

Overview: Union Proposals for Settlement

July 15, 2024

College faculty are committed to our students and the communities which we serve. We train Ontario's future and, as such, require the necessary working conditions to carry out this critical task. We welcome rich and productive discussions with you - representatives of the colleges and the CEC over the coming months.

We have engaged our membership across the 24 public colleges in democratic processes to determine the demands on which our proposals are based. What we will be presenting at the table during this round of negotiations is representative of what college faculty have stated to be our concerns and issues. Our proposals touch on several articles in the collective agreement and cover a few broad areas of concern.

Workload has been a primary area of concern of college faculty for many years. We have a workload formula that has gone largely unchanged since the mid-1980s although the work we do has increased substantially over the past 40 years because of technology (e.g., introduction of email, learning management systems, artificial intelligence) and the shifting needs of our students (e.g., greater accommodation needs, many more students whose first language is not English or French). We were hoping to address workload issues in the prior round of bargaining but were unable to, ostensibly, because of Bill 124, which was subsequently ruled to be unconstitutional. A workload taskforce was instead awarded by Arbitrator William Kaplan and that body has now completed its work with recommendations from the neutral chair, Arbitrator Michelle Flaherty. Our workload proposals are based upon our members' demands and Arbitrator Flaherty's recommendations and address the needs of all faculty – full-time and partial-load professors and instructors, as well as counsellors and librarians. The data, which the CEC requested during the last round of negotiations, from the Workload Taskforce, supports what college faculty have been saying about the increased workload that we have been experiencing. We look forward to presenting our workload proposals, impacting Articles 11 and 26, during these first two days of bargaining.

College faculty, like so many workers, are facing the challenges of the current affordability crisis. Our salaries and benefits have not kept pace with inflation and our comparators over the past two decades. Further, the current housing and rental crises have placed additional pressures on members. It is notable that one college – George Brown – has acknowledged the housing and affordability crisis faculty are facing by proposing to build more affordable housing on its property as a means to improve recruitment and retention of faculty. We will be presenting proposals regarding Articles 14, 19, 25, and 26 to address the affordability issues college faculty are facing.

Having appropriate staffing levels is critical to the success of our students and the colleges. The core objective of Ontario's public colleges is to provide affordable education and training to the communities which they serve. This core objective goes back to the creation of our community

college system by Bill Davis in the 1960s. College faculty are on the front lines in performing this critical work, which benefits not only our students but the entire economy of the province. It is crucial that we have enough full-time professors and instructors, counsellors and librarians to appropriately address the needs of our students. By the CEC's own admission in 2021, more than half of all teaching in the college system was being performed by contract faculty and our own bargaining unit was comprised of 42% contract faculty – the partial-load members we represent. We have data that indicates that number has only grown since then; in fact, while full-time faculty numbers have grown very slowly over the past decade, the numbers of partial-load faculty positions have experienced both significant and rapid growth. Further, at a time when we are experiencing a mental health crisis among our students, the numbers of counsellors have not kept pace with the increase in numbers of students or their mental health needs. It is our view that this must change. It is also alarming to see that half of Ontario's public colleges do not have even one librarian. In a system that has seen increases in granting of degrees, including plans to introduce master's level degrees, it is astounding that colleges do not have anywhere near the necessary librarian supports for students' academic needs. We will be presenting proposals to address these staffing issues that will impact Articles 2 and 27 of the collective agreement.

On a related note, we have significant concerns about the integrity of our bargaining unit – concerns that were raised during the previous round of bargaining. We continue to see faculty work being siphoned off to support staff, private colleges, third party providers, and OntarioLearn. Arbitrator Kaplan recognized that the integrity of our bargaining unit is an important issue when he awarded a Letter of Understanding to have further discussion of these issues between rounds of bargaining. As we are now beginning a new round of negotiations and seeing program cuts at some colleges, such as Fleming, Sault, and Algonquin, it is incumbent upon both parties to once again address this issue as well as employment stability for all our members. This is why you will see proposals from us that affect Articles 27 and 28.

As previously mentioned, a substantial proportion of our bargaining unit is now comprised of partial-load faculty members, who contribute enormously to the colleges but often feel like second-class citizens. Given that we all want stable, secure employment for graduating students, it only makes sense for all of us in the system to have stable, secure employment for all faculty members, including those who are partial-load employees. We will be tabling proposals in Articles 26 and 27 to further improve upon the gains of the past two rounds in job security and benefits. It is also important for partial-load faculty to have the opportunity to transition into full-time employment for those who wish to while enabling all partial-load members to be able to feel secure and stable in their employment within this system.

Back in 2017, Arbitrator Kaplan awarded a task force, backed by the provincial government of the time, to explore many of the key issues that I am speaking to you about today. Unfortunately, that task force was never allowed to complete its work by the Ford Government which cancelled it upon taking office. However, there had been agreement between both sides that we needed to examine academic governance structures and intellectual property issues. We will once again be presenting proposals to address these key issues. Given that faculty are dealing directly with students on a day-to-day basis and that we have the academic expertise, it

only makes sense that, consistent with what occurs elsewhere in post-secondary in Canada, faculty have real input in the governance of the colleges and the colleges' mandate to provide affordable education and training to members of the community. We are not seeking control or power, but, rather, meaningful input to ensure that students are receiving the highest-quality education that they require and deserve. Collegial governance, intellectual property, and academic freedom are the means to ensure this. While we have attained the latter, there is still much work to be done on the other two key components. As such, we will be tabling proposals which affect Article 13.

Coordinators play a crucial role in the college system through the academic leadership which they provide. Coordinators are an important liaison between their faculty colleagues, administration, and students. Unfortunately, we have seen the loss of some of this work to administrators and support staff. Additionally, coordinators have reported that they do not receive sufficient time to complete all their necessary work. We will be presenting proposals affecting Article 14 to address the issues and concerns that coordinators are currently facing.

As colleges have grown, so too has the work of our union. We will be presenting proposals affecting Article 8 to ensure that union representatives have sufficient time to perform the important work that they do to support our membership, as well as to allow for partial-load members to be able to actively participate in the Union. These proposed improvements would only strengthen labour relations, which should be an overriding goal for both the Union and the employer. Additionally, you will see proposals from us affecting Article 32 to simplify the grievance process.

Finally, we are happy to see the colleges continuing to speak about the importance of equity; however, the talk must be backed up by meaningful action. Substantive improvements were awarded in the form of the new Article 4.03 in the 2022 Kaplan Award. We will be making proposals to ensure that the necessary work to make for an equitable college system is completed by both the Union and the employer in an expeditious manner.

Thank you for your attention to this opening statement. College faculty are committed to negotiating an on-time renewal collective agreement. The goal of our proposals is to attain the highest-quality public college system that we, as workers, deserve so that we can educate and train Ontario's future. We look forward to hearing your responses to our proposals and the proposals that you put on the table. Our students, especially, deserve rich and productive discussions at this table over the coming months so that we can move this system forward together.