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BULLETIN

FASBU BARGAINING BULLETIN

When is a Chair a Chair? Ask a Librarian!

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Universities have a long history of collegial governance whereby leaders emerge from the *collegium* and serve for a specified period of time. Chairs, drawn from academic units, continue the tradition of collegial governance and are worthy of being retained and remunerated appropriately. The reasons are many—they are the voice of the academic unit to the Dean and a liaison between and among students, fellow faculty members, and the administration. They advise, consult, represent, and schedule. Perhaps most importantly, chairs help the academic unit put its most creative, innovative, and rigorous face forward to students, the wider university and the public. Deans depend on Chairs to ensure smooth operation of the academic unit and typically recognize their value accordingly. However, if the Employer's current proposals prevail, things will change radically at Nipissing University.

Completely reversing their proposal from the last round of bargaining, which called for the elimination of financial compensation for Chairs and replacing it with course release, the Employer now proposes to eliminate course release and offer only money as compensation, but at **half** the current rate. This scenario is equally unacceptable. Having the option to take three or six credits in course release is, for some Chairs, important in enabling them to attend to Chair duties while maintaining their teaching, research, and service commitments to an appropriate standard.

The Employer has also tabled a proposal that would eliminate all academic units (divisions) in Education thus negating



may present this as a simple cost-cutting measure but its implications run much, much deeper than this. First, it is a move toward a top-down governance structure that contradicts and erodes the collegial model. No longer will Chairs lead a group of peers, instead faculty will simply answer to/negotiate with their supervisor, the Dean. Second, it is the epitome of centralized planning, with everything emanating out of the Dean's office, and Faculty Council the only forum left for consultation and discussion. Sometimes more can be accomplished in small groups (divisions) than in a large forum. Finally, in the absence of Chairs with which to consult, the Dean runs the risk of isolating him or herself in an administrative bubble, limited in the number of people who can advise them without fear of reprisal.

There is no question that the current structure of academic units can and should be questioned and reviewed. Indeed, we have to be open to revisiting organizational structures from time to time across the university in order to best meet changing circumstances and conditions.

However, it is NUFA's position that the decision to eliminate academic units in Education (or anywhere, for that matter) should not be made at the bargaining table. NUFA would no more negotiate the closure of a department or the merger of two departments at the bargaining table than it would negotiate the creation of a new School of Architecture! These are academic governance questions that should be decided through appropriate academic channels—Faculty Council and Senate. For NUFA to agree to the elimination of divisions in Education at the bargaining table would not only be unacceptable to a large segment of our Membership, it sets a very dangerous precedent for all of us. Who or what would NUFA be asked to shut down next?

NUFA stands committed to protecting the concept of collegial governance at Nipissing University. We will support our current and future Chairs by calling on the Employer to remove these deeply problematic proposals from the table so we can move forward toward a fair and equitable settlement for us all.



IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT LIBRARIES ARE AT THE HEART OF UNIVERSITIES AND GIVEN THAT WE ARE RESEARCHERS ENGAGED IN THE ACADEMIC ENTERPRISE, THIS STATEMENT HAS MORE THAN A LITTLE MERIT.

But, as we all know, we don't always treat our hearts very well. Such is the case with the Academic Librarians who professionally operate and maintain Nipissing University's library, while also going about their own, unheralded, scholarly work.

In a recent survey on the status of Academic Librarians and Archivists across Canada (CAUT, 2014), most university faculty associations represent and serve as bargaining agents for this important university constituency. There are a small number of universities where Librarians and Archivists have their own association (e.g., McMaster) or are represented by the support staff bargaining unit—usually a carry over from the institution originating as a university associated college (e.g., Brescia). Disturbingly, the survey clearly shows Nipissing University as one of only four post-secondary institutions across Canada where Academic Librarians have neither an association representing them nor an agent bargaining on their behalf (the others being UOIT, Moncton (Shippagan), and Huron University College). In short, each Academic Librarian at Nipissing University is in the unenviable position of navigating all dealings with the Employer **alone**.

As you know, NUFA has tabled a proposal to bring three Academic Librarians into the Faculty Association, offering them equitable and known terms and conditions of employment. This will not only give our Librarians a sense of academic purpose as well as voice within the institution, it will also provide them the benefits of collective representation when dealing with the Employer. NUFA believes this is a feasible goal and in recent months the Employer has indicated receptivity to the idea as well. Let us hope this openness translates to the bargaining table.

But why should all this matter to you? I suggest that if we want to be taken seriously as an academic institution, one that is worthy of public respect, can attract students from around the world, and viewed as the home of credible applicants for research grants, then we have to have a thriving, well-resourced library comprised of competent, professional, academically-grounded Librarians with comparable terms and conditions of employment to others in the university sector. Nipissing University is currently at the bottom of survey rankings on the latter point and one path toward respectability is to bring the Librarians into NUFA and ensure they have a contract that treats them like the professionals and academics they are while according them the respect offered their peers elsewhere in Canada.

Canadian Association of University Teachers. (2014). *Librarian Salary and Academic Status Survey 2014*. Table C. Ottawa: CAUT.