



the Educator

22 January 2016

For Fanshawe College Professors, Librarians and Counsellors

Education is not filling a bucket but lighting a fire – W. B. Yeats

In This Issue

Doing Things Differently: Bargaining 2017

Whitney Hoth— pg. 2

Fanshawe and Family: My Story of Accommodation and Arbitration

Amanda Zavitz— pg. 4

Everyone Talks About Workload: WMG Does Something About It

Mark Feltham — pg. 6

Let Them Eat Moocs

George Fogarasi — pg. 7

What To Do When Sheppell Calls You

Pg. 8

Give Enlightenment a Second Chance

Carmen Gindi — pg. 9

My Bid For a Nobel

Jamie Austin — pg. 10

My NFT Life

Matt Farrell — pg. 12

President's Message: Status Quo is Erosion

Darryl Bedford — pg. 13

An Anarchist Squint

Michael Boisvert — pg. 14

The Student Feedback Survey: Validity and Reliability

Kathleen Dindoff — pg. 15

Welcome to a new term and the new year. This issue contains a few new year's resolutions of our own.

Our **opening editorial** calls for a new approach to bargaining focusing on the needs of partial-load faculty. For some, such a focus may seem controversial, for others it is only commonsense. We need to open the discussion well in advance of renewed bargaining in 2017. Whatever your take on the proposal, be sure to attend the next **General Membership Meeting** to cast your vote.

Dr. Amanda-Zavitz provides a sincere first-person account of her struggle to secure accommodation for childcare, a struggle which took many years and ended in a judgement against our college for violation of her human rights. Dr. Zavitz's *Fanshawe and the Family* tells a story that many others have experienced. Those of you who are familiar with the work of Anne-Marie Slaughter, especially her recent book *Unfinished Business: Women Men Work Family* (2015), will see immediately how timely Dr. Zavitz's story is as an instance of the ongoing struggle for recognition of family care as a right in the workplace.

Morneau-Shepell, the college's offsite third-party manager of medical absences and accommodations, has acquired an unsavory reputation among many of our members. You need to know how to deal with them if you are sick or injured, and we provide some guidance in the article *What to Do When Shepell Calls for You*.

George Fogarasi, a colleague from Fleming College, takes a look at the ballyhoo surrounding MOOC course delivery in his article *Let Them Eat MOOC*. **Carmen Gindi** ponders the growing division between the sciences and the humanities in *Give Enlightenment a Second Chance*. In *My Bid for a Nobel Prize*, **Jamie Austin** takes aim at the inflated claims of economics, a discipline that can proudly declare it is 100% accurate at least 15% of the time. **Matt Farrell** tells us about the struggles of teaching as a precarious education worker in *My NFT Life*. Our intrepid Chief Steward, **Mark Feltham**, explains the workings of the Work Load Monitoring Group (WMG), one of the many acronym agencies that regulate and control our lives at the college. Mark has an inexhaustible appetite for procedural complexities, and we all benefit from his slightly maddening attention to detail.

Darryl Bedford, in his careful way, makes the case that our current situation in the union is a steady erosion of influence which we can only resist if we are prepared to consider new strategies. **Michael Boisvert** ponders the effects of top-down managerial models in industry and education in his meditation on the 'Anarchist Squint.' New Local Vice-President, **Kathleen Dindoff**, turns her attention to the doubtful validity and reliability of our Student Feedback Survey.

Something for everyone!

EDITORIAL

Doing Things Differently: Bargaining 2017

Whitney Hoth



A Building Consensus

On 30 September, 2017, our current contract with the colleges expires. I have spoken with many of my colleagues about what the union should do in the next round of bargaining. A consensus proposal has emerged among those whom I've consulted. I endorse it, and I hope our local will formally endorse it at the next **General Membership Meeting on Monday, Feb 1st at 7:30 PM in Room D1032.**

I have outlined the proposal below. I hope you will read it and respond to me directly to express either agreement or disagreement. I believe 2017 will be a watershed year for the college system, and we want to hear from as many members as possible before we advance to bargaining (send emails directly to secretaryopseul10@gmail.com).

The Proposal

We propose that full-time faculty in the college system voluntarily accept a wage freeze for two years. Our union representatives in bargaining should not ask for (nor accept) any financial increase for full-time faculty. Such increases in the past have been essentially token and have distracted us, and the public, from more serious challenges facing our professional

status and the quality of education in our colleges.

Instead, the union should demand wage increases and strengthened employment security for our partial-load colleagues who are currently condemned to the second tier of a two-tier system. Our focus must shift to the needs of our partial-load colleagues who lack adequate wages and employment security.

College management has successfully created a permanent underclass of contingent employees living from paycheck-to-paycheck with little or no prospect of full-time employment. We must champion the cause of those in the union with the least not those with the most.

Facing Facts

At present, the percentage of full-time faculty in the college system has fallen to something in the neighborhood of 35%. The great majority of our colleagues now are precarious workers. The Collective Agreement has always contained language requiring the colleges to hire full-time in preference to partial-load positions except for limited operational requirements. Unfortunately, the new Collective Agreement includes a weasel phrase about 'economic viability,' which can be translated as 'hire full-time except when it's cheaper not to.' Even without this disastrous phrase, which is a blank check for management, the union was unable to enforce the hiring of full-time faculty over the last ten years. Management calculated that facing

challenges to wholesale hiring of non-fulltime in arbitration would be an effective delaying tactic allowing them to achieve a *fait accompli* while arbitrations dragged on for years, which they did.

Management exploited the inequities built into a sclerotic arbitration process to circumvent the requirements of the Collective Agreement, burying the plain word of the text under mounds of legal red tape. They outmaneuvered the union, spending prodigiously on lawyers, conscripting compliant frontline managers to recite prepared scripts, and using delay and obstruction in arbitration. In a word, they won.

Now, we must attempt to close the gap they created between have and have-not employees. We must make common cause with our colleagues who are denied a decent wage and the security necessary for professional independence. We must make the next round of bargaining all about them and their needs, and we, their full-time colleagues, must lead the fight on their behalf because only we have the protections and security to do so.

An End to the Worst Abuses

The shift to partial load from full-time was bad enough; now there is a move in the system to substitute part-time for partial-load. We see the consequences of this here at Fanshawe with five faculty members assigned to a single desk. There is also the dubious category of sessional that allows managers to exploit people in need who will work long hours at reduced rates for a few extra dollars. I have heard some managers claim that

most people who work non-fulltime want such employment. Yes, they want it in the absence of anything better, which management's concerted efforts have effectively destroyed. Such flippant distortion deserves no refutation.

As a simple quality issue, the union should also demand that there be a cap on the percentage of part-time any college in the system can hire. Part-time employment may be justified by occasional operational needs and may suit the preferences of a small number of workers, but as a significant part of the operation of any college, it's a scandal and degrades education. Those who talk quality in the college system, while this abusive practice continues, make a mockery of the very idea of quality, unless quality is synonymous for them with maximum managerial control. We think otherwise and believe economic independence contributes to professional independence, which is the best guarantee of quality.

