



THE
ALLY
A PUBLICATION OF CUPE LOCAL 3906

Volume 5 - Issue 2 - Winter 2015



WHERE'S THE FUNDING?

Featuring :
Not-so-hidden cuts in funding
Gearing Up for Bargaining
Provincial Funding and the Problem of Differentiation
Higher-Education: Privilege or Right?

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The Ally, CUPE 3906 newsletter is published two times a year for its 3500 members.

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Where is the Funding for 5th+ year PhDs!?

- Rebecca Collins-Nelsen, President

As PhD students at McMaster, we are funded for four years of schooling. This generally involves four years of a TAsip (or RAsip in lieu) guarantee, as well as four years of scholarship funding in different amounts from one's department. These are incredible opportunities. However, there is a major disconnect that exists given that according to McMaster's own doctoral cohort study, students take a median of five years to complete their PhD studies (2003). This information is further supported by Statistics Canada data which shows that the average time for completion for a doctoral degree is five years and nine months (2004). This means that for many Doctorial students on campus, there is at least a one year gap where we are receiving no guaranteed funding from McMaster.

Not only is the campus funding cut after four years, but there is also a four year restriction on applying for many external funding opportunities. The biggest national and provincial funding agencies (SSHRC and OGS) have restricted their scholarships so that only people who are in their first, second, third, and fourth years of their PhD are eligible.

There are a myriad of reasons why a person would not be able to finish in a four year timeframe; evolving research interests may change a student's project, unforeseen personal or family circumstances may arise, students are often engaged in publishing, researching, committees, which we are told are

necessities for a hope of an academic job, and so on. PhD students who are in their fifth year or higher are not only feeling stress and shame due to not completing within what is, for most, an unrealistic timeframe, but there is also a high degree of financial stress that comes with this as well. Many students are forced to get jobs in order to make a living wage. These jobs can range from sessional teaching to retail, but all of these work to further compromise the time that could be spent working on finishing one's own degree, causing a negative feedback loop.

It is also worth noting that there seems to be consistent differences in time completion rates based on which discipline students are enrolled in. For instance, Statistics Canada reports that degrees in social science took a full year longer than the overall average. Degrees in the Humanities and Psychology tend to have longer average times as well. This is likely related to the kinds of research that are more likely to be done in these disciplines. Patrick Deane's *Forward with Integrity* letter outlines the university's commitment to community-based research. In order to do responsible community-based research one must develop relationships and respectfully enter and exit these communities, which are all time consuming endeavours. If McMaster University is seriously encouraging community-based research and wants to make proper use of their own data they need to consider providing guaranteed funding for PhD students for longer than four years.



