



## PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Welcome back and I hope you enjoyed a happy, healthy and festive holiday with your family and loved ones.

The Local has been extremely busy dealing with a variety of issues that has left me feeling as though I have passed through a time warp, missing the 2013 year entirely. One of the realities that the Local is faced with is the increasing complexity of the issues that we deal with on a daily basis. I clearly recall, perhaps with a touch of envy, the times when issues that the Local dealt with would take a few minutes to a few hours to resolve now the issues often require days and weeks to achieve the same results. Sign of the times? In any case, the New Year will bring with it the harsh reality of our Collective Bargaining process.

Local Presidents represent academic staff across the province, and we have a good pulse on what works well in our present Collective Agreement and what areas require refocusing. However, direction needs to be set for this round of bargaining by the Locals; that requires the participation of all academic staff covered by the Collective Agreement (full time and partial load). In the next few months, the Local will endeavor to engage all of you in this process. Let’s talk about what precedes the actual face to face bargaining. Each College Local will ask their academic staff to create demands on how to improve the present Collective Agreement, either by creating new language (new articles), or improving present language. The Local will also go through the process of prioritizing those demands. When this exercise is completed, the Local will forward the demands to the elected Bargaining Team.

The Bargaining Team will undertake the task of categorizing the demands by either creating new articles, or including the demands under the appropriate existing articles. Once this is done, a provincial Demand Setting meeting is called and the elected delegates will attend. The task of this meeting is to finalize and prioritize all of the demands. Following the conclusion of this process and prior to the face to face bargaining with management, the team is charged with the task of writing legally

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enforceable language that addresses the demands.

Why are negotiations so important? And, indeed, why are improvements to the Collective Agreement, including wages and benefits so important? If we look at past members' gains, you will see that these gains create a positive impact that benefits all workers, in all sectors.

What is interesting and what most people don't know is that when the College system was conceived in the late sixties, the terminology used to describe us was "faculty". 'Counsellors and Librarians' were considered support personnel. The terms and conditions of work were between the Council of Regents and the Civil Service Association of Ontario (Inc.). This document was signed in 1969. The physical size of the Terms and Conditions consisted of **7 and a half** written pages. Our present Collective Agreement consists of **148 and a half** pages. In labour negotiations the gains made over this period of time have been monumental. We need to ask ourselves how did we get from where we were to where we are now and what kind of resolve was put forward to achieve this.

I make it a point to peruse through the 1969 Terms and Conditions of work every bargaining year simply to remind myself of what it would have been like when maternity leave was without pay and the length of that leave varied in length at the discretion of the Board of Governors; sabbatical leave required a minimum of ten years seniority, compared to the six years which we presently have. There was no accumulated sick leave, or group life

insurance, no dental, no religious leave, no supplemental health benefits, no STD, no LTD and the list goes on. Workload – yes, I do remember this well. We had 27 teaching contact hours maximum and in most cases, "Teaching Masters" were required to teach an additional number of hours in Continuing Education in the evening at a fraction of their regular salary. To top it all off, if a work dispute arose, there was no grievance procedure in place to address it.

Over the years, we (all of us), have worked hard and diligently to be in the position we are in today. Over this time period, there have been three work disruptions with an average duration of just over three weeks. As a result of the first strike, the Standard Workload Formula (SWF) was introduced and in defending the workload formula, we struck the other two times at a cost to us of approximately 80 million dollars.

In moving forward, I believe we need to be vigilant in protecting what we have achieved in past negotiations as well as have plans for the future. Your participation throughout this process is invaluable in charting the path for working conditions and benefits for our future. We need to ask ourselves; what did we do that made us so successful? From my perspective it was relatively simple; we had a plan, we had an incredible resolve to see it through, and we were prepared to take the appropriate action, when necessary, to get there.

An important question that we need to ask ourselves now is: What is an absolute requirement that must be entrenched in our Collective Agreement

in order to ensure job security; respect for our knowledge/skills; ownership of our work and the right to make decisions that would create the best opportunities for our students to be successful in their studies and subsequent careers?

