



the Educator

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For Fanshawe College Professors, Librarians and Counsellors

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

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An old medieval poem famously declares, “the summer is a-comin in.” Yes it is. The sleepy sunny season at Fanshawe now returns. The great wintry hoard of students filling the hallways with coughs, crowding and a veritable cloud of expletives gives way now to a quiet trickle. The lines at Tim’s are shorter. The days are longer. Many of our colleagues are on vacation, and those who remain can get in and out of the parking lots without the risk of a broken neck or hip.

Even those of us with 8 AM classes can drive in now in full daylight. Our students look less bedraggled from standing in the cold waiting for their tardy buses. After the hyperventilating hysterics that so often characterize the end of Winter term, we have a brief respite of quiet contentment. Summer time and the teaching is easy, or easier at least.

The Educator traditionally also rests from its labors in the summer. Administration, like the faculty, enters a slower rhythm now, and with the managers breathing easier, the rest of us can, too.

“Pity this poor monster busy

manunkind,” said another poet, and it is true that a fury for busyness and business may be one of the curses we inflict on ourselves.

In any case, the slowdown we always see in the summer seems to soften the antagonism and angers that swirl violently in the cold months when everyone is on his and her mark ready for battle. Let’s be grateful for the respite, however brief.

In this last issue before the new term, we have a smaller, but important, selection of articles. The **officers of 109 and 110** collectively report their response to a recent meeting with President Peter Devlin in **Kind Words and Potemkin Villages**. I provide my report on the last General Membership Meeting and a motion for changes to bargaining in 2017: **Doing Things Differently**. **Kay Wigle** tells us about her experience as an activist and the importance of being a union steward. We include here a copy of **Darryl Bedford’s** open letter to Justin Trudeau.

Kathleen Dindoff

continues her trenchant examination of the college’s student evaluation system. **Matt Farrell** provides a provocative opinion piece about students as customers : **A College *Should* Be Run Like a Business—A *Real* One.**

It has always been the position of the union (and my own) that students are *not* customers, and if we have any ‘customers’ in education, it is all citizens of Ontario. But Matt’s piece provides us with a valuable challenge to clarify our thinking about this important issue. We would like to know what our readers think. Do you feel that students are our customers? If not, who are our customers (if anyone)? What would constitute ‘customer satisfaction’ in the colleges? What would it look like?

Please feel free to email me any responses you may have to these important questions: secretaryopseu110@gmail.com.

Kind Words and Potemkin Villages

The State of the Unions at Fanshawe

Locals 110 and 109



On Friday 29 January 2016, officers from Locals 109 and 110 attended a meeting with President Peter Devlin. Dana Copeland, Bojan Kosarac, and Ron Kelly represented Local 109. Darryl Bedford, Kathleen Dindoff, and Mark Feltham represented Local 110. Also present were various members of the senior administration and the Administrative Staff Association, including Gary Lima, Scott Porter, Bernice Hull, Cathy Auger, and Jeff Low. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the overall strategic direction of the College. This meeting arose from an initial conversation that Local 110 Officers had at our Union-College Committee (UCC). The meeting began with a presentation from President Devlin and ended with an opportunity for questions.

We thank President Devlin and members of his team for providing this opportunity. Obviously we welcome all efforts on behalf of the College to promote transparency and collegiality in terms of decision making, especially decisions that affect the general direction of the College. However, although the intentions of the meeting were good, and although we heard much praise at the meeting for the College's people, most of whom are 109 and 110 members, we feel there is much more work to do. Put simply, we welcome

the courtesy of the meeting and the kind and respectful words we heard, but we also feel obligated to point out that courtesy, kindness, and respect are not always evident where it most matters—in your day-to-day experiences as College employees.

Before we elaborate on this point, we should first provide more detail regarding President Devlin's presentation and comments and also on the larger issues that are driving the College's actions.