Not-so-hidden cuts in funding

Barb Bloemhof, Chief Steward Unit 2

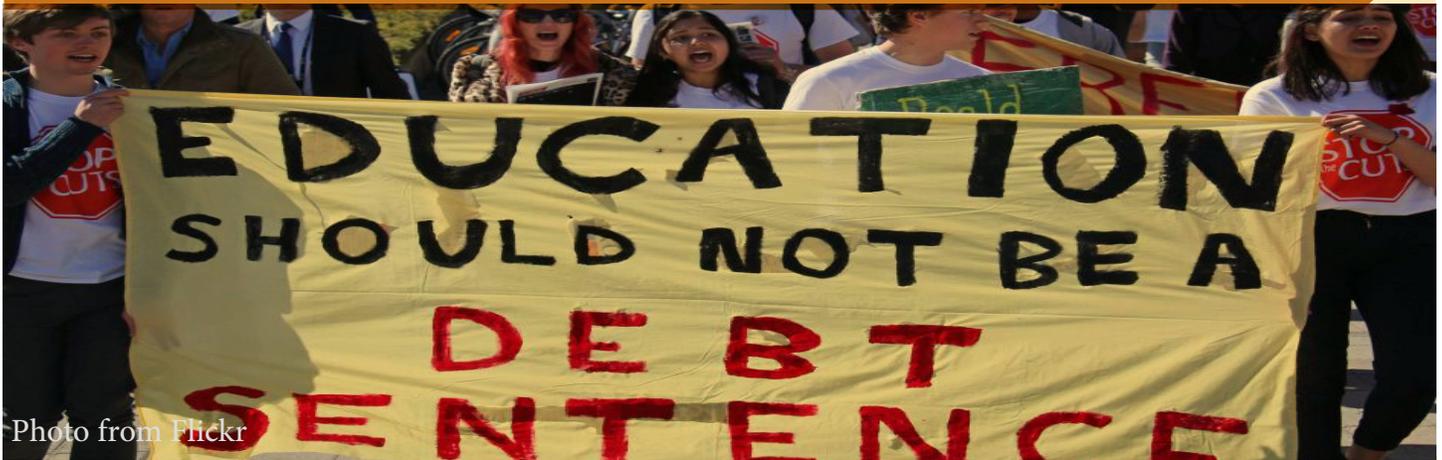


Photo from Flickr

In times of austerity, deferred capital maintenance shows up in buildings and equipment, sometimes quite visibly and other times less so. But the effects of inadequate or misallocated funding can also be inferred from responses to the strain that growth places on primary resources.

Long-time sessional and hourly-rated music instructors are familiar with increasing class sizes over the years. Not so long ago, we noticed that chairs are compelled to remind us that the safety of students in our class is our responsibility. It is left up to us to figure out how to respond creatively to space shortages, and it is not clear what to do when there are not enough seats for everyone or a clear path to the exits in any teaching context for all the people in the class. Of course, it is the instructor who will be tagged with cancelling class, and few will remember that it's the recommended course of action in terms of safety!

Last fall, my evening course competed with commerce midterms scheduled outside of class time. Students had to skip my class to take their commerce midterm, or face a 100% final examination at the end of the term. Students clearly understood the unfairness of this arrangement, but very few exercised their right to question the situation they were put into,

and to my knowledge none took their complaint to the appropriate authority. This term, then, affected students missed one-sixth of the timetabled class hours in my course because their commerce classes had inadequate space to run an in-class assessment.

Student services is another unseen area of inadequate funding. Students needing counselling used to have a short wait to see a counsellor and they could



expect ongoing access according to their need. These services were fully utilized at capacity even before the university's enrollment expanded with the double cohort ten years ago. Now when a student comes to an instructor in crisis, we can refer him to the morning triage appointment time in the Student Wellness Center, and students in crisis do get seen there. But only immediate crisis support is

provided to ensure they are not suicidal. A number of students would benefit from ongoing support, but they can expect a 5 to 6 week wait because the capacity to provide that support to students has not even begun to keep pace with the demand for counselling. There are just three full-time counsellors and maybe four or five contract positions spanning the fall and winter, or about half the staff that accreditation standards recommend if we are only talking about full-time students. Additionally, MBA students, medical residents, and continuing education students are just some of the students who are no longer eligible for counselling support on campus.

The university is running a deficit again this year, but not as large as the “approved” deficit. Sorting out the benefits shortfall has only been addressed at the margin, through less for new employees, and a further issue of equitability remains. Senior

administration expenses dominate the budget for the university. While the previous president had a salary so high that it is said to have become a standard example of the statistical concept of outliers in a

... the previous president had a salary so high that it is said to have become a standard example of the statistical concept of outliers in a popular business course, the current president has not exactly taken a pay cut.

popular business course, the current president has not exactly taken a pay cut. In a recent article < <http://www.cbc.ca/asithappens/features/2014/06/06/university-of-alberta-president-salary-letter/>> we learn that at least 56

people applying for the position of President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Alberta, all in teams of four, because “for many of us one-fourth of your proposed [\$400,000] minimum salary would double or triple our current wage.” It is difficult for a university to appear both very rich to star job candidates and very poor to money-providing governments. For many people asking “Where’s the funding?” the answer is hiding in plain sight.