Saving the Profession

Those of us who have been teachers for many years know that the profession in which we have served is being degraded. The experience of a teacher working with students together in a classroom without excessive managerial interference or elaborate mechanical mediation is disappearing. That experience of a professionally independent teacher working directly with young men and women in a common space is an element of vital democracy as well as a rich and effective learning environment. It is disappearing not because it is inefficient, but because it does not conform to a top-down model of managerial control in the interests of profit measures foreign to the business of education.

We want the profession to survive. We want it to be possible for a teacher to have some independence based on employment security, and we want

teachers to be able, should they chose, to have families and provide for them, not be forced to live in constant insecurity month-to-month working multiple jobs to make ends meet, which is the fate of increasing numbers of part-timers.

How did it ever happen that we in the union allowed this Wal-Mart concept of college teaching to take hold? Did we succumb to the devil's bargain of continuing benefits for a grandfathered minority at the cost of future generations of teachers and ultimately of the profession itself? Many unions did swallow this generational poisoned pill. Perhaps ours did. If so, not anymore. Now we reach out to those whose future has been mortgaged to a philosophy of maximum personal gain at the expense of everything and everyone else.

The Ice-Bucket Challenge

We have often heard that the Ontario college system is underfunded. It is. Ontario funds its students at nearly the lowest rate in Canada. It is also sometimes suggested that the high cost of faculty salaries and benefits puts limiting pressure on already limited resources. This may be true. If it is true, it is also true of administration, which has grown at higher rates than faculty over the last ten years and whose salaries are capped far above the highest faculty step.

Administration frequently declares that colleges operate under conditions of scarcity which require efficiencies and cost-cutting austerity. Let's accept this for the moment. If so, efficiency, like charity, begins at home. We invite our administration colleagues to join us in voluntarily accepting a two-year freeze to allow for a more equitable distribution of resources among the largest number of teachers currently working in the system.

Persons making more than a hundred thousand a year, which represent the top 5% of income earners in Canada, can

safely forgo an increase for two years to assure that partial-load employees currently making as little as ten thousand annually can do better. The real sacrifice — (again a moderate one relative to the conditions of partial-load faculty) — would be borne by more recently hired full-time faculty who would, however, have the benefit of step-increases during the freeze.

We hope that administration will join us in our attempt to ease system strains by freeing resources for a more balanced distribution in the interests of professionalism and education. We hope this, but we do not base our own moral and professional obligation on their participation. We would see such a move on their part as a genuine demonstration of commitment and concern for the colleges they are responsible to manage, and we are sure faculty, students, and the public would appreciate and welcome such commitment.

The Motion

For the union, in any case, the correct course of action is clear. We must step up to support our neglected and exploited colleagues in the system. **We ask that partial-load receive a wage increase, that their employment security be strengthened, and that a cap be set on the percentage of part-time any college in the system can hire.** We must do all we can to resist the current slide to a permanent underclass designed to support climbing incomes for a shrinking remnant of full-time faculty and a rapidly expanding cadre of highly paid administrators.

Do Your Part

If you agree with the motion (and many do), come to the scheduled membership meeting and vote it up. If you disagree, come to the meeting and vote it down. Democracy in the union is participative not merely representative, and you must show and vote to have your say.

Fanshawe and Family: My Story of Accommodation and Arbitration

Dr. Amanda Zavitz



In 2011, I filed a grievance against Fanshawe College. I argued that the College was discriminating against me on the basis of my family status. More specifically, I argued that they were violating the Ontario Human Rights Code because they failed to take my family status into account when I applied for a scheduling exemption. I was told that family status was not a factor that would be taken into consideration when scheduling exemptions were being considered; and that it never would be. I have felt mocked, ridiculed, called spoiled and perceived as pretentious and entitled.

Nonetheless, I stood my ground. I fought for what I knew was right; what was just. In the end, my stance has earned me personally very little. My struggle to attain teaching schedules that fit with the needs of my family status continues. Yet, I am proud of taking a stand against this College policy for two reasons. One, my case has helped to pave the way for other parents in Ontario who are struggling to balance work and child-care duties. Employees are now required to take family status into consideration as a legitimate reason why someone may be granted a scheduling exemption. This is the right thing to do. Large-scale employees, like Fanshawe, ought to be progressive. Fanshawe College is a higher learning institution. For that

reason alone, Fanshawe should be a workplace that strives to create positive and family-friendly working conditions for their employees. Employees that are better able to manage their work and family conditions will be not only more happy and satisfied with their job, but they will also be more productive. In the case of a higher learning institute, this progress is measured most effectively in the classroom.

*"I have felt
mocked, ridiculed,
called spoiled and
perceived as
pretentious and
entitled.
Nonetheless, I
stood my ground."*

The second reason I am proud of standing up for what I know is right is that one day, my children will learn through my example to stand up for justice, even when the pursuit of this justice is tough-going. Here is my story. I was hired as a partial-load professor in the School of Language and Liberal Studies at Fanshawe College in September 2004. This just happened to be the same year that my first child was born and the year that I completed my PhD in sociology at the University of Western Ontario.

This first year of teaching partial load at Fanshawe was rough. I had a baby who

was still nursing at home and I was in the midst of finishing and then defending my dissertation. I had four new preps and I remember very little of the first year of my child's life, yet through this process I discovered many things. Foremost, I learned that I did not love the process of endless writing and research that was only good enough until it was time to write the next paper. I also learned that I love teaching and that there is a certain appeal to Fanshawe students who are more likely to face in life the same poor working-class struggles that were familiar to me. I decided that I wanted to teach at Fanshawe full-time. There was another defining factor in my decision; my husband owns and operates a restaurant and subsequently has a very grueling and demanding schedule with little flexibility. I was attracted to teaching at Fanshawe because in 2004 when I hired on the teaching hours were between the hours of 9:00 am and 5:00 pm, and I knew that would be complementary to my other job as a full-time Mom.

One year later, in September 2005, I was hired as a full-time Professor in the School of Language and Liberal Studies. My second child was born in January 2007. When I returned to work in January 2008, the working conditions had changed. More specifically, I was being scheduled for early morning (8 am) classes and classes that ran into the evening (between 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm). When this first started happening, I thought it was a one off or an anomaly; but increasingly, my classes were being pushed into the evenings, and I began to see that this was not an irregularity, but a planned initiative; that scheduling classes into the evenings was part of the Scheduling Committees plan to improve the scheduling process at Fanshawe College. The implications of this

initiative meant that my conditions of work had changed. It also meant that I had to hire someone to care outside of the daycare that my children were both in at this time. The daycare did not accept children early enough for me to drop them off and be at work for an 8:00 am class and was closed before I could get there to pick them up. This was one obstacle. Over the years, there would be many more. The biggest one would be to find good and reliable care for short periods of time. My childcare needs changed every fourteen weeks. There have been timetables over the last ten years that have been very accommodating of my family status needs and there have been many that have posed significant challenges. Consider having to find someone to watch your two children for from 6:45 am to 8:30 am when they get on the bus one or two days a week for fourteen weeks. The person who is available for this “shift” isn’t necessarily going to have a lot of experience providing child care. Further, they could not be expected to be available to care from them from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm another day of the week in the next semester or even potentially three semesters down the road.