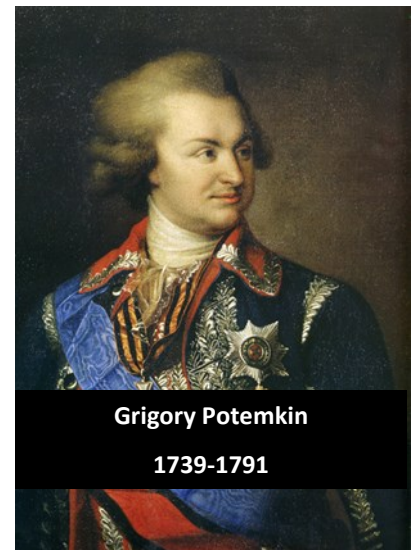
As President Devlin stated during his presentation, funding to Colleges across Ontario is flat while costs continue to increase: this situation gives Colleges an incentive to boost enrolment and engage in entrepreneurial activities to generate revenue. This need derives from a decades-long pattern of underfunding in post-secondary education: since the 1990s, Colleges have gone from being "publicly funded" to "publicly supported," a subtle shift that acknowledges that their direct public funding has dropped below 50%.

Although the Colleges did not create this situation, they have adopted a particular set of strategies for dealing with it. We have seen increased use of contingent workers in both academic and support areas. We have seen cuts in operations to pay for capital projects—in other words, cuts to people to pay for buildings. We have seen entrepreneurial forays that do not, in our opinion, always support the core educational mission of the Colleges. We have seen the College unequivocally support managers who have, as many tell us, mixed records with the people they manage.

When President Devlin and the other managers at the meeting emphasized

their support for the people at Fanshawe, they appeared to mean what they said. Their kind words seemed genuine and sincere. Such words are nice to hear, but as the preceding paragraph illustrates, they do not always align with the concrete actions that define the daily working lives of the people at Fanshawe.

Interested readers may wish to look up the term "Potemkin Village" and learn about its full history. For now, though, the main point is this: the word "Potemkin" generally refers to a polished appearance concealing actual problems hidden within and around the impressive-looking surface. We certainly respect President Devlin's efforts and believe that he has the best intentions for Fanshawe. However, until we see more complete evidence of changes at the day-to-day level—real changes that improve the job conditions of our members—we will remain concerned about the disparity between the College the rest of the world sees and the College at which we work.



Grigory Potemkin

1739-1791

EDITORIAL

Doing Things Differently (Part Two)

Bargaining 2017

Whitney Hoth



On a cold Monday night in February, a robust turnout of our general membership voted in favor of a motion directing our Local President Darryl Bedford to begin advocating for a new approach to collective bargaining in 2017. The text of the motion is included below.

What does this motion mean? It means we have democratically decided at Fanshawe College that business-as-

Text of Motion:

We ask that Darryl Bedford, as President of Local 110, publically advocate the following approach to bargaining in 2017 to all Ontario colleges and local executives:

1. Partial-load faculty must receive a wage increase
2. Partial-load faculty employment security must be strengthened
3. A cap must be set on the percentage of part-time faculty and college in the system can hire

usual in the union is no longer serving our needs. We want a change. The time-honored emphasis on modest financial gains for full-time faculty is no longer enough. In fact, it is now a distraction from the work that must be done to protect the profession and to secure stable employment for the great majority of teachers in the system who work on contract.

The union over the years has done a splendid job protecting the bread-and-butter interests of full-time faculty, and anyone who enjoys the benefits of the union's long fight to secure these should lend the union active and ongoing support. But the battle for wages and benefits must now give way to a concentration on new threats to employment security and to the integrity of the teaching profession.

The motion passed on February 1st is not a list of bargaining demands. Bargaining demands are set province-wide by all the locals. Our motion is a directive to our president to attempt to turn the conversation away from the interests of late-stage full-time faculty to the next generation of younger teachers. Their jobs are threatened by contract insecurity if they are part-time or the prospect of system layoffs if they are full-time.

The profession is being systematically eroded. A fetish for technology is blinding some to the long-term objective of its expansion, which is labor elimination pure and simple. It would be passing strange if the college system were the only large employment sector that did not see significant reductions in employment resulting from technological substitution.