Gearing Up for Bargaining

Brad Walchuk, Staff CUPE 3906



It might seem early, but we’re already gearing up for collective bargaining. The Unit 1 (TAs and RAs, in lieu) and Unit 3 (Post-Docs) collective agreements expire on August 31st, 2016. Although that seems like a long time away, 2015 will be a busy and important year for us as we prepare to negotiate a new collective

agreement. Here's what you need to know:

What's a Collective Agreement?

A collective agreement is a legally binding document signed between your Union and the Employer (McMaster University) that outlines the working conditions of TAs and RAs, in lieu. It contains the rate of pay, benefits (such as the Health Care Spending Account and Dental Coverage), and job security provisions, and regulates things such as the numbers of hours worked. It also provides you with recourse if any of these benefits have been denied or if these rights have been violated. Without a collective agreement, the Employer would be largely free to do as they pleased in regard to your employment conditions.



What is Collective Bargaining?

Collective bargaining is a democratic process undertaken at regular intervals between your Union and the Employer. It allows the voices and wishes of TAs and RAs, in lieu, to be heard by the Employer. Essentially, in a series of meetings, the Union's elected bargaining team (consisting of TAs and RAs in lieu elected by the fellow TAs/RAs) will meet with the Employer's bargaining team to make improvements to our existing collective agreement. After we have reached an agreement that the bargaining teams sees as satisfactory, all TAs and RAs in lieu will be given the opportunity to vote on it.

What's on the Agenda for 2015?

2015 will be a busy year for your union. We'll be electing a bargaining committee in the fall, and all members are able to run for these positions. Later in the year, we'll be sending out a survey to ask members their priorities for collective bargaining.

Where's the Funding?

One theme that will come up throughout the bargaining process is "Where's the Funding?" We know that there is no shortage of funding for new senior administrative positions (and lucrative raises for existing

ones). In bargaining, we'll be asking "Where's the Funding?" for things such as pay raises for TAs and RAs, for benefit improvements, and smaller class sizes. We can also push for things such as job security, which doesn't actually cost anything.

Although negotiations won't begin until the summer of 2016, we'll be gearing up for bargaining all year!

Provincial Funding and the Problem of Differentiation

Evan Johnston, Vice President

CUPE Ontario's Where's the Funding? campaign focuses our attention on the politics of government funding, and forces us to ask difficult questions about our university's financial transparency. It also forces us to look at the larger context, and requires us to co-ordinate our efforts with students and workers at other colleges and universities.

As academic workers at McMaster, we need to recognize that our working conditions do not exist in isolation, and that the goals and priorities of the provincial government have a significant impact on us. As those of us in the Department of English and Cultural Studies recently learned, less funding results in more streamlined undergraduate courses, which means less available TAships for those who need it most. This particularly impacts 5th and 6th year PhDs, but also has spill-over effects for our Unit 2 Sessional Faculty members when PhDs, without TAships, are pitted against current Unit 2 members for work.

If we take a look at McMaster's 2014/15 Consolidated Budget, we can see that the administration has recommended "[s]treamlining optimizing class sizes to reduce sessional faculty and teaching rationalizing facilities," and services" (15). Thanks to this us are feeling the squeeze as we desperately for work, and are employment opportunities

McMaster's 2014/15 Consolidated Budget : "[s]treamlining programs and optimizing class sizes to reduce teaching costs from sessional faculty and teaching assistants," "closing and rationalizing facilities," and "introducing fees for new services" (15)". Thanks to this streamlining, many of us are feeling the squeeze as we see our colleagues search desperately for work

programs and teaching costs from assistants," "closing and "introducing fees for new streamlining, many of see our colleagues search fearful of our future here at McMaster.