Most Professors are very fortunate in that our job offers a lot of autonomy; when we are not teaching classes, consulting with students, attending required meetings or meeting the demands of other College business, we are free to work from home, or even from Starbucks for that matter. We all appreciate this flexibility and autonomy and most of us worked hard to achieve a job that would allow us such privilege. Yet, that fact does not negate the fact that those of us with young children (especially those of us who do not have the support of a partner who is available to assist with childcare duties) struggle to find childcare within fourteen week windows that are never consistent. When I found someone to “cover” for

one semester that same person could not be relied on to be available for whatever childcare needs I might have in the next semester.

I struggled. I had no family to help me or rely on. I had overwhelming anxiety related to my timetables and the challenges it was causing in my life trying to juggle the care of my kids. There was one particular semester where my workday started at 3 pm (my children get off the bus at 3:50 pm) three days a week. This meant, I was “available” and flexible during the day, but I saw very little of my children that semester. For an ambitious working woman who was convinced and who aspired to work at Fanshawe College because I perceived it to be a family-friendly environment, this new pill was difficult to swallow.

After experiencing some health complications associated with the stress and anxiety I had over my shifting work conditions, I filed a grievance against the College in 2011. The actual process of arbitration included many stages, some of which seem so long ago and so humiliating that I have likely blocked them from my memory. What I can tell you is that my grievance was filed in 2011, but the actual process of arbitration only began in the Spring of 2013 and the entire process ended in Spring 2015. Altogether, this amounted to four years of my life. While I am ever thankful to the Union for helping me, I will not sugar coat the process. It was horrendous. It was maddening, humiliating, denigrating, slow and painful. I felt my entire life — my values, decisions, choices and even my intimate personal relationships — were put on trial. I felt put down, mocked, and humiliated. All of this was considered legitimate. There were multiple attempts to prove that I was unreasonable, that I was lying and exaggerating or that courses being scheduled into the evenings were not really a problem for me. I sat through

hours (on three separate occasions) of testimony about me and I testified for hours about minutiae details relating to every schedule that I had ever been given at Fanshawe College. The worst part was that I could not argue; I could not defend myself. I had to sit and submit to the process. I had to let others discuss me as though I were not present in the room. I had to subject myself to other people’s evaluation of me in a process that was highly staged and political.

After the last closing statements were made, I was told that there would be a finding in my arbitration in the Spring of 2014, but a decision in my case was not made until June 2015. Mine was a precedent setting case. Partly, in my opinion, because my case was not clear cut. I do not have a physical disability, I do not have a life-threatening disease; my children are not gravely ill. In many ways, I am symbolic of many other working mothers and fathers who are asking their workplace to grant them an accommodation based on family status. The status of my family is that my husband owns his own business and works 12-16 hour days. This makes him largely unavailable to participate in childcare duties and responsibilities. This leaves me the equivalent of a single parent when it comes to juggling work and childcare responsibilities. It was this factor, this choice that I felt was most on trial. It is this factor that continues to be on trial.

In June 2015, Arbitrator Deb Leighton found Fanshawe College guilty of violating the Ontario Code of Human Rights. They failed to take family status into account when granting scheduling exemptions. Today, they have to take family status into account. What is still unclear is what counts. What situation is serious or egregious enough for someone to be granted a scheduling exemption? Can predominant caregivers like me be considered? Fanshawe College was ordered to

accommodate me unless it would cause them undue hardship. Yet, when I initiated the process of filing for a scheduling exemption for the Winter

2016 term, I was informed that I could follow through with the proper procedures that are now put in place, but the likelihood that I would be

accommodated would be slim. Will Fanshawe College ultimately be a family-friendly higher learning institution? That remains to be seen.

Everyone Talks About Workload

WMG Does Something About It

Mark Feltham



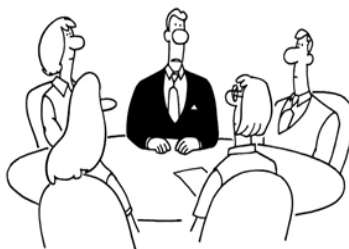
Most of the complaints I hear as Chief Steward involve workload. Fortunately, our Collective Agreement provides a way to resolve workload issues for full-time faculty. Of course, you can always try to work things out by talking to your supervisor; however, if dialogue doesn't work, you can refer your SWF to the College's Workload Monitoring Group (WMG).

The Collective Agreement gives WMG the power to resolve workload disputes. If WMG can't resolve your dispute, you can then refer the problem to a Workload Resolution Arbitrator (WRA), a neutral third party (usually a lawyer) whose ruling is binding for a year on everyone involved.

The process begins with your SWF. When you receive your SWF, you have five working days to make a decision about it: you can either agree to the proposed workload or refer to WMG.

A note of caution is in order here: sometimes members talk about "refusing" to sign their SWFs. You actually can't "refuse" to sign it. You can always engage

in discussions with your manager, but if these discussions don't get the desired result, you have two options: sign and agree to the original SWF, or sign and refer. If you don't do anything, once the five working days are up, the College can impose it, and you generally lose the right to challenge the SWF. Thus, inaction has an undesirable result: you're stuck with the SWF.



"Whew! That was close!
We almost decided something!"

A referred SWF usually gets the College's attention. Sometimes just the act of referring your SWF to WMG causes the College to take your concern more seriously, and we often settle things in behind-the-scenes negotiations after the referral.

However, if we can't sort things out, you will have what we call a referral meeting—you'll attend a meeting of the WMG and present your problem. If necessary, your manager will usually be present as well to tell his or her side of the story.

Referring your SWF is easy—all you have to do is tick the appropriate box on the SWF and sign your name. At that

point, we'll usually engage in the settlement discussions I mention above: these discussions usually involve you, me, HR, and your manager. The Contract says that the referral meeting is supposed to happen within a week of the referral "where feasible," but sometimes we'll delay the referral meeting (with your permission, of course) to try to work things out behind the scenes.

Because WMG consists of an equal number of Union representatives and College managers, any settlement usually happens without an official referral meeting: if the College is willing to make a deal, the deal will almost always happen in the settlement discussions behind the scenes. If the College isn't willing to make a deal, its representatives on WMG will vote against any proposed solution. A majority of WMG must vote for any solution, so at that point, your option usually involves a WRA.

There is also a way to refer your SWF to WMG even after you've signed and agreed to it; however, that process will be the topic of a future article in the *The Educator*. For now, though, you can read more about the technical side of all of this in Article 11.02 of the Collective Agreement; you can also always contact the Union for advice at any time.

The Harvard Business Review: “Let Them Eat MOOCs”

George Fogarasi



You wouldn't necessarily skim the Harvard Business Review for insights into teaching and learning. However, it does have its finger on the pulse of power and the direction of economic trends. It's good to step outside of our disciplinary focus and distinguish the forest from the trees. “Let them Eat MOOCs” by Gianpiero Petriglieri vividly contextualizes the vortex of trees, forests, stumps and paper mills involved in the floundering MOOC industry.

A MOOC is a Massive Online Open Course. They are touted as the future of learning, an online revolution that makes education instantly accessible to anyone. Petriglieri counters that while most MOOC supporters mean well, such courses are used by administrators primarily to cut faculty. Furthermore, far from creating educational accessibility, they worsen inequality by providing empty credentials (creating, in effect, a two-tier education system). Petriglieri observes that “the techno-democratization of education looks

like a cover story for its aristocratization”.

MOOCs aren't digital keys to great classrooms' doors. “At best, they are infomercials for those classrooms. At worst, they are digital postcards from gated communities.”