**Academic Freedom.** In the next few months we will be hearing these two words regularly and there will be much dialogue as to the meaning of Academic Freedom in the College system. Discussion on Academic Freedom is incredibly important for two major reasons: First, we as faculty need to have a good understanding as to what it means to us and what nuances this right

will have on our work as well as the relationship with our Employer and students. The second reason which is just as important, if not more so, is how do we achieve this goal and what are we prepared to do to realize it.

Negotiations will begin June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, so between now and then let's begin a dialogue on this issue that will hopefully create consensus on the meaning of Academic Freedom and the resolve to make it happen!

*Tom Tomassi*

## **PARTIAL LOAD UPDATE**

Welcome back. Over the past year, I have had the pleasure of meeting many of you for informal discussions about your work, your issues and concerns, and your ideas about how to improve existing contract language. The most important issue for many is how we might establish, in future collective agreements, a clearly defined process to convert partial-load positions into full-time positions.

While it is yet to be determined what the exact demands from our negotiators will be in 2014, there is a general consensus that contract language for partial-load faculty needs to be improved. You can find out about your provincial negotiating team and other relevant OPSEU information, by visiting:

**[www.opseu.org/caat/caat\\_ac/bargaini\\_nq-team-2013.htm](http://www.opseu.org/caat/caat_ac/bargaini_nq-team-2013.htm)**

As we enter into contract negotiations mid-2014, there will be regular progress

reports from your provincial team, and from your local team here at GBC.

Watch for future issues of "The Vocal Local" (VoLo), and check your local's website for information on a variety of work-related issues, and news:

**[www.opseu556.org](http://www.opseu556.org)**

**In other news, we now have union office space at St. James campus. The office is located in building A (200 King St. E.) in room 166B – located on the west side of the building just up from the mezzanine. Please contact any of your union reps, or call Madeline at ext 2200 to book a time to discuss any issues you may have.**

By now, you should have received a letter from the CAAT Pension Plan inviting you to join the plan beginning in January 2014. While joining the plan may not be the right thing to do for

everyone, non-full time faculty are now eligible to register and contribute to the plan. For detailed descriptions of the plan benefits, contribution rates, and long-term pension planning, see:

[www.caatpension.on.ca](http://www.caatpension.on.ca)

Lastly, I would like to remind you to sign a union card. See any steward (the list is at the end of this newsletter) or call the union office (x 2200) to arrange a time to do this. As a registered member

of OPSEU, you will have access to [OPSEU group plan discounts](#) for mobile devices, home and auto insurance, and a variety of other items. Also, in the event of a work stoppage, you will be eligible for strike pay from OPSEU as well as top up from the Local. Please feel free to contact me, or any other local representative should you have a question or concern, or just to stay in touch. *Paul Miskin, Steward*

## HERE AND THERE ON-LINE

Interested in what's happening at other colleges around the province? Wonder what's new at OPSEU? Curious about labour news? You can easily keep up to date with OPSEU and with stories related to our bargaining unit online.

The **Campaign for Quality Education** blog debuted this Fall. In the "About Us" section, it says: This blog is about Quality Education in Ontario – what it means to you, why it's important, and how we can increase it."

Recent posts have described issues facing various CAAT-A colleges.

- The post discussing a visit to Conestoga College ends with a mention of the 16% salary increase that college's president got in 2011.
- An October blog entry regarding a visit to Humber notes that Humber has undergone extensive renovations and has opened new facilities, yet class sizes went from an average of 40-45 to an average of 75-100.

- In discussing a visit to Niagara College, the tension between participating in additional activities (open houses, committee work, etc.) and being a "team player" is noted.

