Bilingualism-QC-RPT-EN.pdf

² See: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2022001/article/00003-eng.htm?fbclid=IwAR2LJE-96_eQkgth5P_n9P6Zd1KR7ffZExtA6dZBM8dt9IRcpUQ2er8w

However, federal funding that would normally be used to offset the additional costs associated with postsecondary education in a minority setting has been frozen for 15 years, at both USB and other institutions. Annual federal funding now represents only 19% of the core funding that the provincial government provides to USB.

What happens when a postsecondary institution in a Francophone minority setting strives to achieve its dual academic and social mission while it is continually underfunded in this way?

Given its dual academic and social mission, USB strives to offer the widest possible range of academic programs. It therefore focuses all its efforts and the vast majority of its limited resources on providing its programs of study, high-quality instruction and student services. This commitment is non-negotiable for USB.

However, given the lack of adequate funding, USB cannot afford the faculty required to provide the necessary programs of study. As a result, USB must ask its faculty to take on a very heavy teaching load in order to offer a range of programs that will ensure the development of both the entire French-language education continuum and Manitoba's Francophone community. For example, at USB, the teaching load of university professors is six courses per year. We do not know of any heavier university teaching load in the country. By comparison, in its 2018 report entitled *The Composition and Activities of Ontario Universities' Academic Workforce*,³ the Council of Ontario Universities concluded that regular faculty members teach an average of 3.2 courses per year, or half of the university teaching load at USB.

As a result, faculty members are very busy with teaching, leaving little time for research. USB tries to address this challenge by offering faculty members targeted releases based on proposals for research activities, but its underfunded situation means that it is sometimes unable to provide all the releases needed.

Another inevitable result of chronic underfunding is USB's inability to invest adequately in administration and support services. At USB, administration and support services are not just "lean" or even scarce—they're skeletal. For instance, the USB Office of Research is composed of a single person.

In such a context, administration and support services are at best constantly struggling to keep up. The services provided by such small administrative teams are not only limited, but also particularly vulnerable to disruptions caused by sick leave, retirements and staff turnover.

Under the circumstances, USB simply does not have the necessary institutional capacity to dedicate to proper research development. As a result of the limits of its institutional capacity, USB is struggling, for example, to implement its 2020–2025 Strategic Research Plan,⁴ which, all things considered, is nevertheless rather modest.

³ See: <https://cou.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Public-Report-on-Faculty-at-Work-Dec-2017-FN.pdf>

⁴ See: <https://ustboniface.ca/file/plan-strategique-de-recherche-2020-2025.pdf> [French only]

Until USB is funded in accordance with its dual academic and social mission, as the only Francophone institution at the head of Manitoba's French-language education continuum, and as a strategic asset for the provincial and federal governments, it will be unable to achieve all aspects of this mission, to the detriment of the vitality of the education continuum and of Manitoba's Francophone community. It will also be unable to develop French-language research in any significant way, even though its dual academic and social mission requires it to do so.

Unfortunately, in the context of serious underfunding that USB is experiencing, research is becoming almost a "luxury" that the institution struggles to afford. Of course, research is not a luxury, as it advances knowledge and enriches teaching, while fuelling the development of Manitoba's Francophone community. It is therefore the French-language education continuum, Manitoba's Francophone community and Manitoba as a whole that are suffering the negative consequences of this structural inability to fully pursue the research component of USB's academic and social mission.

Recommendations

In light of the challenges identified in this brief, and in order to make it easier for the Government of Canada to identify the priority actions to be taken if it wishes to develop research in Francophone minority settings, Université de Saint-Boniface proposes the following recommendations to the Committee:

- 1) That the Government of Canada proceed with the implementation of its commitment to provide Canada's French-language postsecondary institutions with additional recurring funding of \$80M.
- 2) That the Government of Canada work with relevant stakeholders to implement the recommendations made by the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada in their recent report entitled *Bâtir ensemble le postsecondaire en français de l'avenir : bilan des états généraux sur le postsecondaire en contexte francophone minoritaire* [Working together to build the French-language postsecondary education of the future: report on the general status of postsecondary education in Francophone minority settings],⁵ including the six recommendations for research.
- 3) That the Government of Canada work closely with the Government of Manitoba to provide funding to enable Université de Saint-Boniface to achieve all aspects of its dual academic and social mission as the only Francophone postsecondary institution in Manitoba's French-language education continuum and as a strategic asset to Manitoba's Francophone community.

⁵ See: <https://egpostsecondaire.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Rapport.pdf> [French only]