

BUFA VOICE



Message from the President

Michelle Webber

It is election season at Brock. Elections for the BUFA Executive and the University Senate are just around the corner – with nominations currently open for both.

Nominations are currently open for candidates to run for the 2021-2022 BUFA Executive and will close at noon on Tuesday March 23rd. All positions are open (President, Vice President, Grievance Officer, Treasurer, Equity Officer, Health and Safety Officer, Communications Director, Professional Librarian Representative, Non-tenured Faculty Representative, and two Member-at-Large positions). Each candidate requires 3 email nominations to be sent to the BUFA office at bufa@brocku.ca. The election will be held Tuesday March 30th - Wednesday March 31st. Successful candidates will assume their positions on July 1st, 2021. A strong and active Association relies on the participation of its membership.

Likewise, a strong participatory Senate is needed in order to preserve the things we cherish most about university governance, such as collegial governance. BUFA members’ concerns about terms and conditions of work often intersect with issues of education policy that are debated at Senate. The University needs Senators who understand the importance of faculty and professional librarian voices in academic decision-making.

BUFA members have a wealth of academic expertise and pedagogical experience to draw on to inform the visioning, planning, reviewing, and prioritizing of academic policy matters.

Nominations for the 2021-2022 Senate close on Monday March 15th, 4:30pm. Electronic voting will begin on Friday March 19th, 8:30am and continue until Monday March 29th, 4:30pm. More detailed information about the Senate election process can be found at <https://brocku.ca/university-secretariat/senate-election/>.



I hope members will give serious consideration to running for a position on Senate or the BUFA Executive or both!

BUFA Annual Membership Meeting

Monday,  10, 2021

details coming soon

Zoom Webinar beginning at 1:00pm



News and Views

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2020-2021 Executive Committee

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BUFA STANDS IN
SOLIDARITY
WITH **LUFAPPUL**

Brock University and Laurentian University – Two Different Stories



Barbara Sainty, Budget Advisory Officer

As faculty members, we are all concerned about the financial situation at Laurentian University. We may wish to develop a better understanding of what happened there to determine if parallels may be drawn with Brock's financial situation.

Many universities in Ontario have faced significant challenges due to various external factors over the past couple of years. In January of 2019, all Ontario universities were hit by the announcement that tuition fees from students were being cut by 10% with no increase in government funding to offset this drop in revenues. Universities were scrambling to cover rising costs without a commensurate increase in tuition revenue. Brock managed to balance its budget through increased student retention and by attracting more international students, whose tuition fees were not impacted by the government mandate. Through various mitigation targets such as deferred hirings, etc., Brock managed to post a small surplus for the 2018/19 fiscal year.

Brock then set ambitious enrolment targets for 2019-20 in an effort to compensate for lost tuition revenue. However, its actual headcount enrolment across all programs was below budget by over 600 students. Furthermore, high school applications for the 2020 academic year were down significantly (down by 20.0%); compare this to Laurentian whose high school applications were down by 14.0%. Actually, Brock had the largest decline in the province from high school applications while other universities saw significant increases (Western, 23.9%; Queen's 29.8%; McMaster, 14.9%).

And then of course, there's COVID. Brock's ancillary services were hit extremely hard by COVID. With no revenues from residences, parking, food services, etc., ancillary services, which usually helped support Brock's academic programs, was scrambling to break even. One can only imagine that Laurentian was experiencing similar problems, both with a drop in enrolment and with little, if any, financial support from its ancillary services.

Laurentian University, too, suffered from these external challenges and it had greater challenges attracting international students. In addition, it had challenges from its internal accounting operations. As with all universities, cash inflows occur at peak times when students pay tuition fees or when universities receive government grants. Universities are then tasked with managing cash flows to ensure that funds are available for various expenditures that occur uniformly throughout the year (such as salaries). Laurentian University did not adequately segregate its cash, and this has resulted in huge challenges to its cash management.

It is difficult to say what will happen at Laurentian going forward. However, at Brock, all our budgeting is done on a cash basis to ensure that we do not spend more than we have. This may contribute to the ongoing struggle of attempting to balance the budget and then ending up with a surplus if all budgeted funds are not spent. However, it is also protection to ensure that cash is available for all committed expenditures. So, while we may empathize with our colleagues at Laurentian, I do not foresee Brock in a similar situation any time in the near future.