By now, anyone with even a modicum of historical awareness must know that expanding technology does not increase net employment. Yes, it creates jobs for some, principally for those who secure their own jobs by actively eliminating the jobs of others. This species of self-serving opportunism is often justified in the name of efficiency: more can be done with less to the benefit of all. This justification is often specious, but it is especially so in teaching. Abundant evidence suggests that technologically-mediated instruction is less effective for many purposes, but this evidence will not slow its expansion because expansion is not driven by genuine measures of efficiency relative to the activity of education but by simple calculations of cost. The proponents of centralized technology delivery in teaching want to make teaching cheaper not better, regardless of whatever rhetoric they may invoke to disguise this.

The union must resist technological substitution that is not demonstrated to enhance teaching, and as things stand now, almost all technological substitution will be unsupported by rational objectives related to teaching effectiveness.

Full-time faculty are paid well because their union fought for good wages and won, but the working conditions for most faculty, both FT and NFT, remain substandard. Most faculty at Fanshawe, and in many other colleges, are housed in makeshift cubicles below the standards of a call center. Crowding, noise and clutter characterize the work environment for most, if not all, teaching faculty at the college. As a result, many teachers spend

as little time as possible on campus because their work environments are not conducive to professional work. Students cannot stop by to faculty offices to confer with their teachers one-on-one without being processed as if they were applying for a bank loan or a driver's license renewal, an impersonal and indirect process that alienates and intimidates many students and denies them the direct supports they need and want. Worse still, remote communication by email and chat in online courses is no substitute for human beings meeting in real time to explore teaching strategies in unmediated dialogue. Some teachers may not know this because they have never had opportunity to do it, and the current environment of the college militates against it. Professionals do not sit on top of one another in feed pens in the midst of constant chatter, and if they are consigned to such environments, the response of many will be to stay away.

This fracturing of our campus community is worsened enormously by the hiring of temps who come and go without establishing any link to the college, their colleagues, or their students. Academic

nomads often working other jobs to make ends meet have little or no prospect of secure employment here or elsewhere. The fact that this is becoming a norm in our world does not mitigate it in our profession. If we have any concept of what it means to be a professional, we must be opposed to this denigration of teachers, and it is not a question of income, it is more fundamental. We want a return to full-time hire, and failing that, we want the conditions of contingent workers to be improved as much as possible so that their professional status – and ours -- is not wholly undermined.

Full-time faculty who receive high wages and good benefits may be indifferent to something as abstract as the integrity of their profession. Some may feel their interests lie in chasing the various career options presented by management to further the elimination of full-time teaching, or the small number of privileged positions in 'advanced programs' remote from the needs of our regional students who still make up the bulk of our enrolments despite government jargon about differentiation and our increasingly mercenary pursuit of international

students. Colleges in service to their communities is a dying idea, not because communities no longer need them, but because the concept of community is breaking down into fragmented individuals serving personal advantage narrowly defined, and this melee of personal advantage makes us all poorer literally and figuratively.

If we cannot act cooperatively in support of our profession, it will be dismantled in the name of efficiencies as defined by government bureaucrats and their agents in administration. These people have decided that education by human being is too expensive, and they believe education by machine will effectively deliver the minimal training necessary to increase worker productivity.

In the oil industry, refineries are now operated by total plant automation, which means a handful of skilled employees can now run an entire operation that once required hundreds of employees. This is the new model for education. For those of us who believe that educating citizens is somewhat different from processing crude, the current drift in education represents a destructive mistake.

WHY BE A UNION STEWARD?

Kay Wigle



Prior to my career at Fanshawe, I was an advocate for people with disabilities, so it seemed natural for me to employ the advocating skills I learned previously to a union setting. Advocacy can be such an important role, if done well. The skills are universal. In both settings, there is

great satisfaction connecting with people who are navigating a system that is not always easy to comprehend.

Advocacy is not always about winning or losing, it is about negotiating the best possible outcome. There are three parties involved in labor advocacy -- the member, the union and management. All three have important roles to play.

