

Message from the President and First Vice-President Treasurer

CAAT-A delegates and their bargaining team will soon gather virtually to set out a list of demands to lay on the bargaining table.

In this pivotal bargaining year, there's one thing you can always count on: OPSEU/SEFPO's unshakeable support. We know very well that it's the courageous and committed professional faculty that make Ontario's public colleges the best in the world. And, at OPSEU/SEFPO, we will work hard to help you remind the employer just how vital you are.

At this critical moment, OPSEU/SEFPO is pushing the government even harder to engage with us in productive talks to guarantee stable, sustainable funding across our public postsecondary system. Earlier this month, the government announced \$106.4 million for some post-secondary institutions to cope with the effects of the pandemic. We want to see all post-secondary institutions receive support, but we applaud every step forward. We also saw Humber College become the province's first public college to offer a standalone four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, recognition that our public colleges have a huge role to play in helping our province out of this pandemic.

Last month, the government committed \$115 million to our colleges to support training for up to 8200 new Personal Support Workers. This all adds up to roughly a quarter of a billion dollars in new investment. It is a shining example of the fantastic results that are possible when we work together for the greater good of our members and indeed all Ontarians. There will be ups and downs as you go through the upcoming bargaining cycle, but we know you will be successful in achieving the best possible contract. You can count on our support, the hard work of our dedicated staff, and the solidarity of OPSEU/SEFPO's 170,000 members.

In solidarity and support,



OPSEU/SEFPO President Warren (Smokey) Thomas



First Vice-President/Treasurer Eduardo (Eddy) Almeida



Exceptional Engagement at Local Demand Setting Meetings:

College Employer Council should listen to front-line college workers

Over the course of February, members gathered in record numbers in their Locals to discuss the results of their general membership surveys, to listen to one another about the issues of concern they face in their work, and to use this information to set their priorities for this round of negotiations. These ranked demands will go forward for consideration at the provincial demand-setting meeting on April 9 and 10. These demands largely reflected key themes around workload, academic decision-making, precarity, equity, job security, and wages and benefits.

Not only was this the first time in CAAT-A history that our local demand setting meetings were held in an entirely virtual manner, but each of the locals reported exceptionally high levels of engagement. Many locals encouraged member engagement through educational videos, pre-meetings, direct reach-outs, and other activities. In addition, the divisional leadership engaged in provincewide meetings for partial-load members, and onboarding activities for the Bargaining Advisory Committee.

All of us can and should be proud of the work that we are doing in preparing for this round of negotiations. The desire to

participate in meaningful ways is reflected in the richness of the discussions at these demand-set meetings, and faculty's willingness to share their experiences and ideas. Our strength is built in these conversations about the common issues we are facing as a system and as faculty. Despite the difficulties of working in the pandemic—with the consequent increases in workload and student support needs—our members have shown a clear energy and focused desire to improve the system as we shift toward an uncertain future.

The Employer's Offer

In the midst of our demand-setting process, and with less than half of the locals having engaged their members in these meetings, there was an unexpected development: On February 16th, the bargaining team received an offer from the College Employer Council to extend our collective agreement. The offer would have seen the agreement extended by an additional two years, with 1% annual increases of salary/wages, but no other improvements.

We met immediately as a team, and within days held consultations with both the Local Presidents and the Bargaining Advisory Committee, according to the process set out in our negotiations procedures. We arrived at a strong consensus to reject any

management offer before our established demand-setting process was completed. We have also met with OPSEU President, Smokey Thomas, and OPSEU staff to affirm our shared commitment to, and OPSEU's support of, the team's negotiating with the CEC at the bargaining table.

Even at this stage in the process, it is clear that the CEC offer failed to address the urgent critical issues in the college system that have been highlighted by the pandemic. In addition, there are massive changes facing our system that require a fulsome examination of our working conditions:

- the push for microcredentials;
- expanding private partnerships;
- outsourcing and casualization of faculty work; and
- faculty exclusion from decision-making around course and program content and delivery modes, just to name a few.

Our strength is our solidarity

Our leadership is clear that we need to hear from our members first, then sit down with the College Employer Council at the appropriate time and table to have a productive and much-needed discussion about the immediate workplace needs of our front-line faculty and students. This early offer was clearly an exercise in testing the strength of our membership and leadership, and testing the faculty's commitment to change, ahead of bargaining. It was also an effort on the Employer's part to avoid a discussion at

the bargaining table about the issues that dominate our working conditions and our students' learning experience.

The message faculty have sent forward at Local demand-set meetings is clear: We need immediate changes to our Collective Agreement to reflect the rigors of online teaching and other work, to address the concerns we have that academic decisions are currently based on financial pressures rather than quality education, and to challenge the growing issues of precarious work and equity. Many of these changes can be implemented at no cost to the Employer.

Our members deserve to have their demands heard with the respect that is owed to the people who are actually performing the mission of Ontario's Colleges. The pandemic has highlighted urgent workplace issues dictated by the massive shift to online teaching, and by our students' changing needs. We look forward to productive conversations with the colleges once notice to bargain is given in July.

Next steps

The Locals have all completed their Local Demand Setting meetings and have forwarded their ranked priorities to the bargaining team. These have now been compiled into a book, for discussion by the delegates at the Final Demand Setting meeting in April. The team have reviewed all of the demands submitted, and will make recommendations to the delegates. We have heard loud and clear that bullying

and harassment have increased in almost every College workplace and needs to be addressed. We have a shared commitment as a team to ensure that we view every demand through an equity lens, and that we will engage in consultations to make sure that we are challenging systemic racism, colonialism, sexism, and other structural oppressions in all of our proposed language.

As a team, we were elected to represent your priorities during negotiations, to develop strategies and tactics to advance the likely success of those interests at the table, and to recommend to you an agreement that addresses your demands. Our goal is to build a more academically and pedagogically sound public college system, and a more equitable one--one that is better for all faculty, staff, and students.

We know that you have placed your trust in us, and we reflect that back in our faith in you and all of us together.

In solidarity,

JP Hornick, Chair

Jonathan Singer, Vice-chair

Michelle Arbour

Kathleen Flynn

Shawn Pentecost

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