The point to note is that you're not alone. Faculty members across the province frequently face the same issues. Read more at: <http://quality-education-campaign.blogspot.ca/>

If you want to get another perspective on what's happening at colleges around Ontario, you can check out **One Ontario College Prof's Blog**, which has been alive and kicking since January 2010. Posts include discussions on Nursing Facilitators (new employment category), Academic Freedom, and musings on credentials, testing standards and so on. Have a look at: <http://collegeprof.ca/>

Blogs aren't the only online places to get updates. Organized Labour also has quite a presence in the Twittersphere.

Of course, our Local members may be interested in following the official tweets

from OPSEU which are found **@OPSEU**. They frequently post links to videos, events info, and shout-outs in support of our union workers everywhere.

Another interesting account to follow is **@CUPEOntario**. Many of their tweets focus on equality and economics. They have recently tweeted about libraries, fair wages and First Nations.

General news and labour updates are regularly tweeted by **@TradeUnionNews** and by **@CanadianLabour**, which tweets about “News & Views from the Communications shop at the Canadian Labour Congress”.

And, finally, you can check the tweets from **@OntMinLabour**, whose Twitter bio says that their mission is to “advance safe, fair and harmonious workplace practices”. They post a question of the week, as well as helpful info on such topics as Health & Safety or Dress Codes.

As our Union heads into the next round of negotiations, it would be worthwhile to take a peek now and then at what’s happening. Remember: Knowledge is power.

## **CELL PHONES**

As a faculty member, the odds are that the College is not paying for your cell phone. So, why are you giving your private/personal cell number to students? It’s not a work phone.

It is laudable and it’s understandable that Faculty want to be available to help their students, but by giving students your number, it essentially invites them into your private life as well as creating for them unrealistic expectations of service.

To be fair to ourselves, and our students, we need to maintain a

professional relationship with them and create clear parameters on expectations.

Students can contact you at your work number, by email, visit during office hours, or

reach you via WebCt. There is no need to give out your personal cell phone number.



# Assessing Education in Ontario Colleges: Notes on the Journey so Far

By Kevin MacKay, Professor of Social Science at Mohawk College / OPSEU Campaigns Officer  
– Campaign for Quality Education

As a social science professor at Mohawk College, one half of my job is to critically examine the society we live in. The second half is to share this spirit of inquiry with the students I teach, and to help them develop the intellectual tools they'll need to make sound life decisions, to achieve their academic and career goals, and to become informed participants in our democracy. These twin responsibilities make the job of a college professor unique, as academic integrity is combined with a student-centered, hands-on learning environment. From my experience, seeing students light up when they discover new information, or develop new capacities within themselves, is incredibly rewarding. These moments are what professors live for, and they're what's kept me motivated over 10 years of teaching.

Since I first began at Mohawk, I've witnessed several changes to the college environment. Some of them have been positive, such as increasing student enrolment, modernized facilities, and new educational technologies. However, others have eroded the quality of education, and have made the job of professor increasingly difficult. As a result, this year I've taken a leave from teaching to work for the College of Applied Arts and Trades – Academic (CAAT-A) division of OPSEU. My task has been to turn a social scientist's eye toward the Ontario college system, and to analyze the challenges it faces. To

this end, for the past two months I've been visiting with faculty at all 24 Ontario colleges. Having completed 23 of these meetings, I'm beginning to develop a clearer sense of the fast-evolving terrain of college education today, and of the serious issues these changes raise for academic integrity, quality education, and the future prospects of our youth. In this article I offer some reflection on the journey to date.

## Early History and Development

It's difficult to understand the college system without first appreciating both the wider sociopolitical context it exists within, and the history of its development. From my experience, many faculty have little sense of this history, and suffer from a case of collective amnesia that is echoed within the broader culture. In Orwell's masterpiece 1984, the slogan of Big Brother's totalitarian Party was: "Who controls the past, controls the future." Orwell was referring to the Party's conscious re-writing of history. However, today a more dangerous phenomenon is not so much history's manipulation, as its simple *absence*. If the past isn't mentioned, and more importantly understood, then it ceases to exist, and we in the present are left without its important lessons.

