

NUFA BULLETIN

NIPISSING UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATION (NUFA) DECEMBER 2014

What's the plan?

Rob Breton, President

Representatives from the NUFA Executive attended all four Town Halls, and we are especially thankful to Jeff Scott who went to Brantford to observe those proceedings and to Rhiannon Don who travelled to Bracebridge to attend that Town Hall. (As a Member of CASBU, Rhiannon's service to the institution is not acknowledged by the Employer, so her voluntary work for us is doubly appreciated.) Despite attending all the meetings, it's not clear that we know more now than we did before the Town Halls about *the plan*.

For example, the President said that the Employer is committed to continuing both the Bracebridge and Brantford campuses. But he added an ominous "for now." What does that mean? When do we find out something concrete? What's the plan?

He also did not answer questions about the recent increase in salaries to senior administration – which comes in at over 1.7 million dollars. Nor did he say how the combining of administrative positions will work.



KEEP
CALM
AND
MAKE A
PLAN

I'm not the only one asking how it is possible to double full-time workloads. I know if faculty members were asked to take over the full-time job of someone "let go" while continuing to do our full-time jobs, we would have to say that it could not be done. There would simply not be enough hours in the day. Were the administrators who have had their responsibilities doubled previously working half-time? The President said that they had been looking at combining positions for a number of months, so this must be part of a plan.

The President also insisted that athletics is cost neutral. But does this mean that the revenues from the sports teams help pay for lighting and heating bills? And how do they know that athletics is cost neutral when they refuse to audit the cost of athletics in the same way that all academic programs have just been audited? Is this a sign of real planning?



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The President did say that severance packages for the 16 employees "let go" add up to 1.5 million. How then will the terminations help reduce the projected deficit? Also consider that the terminated employees were paid for half a budget year and that the promised reduction to LTA Faculty is not to be announced until the end of April. If the plan is to reduce the deficit, can the employee reductions really be part of the plan?

How is it possible that the budget for AQ courses is set at 1.4 million? Sorry, but I now have to ask if the plan is to exaggerate the deficit?

And if decisions about our LTA faculty will not be made until the end of April, how can our LTA faculty make plans for their own lives? And will the plans that have been made by academic units that rely on our current complement of LTA faculty have to be redrawn? In April? Is this part of a plan? Because we don't want to tell our students what courses are being offered and by whom until May? Is offering our students significantly fewer courses part of a marketing plan? How does that work?

**We need our own plans.
We need to take back the
University we built.**

**Faculty must build the
future.**



Building Nipissing's Future

by **Mark Crane, FASBU/
CASBU Chief Negotiator &
Susan Srigley, NUFA Vice-
President**

What's really going on with the financial state of the University? We've all heard about the projected \$11.9 million deficit, but we are left wondering where this number came from, and what it really means. And we hear our colleagues wondering about it too. We've been frantically searching for answers, and all we've got in return is spin.

It began when the changes to Education were announced, and after the release of the budget and the announcement of the projected deficit, warnings about our financial woes intensified, overtly bleeding into negotiations with other unionized employees. The spin continued when we were told that while they may have cried wolf before about a financial crisis, this time it is for REAL! As if to make good on that claim, the termination of 16 positions in the last two weeks has enforced a widespread conviction that we are on the brink of financial collapse

that only these kinds of drastic cuts will solve. This approach does little more than foster a climate of panic and fear. People are worried about their jobs, not knowing what to expect next. The carefully spun media releases add to the tone of gravity.

If it is true, how did we get here? And without a collegial and transparent process, how can we be assured that the particular choices they make are the best for the institution?

These are valid questions, and all faculty, staff, and stakeholders in the University, not to mention the public in whose trust the University is administered, deserve clear and transparent answers. We realize that challenging the University's numbers makes some people feel uncomfortable. Others may feel that it is insensitive of us to ask the hard questions about budgeting when people have lost their jobs. But who gains from us not asking questions? As the employees of a public institution we believe it is our responsibility to be concerned, and to demand

clear justification for a projected \$11.9M deficit.