He notes that, far from making a revolution, MOOCs are another form of colonialism: “the policy and practice of a power in extending its control over weaker people or areas.” The elite will send their kids to fancy institutions (say, Harvard Business School) and most everyone else will access a MOOC.

Privileged students sitting together in classrooms will have the luxury of examining, sharing and creating knowledge and culture (to say nothing of making invaluable social connections). The rest can MOOC it out with “the cult of technology as a surrogate for leadership, and the exchange of digital convenience for personal privacy.”

Patriglieri is scathing: “The idea that we should have access to anything wherever and however we want it for free, in exchange for the provider's opportunity to use and sell our online footprint to advertisers or employers is the essence of digital consumerism. This is the culture that MOOCs are borne of and reinforce in turn.”

It's plug-and-play education without

personal relationships. Digitally mediated multiple choice tests and crowd-sourced peer evaluation with a certificate at the end of it (that “just in time delivery of skills [?]” that employers ostensibly covet) are no substitute for the ineffably rich tapestry that unfolds in an engaged classroom. None of this, of course, comes from the technology. The technology is neutral. What happens all depends on how the courses are developed and taught. And this depends on who is in control of these courses.

Teaching and learning is irreducibly social, a complex dance between teachers and students who learn with and from each other. However, when knowledge becomes a digital commodity, this relationship is diluted or crushed, “no longer a common good but a leisurely privilege.”

We need to know what the boardroom is thinking if we are to stop it from trumping the classroom. Petriglieri's “Let them Eat MOOCs” is a timely look at why managers like MOOCs. With a manager for every three college faculty in Ontario, it's vital to have insight into corporate culture if we are to stop it from trumping (or eliminating) the classroom.

Retiring Local Vice-President Kathryn Tamasi Wins Distinguished Service Award

Kathryn Tamasi, Vice-President of Local 110 since 2006, and long-serving Program Coordinator for DSW, recently received the OPSEU Distinguished Service Award from Local President Darryl Bedford. Here is a portion of Darryl's nomination text: *Kathryn acted with professionalism*

and principled integrity. She could always be counted on to support members with compassion and sage advice. Her support was critical as experienced activists retired. We appreciate everything she has done for the Local and wish her well in her retirement. We certainly do!



What to Do When Shepell Calls You

At Fanshawe College, if you are sick or injured, and are unable to return to work for any period longer than five consecutive days, you will receive a call from representatives of Morneau-Shepell LLP, 'Shepell' for short. You need to know what to do when you receive this call.

Shepell is the college's third-party agent for managing medical absences, accommodations and restrictions. The college used to do this work itself, but now a very expensive outside agency has been hired instead. Any personal relationship between employer and employee has been dissolved in favor of an impersonal representative processing a case load, and you can expect nothing but impersonality, at best, and at worst, as several members have reported to us, insult and harassment.

Since you are dealing with a third-party agent, and not the college itself, we strongly encourage you to contact the union the moment Shepell contacts you. You also have a right to third-party representation and support, and you would be wise to use it.

When Shepell comes calling, simply respond with the following formula: "I appreciate your call, but I will need to contact my union representatives before responding to any of your requests." Say this and no more than this, hang up, and call the union office immediately. You need to know your rights when dealing with Shepell because the forms they ask you to prepare may ask for more information than they are entitled to by law, and you must be sure to provide what the law requires and no more. If they express any resistance to your ending the call after repeating the formula above, note what is said, but respond only by politely ending the call.

These people are not your friends. They are not even fellow employees of the college. They are hired guns doing dirty work for others who want your illnesses or injuries processed, controlled, and expedited with a minimum of human contact and compassion. No fuss. No muss. No kindness and no care.

When Shepell comes calling, simply respond with the following formula: "I appreciate your call, but I will need to contact my union representatives before responding to any of your requests."

You may think only malingerers and excuse makers have reason to fear representatives of Shepell, and that responsible people like yourself will be treated with respect and fairness. Think again. Teachers who have worked at this college for decades, and who were sick or injured for the first time in their long careers, have received letters conveying not-so-subtle threats about the security of their employment should they fail to comply forthwith with Shepell's demands.

Any communication from the college through its representatives that

contains indirect threats as the very first contact with one of its sick or injured employees constitutes an insult, at least in the eyes of employees who expect a more humane communication from the college they have faithfully served for many years.

The language has improved recently in these communications, which we welcome, although the emphasis is still on rapid compliance with Shepell's requirements.

The union will not advise you to any action against your interests. On the contrary, it will guide you through the process to protect your rights and allow you to comply with Shepell's legal requirements without providing them privileged confidential information which belongs only to you and your physician.

Most people will be fortunate enough to complete their career at the college without the need for any medical accommodation extending beyond a few days. We hope this for everyone, but some of our colleagues will fall ill or suffer injury and will need accommodation. We want to ensure that their difficulties are not worsened by dealing with an importunate third-party agency concerned more about its deadlines and deliverables than with the pain and suffering of the people they are charged to manage.

The union can help you in your interactions with Shepell. We know them well and what they have a right to ask and what they do not. We will assist you in providing them all they are entitled to, and we will assure they get nothing more than the law allows.

Give Enlightenment a Second Chance

Carmen Gindi



The Humanities and the Sciences should NOT be in conflict, but, in academia, there seems to be a growing anti-science movement within the Humanities.

Today's Humanities departments rarely, for example, show the relationship between scientific thinking and humanism. During the Age of Enlightenment, some of the most brilliant philosophers and humanists were, themselves, empirical scientists: Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, Locke, Pascal, Bacon...the list is very long.

How many Canadian post-secondary institutions today offer mandatory introductory courses that expose students to the aforementioned philosophers, or to the positive outcomes, in politics and society, of the Age of Reason? Some do, but most don't. In fact, the majority of Canadian post-secondary institutions do not offer an Introduction to Scientific Thinking as a mandatory course in a Liberal Arts education. On the other hand, during the Age of Reason, the border between the two disciplines was not so clear. Empirical scientists influenced public policy, and revolutionaries used scientific thinking to reach conclusions about human rights and responsibilities.

The merging of the Humanities and the Sciences bred democratic societies in Europe that focused on individual rights and freedoms: the presumption of innocence, separation of church and state, liberalism, constitutional

government, the "social contract", the separation of political powers, and the elevation of rational thinking over superstition and religious fundamentalism. These were all undeniably positive outcomes of the Age of Enlightenment.

The habit—the crucial role—of questioning, in and of itself, is the common ground upon which the scientist and humanist stand.

Today, however, the study of the Humanities seems to be ghettoizing itself. When we think of anti-science movements, most of us probably envision religious fundamentalists on the Right; however, there is a disturbing strain of anti-scientific thinking among some "progressives" on the Left. Indeed it almost looks like the Humanities is waging a contest against science similar to the one religion waged in centuries past, and, in many cases, still wages today.

Today's progressives have blamed science for wars, eugenics, genocide, environmental destruction, government eavesdropping...but they are judging science only through the lens of its manipulation in the hands of power elites.

It is much easier to blame science for social ills than it is to consider science integral to the solution of those ills. Green energy, electric cars, flying trains, seawater greenhouses, vertical farming, Ebola vaccines, and cures for AIDS and Hep-C are among so many other emerging discoveries waiting to revolutionize the future, thanks to science.