As a union steward at Fanshawe, you have the opportunity to develop a unique relationship with your colleagues. You listen carefully to determine if the union has a role in their issue and if not, you just listen. It is a privilege getting to know your

colleagues on this level, from helping them to understand their SWF, making sense of their union rights, and being the link to the union executive. It is very rewarding to help a member speak up, whether that is preparing to deal with an issue or attending a meeting as their support and witness.

As a union steward you are able to observe what is happening outside your own area of the college. It can be an eye-opening experience. At steward meetings you share ideas about how to solve similar problems. As a union steward you will also learn about grievances, arbitration and you will become a team member of a progressive union that has adopted a

become a member of a progressive union that has adopted a conciliatory approach to addressing issues.

There are frustrating times, to be honest. When members are afraid to address issues for fear of retaliation, real or perceived, it's hard to walk that journey with them. Your job is to support them in their decision, and after presenting all the facts, let them make the decision that they feel is right. You need to find a

balance in each situation to determine what is right for the member. There are many educational opportunities for union stewards to learn about the rights and responsibilities of their role.

A union is only as strong as its members on an ongoing basis, not just when contracts are being negotiated. Membership meetings are your opportunity to be heard, to be educated and to help make a difference. Attending

meetings is the first step to becoming involved in your union. Unfortunately, unions do not always get the respect they deserve. If you haven't attended a meeting, please come out and support your executive. While their approach to problem-solving is generally conciliatory, they will take a firm stance when warranted.

Our faculty union deserves your respect. Get involved and see why.

Online Student Evaluation of Teaching

Kathleen Dindoff



The Student Feedback Survey (SFS) went online at Fanshawe College in 2015. As is the case with online student evaluations of teaching (SET), the response rate was substantially reduced, in comparison with prior in-class completion (with the course professor out of the room), despite much more time, opportunities and reminders to complete the survey. This is consistent with published research on response rate comparisons between paper-based and online student surveys of teaching evaluation, even when a variety of practices are implemented to increase response rates, such as the use of incentives/prize draws, pushing the survey url to students, extended response periods and frequent reminders (Nulty, 2008).

Another issue that online administration of the SFS raises is whether in-class and online student evaluations of teaching are equivalent. Even when multiple subject matter and student variables not under professor control are controlled statistically, SET ratings are significantly lower in online administration than with in-class administration (Nowell, Gale, &

Handley, 2010). This research also showed that online ratings are significantly more variable, including more extreme ratings.

Nowell et al. also cite research demonstrating that other factors affect online and in-class SET ratings. These include subject matter of the course, level of the course, and class size (with lower ratings given to teachers of large classes). In addition, SET ratings are positively correlated with student grades / grade expectations, confirmed by Nowell et al. in their research. As these authors conclude, "As expected, all else being equal, grades and student SET ratings are positively correlated. Students do reward instructors for higher grades" (Nowell et al., 2010, p. 470).

One of the big concerns with low response rate is the low reliability of the data, and the bias that could occur in students who do respond to the surveys (also resulting in low external validity of the inferences made from this data). This is especially noticeable in responding to open-ended questions with free-format answers, where online response rates are much lower.

The big take-away from all of this is that professors should understand that in comparison to their former in-class SET ratings, the online survey results are likely to be lower and more variable. The increased variability means that students are more likely to provide ratings at the extreme ends of the evaluation scale,

possibly because personal time (as opposed to class time) must be dedicated to completing the survey. We should expect a higher percentage of highly favorable or highly unfavorable ratings from the online SFS. Extreme responses are more likely in free-form comments. In addition, it is important to focus on multiple indicators and methods of gathering information on your teaching effectiveness as you seek to improve your practice. Finally, Boysen (2015) demonstrated that both teachers and administrators overemphasize and over-interpret minor, nonsignificant differences in mean ratings of teaching. So plan ahead, do your best, and don't sweat the small stuff!

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Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada Office of the Prime Minister

80 Wellington Street Ottawa, ON

K1A 0A2

March 28, 2016

February 11th Contract Faculty Day of Action

Dear Prime Minister:

I am writing to bring attention to the issue of precarious employment in postsecondary education. Although education is a matter of provincial jurisdiction, there are measures the Government of Canada can take to improve the lives of thousands of workers.

