

LABOUR IN THE TIME OF COVID

The Educator : Special Issue



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President's Message: To all Faculty Members at Fanshawe College by D. Bedford



First off, I want to acknowledge what you are going through during this time. No two faculty stories are exactly the same. Whether you are a Professor, Counsellor, or Librarian, working on-site or teaching online, we've all had to confront pressures and anxieties of differing types and degrees.

The increased case counts in the province are concerning and can make us feel powerless.

However, there are some things we do have control over. For us as individuals, it might just be taking some steps that reduce the chance we will transmit disease to someone else.

Protocols Really Do Matter

We're sure you've heard this before, however, the protocols as specified by Middlesex-London Health Unit and communicated by Brenda Henry are important. It's these protocols that Fanshawe must abide by in order to stay open under the provincial regulations.

- stay home if ill or if you believe you have been in contact with a confirmed COVID case
- maintain 2m physical distancing from each other wherever possible
- use barriers where they have been deemed necessary
- wear your cloth mask when interacting with others on campus or in public areas
- remind each other and students to follow the protocols
- report gaps in compliance to your department or security as appropriate
- practice good hand hygiene
- disinfect common touch surfaces, tools and equipment between users with the cleaning supplies provided
- complete the online COVID report form if ill or needing to self- isolate

The Apps are Okay

The official Canada **COVID Alert** app does not track your location. It exchanges randomly generated numbers via Bluetooth with phones that you have been close to for an extended period of time. Arguably, it is one of the most private apps you could be running on your smartphone. The Fanshawe

Stay Safe app does not track your location either: it relies on you to select the campuses for which you wish to receive alerts.

There is a Process for Everything

Be aware that there is a process for students to request a medical exemption from mask wearing. It is similar to other student medical accommodation requests that must be reviewed. In the rare circumstance where an exemption has been granted for one of your students, you'll be notified just as you are with any other accommodation.

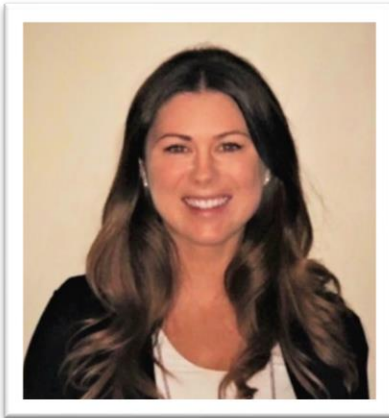
Seek Direction and/or Assistance

If you encounter a health and safety issue, advise your manager first. *If you need to refuse unsafe work*, you must also notify your manager first, and the JHSC will be called in to make a determination.

If it is a safety issue that requires immediate attention, contact the Control Centre (extension 4400).

If you need advice, please feel free to contact us at the union. We are here to help. ■

RESOURCES IN A CHALLENGING TIME by SARAH ASHKANASE – 1st Vice-President



Education is undeniably a stressful profession and we recognize our current realities are having a compound effect that may be contributing to feelings of burnout for our members. We would like to acknowledge the hours you have dedicated to Fanshawe College and to your students. You are valued and appreciated by those you serve. Your ongoing commitment to provide quality education does not go unnoticed. Your wellness matters to us and that is why we would like to take the opportunity to remind you about a few important options available to you for additional support in these hard times:

EFAP

EFAP stands for Employee & Family Assistance Program, a voluntary and confidential service to help employees and their family members (dependents) who are experiencing personal concerns affecting their well-being. EFAP also offers a variety of virtual wellness tools such as the “mental health toolkit” and “nutrition resource kit.” Fanshawe is currently using Homewood for third party EFAP services.

You can access the EFAP information portal by visiting:

<https://portal.myfanshawe.ca/employeeservices/fcew/Pages/default.aspx>

Paramedical Services

With EFAP, members will be connected with a support, but they may only be covered for a limited number of sessions or weeks; this is where your paramedical benefits kick in. Paramedical services

offer a variety of options for support that may be helpful to members who are experiencing stress or burn out. While increasing physical activity, adjusting your nutrition, or starting to include mindfulness into your daily routine can help, if you think it would be beneficial to seek support from a professional in your community (e.g. social worker, psychologist, etc.) consider using this resource to find someone who feels like a fit for you: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapists/ontario>

For full time and partial load members, the plan will cover 85% of the costs, up to a combined maximum of \$1500 per insured person in a calendar year for all eligible expenses.

