

# BULLETIN

## FASBU BARGAINING BULLETIN

### Pregnant Pauses

**Rob Breton, President NUFA**

In the last round of FASBU bargaining, the employer seemed to recognize that Nipissing needs to make improvements to pregnancy and parental benefits, insofar as it committed to a special joint committee on pregnancy and parental leaves. As you know, this was not a spectacular victory for us as the employer subsequently said that if we wanted improvements to the benefits we would need to bring the proposal back to negotiations yet once again.

This is what happened. We met with the employer's representatives and together decided to compare our pregnancy and parental benefits to counterparts across the province. After we understood how much less we get at Nipissing, the employer's team provided costing of what it would take to bring us up to the Ontario average.

The full report is available in the NUFA office. Basically, at Ontario's universities, the total number of weeks a biological mother can receive paid pregnancy / parental leave (a "top-up" to the government's benefit) ranges from 52 (Guelph) to 17 (Nipissing and Algoma). The average in Ontario (not including Nipissing) is 28.8 weeks with 4 institutions topping-up at 100%, 10 at 95%, and 1 at 93% (Nipissing's top-up is 95%). Guelph has 28 weeks of paid leave at 95% and 22 additional weeks at 25%. Without Guelph's 22 weeks of added benefit, the average (again not including Nipissing) would be 27.3 weeks in which the birth mother can receive a benefit.



This means a biological mother at Nipissing gets on average 10.3 weeks less of a benefit than biological mothers at other institutions. The real difference between Nipissing and other universities is that Nipissing denies the right of the biological mother to claim parental leave in addition to pregnancy leave. Nipissing's benefit for a *parent* is in fact near the average of what a parent gets at other institutions, unless that parent also happens to be the biological mother. It is standard across the province to allow a birth mother both a pregnancy (or maternity) *and* a parental benefit. Why we would continue with a parental / pregnancy benefit that only disadvantages women is very disturbing. I can understand why the Board of Governors would wear the fact that our salaries are the lowest in the province with pride. But I cannot understand why the BoG would allow *this* kind of inequality to continue. The BoG essentially asks female employees to choose if they are a parent or a biological mother. Is this reasonable?

The joint committee approximated the cost of allowing a biological mother to claim an additional 12 weeks of parental leave to be \$19,382.00 / year (total annual cost to the employer, *not* the cost per FASBU Member taking the leave). The employer said no, this was too expensive. Let's put this in perspective. As the committee was doing its work, the employer was paying a consultant an undisclosed amount of money to see if some administrative salaries needed adjustment. Believe it! The consultant found that the salaries of some administrators were below the Ontario average for their positions (disregarding, I presume, that not one of the administrators who got an increase, as I understand it, ever competed for the position for which they were getting a raise). According to the Sunshine List, the salary increase of any one of these administrators would have paid for a year's worth of our proposed benefit, and then some. The employer pointed out that if they gave us this benefit they would need to give the benefit to all female employees on campus. Good, that would be the right thing to do. What would the cost be then? Would it equal the raises given to *two* top-level administrators?

The employer makes decisions. Note, they did not bother to ask the consultant to compare Nipissing faculty salaries to others in the sector so as to right that wrong. But with the parental benefit the current administration had a very inexpensive – almost symbolic – way to distinguish itself from past administrations, but it did not. We are yet again attempting to get improved pregnancy and parental benefits in the current round of negotiations.