

Winter  
2026

Eds. Susan  
Srigley & Pat  
Maher

# NUFA NEWS

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## A Word from the NUFA President

**Robin Gendron**

When asked to write something for this edition of the NUFA News, it was suggested that I could reflect on the faculty strike at Laurentian University. That was just a few days after I and seven other NUFA members had made the drive to Sudbury to support our colleagues from LUFA on their picket line. Of course, that suggestion had been made to me only a few days before the CASBU bargaining team headed into mediation for a last-ditch effort to get CASBU a new contract. At that point, I thought to myself, there was every likelihood that if NUFA News wanted me to reflect upon supporting colleagues on a picket line, that I would have an even more pertinent, closer-to-home story to tell. Fortunately, we were able to avert a CASBU strike after a very long day of mediation; LUFA reached an agreement after three



weeks on strike. The two experiences together, only a week apart, made me think about the importance of solidarity. Of sticking together, supporting your colleagues, having their backs. On January 23, LUFA's strikers were joined on their picket line not only by a significant delegation from NUFA but also by flying picketers representing faculty associations across the country and local unions, including the United Steelworkers. It was one of the coldest days of the year – a windchill of -37 – but faculty had travelled to Sudbury from places like Winnipeg, Fredericton, and Halifax, as well as North Bay to stand with colleagues from Laurentian who are fighting to recover from the devastation of Laurentian's CCAA bankruptcy. We

brought LUFA support in the form of donations to its strike fund, but even more importantly we were the tangible evidence that the 75,000 members of the CAUT stood with our striking colleagues and would stand with them as long as it takes. The encouragement that LUFA members we walked with that day took from that demonstration of solidarity was evident. Knowing you are not alone in your fight gives you the strength to keep going.

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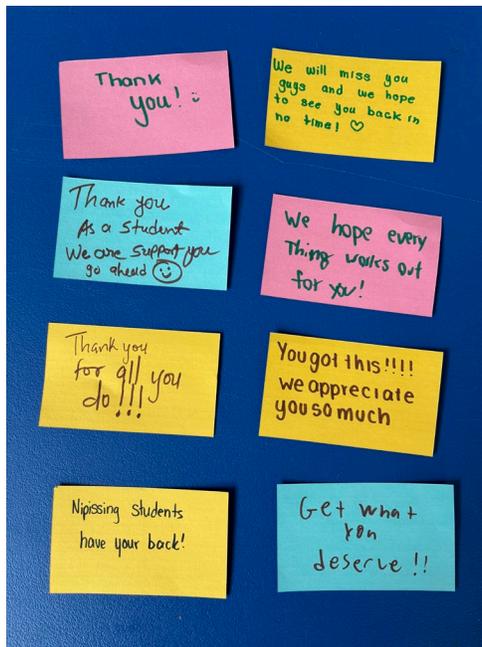
*Knowing you are not alone in your fight gives you the strength to keep going. As the Steelworkers say, “one day longer, one day stronger.”*

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Solidarity was also key to making sure that CASBU did not have to go on strike. That solidarity manifested itself first and foremost in the unity that CASBU members demonstrated in supporting Laura and the collective bargaining team, especially through a resounding strike mandate. As crucial as that unity was,

however, CASBU also benefited from the solidarity shown by FASBU – FASBU members served on the bargaining team and did much of the mobilization and strike preparation work – and other unions including OPSEU, CUPE, and the Ontario Teachers Federation (OTF), not to mention the help CASBU received from the CAUT, OCUFA, and other associations like the Wilfrid Laurier Faculty Association (WLUFA) and the faculty association of the Ontario Technical University (UOITFA). The day before CASBU entered mediation with the university, I received a letter from the OTF assuring CASBU of tangible support from 160,000 teachers in Ontario. And let’s not forget the students, who demonstrated solidarity with their part-time faculty in numerous ways, including messages of support and encouragement and pithy strike slogans.



Those slogans were not ultimately needed, but it was a close-run thing. It was only the readiness of the bargaining team to walk away from the talks that compelled the university to come back with the deal that CASBU needed. And the bargaining team only felt able to end the talks – to call a strike – because it knew that it had the backing of CASBU members and that CASBU would be supported throughout a strike by full-time faculty and staff here on campus, by faculty associations across the country, teachers across Ontario, bus drivers here in North Bay, many other unions and their members, and by students.