Another lesson from Orwell is that those who seek to eliminate the past are generally those who benefit most from

the present set-up. Today is no different, and it's not surprising then that politicians and business leaders portray the current political and economic environment in Canada as inevitable and inescapable. Starting in the 1980s and intensifying since the financial crash in 2007, a narrative of competition, crisis, austerity and insecurity has been so often repeated that any discussion of past ways of thinking and doing can seem almost mythical. Times where Canadian life was guided by a spirit of cooperation, justice and fairness are merely fanciful tales, and more importantly, are simply impossible to consider in the present, grim reality.

However, history *does* matter, and when the Ontario college system was first founded in 1965, it was within a very different context. In the period after WWII, industrialized countries in Europe and North America had undergone profound changes in the structure of their economies and in the way they did politics. Soldiers had returned from the world's battlefields to demand a fair share of the wealth generated by industrial economies. Through the labour movement, workers gained legal recognition of unions, and secured major improvements in labour law, wages, and working conditions. Labour parties entered into politics with renewed strength, and helped pass legislation that made tax structures fair, and that committed governments to providing critical services to all citizens, not just the wealthy. Publicly funded healthcare, social services, and education became the heart of a social safety net that lifted working families out of poverty at unprecedented levels.

This was the environment in which the college system was founded, with government funding accounting for 75% of operating revenues, full-time professors, and small, highly interactive classes. The community colleges were intended to meet the needs of Ontario's cities for employment and economic development. They were also specifically designed to open up post-secondary education to a much larger population than had originally been serviced by universities. At its inception then, the colleges were about access to quality education, and being responsive to the needs of diverse communities.

When the college system was constituted, and for the first two decades of its existence, a kind of "social contract" existed within each institution. This contract was based on collegial relations between faculty and management. Management acknowledged faculty expertise, and left academic decisions to professors. The overarching goal that united college faculty, students, support staff, and administration was education. Even as university class sizes began swelling into the 100s, community colleges retained the intimate, hands-on educational experience that is most associated with student success.

The quality of college education was primarily advanced by the faculty union through collective bargaining. At its inception, the college faculty collective agreement was only 6 pages long. Today, it is a 148 page document that protects faculty from workplace exploitation, and that safeguards educational quality through Article 11 and the Standard Workload Form (SWF). Although there was ample

funding for the early colleges, workloads were erratic, and often unfairly distributed. Professors could teach 30 hours per week, with little time allotted for evaluation, student meetings, prep, or course development. Through negotiations faculty were able to create an agreement that enabled them to do their jobs effectively, and to achieve good wages, benefits and job security. With only three work stoppages in just under 50 years, **collective bargaining worked**, and enabled management and academic workers to negotiate the best possible working and learning environment.

### Education in the Age of Austerity

In the early 1980s, the political culture in Canada began to shift, and federal and provincial governments started to embrace a “neoliberal” ideology that favoured lower taxes on the wealthy and corporations, the privatization of public services, reduced government funding of the public sector, and a corporate model of public sector administration. The highest marginal income tax rate plummeted from 80% in 1948 to 42.9% in 2009. Similarly, federal corporate tax fell from 41% in 1960, to 15% at present. All told, after 30 years of tax cuts, income inequality reached levels not seen since the Great Depression, and federal and provincial governments succeeded in gutting their revenue streams. This led to budget deficits, which were then used as a rationale to cut services and hollow out the public sector. In Ontario, the neoliberal model hit hardest in Mike Harris’ 1990s “Common Sense Revolution”. Part of the “revolution” saw government funding of post-secondary plummet, leading to severe layoffs among full time college

professors and steep increases in student tuition.

As government priorities shifted, and funding for post-secondary dried up, pressures to “rationalize” the highly successful community college model have steadily mounted. Increasingly, college management have become more concerned with cutting costs than with maintaining educational standards. Class sizes have been increasing, part-time professors now far outnumber full-time, and online learning is starting to proliferate – an irresistible opportunity for management to reduce the need for professors and for classroom space. The size of the management class has also begun to swell, reaching a point today where there is approximately one administrator for every three full time professors. In addition, management salaries have been steadily increasing, as college Presidents and Vice Presidents seek payment more in line with private sector executives.