The problem of precarious employment in colleges and universities is serious and widespread. At just our college, Fanshawe, there are over 830 faculty members employed on a contract basis. That equates to a full 61% of our faculty not knowing whether their employment will last any longer than their contracts which are typically just 14 weeks in length. And most of those workers do not have access to union representation, statutory holiday pay, or a living wage due to legislative and policy decisions of the current and preceding Ontario governments.

Recently, a Contract Faculty Day of Action was held on February 11. Attached is a joint release from our union local and UWOFA representing faculty at Western University to highlight the impact on London, Ontario and its surrounding communities.

There are areas where the Government of Canada can help.

One of those would be to improve access to Employment Insurance (EI) benefits for precariously employed faculty. We have encountered issues with the way that employers complete Records of Employment (ROE). As a former educator yourself, you are aware that teaching consists of much more than just the hours spent in the classroom. Although the employer might use a formula to approximate work hours, we are finding that the resulting ROE does not adequately represent the work spent preparing for class and evaluating students. Methods of appeal exist but are not known nor is the process straightforward. We have some ideas on how this issue can be rectified.

One thing that we must never overlook is that our universities and colleges are only successful as a result of their people. It is difficult when those people are in precarious situations and have an uncertain future. We would be happy to assist in the development of any policy or legislation that helps these very important workers who give so much for so little in return.

Sincerely,

Darryl Bedford

A College Should Be Run Like a Business – A *REAL* One

Matt Farrell



Educational decisions are made with the bottom line in mind: classes are crammed to save costs; part-time faculty are used in favour of full-time; and resources are stripped from departmental budgets to fund shiny new facilities (with obligatory photo-ops). It's hard to dismiss these education-business critiques, however, because businesses are run with a laser-like focus on their customers. The same cannot be said of the college system. If colleges were to be truly run as businesses, the needs of the customers – the students – would be front and centre. All too often they are not.

As luck would have it, we have readily available customer data. In Ontario, student satisfaction is regularly monitored via the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) rankings. In 2015 Fanshawe outperformed the category average in student satisfaction (by a whisker). Such a standing is laudable, if not for the fact that the average satisfaction rate was a tepid 76.2%. What kind of business strives to earn a solid B-plus from its customers? In any other sector of the economy, heads would roll.

Another critique of the higher-ed business model (ugh) is the heavy reliance on contract faculty. Without question, some of the most passionate and effective educators are contract employees. Accounting for over 60% of the faculty at some institutions, they do more than their share of the heavy

lifting. Indeed, their classes are packed to the rafters and they often take on new teaching assignments with little notice and little regard for the tenuous nature of their employment. This does a disservice to the students by ensuring their professors are always playing catch-up. Contract faculty should be afforded more seniority (and more money) which would allow them to fully develop as educators and deliver the quality education that students deserve. Successful businesses invest in their employees, they train them, and retain them. From a student's perspective, the payoffs would be significant.

Not to be overlooked, full-time faculty members must also share some responsibility for producing unsatisfied customers. As professional educators, it is incumbent upon us to keep up with the latest developments in our discipline (note: our discipline is teaching). It is also essential that we strive to provide an exceptional classroom experience.

Consider this: have you ever sent back a meal at a restaurant because it was poorly prepared and not worth paying for? Well, what should our students do when we decide to phone-it-in for a lecture? Especially when those students might be commuting an hour to class, or paying more than they can afford for child care. It's fair for them to expect something more than a professor reading to them from outdated PowerPoint slides. We are, after all, service providers. Let's make sure we're providing value to our customers.

Behind the scenes, administrators must admit their complicity in our sub-par satisfaction rates. While faculty are on the front lines, they can only teach the courses that are offered. Curriculum planning decisions should be made with the interest

of student success in mind – period. It is true, budgets are shrinking and the climate of austerity doesn't provide much flexibility, but course offerings should reflect student need.

Moreover, faculty should be assigned to teach courses that are best aligned with their expertise. When faculty are conscripted to teach courses lying outside of their subject areas, students are being

ripped-off. Trying to teach new and unfamiliar material is a challenge for the most seasoned of educators. It takes several terms of teaching a course before the delivery is optimized. Professors are not interchangeable units of labour; they are professionals and they should be treated accordingly.