Speaking at LUFU’s rally in the freezing cold at the end of their first week on

strike, I told our colleagues from Laurentian that their fight is NUFA’s fight, that we are all in this together. We are all stronger when we stand together. I saw that strength at work during mediation, especially in the reaction of the university’s team to CASBU’s willingness to end the talks and go on strike. Our challenge, and it is an ongoing one, is to build and maintain that mutual support all the time, and not just when we’re staring down the possibility of a labour action. Solidarity!

## Academic Governance May Feel Tedious, but the Future of Universities Depends on it

**Todd A. Horton**

“Can I get a mover for that?” “You’ll find that information in the attached documents”, and “It has to go through the committee first”. These, and many more statements like them, are spoken regularly on university campuses across Ontario, Canada, and around the world.

They are little indicators of that vital aspect of university life known as *academic governance*. But what exactly is ‘academic governance’ and why is it so important? Briefly stated, academic governance is a broad notion encompassing the decision-making processes related to academic matters, including but not limited to, curriculum and program development, admissions, and the granting of degrees. At Nipissing University, like many other universities, this is a shared responsibility between faculty, administration, and students. Embedded within this notion is a set of norms, beliefs, and values about not only how decision-making should be conducted and by whom, but the position of universities within our society and the very nature of academic work itself.

The last point is particularly important because it reflects the deeply held belief that the work we do at universities is rather unique. Unlike corporations that make products or offer services in pursuit of profit, or charities that do the same work to benefit the lives of individuals and communities but without the profit element, universities are predominantly focused on the pursuit of knowledge creation. Knowledge creation may, in turn, lead to profits or help better the lives of individuals and communities, but the core mission of universities is, and always has been, to be a space and place where ideas can be generated, questions can be asked, hypotheses can be tested, and arguments can be proposed, critiqued, or defended. Most importantly for us, academic work is and must remain self-directed (i.e., of our own design), autonomous (i.e., free from undue outside influence), with the results of our efforts able to be disseminated (i.e., freely shared inside and beyond fields of expertise).

Central to ensuring the nature of universities and academic work is academic governance. Like the citizens of a nation-state, faculty members are citizens of the university, with the right and responsibility to participate in decision-making processes that support teaching, learning, and research environments that embody our norms, beliefs, and values, while fostering the pursuit of knowledge. It all sounds so lofty, so grand, and so painfully tedious. Who amongst us hasn’t been in their third committee meeting of the day, looking at their watch, wishing the speaker making their umpteenth “critical point” would wind it down so we could get back to our “real job”? There is no doubt that academic governance can sometimes *feel* unimportant, trivial, and very much like a grind. But make no mistake, like citizenship in a nation-state whereby people must remain informed and engaged lest the foundations of democracy teeter and fall, so too is citizenship in the university. The best defense against the undermining of the nature of universities and the erosion of academic work is to remain involved and actively engaged. That means offering to sit on committees, reading agendas, attending meetings, formulating questions, posing motions, and a host of other somewhat tedious but incredibly important acts of service.

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Can I be so bold as to say this is more important now than ever? In a world where each day seems to bring a new “crisis”, such a statement may be losing or already have lost its meaning. Still, we are at a critical crossroads in the life history of universities in Ontario. It’s no secret that we are not what we once were. For many decades, universities coasted along, revered, immutable, and, most importantly, well-funded. No longer. The sense of universities as part of the common good has passed, with governments openly questioning their role in our society, wondering whether they contribute to the economy in a practical sense. Today, per student funding of universities by the Ontario government has been declining for over thirty years and now sits at 55-57% of the national average, and new funding models are unlikely to change that in either the short or long-term. To compensate, universities feel forced to cut costs while trying to increase enrollments. This can be seen as an opportunity to engage in self-reflection, make long-needed revisions and adaptations, and create new learning pathways that speak to a generation that consumes information and makes meaning in different ways. But it can also be an opportunity for some to make changes that subtly and not-so-subtly change the very nature of what it means to be a university and engage in academic work.

