

Message from the President and First Vice-President/Treasurer

Meeting resistance – and overcoming it

Bargaining successes for faculty members ultimately result in a stronger education system for all Ontarians.

Better workload, staffing, equity and professional conditions for College Faculty will mean a better future for our colleges. As we look ahead to a recovery from this pandemic, a strong college system is important to that recovery.

Bargaining is a long and challenging journey but a worthwhile one to fight for better working conditions for all College Faculty members and improvements to Ontario's colleges for all students. Your bargaining team has the full support of OPSEU/SEFPO's 180,000 members, and our 300-plus staff experts are here to provide every resource necessary to succeed.

In solidarity,



Warren (Smokey) Thomas
OPSEU/SEFPO President



Eduardo (Eddy) Almeida,
OPSEU/SEFPO
First Vice-President/Treasurer

Message from your bargaining team

The Employer's questions

This week, we met at the bargaining table for three days with the College Employer Council (CEC) bargaining team. The week prior, we had tabled extensive proposals in an attempt to incorporate into our collective agreement the demands presented by our members at local and final demand-setting meetings.

Our proposals covered a broad range of issues including workload, staffing, co-ordinators, the treatment of contract faculty, academic quality, and employment and workplace equity.

We were hoping during this week's bargaining dates to receive a comparable set of the employer's proposals from the CEC. Unfortunately, that was not to be the case, as the employer declined to provide their full package of demands. Instead, they limited their proposals to brief counters on workload and the counsellor class definition (both of which are discussed below). As well, rather than engage meaningfully with our proposals on equity and workload, the employer provided exhaustive lists of questions regarding supporting research and data collection seemingly for the purpose of demonstrating that our members' concerns are valid.

The Employer's proposals

The mutually agreed-upon addition of two new bargaining dates in September means that we have completed over 40 per cent of

our 19 scheduled dates. It is a matter of some concern that the employer's bargaining team has provided concrete proposals on only two issues.

Both the union team and the CEC team have proposed new class definitions to clarify the role of counsellors in Ontario colleges. We are concerned that the employer's proposed definition would seem to restrict counsellors to the work of addressing mental health issues and providing referrals, with no recognition of the other work currently performed by counsellors, including traditional culturally based counselling services, academic advising or disabilities/abilities counselling. Nor was there any clear identification of whether that work would remain performed by faculty.

As for workload, the employer's only proposal thus far was to create a workload task force that would provide data to inform the next round of bargaining, some years away. We have expressed our concern with the proposal, noting that several workload task forces after the introduction of the SWF in 1984 have provided limited improvements to our members' working conditions. We also noted that our members have communicated to us that meaningful change in the amount of time that we are given to evaluate our students' work and to prepare our students' classes is necessary now – particularly in the context of the modes of teaching that the colleges are currently implementing.

The CEC team also identified areas of the collective agreement for which they would like to see changes related to faculty scheduling and assignment of workload. Although they did not provide concrete proposals, they indicated possible future proposals may include:

- creating a two-tiered collective agreement in which new faculty would be subject to different working conditions, including teaching on Saturdays and Sundays, without additional compensation
- exempting faculty members in academic upgrading, apprenticeship and aviation programs from workload protections offered by the SWF
- changing the definition of the academic year to 12 months from 10, which would permit managers to assign vacations at any time of the year
- greater management control of what faculty do during professional development periods
- eliminating or reducing prep time for asynchronous online courses
- teaching contact hours of less than 50 minutes of instruction time to permit managers to assign classes of virtually any length

Again, no concrete details have been provided around these items, but it seemed possible that the colleges might propose an inequitable two-tier collective agreement in which newly hired faculty would lack rights and protections granted to other faculty

The CEC also provided a presentation that questioned the preparation hours associated with academic upgrading, apprenticeship

and aviation programs, and we expect those areas to be targeted for further concessions. Of broader concern is the statement from the CEC chair that, in cases of asynchronous teaching, “Detailed development occurs prior to delivery, and the current preparation factor does not obviously apply”. We invite faculty teaching asynchronously to reach out to us at bargainingteam2021@gmail.com and share their experience of the preparation that is required throughout the semester when teaching such courses.

The Employer’s responses

The employer rejected out of hand the union’s proposals on the constellation of issues that are foundational to academic quality: academic freedom, intellectual property and academic councils that would provide faculty and students with a representative voice in academic decision-making at the colleges. We will continue to advocate for faculty members’ demands on these issues, which we maintain are essential to modernizing the colleges and promoting innovation, academic quality and academic integrity.

The System’s finances

We have received documents related to our disclosure requests on the colleges’ financial situation. Based on the information provided by the CEC, there is a surplus of over \$100 million in the Ontario college system thus far for the current fiscal year, following on the heels of a \$333-million surplus in 2019-2020. Only two colleges – Durham and Fleming – are claiming a deficit, and this is despite both of these institutions receiving government bailouts of \$7.1 million and \$6 million, respectively. Nevertheless, the CEC has repeatedly referred to funding challenges faced by the colleges. While we agree that

chronic underfunding from the government is a challenge, it is clear that the colleges are in a position to invest in the changes that faculty and students need to ensure that academic quality is the central concern in a rapidly changing college system.

The Employer's approach to bargaining

It would appear to us that both sides are approaching bargaining with different understandings and goals in mind. The employer has stated that, because this is a mature collective agreement, they do not believe change is necessary unless one can prove a demonstrated need with data, research, etc. They are looking to us to prove beyond a doubt where problems specifically lie and to demonstrate beyond a doubt how our proposals will solve those problems. They also seem to reject proposals outright, either by questioning the legitimacy of proposals that are grounded primarily in our members' demands, rather than third-party research, or by disregarding proposals that have been tabled in previous rounds.

This is not how the negotiation process works. We are at the bargaining table with proposals that our members brought forward and voted on through a democratic and transparent

process. Our approach ensures that the needs of our members are communicated through processes that they determine are fair and representative. The demands that end up forming our proposals are based on evidence: the experiences of faculty as they perform their work. It is not the employer's right to tell us whether faculty's experiences are valid issues to bargain. We have reminded them of the collective bargaining process, and we hope that they start to take your demands more seriously.

In solidarity,

JP Hornick, Local 556 (George Brown) – chair

Jonathan Singer, Local 560 (Seneca) – vice-chair

Michelle Arbour, Local 125 (Lambton)

Ravi Ramkissoonsingh, Local 242 (Niagara)

Kathleen Flynn, Local 354 (Durham)

Shawn Pentecost, Local 415 (Algonquin)

Rebecca Ward, Local 732 (Confederation)

#Bargaining *for Better*



To contact your CAAT-A bargaining team, please write to:
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Authorized for distribution by:



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