Finally, in pursuit of broader revenue streams, many Ontario colleges have set ambitious targets for international student enrolment. This is a strategic priority and a worthwhile goal. I, for one, am often humbled by their personal stories and inspired by their drive to succeed. Sadly, that success is jeopardized when they are crammed into an over-capacity classroom taught by over-worked contract faculty. This is where our international students are most at-risk. They are paying big money to be here, and we shouldn't short-change them.

Before coming to higher education, I spent many years in the private sector; I am, therefore, under no illusions about the role of dollars and cents. I also understand the primacy of the customer. Decisions cannot be made purely on their financial and administrative merits. College students – the customers – need to be the starting point for any operational or strategic decisions. If we are failing them, we are failing.

The Tragic Presidency of Barack Obama

Whitney Hoth



Barack Obama, 44th President of the United States, is one of the most decent men to occupy the Oval Office since (maybe) Abraham Lincoln. That does not mean he is a great president. No thoroughly decent man (or woman) has any business being president of the United States. As recent biographies of FDR and LBJ confirm, these two great presidents were often personally reprehensible and downright nasty. That's what the job requires. No one who has not spent a considerable amount of time and effort learning how to use threats and force to get things done should think about running for president.

Fortunately, people of firm virtue and pure motives seldom run for president, and if they do, seldom win. The country needs people with some burning damage at the core to keep the terrible machine moving, and now and then, we get someone with some saving grace to balance ambition and domination. We should be ever thankful for the polio that brought down the frozen patrician FDR and taught him profound suffering. Out of that frightening weakness combined with massive and impervious vanity we got a man adequate to face down Hitler and Mussolini.

Maureen Dowd, wasp-tongued columnist for the *New York Times*, has been unrelentingly hard on Obama. She has represented him as effete, avoidant, repressed, reticent, ironic, oblique, absent.

She is not wrong. Very soon in his presidency, it was clear that the job disgusted Obama. He tried to be fair-minded and high-minded out of the gate, a bi-partisan consensus builder willing to consult and compromise with the other side. A man of reason and temperance who kept his cool and never deigned to be baited, Obama made reasonable and balanced recommendations. He did not descend to horse-trading or cajolery or threats or insults or any of the political sausage grinding of his heavy-weight predecessors Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan. All that sort of thing was beneath him. It *is* beneath a man like him. He was too good for it. Obama was too good to be president.

On his way out now, Obama is using executive orders to their constitutional limit to get a few things done. This suits him. His orders are reasonable, balanced, sane. He cannot make them prevail in the snake pit of Congress, but he can issue them from on high like the philosopher king he wants to be, and partly is. His cold-bloodiness, or at least his uncrackable veneer of cool, may have helped us weather the panic of the 2008 Crash, but he will not be credited for the things he avoided, no one ever is.

What he did accomplish is muddled. Obamacare was mired in compromise (of the compromised kind) from the start and will either be dismantled by Republicans or pushed on to single payer by Democrats. He left most things unfinished because he came to believe they were unfinishable; and for him, they were. He lacked the poisons needed to make power tell. He never inspired fear because he had not wish to do so. Who does? Damaged goods and flawed mortals like FDR and LBJ who ruined careers and hounded opponents

into quiescence or submission.

The Oval Office chair is a siege perilous. It destroys anyone not suited for it. Of course, it also destroys those suited for it, but that's the price some are willing to pay.

Obama may leave the office in better health mentally and physically than any president ever has. He has aged as they all do, but less it seems than most. Even George Bush junior, protected by his powerful superficiality and lack of self-awareness, now looks feeble and faded.

Obama, in contrast, still seems balanced and composed. He never sat firmly in that awful chair of power. He did not impose his personality on voters or legislators, he did not exhaust himself bullying with charm and *bonhomie* like Clinton.

No, Obama kept himself intact and apart and survived. Not a great president, but a good man, and those two may be mutually exclusive. His presidency has been tragic, yes — not for him, but for us.