More information can be found in the Full Time Members Benefit Booklet -

<https://www.opseu110.ca/members-opseu-local-110/full-time/benefit-booklet/>

More information can be found in the Partial Load Members Benefit Booklet -

http://www.opseu110.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/BenefitsBookletAcadPL_E.pdf

As human beings, we are designed to feel a whole range of emotions, some of which may be comfortable to us and others uncomfortable. Most people I know aren't too fond of the uncomfortable emotions! Right now, these emotions are hard to avoid as many of us experience an increase in uncomfortable feelings related to all the unknowns associated with the pandemic. All of us tend to prefer stability, routine, and a sense of control over our environments and can experience significant stress when there are disruptions to our day-to-day lives. Over the past several months we have certainly experienced disruptions and have had to adapt quickly to our changing realities. While this is definitely a stressful time, I invite you to consider this as an opportunity to learn new skills and find new ways to adjust despite not knowing what lies ahead. If you think you may benefit from the opportunity to build your tolerance for uncertainty, increase emotional regulation, or just simply find a place to 'drop off' these uncomfortable feelings, I encourage you to consider the resources available through EFAP or through the paramedical services. We all require support, compassion, and kindness as we continue to navigate these exceptional times. ■

TAKING THE PULSE by JENNIFER BOSWELL – 2nd Vice-President



For Canada, the pandemic has been on the radar since February 2020, and Ontario entered lockdown in the middle of March. Teaching at Fanshawe was forced online after Friday, March 13, and even professors who had hands-on skills to teach had to come up with alternate ways to teach in the weeks and months afterward.

Along with the rest of the world, for seven months Fanshawe faculty and employees have been dealing with our new reality.

How are Fanshawe faculty doing? I decided to try and find out.

The information gathered for this article is *not* the result of a scientific survey—just a few open-ended questions emailed out,

and conversations with multiple colleagues. The answers ranged from “I’m doing well” to “I alternate between explosive anger and depression and anxiety.” Of course, as always, those who are strongly motivated responded, but we did get a full range of response. I suppose we might say this is a reasonably fair sampling of responses from those who have a definite stance.

THE GOOD

“We are thankful and know that we’re privileged to earn our salaries from home.”

Some professors state that the current term is going well. They were used to teaching online in the past, so the extension to all their courses being online was not that hard. Although March and April were completely chaotic, this term online teaching was not a surprise.

Some say they prefer working from home because it has eliminated travel time, reduced office politics, and cut interactions with negative coworkers. They are more productive because the environment in the office was distracting, and it was easy to get derailed in attempts to work there.

FanshaweLearns and other supports such as technological support staff have done an excellent job of rolling out training seminars and gaining licences to various learning technologies.

Positive responders said they have a much better work/ life balance and are dismayed when thinking about returning to the office when the pandemic is over. They would prefer to teach mostly online in future.

THE BAD

“We are in an emergency and we’ll get through it, but it sucks in the meantime.”

Increased Workload: Workload has gone up in all facets for professors. At the same time, every hour spent is less effective, some feel. It takes hours and hours to try to do work that can be done easily in the classroom. Adding to the sense of frustration, some think these attempts to recreate the face-to-face learning environment or replace it are substandard, or simply don’t work.

Significantly more time preparing online curriculum leaves little to no time to update materials or learn new technologies.

In one area the long-standing class cap sizes for online classes have increased. It has long been accepted that successful online learning requires fewer students, and that reality is being ignored.

Longer hours at the desk have negatively impacted home lives, for some, and have created physical and health challenges for others.

Professors who have children at home or an inadequate space to work have a harder time with a heavier at-home workload.

Evaluation Difficulties: I haven’t once met a professor who enjoys marking, yet evaluating and giving feedback is an even longer, more laborious process online.