Academia aside, even today's public intellectuals are of a different breed

entirely than the ones produced by the Enlightenment. Voltaire, the philosopher of the French revolution, also held forth on Newtonian physics. By contrast, we have public intellectuals like Chris Hedges, who condemn science and vilify scientists as though the latter have contributed nothing to civilization but the destruction of the environment and the slaughter of humans. "The 17th century Enlightenment myth of human advancement through science, reason and rationality should have been obliterated forever by the slaughter of World War I" ("The Science of Genocide" par. 9). Hedges blames world wars on Enlightenment values—science, reason, and rationality—rather than the far more likely culprits: fascism, tribalism, and other flawed power structures.

He's not alone. Too many academicians lump the hard sciences with capitalism, war, colonialism, what have you, so in the process of condemning these evils, they also condemn the sciences—as an act of political protest. They see science and technology as the engines drawing Western civilization to an apocalyptic end.

While the Humanities should question the Sciences, particularly when it comes to ethical issues in scientific experimentation or the impact of emerging technologies on society, if the Humanities continues to pitch itself squarely against the sciences, then it will surely lose.

Already, Humanities departments are shrinking, if not outright closing, in several American public universities. Students coming in to post-secondary institutions are often prejudiced against the Humanities in the first place. They believe they have to choose between the Humanities (an airy-fairy discipline, which

is, at its heart, anti-science, full of impractical, Utopian ideas) and the Sciences (which lead to "real" jobs and "practical" skills). Here at Fanshawe, students are more inclined to register for science courses than they are to sign up for literature, philosophy, or history courses.

And sometimes, when students do choose the Humanities, they do so by default--because they found the hard sciences and mathematics too difficult (or too boring) in high school, so what else can they study? Not surprisingly, many of these students choose disciplines that they assume are not as academically rigorous: the Humanities or the Social Sciences. Meanwhile, the demand for hard science courses at

colleges and universities is on the rise. Why? They lead to higher-paying jobs. According to a Statistics Canada study, the university degrees offering the highest-paying salaries in Canada were in Engineering, Business Administration, Maths, Physical Sciences, and Health (cited in "Engineering and Business").

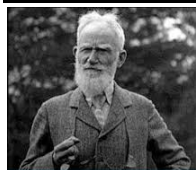
Do scientific facts, theories, processes, and entities--do microbes, DNA structure, and quantum physics--have a place in the Humanities? Absolutely. Likewise, rhetorical analysis, history, and philosophical questions about meaning, rights, and responsibilities (among many other subjects in the Humanities) also have a place in the Sciences. Inter-disciplinary

discussions are vital to enriching our understanding of the world.

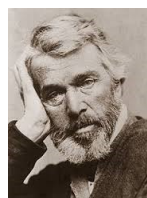
Unfortunately, as it stands, the Humanities is distancing itself from the Sciences, often portraying them negatively in dystopian works of science fiction or in critical studies that focus only on the negative effects of a techno-centric world. These represent valid concerns, but as humanists, we must also acknowledge the positive impact of science and technology because, after all, the purpose of scientific knowledge is to serve humanity. That does not mean that science has the answers to all questions, but it does mean that science can help inform the answers to many questions in the Humanities.

MY BID FOR A NOBEL

Jamie Austin

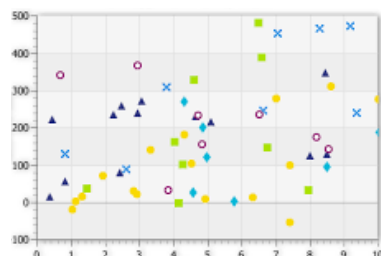


George Bernard Shaw once famously declared "if all the economists were laid end to end, they still wouldn't reach a conclusion" -- but in this case (plus, of course, in his oft-quoted slander of teachers) Shaw was wrong. The truth is that those end-to-end economists would reach a conclusion, alright, usually the one(s) they'd always intended to.



Another famous writer, the great Victorian sage Thomas Carlyle, once pronounced economics "the dismal science"--but he, too, was off-target. Everyone who thinks about it even a little bit realizes that economics is *not* a science and that economists are *not* scientists -- but many people seem to find that fact very easy to forget. Economists do their best to help us all to disremember this reality by the studied gravity of their utterances, the portentous titles of their published papers, and most tellingly by their generous use of charts and spreadsheets.

Nothing makes a thing look more scientific than a chart. Here's part of one typically daunting scatter plot:



WHAT DOES IT MEAN? Who knows?

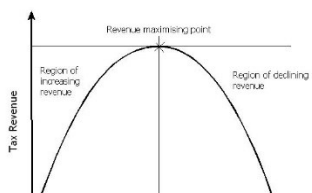
As for economists' reliance on spreadsheets, one fairly recent (and really embarrassing) example was a worksheet being brandished as a godsend by all kinds of well-known austerity types to show that not only is high government debt associated with slow economic growth, but that economic growth is particularly weak when gross government debt exceeds 90 percent of gross domestic product. 90%; finally there was a number to attach to everyone's sense of nameless dread. That spreadsheet's specific calculation was treated as a revelation, and 90% of GDP

was, scarily, a threshold that the U.S. had already crossed. Clearly, there should be no more stimulus, no further extension of jobless benefits. Hang the unfortunate; debt had to be driven down post-haste. The only problem with the austere's unassailable mathematical, scientific proof was that a crucial formula in this spreadsheet, one that ultimately produced the 90 percent, contained an obvious error. The proof, sadly, was wrong.

So, what was the response of the politicians who had been trumpeting this exact calculation as confirmation of their viewpoints? Well, we can argue about numbers, they said, but the point is the same. Think about that. It's a spreadsheet, but hey--numbers, schmunbers. Let's not get hung up on *calculations*.

This is exactly what the majority of economists have been saying about inflation for at least the last six years. It is about to explode; it's looming in the background, rearing up, battering against the sea-wall, just waiting to engulf us all. It's coming... wait for it...wait...

“We can expect rapidly rising prices and much, much higher interest rates over the next four or five years,” prophesied economist Arthur B. Laffer in *The Wall Street Journal* in 2009. In the great tradition of economists Laffer was, of course, dead wrong. Didn’t hurt his reputation, though; seriously and consistently not right predictions never seem to impair the reputations of economists. Why? Because reasons, essentially. There’s always something that unfairly mixes up their otherwise impeccable logic, or delays its recognition as truth...some little anomaly that no one could have foreseen, and besides, we little people seem to have a real need to believe that there exist experts, scientists, in every field. Relationship scientists, dream scientists, scientists of the celebs, economic scientists; we love to turn to them.



Back to charts for a second.

Laffer is the contriver of the **Laffer curve**, that tongue-like bow that sweeps out and then back in (or depending on the chart’s orientation, up, and then down) to show with arresting elegance that at a certain point, if you tax the upper earners too heavily, you will simply kill the goose that laid the golden egg. Or, to put it another way, by reducing taxes you can actually increase government revenues. Unsurprisingly, this parabola is well-beloved of those who want their taxes lowered; it proves that it’s really a public-spirited thing to fight taxes, you see. The better-off will actually wind up contributing more to the public coffers if they can clutch more of their cash. The curve is only slightly magical, since no one can agree where the sweet spot, that optimal rate, lies. Where the curve peaks, how far to the left or right its vertex occurs, is up for grabs, but even if it basically says nothing, the Laffer curve’s pedigree makes it worthy of close scrutiny. It was originally championed in

the mid-’70s by two worthies who would go on to prove, better than any mere economist ever could, that being monumentally wrong means never having to say you’re sorry: Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney.