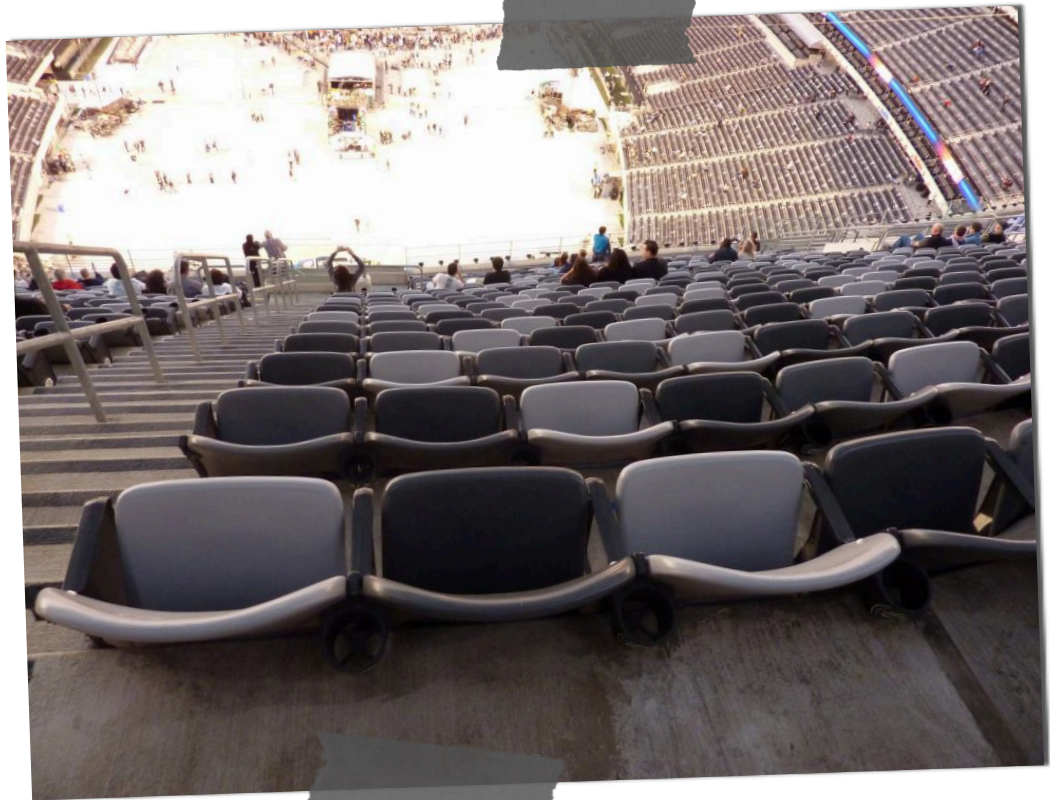
At our recent town hall in North Bay, when a faculty member asked some very specific questions about the increased salaries of senior administrators, he deserved a clear answer. What he got was spin. Administrative salaries cost the University a lot. If the Employer has nothing to hide, then as one of our colleagues remarked at the meeting, they should make their numbers public. That is the type of transparency we need and deserve, folks, if we are going to play a central role in building Nipissing's future.



The Nipissing University community is going through tough times. However, financial issues may be the least of our problems. We have issues of morale that have been evident for some time but took a direct hit with the firing of an entire stratum of administration in recent weeks. We have issues of confidence as we wonder how we will find our way to sustained academic and financial health in the absence of expert leadership in the offices of finance, registrar, marketing & external communications, and technical services. We also have issues of trust as previous experiences lead people to scrutinize every word, decision, or action of the administration for meaning and intent. It was in this climate that the entire university community was invited to a series of town hall meetings in Brantford, Bracebridge, and North Bay. The meetings, to varying degrees, involved a short presentation by President Mike DeGagné, followed by a question and answer period. Dr. DeGagné gave the assembled multitude his version of Nipissing's financial troubles (a projected \$11.9 million deficit for 2014-15) and how this state of affairs came to pass. ➡

The View from the Cheap Seats

Todd Horton, NUFA Executive Member at Large (Education)



Using a graph on an overhead, he showed us how the university has been on an upward trajectory of growth (both students and expenditures) for most of the 21st century, but since 2010 enrollment has been declining while expenditures have continued unabated. This, it seems, has led to our current budget deficit. It sounds logical and simple but if that truly is the case one has to ask—why? That question would have to wait. Dr. DeGagné continued by outlining how the university planned to confront the deficit, including the “letting go” of administrators (Phase I, already completed), OPSEU members (Phase II, set to begin in January), and ending with limited-term faculty (Phase III, at individual contract conclusion in 2015). Dr. DeGagné expressed an appropriate amount of regret at having to take these actions and I have to say I believed him. But there is an old adage that states, it isn't where you stand on the issues, it's where you sit. I, and most of the people assembled for these presentations, sit in the cheap seats. We have little direct control over these decisions. We are outside the inner sanctum. So for us the town hall meetings require more than explanations, they are opportunities to prod for deeper meanings and intent. They are occasions to pull back the curtain and take a look at the wizard.