One example involves writing courses. WRIT Level 1 courses are the most populated course at Fanshawe. Every fall there are between 3,000 to 4,000 students enrolled. But online evaluation of this

course is extremely difficult: students submit their work in the Quizzes function, which does not offer the chance at GradeMark feedback through Turnitin, or even the very modest editing tools available through FOL submission folders. This is a large problem for many professors. Some argue that basic writing instruction is not even feasible in an online environment. Since there are over 140 sections of this course in the fall term alone, the struggles and frustrations of these professors are widespread.

The effectiveness of the feedback a professor can give online is questioned. Checkmarks on a rubric are not as effective as being able to write in the margins, circle items, and make corrections, for example. Spending more time evaluating and giving feedback coupled with a feeling of inadequacy leads some feeling thwarted and discouraged.

Lack of Student Engagement/Fewer Successful Students: Professors are always thankful for those students who will engage, learn, and thrive no matter what the circumstances. But that percentage is relatively small, and most students seem unable to learn well online. Add the stresses of the pandemic to online learning, and even more students whom educators would normally be able to succeed with are adrift.

All kinds of technologies and teaching modules are offered through FanshaweLearns to try to increase engagement, but that puts most of the pressure on the professors to engage.

Even with video technology, professors say there is a lack of student engagement. Students say less or don't speak at all, don't turn on their cameras if given a choice, and are asking fewer questions in any format, whether email, on discussion boards, or online chat.

The Online Teaching Environment: Some respondents assert that we can't recreate the face-to-face classroom online. There are many deficiencies--several are listed in this article.

Most professors will tell anyone who will listen that the most enjoyable part of their job is engaging with and being around students. These pleasures are now greatly reduced. "It's like teaching into a void" was said more than once.

The virtual classroom is not an actual classroom.

One respondent remarked that "Teaching online is lesser. It is not some great thing. We're doing it only for survival."

Poor Psychological Well-being: When asked how they were doing psychologically, some respondents report being less motivated to work, even though they are putting in more hours.

"I'm feeling like I can't cope but we have no choice. There is no end in sight," said one respondent. Another, "I have lost all control of my working conditions."

"We are rudderless. Cast adrift with little collegial support. We are not going to look back with nostalgia."

"I'm a roller coaster, up and down."

"I would retire tomorrow if I could. I feel dread when I wake up in the morning."

One employee who must be on campus everyday observes people not distancing all the time at the college. They're scared about getting COVID and bringing it home to their family.

Burnout is more common when working from home because we can't leave. Some concede that feelings of depression and anxiety are also due to the larger pandemic atmosphere.

Leadership: One person said that many managerial decisions are being made without professors' input.

Another says it's highly stressful that there isn't enough support being provided from administration about the realities of the changing opportunities and ability for students to meet learning outcomes.

There were two directly opposite statements about management: one person said their manager was not communicating or leading enough—while another said that as long as managers and administration leave us alone to do our jobs as we see fit to meet learning outcomes, that's best.

THE UGLY

"We're experiencing a vast shift that is detrimental."

Loss of Public Face and Private Space: When professors come to campus, we are able to leave our home lives behind. We are professionals, with a public face and a professional persona. How we present ourselves at work is how we want the world to see us.

Few professionals ever expected that we would have to show our homes, nor be recorded in them using video technologies. The invisible line that we drew to separate our private selves from our public selves is gone.

Some respondents detest the intrusion of online video teaching and resist it. The pressures and exhortations to 'engage the students' are forceful and ongoing, however.

If you have a beautiful home you're proud of, or a green screen that allows you to hide what's behind you, or you kind of want the students to see your bong on the table in the background, then this new experience may not trouble you.

We are more vulnerable, our private lives and private spaces revealed while using online video technologies. A line has been crossed, and some feel it is a transgression. We are diminished, both personally and as professional educators.

Students can experience this loss also: When students come to the actual classroom, they too are their public selves. The classroom is a protected zone. The things that happen there are human interaction, connection and learning. No one has to know about the student's home life or living conditions.