Well, but that was decades ago; let’s fast forward. In April 2014, all 67 tame economists surveyed by the Bloomberg Group predicted higher interest rates six months hence. Every one of them. What happened? Rates fell sharply instead. These same oracles had been making similar predictions every month for some time, with ninety-plus percent of them consistently predicting rate increases, and that same percentage always unreservedly wrong. Didn’t deter them, though; by April, all were finally on board. Rates were a’ roarin’ up. I mean, it had to happen sooner or later, right? Rates would certainly rise. They must. They didn’t, of course.

Okay; hindsight’s 20-20 and so on, but a clever person would have capitalized on that prognostication logjam in April 2014 and guessed that rates would fall, even if he or she was no better at soothsaying than the Bloomberg cadre. Why did not one of those 67 survey participants inquire what all of the others were predicting, and then ask “Seriously. Everybody? Sixty-six say up?” No glory in being part of the herd; the only way to stand out, to have any chance at all at fame, was to predict that interest rates would fall. Had there been just one such contrarian, he or she would suddenly have looked like a hero, a genius. An economics *scientist*.

Postscript: just today, December 16, 2015, U.S. interest rates were finally raised, just a little bit. Why? To forestall inflation, and because with rock-bottom interest rates the economy looks weak. Think about that reasoning; inflation is very low, but it must be stopped before it gets high, and the economy will look stronger if we give it the appearance of being stronger. Ergo, rates must go up. Hard to fault that logic. However, after surveying some sheep’s knuckle bones that he just threw down in

the dust, this author is going to go out on a limb and guess that the next move on interest rates will be back down. If I’m right, I’ll construct a truly impressive chart, and I trust that someone will nominate me for the Nobel prize that I deserve.

I can’t resist attaching to Austin’s article here my own current *bete noire* from the pretentious pseudo-scientific jargon of economics: the euphemistic slight-of-hand phrase *tax inversion*.

You may have seen this phrase recently in the press in connection with the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer and its decision to shift its headquarters from the United States to Ireland following its purchase of the Irish owned corporation Allegran, makers of Botox.

By shifting headquarters to Ireland, Pfizer can avoid relatively high corporate taxation in the United States and pay negligible token corporate taxes in Ireland. Of course, it is very unlikely that the majority of Pfizer employees will be working in Ireland, or that the research chemists in Pfizer’s RD department will be drawn primarily from the counties of Ireland, but no matter, with headquarters in Ireland, that’s where Pfizer pays taxes.

Our current commitment to global free trade and reduced barriers to capital circulation enables another corporate shell game. The socially produced resources that support Pfizer’s corporate activity (think North American research universities) can be exploited without any requirement for social return. Until we achieve global standardization for tax and labor policies, our global pass for corporations and capital will work only for share holders and against ordinary citizens. Pfizer is only an especially flagrant instance of this ugly practice.

Tax inversion is another way of saying (and doing) *tax evasion*. The word *inversion* sounds meteorological, a sort of economic weather, but it’s really just good old-fashioned cunning. **WLH**

MY NFT LIFE

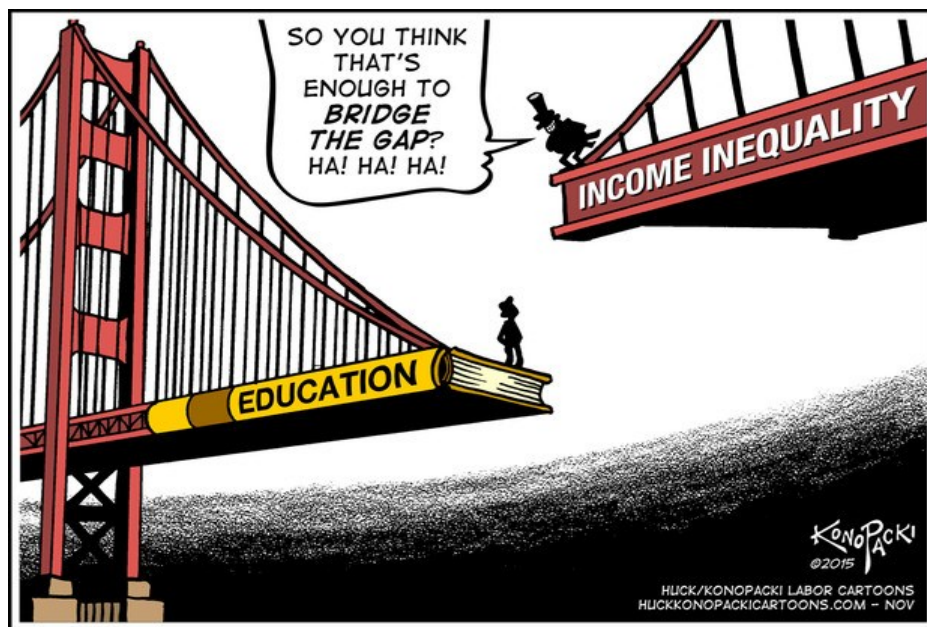
Matt Farrell



Recently, a colleague asked if my workload had increased since I was hired full-time. I was taken aback by the question, yet I understand why he asked. In my first year as a full-time faculty member I was buried under an avalanche of new preps, committee work, and probationary paperwork. Compared to my NFT teaching load, it was indeed a longer list of commitments. However, this cursory inventory of new tasks obscures the significant difference between the two job categories. Compared to the demanding, unpredictable and, frankly, tenuous nature of NFT teaching, there is simply no comparison as to the burdens involved.

I enjoyed teaching part-time, partial load, and - for a term - sessional. It was a pretty good gig. I taught a few classes each term, which left me plenty of time to work at my other job. Yes, my *other job*. Most NFT faculty have another job (or even jobs) in addition to their teaching work. Without the additional income it can be difficult to pay rent, provide for a family, and, you know, eat. (And don't even think about trying to qualify for a mortgage). That's the reality of teaching part-time, and partial load: it isn't sustainable for the long term, although long-term non-fulltime is now normative in the college system.

As it turns out, sustainability isn't the most pressing concern. The big problem was reliability. Typically an NFT faculty



member will have a few weeks' notice (at best) about their teaching load (if there is one) for the upcoming term. This makes Christmas an adventure: each December I would find out whether I was teaching in January, or not. And those were weeks without a paycheck.

Four weeks without a paycheck makes for a tough holiday season. Not nearly as tough, however, as summer time. That's when I would return to my other job. Others weren't so lucky. The single parents, or those who needed child care, were relegated to EI, and sometimes they would miss the minimum requirements for EI.

I was lucky in this respect. I had been a bartender for 18 years, so finding work wasn't a problem. The problem was, it made me a sub-par educator. I planned my courses around ease of marking, rather than sound pedagogy; I postponed marking because of weekend shifts at the bar; and I faked my way through 8:00am classes after finishing work at 3:00am. The students suffered. I suffered.