Following the presentation, the town halls were all opened up to questions from the “audience”. Few people believe we will end 2014-15 without any deficit at all. The drop in Education numbers alone is cause for concern.

cheap seats cont'd.

However, deficits are not new to public institutions and small deficits have to be expected from time to time. We're not in the for-profit-business; we're in the creation of knowledge business. As well, university budget deficits have miraculously turned into surpluses and break evens many, many times before so the President's 'we may have cried wolf in the past but this time we really mean it' message was met with more than a little incredulity.

Indeed, questions revealed a disconnect between the President's worldview and that of the audience on several issues. Specifically, the point that **many of the challenges facing Nipissing University were created by choice—by decisions taken (or not taken) by present and past administrations.**

First, people queried the approach to firings (i.e., piecemeal, timing, unceremonious exit from the building) and why, if we've been in enrollment/revenue decline for four years, we haven't taken steps in the intervening years; steps that may have made this trauma unnecessary or at the very least less damaging. The answers were less than compelling. Adjustments, reassignments, long-term commitments, etc. all figured in the response but in the end 16 or more people are gone, unlikely to return, with more firings are to come. It is and was a choice.

Second, there was intense questioning concerning the exclusivity of a five-person University Management Group (UMG) making these decisions and the absence of community consultation to find potential, dare-I-say-it, efficiencies (i.e., efforts to find internal savings; input on who should stay or go). We all know you can't run a large organization by committee but with the limited institutional history

and insight into operations by the "Big Five", the current process feels a little like bringing a hatchet to surgery rather than a scalpel. In the end, the President's response suggested UMG put a premium on flexibility and nimbleness to make the "necessary" cuts. It's a choice.

Third, questions were raised about the budget and the veracity of the \$11.9 million deficit number touted in media releases and public justifications for recent actions. Remember that budgets are projections into the future based on anticipated revenues vs. expected expenditures. The deficits are not "real" per se because the revenues haven't yet arrived and the bills haven't yet been paid. Again, revenues for 2014-15 are likely to be down but by how much remains open for interpretation and the question of where to spend or cut is in many cases an important and strategic choice. To be sure, you have to pay for certain things (e.g., utilities, salaries, repairs) but other budget lines are highly discretionary. I asked, as examples of choices made, why the budget lines for salaries in Additional Qualifications and the VPAR's office both doubled in a single year (approximately \$600K and \$400K respectively). This question went unanswered. I encouraged everyone to examine the budget and ask hard questions—why are we spending money on this? Why are we raising the budget on that? Why are we raising the budget on this, this much, this year??? Indeed, a question was asked why the budget line for Athletics rose by 24% (approximately \$500K) for the coming year. We were told that Athletics, an important aspect of university life to be sure, pays for itself dollar-for-dollar. Really? Did we see a 24% increase in revenues from students playing varsity sports this year? I wonder...but it's a choice.

Finally, the issue of ballooning administrative salaries came up. Now for me, I've never thought challenging administration salaries was a winning proposition. Though I do not understand how Nipissing University has permitted, for example, the cashing in of administrative leaves (i.e., working for your salary and receiving cash for the leave you don't take—aka the big "double dip"), I've always felt that challenging salaries was petty. But once you start firing people, once you start suggesting that faculty can't receive a raise this bargaining round even though we are among the lowest paid faculty members in the province, all bets are off. Administrative salaries are on the table. Dr. DeGagné wasn't particularly receptive to this line of questioning, stating that we have to "compare apples to apples not oranges" and we have to understand "context". Well, the context for OPSEU is that they have to make their way in a world of job insecurity. The context for CASBU is that they have to pay their bills in a world of rising prices. The context for FASBU is that we have to prepare for our retirements in a world of declining social safety nets. Maybe the view is different from where the President and the UMG sit but that's our context.

We are indeed in troubled times. We've lost and will continue to lose our colleagues and friends—the 'human' face of what institutions call human resources. But that cannot deter we in FASBU from the job that will soon be at hand. As we prepare for collective bargaining we have to stand together and fight for our right to be valued for what we bring to the university. If the faculty members from Brock, Carleton, Western, Laurentian, Windsor, and others can do it in this environment so can we—we will not be left behind! That's my view sitting out here in the cheap seats.