In a section of this year's Labour Negotiations," the

states that "McMaster has been pursuing strategies in [their] labour negotiations, targeted at *reducing the rate of increase* and establishing greater cost certainty while being mindful of the need to be *competitive in the market* to ensure effective retention and recruitment" (15, emphasis mine). If the way the administration treated the cleaning and maintenance workers this past year is any indication, 'strategic labour negotiations' is a codeword for hardball and belt-tightening, with reductions in 'increases' reserved for those at the bottom, and concerns for market competitiveness for those at the top (ie., high salaries to attract leading technocrats).

budget entitled "Strategic administration explicitly

But is this solely a problem of misguided administrators, or are there structural pressures that are forcing the hand of the university? The administrators have certainly demonstrated an unwillingness to make cuts at the top, but if we stop there, our picture remains incomplete.

The Drummond Report

The best place to start is with the Drummond Report. Don Drummond, a former TD Bank executive, was appointed in 2011 to lead the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services for Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government. This commission was tasked with finding ways to reduce a projected debt of \$16 billion, and his final recommendations entailed deeper cuts to the public sector than those implemented by former Progressive Conservative Premier, Mike Harris, in the mid 1990s.

The commission was flawed from the get-go. Critics have noted that Drummond only looked at the spending side, and ignored the fact that much of the debt was produced by revenue shortfalls. Consequently, Drummond looked for things to cut, rather than finding new sources of revenue. The questions surrounding the commission weren't "will there be cuts?", but rather, "how deep will the cuts be?"

When it came to the post-secondary sector, much of Drummond's recommendations were identical to those he had previously presented in a 2010 report for TD Bank, co-authored with fellow TD economist Shahrzad Mobasher Fard. These included, among others, a dismissal of tuition freezes and a commitment to continued tuition fee increases of 5% per year, albeit under a more simplified framework; compressing undergraduate degrees; increasing the commercialization of research; and, most significantly, increasing the differentiation between universities.

Differentiation

Differentiation sounds like a perfectly innocuous thing, but what does it really mean?

In a November 2013 letter from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to the heads of colleges and universities in Ontario, Deputy Minister Deborah Newman writes that the MTCU has "adopted a policy of differentiation to better advance the government's vision and priorities for postsecondary education, while ensuring institutions can reinforce their distinctive strengths." As she goes on to list, one of the government's primary goals is "avoiding unnecessary duplication," but fails to explain what would qualify as duplication.

In a policy document released in the same month, *Ontario's Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education* (November 2013), we are told that the aim of differentiation is to "help focus the well-established strengths of institutions" and to "enable them to operate together as complementary parts of a whole". In other words, we see a dual emphasis: on the one hand, the government claims it wants to enhance what institutions already excel at, while on the other, it wants to ensure that universities aren't all trying to excel in the same area.

But the obsession with avoiding duplication is misguided, as it is not only an ineffective way of saving money, but it carries with it unrealistic expectations for students and a lack of respect for the autonomy of individual universities. As the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) puts it, “reducing the number of duplicate programs in Ontario will not achieve cost savings. Institutions offer many similar programs because the demand exists from students. As a result of high fees, many students must study close to home and rely on duplicate course offerings throughout Ontario.” When the government talks about reducing “duplicate” courses, what they are really talking about is limiting the opportunities available to students in, say, Guelph or Peterborough, to access the same types courses that are available in Toronto.

The assumption behind the 'duplication' concern is that students can afford to pack their bags and travel to whichever university is offering the courses most relevant to them, which we know is not a realistic option for many students, and particularly disadvantages students from low-income and working-class families.

A further irony is that while “differentiation” makes it sound like the university system is encouraging a greater diversity of options for students, it really masks a deeper level of standardization. For example, it assumes that a literature course at York University is the same as a literature course at McMaster, or Carleton, or Lakehead. It reduces “courses” into abstract and quantifiable units, a packaged commodity that is the same at any institution. Absent from this conversation is any interest in the diversity of pedagogical approaches and frameworks that different faculty and departments bring to the study of their particular disciplines.