This isn't to say that there is less teaching competence among our NFT faculty. Quite the contrary. Our NFT colleagues are some of the most dynamic, committed, and professional educators around. They routinely go above and beyond what is required of them. The system exploits this commitment: we often ask more of NFT than we do of our full-time faculty (they won't complain, right?). It is, after all, an audition. Sadly, it is often a fruitless audition for a part that may never materialize.

This is merely a snapshot of my life as an NFT faculty member, but it is typical. It is a difficult way to live. In fact, it's a struggle. If we are serious about delivering quality education - and I think we are - we need to pay more attention to this. A system with a minority of non-fulltime teachers is possibly sustainable; but a system in which a majority are precarious employees without security or the ability to commit to their career without outside jobs is a scandal.

President's Message: Status Quo is Erosion

Darryl Bedford



You may have seen the Toronto Star story on the public sector being a large source of precarious employment (<http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2015/12/12/public-sector-workers-feel-sting-of-precarious-jobs-data-shows.html>).

We know that Fanshawe, just like the other colleges, is a source of precarious employment. But just how big a source of precarious employment is Fanshawe?

If we consider just non-fulltime faculty, there are about 500 part-time, 250 partial-load, and up to 100 sessional faculty in the Fall and Winter semesters. That's about 1,150 NFT faculty out of a labour force of approximately 217,000 in London, Ontario.

That may not sound like a lot until you consider that is just the result of one single employer. Counting NFT faculty alone, Fanshawe College's precariously employed academics represent one-third of one percent of the entire London labour force, which is a lot from one employer.

And remember, that doesn't include part-time support staff. I know what some will say: "But these people only want part-time employment." According to the Part-Time Pay Task Force Final Report commissioned by Algonquin College management, the majority of faculty surveyed (64%) were not part-time by choice. If that number is reflective of the workforce at Fanshawe College, that's a lot of underemployed workers.

The bottom line is that if we are expecting colleges to set a good employment example for the private sector, that isn't happening.

There isn't adequate funding of the system so colleges then turn to some potentially risky "alternative" revenue sources. For Fanshawe, that would be Hot Zone and CCPV. For Algonquin College, that's been the Saudi Arabia campus that has now lost nearly \$1.5 million.

Even if these risky strategies work, the revenues hardly make up for inadequate funding. In any event, we've not heard a commitment to use the revenues to significantly change the ratio of part-time to full-time faculty.

In the colleges system, the status quo is erosion.

So, what do we do about it?

We could do nothing: that will just allow further erosion.

We could look at what counterparts in the Corrections Division of OPSEU are facing. The province has allowed the corrections system to descend into chaos and decay. The workers are standing up.

One would hope colleges will not be left to flounder in the same way. But still, what will happen to our system if we stand by and do nothing?

What leverage do we have? We do have the bargaining process. For many years, arguably we've been dodging bullets in bargaining in an attempt to protect our existing membership. One can also argue we've done a pretty good job of dodging the bullets. That was especially true in the 2012 and 2014 rounds.

We can only do that for so long.

If we want change, what approach do we take in bargaining?

We could take the standard approach, look at our comparator groups, and put on the table a modest package of improvements and salary increases.

Or we could be bold. Even if one accepts that things are not as bad at a growing college (Fanshawe) versus the shrinking colleges, can we accept that the status quo in the system is erosion?

Even if you think your job will survive, erosion is not a good thing for our pension plan to cite one example. Dwindling membership is not good for the union in terms of finances or ability to act on behalf of the membership.

Bold it is then. But what does bold look like?

It could mean making sacrifices for workers we don't represent (part-time, sessional).

It could mean voting down and not advancing contract proposals we would usually make (benefit, salary improvements). That's hard if you are going to personally benefit.

It could mean doing exactly the things the other side would not expect us to do.

We would be fighting for a system, not for us. Not every member of the public will get that we're not in it just for the money. Some citizens will get it and that may just be just enough to make a difference.

To do such a thing will take incredible planning and coordination. No one person will be able to do this on their own. It will take grassroots approaches from the membership.

Are you ready to make a difference?

On School, Work, and James Scott's 'Anarchist Squint'

Mike Boisvert



In recent years, students in one of my classes have been offered an end-of-term assignment they can use to replace a lower assignment mark. For this assignment they are asked to critique and comment on ideas presented in the RSA Animate lecture, *Changing Education Paradigms*, by Sir Ken Robinson. In an RSA lecture, an animated hand generates sketches to illustrate ideas presented by a narrator.

The thrust of Robinson's lecture is that education, particularly at elementary and secondary levels, isn't serving students well and ought to be conceived and structured in a new way. Robinson notes that systems of public education were built on two foundational pillars, one economic, and one philosophical. Public education was devised during the industrial revolution, and was and remains structured along factory lines; subjects are specialized, taught separately, often in separate facilities; decisions are made centrally and pushed through the system; students' behavior is rigidly scheduled by clock time; students are sent through the system in batches by age, or as Robinson quips their "dates of manufacture"; and, standardization and conformity are reinforced throughout the system. The second pillar is the assumption that people are either academic or nonacademic; more plainly, smart or dumb. Smart kids are those who possess analytic intelligence and do well on tests measuring the same. No room for circularity there. One of the most

interesting ideas in the talk, and of most interest to Robinson himself, is his contention that public education may stymie children's creativity and capacity for divergent thinking. He cites a longitudinal study that found that scores on divergent thinking tasks (e.g., asking someone to list as many uses as they can for a paper clip) peak during kindergarten and decline markedly thereafter.

Students' reactions to Robinson's lecture have always befuddled me. With few exceptions, they have responded enthusiastically to Robinson's arguments, as though

someone has put words (and sketches) to their own experience with education. Student often describe painful journeys through elementary or high school classrooms that left them believing themselves to be stupid. More unsettling are the not infrequent reports of an overly harsh teacher that "made me feel stupid". Yet, despite students' immediate, almost visceral reaction to the video, they rarely offer much when prompted for solutions to the problems Robinson poses. The typical reaction seems to amount to resigned defeat. Requests for simple, even superficial changes to how education might be delivered or how the role of student could be altered are typically met with shrugs, or the rejoinder that nothing will ever change, so why bother?

Many years ago while an undergraduate I was hired to work the afternoon shift at a St. Thomas truck assembly factory. Workers on the plant floor were arranged in teams; I belonged to a group of material handlers, whose primary tasks were to monitor inventory and supply parts to other teams who were themselves responsible for assembling the trucks. Though we

were organized in teams, there was little in the way of collaborative decision-making; instead, work was organized and controlled from the offices on the other side of the plant wall.

My team got along well and most members were fair and forthright; it was also clear that most got little satisfaction from the job itself, and were instead working for their paycheck. In observing my team members it quickly became clear that each had developed idiosyncratic ways of getting through the shift. As the team leader, John enjoyed greater freedom to exercise control over his work; he could, for instance, assign this or that task to a team member, or exercise some degree of planning or problem solving, such as when required parts were unavailable. He spent most of each shift walking briskly through the plant liaising with other team leaders. Several times each night he could be heard greeting team members with a chant to "Get 'er done!", followed by a pump of his fist and a loud "CHOO! CHOO!" I occasionally wondered if he knew it was transport trucks, not trains, we were building. Brian, like the rest of us a subordinate member of the team, seemed to spend most of his shift moping around as though moving through setting cement, inching his way from one computer terminal to the next, casually checking messages on the plant's intranet. Dave rarely left his corner of the plant and said little except to note which members were being especially unproductive each shift. Thom, was a smart, university-educated reservist who spent most of each shift running axles through the plant by forklift. He often spoke of feeling disheartened that his professional life had become the equivalent of a color-

-by-numbers project. Had a count ever been made, he would likely hold the record for the most eye-rolls and head-shakes during team meetings.