“We Have To Do Less With Less”

Rhiannon Don, NUFA Executive, CASBU Member at Large

On Monday, December 1st, President DeGagné and VPA Keech travelled down south to visit the university's two regional campuses and hold town hall meetings with the staff and faculty at those locations to discuss the projected deficit and the restructuring.

At the Muskoka campus, anxiety ran high, and over twenty faculty and staff turned out to hear what the President would say; the meeting lasted over two hours. Two of the dismissals, both Instructional Designers, called Muskoka home, and it was apparent that their loss was very keenly felt by the community there.

The President's speech was much the same as the one he would give two days later in North Bay, using hand-drawn figures to illustrate the trajectory of our financial situation, but the question and answer period was very different in its focus. Understandably, the people at the Muskoka campus are very concerned about what the future holds for the regional campuses, and several people tried to get a concrete answer out of the President. When asked if he was committed to the Muskoka campus, he responded by saying, “Today I am,” an answer that raised more questions from the audience. The President then turned the question back to the audience, asking, “If there are no students here, are you committed to Muskoka?” before adding that the regional campuses cost the university a significant amount of money. This came as news to



many in the audience, as the administration has long claimed that the Muskoka campus breaks even.

When questioned about the possibility of cost or job sharing in order to prevent further layoffs, the President firmly vetoed that idea, saying that the savings would be too small and too slow to be meaningful in light of the projected deficit. He was also asked pointed questions about the accountability and oversight of the committee who made the decisions, and his response was that there would be no opportunity to revisit these decisions in the future, saying, “We can't unplow the field.”



Déjà Vu



**Angela Fera, NUFA
Executive Assistant**

The events of the last few weeks have left me sleepless and sad. For those who know my history at Nipissing University, I'm sure you can understand why I might be having an awful sense of déjà vu.

It's been stated many times over the last few weeks that the decisions are not about people but rather their positions. To me, it's all about the people...the people who have the power to make the choices and the people who experience the consequences of those choices. In this case, they are rarely the same people.

In 2009, the situation was similar. The rationale for job cuts was financial. The Employer was projecting a \$1.6M deficit. It was a full-time faculty bargaining year. Ten positions were cut. The audited financial statements for 2009-10 showed a \$5.1M surplus "before swaps" and a \$7.4M surplus "after swaps."

When I returned to my office after being told I had been terminated, all I could think was "Did the last 18 years mean nothing?" It was clear that two or three senior administrators, with no apparent consultation with others who would feel the impact, made the decisions. I was told that the questions were many, the answers were few and unsatisfying, and trust and confidence was eroded.

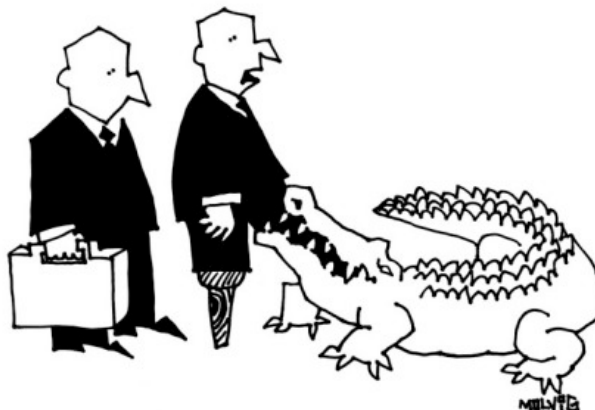
History repeats itself...this time with a greater projected deficit and a greater loss of people. What led to this remains the same. Choices are being made by a very few people, and jobs are

terminated without consultation or warning. Where is the collegiality, transparency, and respect, which are said to be our institutional values?

Yes, it is the responsibility of the senior administrators to make the tough decisions; however in the absence of transparency, collegiality and respect, many questions of why and how still remain, and trust and confidence continues to erode.

Regardless, I continue to hope because I believe it is the core of this university that has always sustained it – the teaching and learning that occurs through the faculty and their interactions with students.

For those people who are now gone, and for those who may soon be gone, I thank you for your contributions to Nipissing University.



"Whoa. Déjà vu."