In the fall of 2024, Nipissing University enlisted the consultant company, Cheryl A. Foy Strategic Governance, to conduct the review of university governance practices, with its final report released on February 25, 2025. While ostensibly an arms-length, neutral analysis of university governance practices, it is not a stretch to say that the Foy consultancy approaches its work from a particular perspective that is embraced by parties most interested in ensuring that decisions are made quicker and that those decisions are more aligned with government and administration interests. Even a cursory read of Foy’s oft-touted book, *An Introduction to University Governance* (2021), illustrates the need to reduce faculty voice in academic governance spaces such as Senate and Senate committees under the auspices of efficiency, and has a particular belief in the need to remove anyone associated with unions in governance spaces, under what I would assert is a flawed notion of “conflict of interest”. Read the book. It is illuminating.

What does all this mean for academic governance at Nipissing University? In the short-term, the government-funded reports remain just that, reports. The President’s Office has initiated a Senate Governance Review Committee to consider the Foy recommendations, but it has, heretofore, been stalled, though there are indications it is about to be revitalized. What I can say is that the work of the committee is very important. It will be considering what academic governance may look like at Nipissing University moving forward, and, for me, that translates into considering what my citizenship, including my rights and responsibilities, means at Nipissing University. It also has implications for how we will embody our norms, beliefs, and values about what it means to be a university and conduct academic work. Heady stuff. Important stuff. *Vital* stuff.

Is anybody doing anything about all of this? Well, in times of instability, I always like to go back to first principles. What do I believe? What do I value? And my answers to those questions guide the actions that I choose to take. On the provincial level, we have allies at the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA). This, our representative in provincial spaces, continues to engage with the Ford government on these issues, alerting them to perspectives they don’t often consider and lobbying them to make changes to plans that we feel undermine our notions of what it means to be a university and engage in academic work.

At Nipissing, we have a history of holding pre-Senate caucus meetings to collectively prepare for Senate. Preparation includes learning how fellow senators interpret proposed motions, formulating thoughtful questions that will hold all senators to account, and composing motions that serve to demonstrate the Senate’s will on questions and issues. But is that enough? No. We must do more. We must not only remain involved and

engaged; we must also be open to change when the evidence suggests change is needed. The world is dynamic, and we must be prepared to adapt even if it means discomfort in the short run. But that doesn't mean we have to sacrifice our collective values. When appropriate, we must be ready to clearly but respectfully do what needs to be done to ensure universities remain autonomous entities where the right and responsibility of shared academic governance is acknowledged and adhered to as it has been in the past. Together, we can walk this increasingly bumpy path and, with the support of each other and our allies, we can remain true to ourselves. The future of universities, as we understand it, depends on it.

## Reflections from a New Grievance Officer

**Geoff Hartley**

Stepping into the role of Grievance Officer has been eye-opening in ways I didn't fully anticipate. Over the past few years, I've served in several capacities on the NUFA Executive Committee, and this past summer, I was appointed as NUFA Grievance Officer. Like many faculty members, I had a general sense of what "grievances" were, but the day-to-day reality of supporting colleagues has been far more nuanced. If there's one thing I wish I'd known before being appointed to this position, it's that most issues Faculty bring forward do not, and often should not, become formal grievances.

In fact, most conversations I've had so far with my colleagues fall into a different category: early-stage concerns, misunderstandings, or situations where someone simply needs a sounding board before deciding how to proceed. These informal conversations matter. They're often where problems can be de-escalated, clarified, or redirected long before a formal process becomes necessary. My more experienced colleagues on the NUFA Grievance Committee have taught me that a formal grievance is a blunt instrument that often leads to unsatisfactory outcomes for everyone involved. And sometimes, the best support a Grievance Officer can provide is helping a colleague articulate what they need, understand their collective agreement rights, and explore informal pathways that preserve relationships with our employer while still addressing the issue.

Another lesson that has become clear is to never attend a meeting with a Dean or University administrator alone. Even if a meeting seems routine, having a Grievance Officer or another colleague within the association helps to ensure clarity and helps maintain a balanced conversation. It also gives you space to focus on the substance of the discussion rather than the procedural details. I've already seen how much more effective these meetings can be when faculty don't have to navigate them alone.

