

Overview: Union Proposals for Settlement

July 8, 2021

College faculty were pleased to see that the College Employer Council has decided to make changes to improve their bargaining process, their relationship with faculty, and provide stability for students. Our members share a strong desire to build a system that works for all students and faculty, and one that is built on a strong foundation of equity, and sound academic and working conditions that meet the needs of faculty in a rapidly changing post-secondary landscape.

We have come to this round of negotiations with a clear and resounding mandate from our members at all 24 colleges. This mandate reflects our experience and learning around teaching in the pandemic, and also draws on the shared work we began in 2017 toward a system that was better for all faculty, students, and staff, but that was cut short following the Ford government's cancellation of the task force.

We also approach this round within a specific context of massive changes, and overwhelming challenges facing faculty today. While there is overlap within certain legislative and other areas facing all public service workers, such as Bill 124, we are also incredibly conscious of the ways in which faculty went above and beyond for our students from the earliest days of the pandemic. Within days, faculty shifted to emergency remote teaching in the midst of the largest upheaval in public post-secondary education in decades, while serving as front-line resources for students who were doing their best to cope with an acceleration of the existing mental health crisis in post-secondary institutions. Faculty were exemplary in their work to create equitable access and quality learning experiences with little acknowledgement of the work involved and the personal toll it has taken.

Our faculty don't exist in a vacuum separate from the impact of not just the global pandemic, but also the daily toll of working in institutions that have yet to fully address structural and systemic racism and colonialism. This systemic marginalization manifests in inequitable working conditions and higher levels of precarity for racialized and Indigenous faculty, women, and other equity-seeking groups. And while we applaud those colleges who are taking concrete action to identify and address discriminatory practices and policies, our members have told us loudly and clearly that there is a long way to go. They have also provided direction on how to get there much more quickly.

CAAT faculty are concerned about the direction the government and the colleges appear to be taking in response to these political and economic challenges. As college faculty, we want to present a better vision of the future of post-secondary education, and, also, the future of our work.

Our members are bargaining for better, and we welcome the opportunity to work in a period of labour stability in the colleges. To do that in a time of such enormous change requires flexibility from the employer in allowing faculty the ability to excel, to innovate, and to engage fully in the creation of the academic community of the colleges.

We have proven ourselves to be dedicated to our students, and to working with the college administration to ensure our communities are safe, our students are supported, and that new technologies that support quality pedagogical approaches can be tested. What we know is that to continue to grow, we need changes to our Collective Agreement that enshrine better protections for our work and a stable faculty complement; workload provisions that address the particulars of online learning, so-called Hyflex models, and microcredentials; meaningful input into academic decisions; and equity language that ensures all faculty are valued and protected at work.

We need to adopt best practices of the governance systems of the colleges so that academic staff are equal partners in academic decision-making. It is essential that all decisions about new credentials are made in conjunction with academic staff. The 2017 Task Force was working toward a system of collegial governance in Ontario's colleges so that faculty and students would be guaranteed a role in academic decision-making. It was clear from all participants at that table that decisions over the future of Ontario's colleges need to meaningfully incorporate the perspectives and needs of all stakeholders. Colleges do not belong solely to governance boards. They are not private businesses. They are the result of our society deeming quality higher education to be a public good and, as such, faculty deserve to have a democratic say in how these public institutions are run.

College faculty are experts in their respective fields and have a deep understanding of the trends and challenges those fields are facing—and these changes are coming at an alarming pace. Without this expertise represented at the college governance level, colleges run the risk of hopping onto unproven education trends from other jurisdictions that could undermine the quality of education Ontario's public colleges provide. Democratic engagement in college governance by faculty will also help to improve worker morale and investment at Ontario's colleges. College faculty are invested in updating college curriculum and offerings, but it must be done through actual shared governance and the basic intellectual property and copyright protections already enjoyed by post-secondary faculty in other college and university systems in Canada.

We need to invest in students and workers first by implementing education and labour strategies developed in partnership with faculty, industry, and labour. Students need education and training that provides them a full suite of skills and foundational knowledge that will lead to good stable jobs, not a partial qualification that will limit their future success in the labour market and, in a worst-case scenario, could put the health and safety of themselves or others at risk. Innovation and the resulting economic growth are built from a solid foundation in theory and practice, combined with ongoing interaction with a stable complement of full-time faculty,

not a patchwork of digital badges completed in isolation. A “made in Ontario” solution that keeps knowledgeable and experienced students and workers in our province requires supports for a holistic educational model predicated on a stable, full-time faculty workforce supplemented by specific expertise from industry partners.

The implications of a college system built largely around contract faculty has wide-reaching impacts for students and the local communities around the colleges. Precarity undermines social cohesion, innovation, and support for students. College students attend our world-class colleges so that they are well-positioned to get good jobs, and that requires that the faculty teaching them also have good, stable jobs. Precarity also disproportionately affects women and racialized and Indigenous workers. Ontario College Administrators are at a crossroads on this issue: do you choose to serve as an example of what students can and should look forward to - a fiscally responsible employer looking beyond the bottom line and profit margin? Or will you continue on a race to the bottom in the name of fiscal austerity packaged as “flexibilities and efficiencies”?

With COVID-19, online teaching and learning has become the norm, but has been done in a manner that has been predominantly haphazard and chaotic. We have an opportunity this round to reflect on what we have learned and create language that fosters best practices and creativity and prevents the abuse of online learning as a budgetary bandaid or move toward disconnecting students from faculty through automation.

College faculty have raised many concerns with the transition to online learning and have also proposed a number of solutions to address these problems. However, there is significant concern that the government and college administrators see online learning as a budgetary balm that will lead to deskilling of faculty and students alike, while leaving many students behind.