There is a loss of privacy or risk of exposure if students are required to turn on their video cameras. In the respondents' experience, if given the choice whether to turn on their cameras, very few or no students do. Perhaps this is a reason. Since professors must have their screens on while students don't, teaching using video technology can cause social anxiety and breaches privacy while conferring none of the rewards of actually being around people.

Worries About the Future: A few respondents mentioned something along these lines: under the guise of safety, efficiency, space, scheduling—or whatever—we will continue teaching online, even after the pandemic is over. This would represent a profound transformation in post-secondary teaching—and a detrimental one, according to some.

CONCLUSION

Well, here it is—I took the Fanshawe pulse and it seems the patients are not all doing well. Though there are some who are happy with the current circumstances, most were not.

In my doomscrolling through Twitter one night, I came across a heartening series of tweets from Dr. Aisha Ahmad, an International Security professor at University of Toronto. She has been in many danger zones, and she says hitting the wall six months into a crisis is normal and should be expected.

By the six-month mark patience, good will and resilience are depleted, says Ahmad. It is normal to become fed up, tired, and have your mind and body push back. She tells us from experience that the six-month wall is “harsh, but also temporary.” If you are feeling bad now this does not mean it will last. The six-month wall is a normal phase in adapting to sustained crisis conditions, and this stage normally passes in a month to six weeks. All the best to you as we continue in the months to come. ■

***The Chief Steward’s Notebook: DFR and Its Discontents* by Mark Feltham – Chief Steward**



Local 110’s recently retired 1st VP JC (John Conley), who introduced generations of students to the mysteries of electricity, had this to say about one of the myriad laws of electron flow: “it’s called Ohm’s Law,” he’d declare. “It’s not called Ohm’s Suggestion.”

As I was drafting this article, this anecdote popped into my head in relation to the concept of “DFR,” which is as close to the Prime Directive as trade unionists get. “DFR” stands for “Duty of Fair Representation.” To paraphrase JC, it’s a duty—it’s not a suggestion. In fact, it is an enduring obligation for us, ethically and legally.

In essence, this duty defines everything we do, from meticulously documenting the stories our members tell us and the advice we give them to filing grievances to ensure our members’ rights are fully protected. If you’ve ever come into our office in D-2018 or, post-COVID, talked to one of us on the phone or via Zoom, you’ll have encountered our practices. You’ll have heard us ask many questions, take copious notes, look things up in the collective agreement, and often write emails back outlining your various options, often determined in consultation with OPSEU’s own Lesley Gilchrist, our grievance officer and a law graduate from the University of Toronto. I personally have spent many hours—probably hundreds, if I bothered to count them—on the phone with Lesley and Darryl figuring out exactly what we need to do to represent our members fairly. It’s hard work, and it should be.

Most of this is uncontroversial—no one is going to question taking careful notes, researching positions, and consulting experts. Many times, however, I have found myself in conversations about the more controversial (and thus more interesting) sides of DFR: topics range from such questions as

“why do unions protect lazy workers?” to “what if you think a member **should** be fired?” The “should” always bears extra emphasis whenever this question comes up. I always think of the parallel question perennially posed to defence lawyers: how can you defend someone charged with (insert heinous crime of the questioner’s choice)?

First, unions don’t protect “lazy” workers. This facile adjective glosses over much thornier and more complex problems like stigmatized mental-health struggles, demoralizing bosses, and baked-in institutional inequities of the sort that have upwards of 70% of the teaching at Fanshawe done by precarious contract workers. Indeed, the lazy-worker trope, like the racist “welfare-queen” trope so beloved by politicians of a certain sort, is a weaponized archetype meant more to discredit unions than to pose a serious ethical conundrum.

Second, it doesn’t matter whether I think a member should be fired or not, because it’s not my job to decide that question. Rather, it’s my job to protect the member’s rights: all of them, without regard to our own personal opinions about the matter. This sharply necessary distinction between personal opinion and duty is the essence of fair representation. I once found myself accused of advocating for a member’s position on an issue, one that I in fact resoundingly disagreed with (and no, you’ll never get me to reveal details): my response was that we’re not advocating for the position at all; we’re advocating for the member’s workplace rights.