All the men on the team were bright, likeable people who made important contributions to the local manufacturing sector, to their communities and their families. And they were bound together in an environment in which power and decision-making was centralized and authoritarian, in which their work was largely controlled by plant managers, engineers, and the temporal schedule of production, and in which their input was rarely sought.

Adopting what he calls an “anarchist squint” political scientist and anthropologist James Scott has suggested that the sorts of idiosyncratic behaviors I observed among my team

members might reflect a mild form of institutional neurosis. The term arose to describe the increasingly apathetic, passive, and deferential behavior of residents of highly authoritarian, paternalistic institutions, such as prisons and psychiatric hospitals. Scott argues that just as environments or institutions vary in terms of how much flexibility, control, and creativity they allow individuals, so too we should expect that institutions may breed varying degrees of institutional neurosis. Is a factory a prison? Of course not. Do some factories, or other workplaces, share any similarities with prisons? Probably some do.

But what of our students who have spent the majority of their lives being educated? With little more than basic control over decision-making; often forced to be

passive receivers of information in what Robinson notes is certainly the most intensely stimulating period of human history; reinforced for deference to authority; their daily activities controlled by a clock on the wall. What of our students who have struggled academically and have come to view themselves as their generations’ also-rans? And what of my students who seemed so engaged by Robinson’s critique of education, yet were so impotent to think of a path forward, indeed even a step forward? It is tempting to furrow our brows and shake our heads at this foundering, but we might be well served, to occasionally at least, view our students’ behavior through a squint.

The Student Feedback Survey: Validity and Reliability

Kathleen Dindoff



The Fanshawe Student Union and Fanshawe administration strongly support the collection and limited dissemination of quantitative results as well as free-form comments on the revised Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Many faculty, if not most, use the results of this and previous surveys as a formative evaluation tool, providing indications of where their teaching practice could be improved and how that might be accomplished. When the new

SFS was launched, the College released quantitative ratings to HR, the Department Chair and the relevant faculty member, whereas the free-form comments would only be released to the faculty member in question. At College Council in the spring of 2013, despite arguments from several faculty representatives, a vote approved the release of free-form comments to HR and the Chair as well as the faculty member in question.

Issues of evidence for reliability and validity related to students’ evaluation of teaching (SET) have been well documented in the educational research literature. Spooren, Brockx and Mortelmans (2013) conducted a recent review of validity research for SET, through the lens of a meta-validity evaluation framework proposed by Onwuegbuzie, Daniel and Collins, (2009).

The three levels of validity evidence in the Onwuegbuzie framework are content-related validity, construct-related (what is involved in effective teaching and is that appropriately reflected in the survey?) and criterion-related (outcome) validity. In the Spooren et al. review, support for and threats to valid inferences based on these three types of validity evidence are reviewed, with attention to low response rates in such surveys (which threaten reliability and internal validity and can introduce bias), online versus in-person / paper and pencil administration, student versus faculty perceptions of effective teaching versus evidence-based models of teaching effectiveness, and inferences related to formative evaluation (improvement-related) and summative evaluation (related to outcome evidence for human resources decisions). Although there are some areas of student evaluation

of teaching that provide positive signs of valid inferences made from student evaluations of teaching, Spooren et al.'s review concluded that the current state of the art in student evaluation of teaching shows that there is not sufficient validity evidence for summative evaluation. This makes managerial decisions based on such ratings problematic, as these authors conclude.

"Our systematic use of the meta-validation model of Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), however, shows that many types of validity of SET remain at stake. Because conclusive evidence has not been found yet, such evaluations should be considered fragile, as important stakeholders (i.e. the subjects of the evaluations and their performance) are often judged according indicators of effective teaching (in some cases, a single indicator), the value of which continues to be contested in research literature." (Spooren et al., 2013, p. 629)

At Fanshawe College, both quantitative SET ratings and individual student comments (supposedly scrubbed of inappropriate content) are given to the relevant faculty member, his/her academic manager and Human Resources. The academic manager is not supposed to use either the quantitative ratings or the student comments in evaluation of faculty teaching, although once known, this information is very likely to have some influence on manager perceptions of faculty performance, and/or cause academic managers to focus on SET-relevant comments / ratings in other sources of evaluation of a faculty member's teaching performance.

Whereas validity is concerned with drawing appropriate inferences and conclusions from measurements, reliability is concerned (inversely) with the measurement error that may be contained in that measurement. This kind of error

can result from non-standardized administration or completion of the measurement instrument / protocol, different ways that students may interpret the survey questions or rating scales, differential student abilities or biases in understanding the meaning of survey questions, small sample sizes (of questions and/or survey takers), single-question measurements of specific teaching behaviours, etc. In a measurement sense, reliability provides the upper bound of validity; in other words, something cannot be more valid than its level of accuracy / freedom from error of measurement. To the extent that students may complete the SFS in groups rather than individually, in different emotional or sobriety states, with varying levels of attention, etc., reliability is negatively affected. Reliability is also negatively affected with low response rates to the survey or to different kinds of survey questions, especially if these response rates reflect a greater tendency of certain types of students to complete the survey (based on course grades to date, personal demographics, etc.). Finally, fewer students submit anonymous free-form comments, leading some colleges to treat free-form individual comments as a customer service perception issue rather than something that is a meaningful indicator of teaching effectiveness.

What does this mean for you? Your results from the SFS may provide indications of areas of strengths and weaknesses in your teaching practices. This kind of formative evaluation may help you to understand how some aspects of your teaching practice are received by students, and to guide you to focus on areas where changing aspects of your teaching approach may improve student perceptions and / or outcomes. However, SFS reliability and validity issues, outlined above, degrade the value of the SFS as a specific and reliable indicator of the

quality and effectiveness of your teaching practices.

The SFS results from fall 2015 should be available to faculty members and their academic managers by the end of this month (January). Your Local 110 executive encourages you to come in to discuss any concerns with your results or with your manager's interpretation of your teaching performance based on these results.

References

- Onwuegbuzie, A.J., Daniel, L.G., and Collins, K.M.T. (2009). Meta-validation model for assessing the score-validity of student teaching evaluations. *Quality & Quantity*, 43, 197-209.
- Spooren P., Brockx, B., & Mortelmans, D. (2013). On the validity of student evaluation of teaching: The state of the art. *Review of Educational Research*, 83(4), 598-642.

We depart from standard editorial practice for *The Educator* in providing references for Kathleen's article. This exception is motivated by our concern to underline the integrity of the analysis, which is data-driven and supported by authoritative studies in the relevant literature. This kind of rigor is precisely what is missing in the management's decision to use these flawed survey instruments as part of its regulatory culture. Assessment and response surveys may be legitimate tools of evaluation, but they should be intelligently designed and applied.