Strategic Mandate Agreements

The way that the province has set this process of differentiation in motion has been through Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs). SMAs are, according to *Ontario's Differentiation Policy Framework*, “the mechanisms through which colleges and universities articulate their unique mandates, strengths, and aspirations. They outline the relationship between the ministry and the institutions, and how each institution's mission and activities align with Ontario's vision for postsecondary education as articulated in this framework.”



Each university is expected to provide an SMA to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, indicating what the current administration sees as its institutional strengths, its current mandate, and how the university will align itself with the priorities of the government.

It is still too early to tell how McMaster University's SMA with the government will effect us as academic workers. On the one hand, the SMA itself is packed-full of everything the university already seems to do, which could be an indication that the SMAs are just another perfunctory exercise. As they currently stand, they may not be binding in any significant way, and only require loose commitments from the individual institutions.

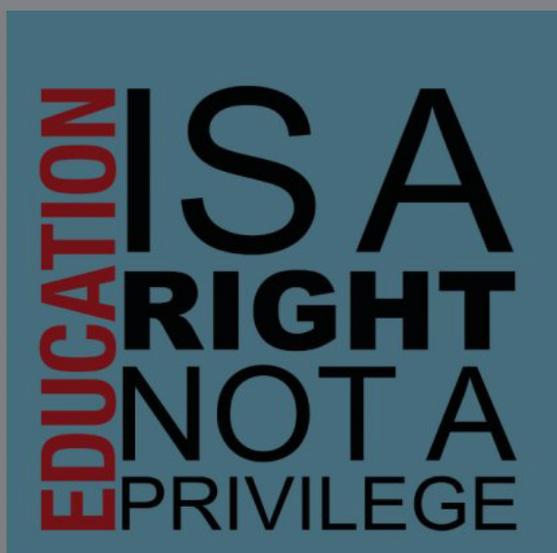
On the other hand, McMaster's supplement to the SMA, the *Institutional Vision, Mission and Proposed Mandate Statement* (March 2014), stresses entrepreneurship and increasingly commercialized research, which many of us who are engaged in research that challenges the priorities of the government — and of the corporate sector — find increasingly problematic. The next two years will be an important time for us to be monitoring the priorities and direction of McMaster, and we need to be ready to fight for a vision of the university that is about more than churning out research for profit and capturing ever greater BIUs (the university's name for undergraduate students). Our alternative strategic mandate should call for a university that produces knowledge that is critical and reflective about our place in the world, that challenges and holds power accountable, and keeps alive the promise of a democratic public sphere. If we really want to differentiate ourselves as an institution, that would be a good place to start.

Higher-Education: Privilege or Right?

Mitch LaPointe , Health and Safety Officer

In Canada, higher-education is deemed a privilege. The term itself says as much, with the implication that there is a lower-education (primary and secondary) - that which is fully paid for by the collective.

Certainly, I do feel privileged when I consider the \$20,000-plus I have spent on my undergraduate degree and the \$30,000-plus I have spent so far on my graduate programs. I feel particularly privileged when I consider that I have had the means to pay such outrageous costs, whether through access to employment or loans. However, I feel less privileged as I near the end of my tenure as a university student, especially



Regardless, how I feel as a university student is a non-starter. I do or do not feel privileged because of the larger system in which I study. It is here that I, we, have been told that it is a privilege, and the educational structure dictates such.

Though twelve years of fully paid public education in Canada may seem like an arbitrary line dividing the hallowed grounds of university

scholarship, it once served a purpose. Education falls under the mandate of each individual province in Canada. While the history of publicly funded education varies widely from province to province, nationally it became more streamlined after the Constitution Act of 1867, where provincial ministers of education first met. It was at this conference that it was agreed that each province, our country, benefits from a populous with at least 12 years of education. It is easy to see the logic here, I benefit when my neighbour can read and write.

Things have since changed. It is commonly noted that a bachelor's degree is the new high school diploma; meaning, the jobs that were once available to those with a high school diploma now require a bachelor's. The line we have drawn, our criterion on how much education we are willing to pay for collectively, needs to be adjusted. The value of fully funded education is different now than it was in the late nineteenth century.