OPSEU actually has a rule that helps us out very much in this regard: it’s called *individual carriage*. In essence, it’s up to a member to decide on an action, including filing a grievance. Most unions can actually decide not to file a grievance, even if the member wants to file. I personally like not having the option to file or not file. Here’s why: it saves me from needing to have an opinion. Put another way, it puts my own biases (and we all have them) entirely out of the equation. ■

OPINION: *Confucianism and COVID 19* by Whitney Hoth - Secretary



By now most of you know that the island of Taiwan has the coronavirus under control. If you don’t know the specifics, they are worth repeating. Taiwan, with a population of approximately 26 million people, less than 80 miles away from mainland China, has a total of only 509 COVID-19 cases and 7 deaths -- less even than our tiny little London, Ontario, with 793 cases and 57 deaths. A better comparator is New York State with almost 20 million people, which now has over 455,000 cases and 32,000 deaths.

Of course it is easier to close off an island than a continent, but even so, Taiwan’s handling of the coronavirus is exemplary. What did they do? They reacted quickly. Having learned from the SARs crisis of

2003, Taiwan developed a rapid response team in readiness for the next pandemic. As soon as Taiwan learned of a new disease being hushed up in China, they mobilized. Borders were closed to most international travel. Anyone still coming in was screened at the airports. Masks were made mandatory even before there was certainty about mode of transmission. The army was called out to assist in monitoring and tracking and to ensure rapid and equitable distribution of PPE. Quarantine

was required and supervised. No voluntary anything, minimal privacy concerns, no unchallengeable exemptions from the masking requirement, no political wrangling or dissention, just rapid and nearly universal obedience. Taiwan never closed down. Its economy remained largely unaffected.

Taiwan is a deference culture. Expertise is not merely honored but revered. Some Taiwanese attribute this to the lingering influence of Confucianism, which privileges education and acquired skill. The vice-president of Taiwan at the time of the crisis, Chen Chien-jen, is himself an epidemiologist. When he proposed mandatory masking, the population put on their masks and kept them on without complaint. Deference and conformity allowed the Taiwanese to avoid mass infection and death without having to imposed a general and prolonged shutdown. Those who had the disease were required to stay home and were closely monitored to ensure they did. It worked.

The ultra-individualism of the United States makes mass masking difficult to achieve. In very few jurisdictions is it mandatory, and even in those, it is openly resisted. Here in Canada we are more compliant and masking is mandatory in many of our cities, but quarantine is largely voluntary and unmonitored. We did not turn out the army in Canada during this crisis except in nursing homes, where alert and attentive soldiers quickly helped to bring things under control. We have chafed under restraint and are anxious to get back to our lives of mass consumption and pleasure travel. Bars in London are full of young patrons enjoying the relative freedoms of Phase 3. Grocery stores are full of customers with masks worn incorrectly standing in the middle of aisles blocking passage. We are asked to observe the recommended precautions, and we generally do -- *sort of, more-or-less*, except when we forget or get tired. "You know, we do our best, okay?" "So, lighten up, eh?" We are **not** Taiwan.

Do we want to be Taiwan? Probably not. We aren't the United States either. We're somewhere in between. Observing in our relaxed and indifferent way the principles of peace, order and good government not shouting and waving guns over our heads pursuing our individual happiness damn-the-torpedoes-full-speed-ahead like Americans. Okay, fair enough. People sometimes say they would be willing to die to defend freedom. Well, they are doing it now in the United States, not altogether willingly, I suspect. Those who are dying are often poor, Black, old, and female. We're all in this together, I hear. Evidently not. Viruses are vicious things. Not even lifeforms really, more like little bits of code, tiny stubborn **facts** that want to colonize and kill us, and can, and do. Trump can spin most things, but a virus is impervious to lies and misdirection because it *isn't human*.

Some thoughtful people suggest that Covid19 is a precursor event, a forerunner of more and worse to come. Shame on them for saying so. That is very discouraging. Talk like that takes all the pleasure out of planning a trip to Disneyland.