As the people within the college system most concerned with academic integrity, professors have been fighting back against austerity as best they can. Time and again, faculty have been the ones raising concerns about degrading educational standards, and in response, management has begun to marginalize professors from academic decisions. Whereas once faculty teams created courses and course outlines, designed evaluations, and chose textbooks, these functions are now increasingly done by managers. Whereas faculty were once acknowledged as the heart of successful college programs and satisfied students, now they are increasingly written right out of the picture. Management regularly overturn faculty grades, and



dictate the form, content, and evaluation of courses based on budgetary, as opposed to educational, criteria. The reasonable balance between fiscal management and academic integrity has been thrown deeply off kilter, to the point where employers sitting on college program advisory councils are complaining about the skill level of graduates.

When marginalizing faculty hasn't worked, college management have resorted to bullying tactics. "Problem" faculty who criticize management priorities are targeted – either forced out through manipulated workloads or outright termination. As the number of full time faculty shrink, those remaining are struggling with maxed-out workloads and with the difficult task of mentoring an ever-changing roster of part-time workers. In the face of this escalating pressure, workplace stress has become a serious concern, and faculty are feeling dispirited and afraid. Being a college professor, in ways one of the most rewarding jobs, has for many become both stressful and demoralizing.

### **Strengthening Faculty Input: Renewing College Education**

If I was asked what struck me most about my visits with Ontario college faculty to date, it would be the recurrence of two particular narratives. First is the story of a professor who has poured years of hard work, passion, and expertise into the profession of education, only to see this profession slowly and painfully eroded. It is a story of frustration at how a corporate model of education has marginalized the group of people – faculty – who are most important to the task that community

colleges were given – to educate our youth and give them the skills they need to succeed. The second narrative is of the part-time professor, underpaid for the work they do, without job security, scrambling between various institutions to make ends meet.

Of course, these two narratives are not just playing out in Ontario colleges, but in colleges and universities Canada, and even North America, wide. One of the major issues professors face is government's continued lack of commitment to fund education at appropriate levels. Changing this will entail changing the priorities of the electorate, and shifting the political culture. This is a large task, and one that college faculty will have to engage in solidarity with other public sector workers, and with the broader labour movement. Making these changes won't be easy, but the first contribution we can make to this larger campaign is to fight the battle that is right before us. In bargaining for academic freedom (more faculty input and control over the terms of our work), and in ensuring that full time professors are hired, we can renew the original vision of the community colleges as institutions dedicated to access, quality, collegiality, and respect.

College faculty will be bargaining a new contract in July of 2014, and the issues of academic freedom, full time work, and workload will once more be central to negotiations. Earlier in this article I stated that history matters, and so it is more important than ever that we remember what the college system was like before the age of austerity. Despite generous government funding of the colleges, the professors who taught with

that first, 6 page collective agreement had nowhere near the same protections, salary or benefits as professors do today. Just as working people organized to pressure governments to fund public services, so our members organized to improve their own workplaces. Today's collective agreement has so much more because of the proven ability of our members to stand together to advance the quality of their workplace and improve the quality of education.

The educational environment has been changing rapidly over the past ten years, and we face new challenges, like online learning, that are simply not reflected in the collective agreement as it now

stands. Other challenges include the proliferation of management and their increasingly autocratic, hostile style, and the worrying decline of full time professors, counselors and librarians. The collective agreement must change to account for these new developments, and it can only do so if our bargaining team sits down to negotiate with a strong mandate from the membership at their backs. In such a scenario, it is possible to change the direction of the colleges, and to once more make them places where full time faculty decide how best to deliver high quality education. All it takes is for our membership to remember the strength in solidarity that got us this far.

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