Time is a Factor of Nothing: Putting a Face on an LTA Contract

**Rob Graham, Schulich
School of Education**

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I would like to begin by thanking NUFA president Rob Breton for inviting me to put a 'face on my contract' by sharing this reflective piece. I think it is important that I clarify at the onset I fully understand the considerable challenges facing our administrators. Our Schulich School of Education has been given the substantial task of re-imagining a two-year program. Perhaps the greater test is doing this with the spectre of an unprecedented provincially mandated cut in teacher candidate enrollment and the knowledge that jobs will be lost. What follows are some personal insights about my time as an LTA and my attempt to 'put a face on my contract'.

In the field of child development it is often said 'time is a factor of nothing'. Time is limited; what we do with the time is not. In essence, what is most important is what happens within the time we have. As an LTA I have persisted for set periods of time with the hope I will be offered more time at the end of each contract. At a recent meeting where my future status was being reviewed, I was informed, "We don't advocate on behalf of people. We can only advocate on behalf of positions".

Later that day sitting in my office I was left to wonder if what I had done within the time I have been

granted here at Nipissing in the Schulich School of Education really mattered or, was I just filling time in the eyes of some. In my mind, that statement contradicts the very ethos of what Nipissing University is advertised to stand for; I can't help but speculate if part of where we are today is a result of straying from our grass roots that is distinguished by a high regard for interpersonal aspects of learning, teaching and organizational management. By chronicling some of what has 'filled' my time here at Nipissing University in my role as a long time LTA, I am hopeful that I can put a face on my contract and demonstrate that indeed, time is a factor of nothing; what occurs within it is what really matters.

In 2006 I was invited to take a 2-year leave from my teaching position with the Near North District School Board (NNDSB) to teach a specialized course in technology enhanced learning and teaching within the Faculty of Education. At this stage of my career I looked at this move as an opportunity for rejuvenation and professional development. My goal was to complete my master of education degree while getting the experience of teaching at this higher level of education; I had full intentions of returning to my former teaching position. However, after completing my 2-year term and my master's degree, I was offered a one-year contract. After a period of negotiation, I agreed to another 2-year term. This decision was not

an easy one given the fact I was forced to resign from my teaching position with the NNDSB, giving up my seniority. In essence, I had decided to take a new career path with the intention of immediately entering a doctoral program. Recently, I successfully completed and defended my doctoral thesis at Lancaster University in the UK in the field of technology enhanced learning (TEL) and e-Research. The rationale for entering a program specific to TEL was to ensure I brought a high level of scholarship specific to this specialized domain of research and scholarship to the Nipissing University community, and specifically to my position within the Schulich School of Education. In this regard, I am now able to add the dimension of academic excellence to my portfolio; something I have been repeatedly told over the years would be the only thing that would give me a chance to remain at Nipissing. I should add, making the transition to academia and completing my doctoral studies was largely enabled by the regular mentoring, support and encouragement offered to me by many faculty members. Supervisors at Lancaster often commented on, and marveled at, the high level of support and collegiality I reported. Our Schulich School of Education program has advertised and marketed itself as a mobile computing program for years, and we are now branded as an Apple Distinguished education program.

time, cont'd.

It seems necessary, therefore, that some infusion of specific scholarship, leadership and expertise in this area is essential. In my case, eliminating my LTA position, and others, would also eliminate this specific area of scholarship and teaching expertise among the faculty complement. Perhaps some 'taken-for-granted' LTA positions will be better understood when in the upcoming months they are put under a microscope and details about the position are magnified. Although it could be argued there is the ability and capacity for faculty members to take on additional courses outside of their specific area of research expertise, I would argue going forward an important and deeper question is, "What level of proficiency do students expect from their professors when entering a course?" While many faculty members could quite

capably teach outside of their area of specialization, at what level would this teaching be delivered? These are issues related to the integrity and quality of programming and must be at the forefront of the conversations going forward as we continue to build not just for the *now*, but for the future.

With that being said, I can truthfully say I have appreciated the ongoing support of NUFA and many faculty and administrators in the 8 years since I was invited to leave my teaching job with the Near North District School Board and join the Schulich School of Education as a leader in the field of technology enhanced learning and teaching. My grandmother always told me that integrity, hard work and passion was the magical elixir and if you drank it you would have immunity

to some of what ails life and work. I have done my best to follow grandma's advice and I am confident that going forward there are some great opportunities ahead. Regardless of the outcome in the upcoming months, the time I have spent at Nipissing University has been some of the most productive and self-actualizing time of my life.

I wish our leaders well as they continue to make difficult decisions and I would suggest that universal commitment to high levels of collaboration and respect will be required to advance our University in the upcoming years.