For decades now, we have heard a constant drumbeat about our globalized world, about its wonderful economic benefits, about the endless blessings of worldwide free markets. Of course, all sorts of informed people also knew the probabilities of a global pandemic were high and steadily increasing. We might have been prepared, but that would have required strong federal governments amply funded by robust taxation able to promote and sustain powerful national and international health agencies, but that is the long view, and populations of the West do not take long views and will not vote for those who do. Western governments are in the business of serving immediate demands

for material abundance in cultures obsessed with entertainment and mad for consumption. Even in the midst of a killing pandemic, they are unable to restrain the animal restiveness of their unthinking millions, many of them children, who desperately want to return to their bars and backyard bar-b-ques, exercising their freedom to swarm and mill and mass at sporting events, in theatres, in shopping malls.

“Confucius said, ‘a people who are impulsive and headstrong without the virtues of simple honesty, who know almost nothing but have not wit enough therefore to speak and act cautiously, or who have no particular abilities but lack restraint and faithfulness – why, there is nothing to be done about such people.’” Perhaps he is right. Cultures that grant expansive rights to angry ignorance and general thoughtlessness may be forced to accepted not “liberty or death” but “liberty and death.” ■

***The President’s Last Word: What is Next for the Union?* by Darryl Bedford**



OPSEU is much like other large organizations. It has employees and buildings. There is a Constitution and Bylaws for the various structures. The union has its own bureaucracy.

And like any other organization weathering this pandemic, OPSEU has had to cancel and postpone in-person meetings. That includes its annual Convention that in recent years has hosted over 1,700 delegates. OPSEU’s Convention is important because it is the ultimate decision-making body in the union. It’s where the President and Vice-President Treasurer are elected, the Constitution amended, and Resolutions passed that set the union’s policy.

However, does anyone realistically think we will be gathering in groups of over a thousand people in 2021? Or 2022 or maybe even 2023? And when we do, can we realistically think that Convention will look exactly the same? Will we be shaking hands by then? Or shaking hands again ever?

In my opinion, Convention was faltering under its own weight prior to the pandemic. It was becoming less and less viable for 1,700+ people to fly, train, drive to Toronto at a cost of \$2 million, give or take, to accomplish less and less business. 2019 saw four resolutions considered, three of which were statutorily required. A member would be right to question just how effectively we were conducting the "business" of the union.

The Convention structure and rules are intimidating to new members and new delegates. Yet, I would argue these are the very voices we need to hear from.

We are at the point where the union as a whole needs to evolve, because there is no choice but to evolve.

There is quite the dispute over online voting in the union right now. Our Local did show that it is possible to run votes successfully, securely, and with confidence in the results. If I can be honest, members were more engaged in the process this time. We brought the election to them, instead of them having to come to the election. No doubt online elections have necessitated a different way of campaigning. This may be off-putting to the established candidates who are used to working the room, distributing flyers, and hosting hospitality rooms.

Dare I suggest that these challenges may also bring opportunity: leaders who can adapt, those who use the technology effectively, those who connect with members over email and social media, those who personally call voting members, those who have been marginalized, the introverts, the extroverts, and the members without money to run traditional union election campaigns.

Dare I suggest those who can present ideas most effectively in this “new normal” have the best chance of showing the way? To the benefit of us all? Did I say ideas? Yes, ideas! What a concept!

Some things will need to stay the same. What must remain is a commitment to serving members, democracy, transparency, and accountability.

It’s hard to know exactly what is in store for the future of OPSEU or of Local 110. Whatever changes are made to respond to the pandemic and the changes in our workplaces must be in the best interest of you, the members who pay the dues. You must have a say. You’ll also be called to action to protect good jobs at our college and at other workplaces in Ontario.

What is next for the union... is up to all of us. ■

OPSEU 110

Darryl Bedford – President

Sarah Ashkanase – First Vice-President

Jennifer Boswell – Second Vice-President

Mark Feltham – Chief Steward

Karen O’Brien – Treasurer

Whitney Hoth – Secretary