¹ <https://financialpost.com/opinion/opinion-why-no-one-was-watching-the-books-at-laurentian-university>

² <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-money-intended-for-research-at-laurentian-university-went-to-keep-the/>



APRIL 28
NATIONAL
DAY of
MOURNING



WORKERS DIE ON THE JOB EVERY DAY.
EVERY YEAR, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS MORE
SUFFER INJURY OR ILLNESS BECAUSE
OF THEIR WORKING CONDITIONS.

Unions, labour councils, families and community partners gather on April 28 to mourn these losses and vow to prevent more. They follow with action in the workplace and community pressing for work that promotes dignity and health.

Remembering workers injured or killed on the job
Committing to keeping each year safe



What do Laurentian University, COVID-19, and Micro-credentials All Have in Common?

Tim Murphy, Communications Director

At the recent OCUFA Board meeting, financial issues at Laurentian University and the role of the Ontario government figured prominently. Laurentian University unexpectedly filed for protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA). This move caught most people by surprise because Laurentian University has a financial exigency clause in their Collective Agreement with the faculty association (LUFA); however, they chose to bypass this mechanism and declared the University insolvent. The majority of recent decisions made by the Administration at Laurentian have been determined behind closed doors and without consultation with LUFA. On numerous occasions, LUFA has condemned these secretive actions that have the effect of eroding collegial governance. There have also been recent written communications between the Government of Ontario and the Laurentian Administration. LUFA and OCUFA have requested disclosure of these documents, however, they have been sealed.

Filing for CCAA protection has several concerning implications for Laurentian University and potentially other institutions. The CCAA was designed for use by private corporations and was likely never envisioned for use by publicly-funded institutions. One potential outcome of the CCAA process is to shut down the organization, sell off all assets, and pay creditors off on a percentage basis. Such a scenario is an unimaginable, and extremely unlikely, outcome for a university. Thus, LUFA and OCUFA both strongly condemn the decision to invoke the CCAA because it is an inappropriate mechanism to use for a public institution. Universities are public institutions and exist for the public good. As such, universities should be supported by the provincial government. However, the Ontario government appears to be abandoning this responsibility.



In recent documentation, the Government of Ontario has changed the wording of its role in terms of University support. Universities used to be “publicly-funded”, but now they are referred to as “publicly-assisted”. This attempt to distance the Government of Ontario from its responsibility of ensuring the continued financial health of universities is symptomatic of a government that seeks further oversight of universities through such actions as merit-based funding, strategic mandate agreements, tuition cuts and freezes, all while stepping back and claiming that universities are not publicly-funded, only publicly-assisted, organizations. Thus, the Government of Ontario appears to have decided that it is

not obligated to step in and provide the required funding for Laurentian to remain financially viable, yet the Government has also hinted that increased governmental control over university finances may be required.

Chronic underfunding of Ontario universities is nothing new. The Government of Ontario has allowed the per-student government funding to be among the lowest in Canada. In 2019, the per-student funding in Ontario was just \$7,565 (10th place) lagging \$2420 behind 9th place Saskatchewan at \$9,985 and over \$5,000 below the mean for the other nine provinces (\$12,725). This funding shortfall had been partially alleviated through tuition increases until the Government imposed a tuition reduction of 10% and a two-year tuition freeze in January of 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic has, of course, exacerbated the ongoing financial problems at Laurentian and numerous other post-secondary educational institutions; however, if universities in Ontario had been funded at similar levels as the other provinces they would have been in a much stronger position to maintain their finances during this time. The danger of a heavy reliance on ancillary income and international student tuition fees has also been exposed during this pandemic as both sources have greatly decreased. It is time to properly fund Ontario universities and make them financially stable. Universities serve the public, they offer students a solid education and drive innovation through research. University programs provide breadth and transferable skills that allow graduates to move through their careers, either gaining promotion or changing occupations over time. Yet, the Government of Ontario appears to view the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to further erode collegial governance and educational quality through increased governmental interference under the guise of providing needed skills training as we emerge from this pandemic.

The only substantial funding increase for colleges and universities in the 2020 Government of Ontario economic statement was 60 million dollars earmarked for the establishment of micro-credentials. Micro-credentials are described by the Government of Ontario as “rapid training programs offered by colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes across the province that can help you get the skills that employers need. They help people retrain and upgrade their skills to find new employment”. There was also an emphasis that these credentials can often be completed online and were to be created with “input from business sectors, so the skills being taught match employer needs”. Universities (Brock included) and colleges are working quickly to create these micro-programs as a way to increase enrolment. However, there is a danger in focusing on short-term training for specific, potentially short-term, industry-related requirements at the expense of skills that can be utilized throughout one, or multiple, careers. These micro-

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