While online courses can work well with proper time and resource investment, developing online instruction is not as easy as simply delivering a lecture over a video chat platform, and not all material is suited for online environments. Online courses, in order to be successful, need to be developed over time in order to be robust, and this instructional design must be done in-house by faculty with knowledge of our specific students. Contracting out online instructional design and other faculty work is another short-term “fix” with long-term negative consequences for our colleges. This could result in higher costs to the colleges, as they would be reliant on third parties to update course design and content or be faced with providing outdated material. Online learning based on solid pedagogical values would instead require the colleges to provide more support to students and faculty. If online learning is built as an accounting exercise to relieve budgetary pressure by cramming more students into virtual class spaces, it will be a failure, and will have serious consequences for our students.

Similarly, caution must be taken with emerging technologies being aggressively marketed to college administrators, such as HyFlex models. These require specific training for faculty and students, massive expenditures in technology, and are not suited for all classrooms, faculty, students, or courses. They run significant risk of violating student and faculty privacy, and of creating inequitable and often hostile classroom environments for students from equity-seeking groups. The successful deployment of these entirely new modes of course delivery requires input from faculty who are supported in enthusiastically embracing and creatively testing where they may best work, not inflexible direction from managers seduced by the lure of packing more students in a single course. Done well, these can serve as another entry in a diverse range of course offerings. Done poorly, they can highlight the worst aspects of online learning environments.

The demand package we will table over the coming weeks was developed after consultation with faculty in all 24 Locals, as well as specific groups of faculty (including partial-load faculty, counsellors, Indigenous faculty, and faculty from equity-seeking groups) as well as students, support staff, and other stakeholders. As you will see below, the proposals we have developed together to address these 17 demands are responsive, responsible, and realistic; the vast majority of them are cost-neutral, but will provide high return on investment. They will also enhance the stability our students and faculty so desperately need now.

Our proposed changes are grounded in language and structures that currently exist in post-secondary institutions in Canada. We have built on best practices in individual colleges and universities in Ontario, as well as model language in comparable systems in other provinces. Our aim is to achieve an on-time and reasonable settlement that is based upon the realities faced by the colleges today.

Faculty want to do better, and we invite the Employer team to join us in bargaining for better or, as you've indicated, building toward a future together. To do that, we must be unflinching in identifying and facing the challenges before us. The first step in that process is listening to faculty's experiences, and believing that what we are sharing is true, valuable, and welcome.

2021 FACULTY PROPOSALS: WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED AND CREATED TOGETHER

Workload

The union proposes changes to those Articles in the Collective Agreement to address workload provisions that have not changed in over 30 years and that will:

- Ensure that all faculty workload is accurately recorded
- Ensure that faculty workload measurements and class definitions capture all work associated with changes in student needs, modes of delivery, professional requirements, and technological demands

Collegial Academic Decision-Making / Intellectual Property

The union proposes a fully collaborative approach to academic decision-making in the Colleges that protects faculty intellectual property, copyright, and academic freedom to foster innovation, creativity, and the ability to respond to labour market and pedagogical needs. To achieve this shared and balanced approach, we propose that the parties:

- Institute a system to ensure collegial decision-making around academic issues
- Strengthen the decision-making authority of teaching faculty over course materials and modes of evaluation
- Establish faculty ownership of all educational materials produced in the course of employment; and recognize faculty ownership of all educational performances in the course of employment

Partial-Load

The union proposes that we build on the work begun in 2017 to improve working conditions for partial-load faculty and to build an equitable college environment for all faculty. To do this, we propose that we must:

- Ensure that all work performed by partial-load faculty is appropriately and equitably recognized, recorded, and compensated
- Improve language around partial-load staffing and job security

Equity / Harassment / Racism

Over the past few years, it has become abundantly clear that more must be done to dismantle racism and colonialism in our colleges, and to improve conditions for racialized and Indigenous faculty, and faculty from other equity-seeking groups. In addition, the parties recognize that no improvements to working conditions should be made without active attention to centering equity and without using a critical intersectional lens. To that end, the union proposes that we:

- Strengthen language to prevent bullying/harassment/racism and to provide oversight and accountability

- Improve efficiency, fairness, equitability, and cultural sensitivity of dispute resolution processes
- Strengthen language to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion of equity-seeking groups in hiring, retention, advancement, workload, and compensation

Staffing / Bargaining Unit

The work of the Task Force in 2017 was rooted in the building of a stable full-time faculty complement, as well as protecting academic work. Ensuring that students are supported in their learning by professors, instructors, counsellors, and academic librarians is essential to the success of the colleges. The union proposes that we continue this work and:

- Ensure that all academic work is performed by faculty who are employees of that College
- Establish staffing ratios for each College, including minimum staffing ratios for FT
- Establish minimum complements of full-time counsellors and librarians at each College

Job Definition

Coordinator functions vary widely from program to program and college to college, and the selection of coordinators is often steeped in favouritism and/or a lack of transparency. The union proposes that we work to:

- Clarify the coordinator role, including but not limited to the selection process for coordinators, preference for full time faculty, time allocated, salary steps, and issues of equity, including coordinator duties for counsellors and librarians

Job Expertise

In order to allow faculty the ability to continue their professional development and build their field expertise, the union proposes:

- Ensure all faculty the freedom to take employment, consulting or teaching activities outside the College in cases that do not cause any conflict of interest

Compensation

The union proposes to improve wages and benefits in keeping with the current restrictions imposed under Bill 124 as it applies to total compensation and that will:

- Implement an increase in wages and benefits that is consistent with our established comparators and current legislation
- Benefit coverage for medical cannabis and dental implants