In the mean time, university tuition has skyrocketed from a Canadian average of \$1,464 in 1990 to \$6,348 in 2013. The average is expected to reach \$7,437 by 2016. We cannot excuse this increase by way of inflation, tuition has outpaced that rate by almost fourfold during the same period. What makes a university education worth so much?

It may be difficult to answer that question, but it's easy to find reasons why high tuition fees are bad. For one, it is tough not to expect, perhaps even demand, a tangible product worth some monetary value after paying \$20,000-\$30,000. To my mind, the consumer mentality erodes much of what academia was built on and modeled after for centuries - a centre for learning. Learning, in and

of itself, was once the value worth time and effort. Perhaps most troubling is that high tuition fees act as a gatekeeper to knowledge. Of course, there should be criteria for getting into and completing a university program, but money should not be it. Perseverance is a natural gatekeeper, but skill acquisition (e.g., tests) also serves the purpose. How many people have been shut out of higher-education as a consequence of money? How many ideas could we have nurtured, but otherwise smothered? And, why is fully funded university such a radical idea - outside the norm of public consciousness?



There are some who will say that the quality of university education will plummet under a fully funded system. This is a red herring. There is no reason we could not have both

private and public institutions, much like our current system for lower-education. Moreover, competition globally motivates quality. Finally, if amenities such as sports teams are an important part of a university education (as we have decided with lower-education), then they should be publicly funded too.

Still, others will say the idea is radical due to the magnitude of change that would be required. At minimum, the first step should be an immediate freeze on tuition fees, before accepting the idea that each and every Canadian deserves access to higher-education and that priority funding is needed.

I am sure there are available taxpayer dollars in our justice system. The demilitarization of police would be a good start. Arresting fewer people would be better. That, however, is a topic for another day.

Join Our Committees and Working Groups

Departmental Stewards

This is a crucial union position. Each department has at least one steward who provides a direct link between the executive and the membership. You can contact our Chief Steward at chiefsteward_tas@cupe3906.org to get more information about your department's stewards.

Executive Committee

Executive officers are elected members of the union. The Executive committee is tasked with the day-to-day function of running the local, including outreach to members, assisting with benefits, ensuring a healthy and safe workplace, and much more. There is an honorarium for sitting on this committee. Check the vacant executive positions if you are interested in participating in the executive committee.

Political Action Committee (PAC)

A semi-autonomous committee committed to extending solidarity to the rest of the labour and social-justice community in Hamilton and beyond. Interested in participating in or knowing about PAC? Visit PAC's Website: <http://pac3906.wordpress.com/> or email politicalaction@cupe3906.org.

Equity Action Committee (EAC)

EAC is another semi-autonomous committee working towards equity-seeking groups in our union and the Hamilton area. The chair of the EAC is our Equity Officer. Please email at equity@cupe3906.org for more information.

Benefits Committee

Chaired by the Benefits and Advocacy Officer, the Benefits Committee work to administer benefits-related tasks. Please email the Benefits & Advocacy Officer at benefits@cupe3906.org for more information about joining this committee.

Communications Committee

This committee is responsible for the production and distribution of The Ally, our local's magazine. The Communications committee works to get the word out about CUPE 3906. The chair of this committee is the Communications Officer. Please email the Communications Officer at communications@cupe3906.org, for more information and participating in this committee. You can send your articles/pictures/poems to be printed in The Ally.

Steel City Solidarity Working Group

Steel City is a Worker's Action Centre for precarious workers in the City of Hamilton. Established as a working group of CUPE 3906, they are composed of precarious workers and labour and community activists from McMaster University and the Hamilton community. For more information, contact info@steelcitysolidarity.com

Indigenous Solidarity Working Group

The group's mandate is to educate CUPE 3906 membership and the broader Hamilton community about issues relating to matters of indigenous sovereignty and solidarity. If interested, contact Indigenous Solidarity working group at iswg3906@gmail.com