There are a few other things I've come to appreciate:

- Timelines matter more than you think. Our collective agreements (both FASBU and CASBU) include firm deadlines for responding to concerns. Even when we're not seeking a formal grievance, being aware of these timelines helps you make informed decisions.
- You don't need to wait until something is "serious" before reaching out to NUFA. Some of the most constructive conversations happen when a faculty member reaches out early, even just to ask, "is this normal?" or "should I be concerned?" If you're unsure, this is the right time to talk to a Grievance Officer.
- The process is as much about support as it is about procedure. Sometime faculty hesitate to reach out because they don't want to "cause trouble." But the Grievance Officer's role isn't to escalate—it's to ensure fairness and clarity with respect to our collective agreement rights. Sometimes that means

advocating; sometimes it means helping someone navigate a difficult conversation; sometimes it means simply listening.

As I continue learning this role, I am mindful of how much of the work involves building relationships, rather than being adversarial. The grievance process exists for a reason, but so does the work of helping colleagues feel supported and informed. If you ever find yourself in a challenging situation with your employer, I hope you reach out. Chances are the NUFA Grievance Officer can help before anything becomes formal.

## NUFA and AI

Sarah Winters



When it comes to AI, I hope that J.R.R. Tolkien and G.K. Chesterton are right: “Long ago Chesterton truly remarked that, as soon as he heard that anything ‘had come to stay,’ he knew that it would be very soon replaced—indeed regarded as pitiably obsolete and shabby” (Tolkien “On Fairy-Stories,” 1947).

But if they are wrong and AI, rather than being regarded as pitiably shabby (or perhaps in this case “sloppy” is a better word), is around for at least the next decade, having not yet killed us all, then unions must grapple with its job-destroying effects. Our university faculty unions have to deal with such effects twice: first, AI could be used to replace some of us; and second, AI will destroy many of the jobs that require Bachelor’s Degrees.

Current messaging from pro-AI voices is that AI won’t destroy jobs but become embedded in all jobs so everyone needs to become AI-literate. I don’t find this convincing because if AI can do half of everyone’s current jobs, for example, then half of the humans doing those jobs can be made redundant. In a refreshingly honest address by a politician on this issue, the UK technology secretary Liz Kendall stated in January “I want to level with the public. Some jobs will go.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2026/jan/28/artificial-intelligence-will-cost-jobs-admits-liz-kendall>

She went on to say that other jobs will be created in their place, but one issue for us (Canada being a country very like the UK, economically) is whether these other jobs, whatever they might be, will require a university education. Will we be offering a BA or BSc in Prompt Creation?

It is not just AI’s job-stealing function that should worry us but its environmental effects, its privacy issues, its ravaging of our intellectual property, and, most importantly to me, its rendering of a huge part of our work meaningless, hopeless, and joyless because of student cheating. If AI is making you want to retire as soon as possible, and earlier than you would have otherwise done, you are not alone. To be cynical, maybe that is why the Council of Ontario Universities is doing nothing about it.

What should a university be? I think four years of study at a university is analogous to four years of a gym membership in that both should result in health and strength, of the body in one case, and the mind in another. People using AI to think for them is analogous to people using machines to move their muscles for them and will end in equivalent weakness, illness, and depression.

For all these reasons, Faculty Associations need to make resistance to, or at the very least caution about, AI a priority in messaging, lobbying, and bargaining.

## From Staring at the Stars to Playing with Brains: An Interview with Christine Lalonde

Laurie Kruk

LK: I am excited to introduce Christine Lalonde, our new colleague in Psychology and Child and Family Studies. Her bio reads, **“Dr. Lalonde was a first-generation student from rural Newfoundland, where she was a town mayor prior to moving to Northern Ontario in 2010. Since 2023, she was the Director of Health Services for Nipissing First nation, where she directed the planning, implementation, and evaluation of 20 health care programs and services. Dr. Lalonde is actively involved in community and academic service ranging from Speaker of Senate [at Laurentian University] to a volunteer firefighter.”**



This brings up many questions, but first: what’s the focus on Indigenous Health about?

CL: Okay: the actual job ad for this position was Indigenous Child and Youth Mental Health, which fits quite well with: 1) Where my research had been going since Grad School; and 2) What I had been doing for the last few years, which is running the Indigenous Health Centre for Nipissing First Nation ... and under that is a Mental Health Department, and there are two Child and Youth Mental Health Counsellors located there (one of whom was my former student ). So that was really interesting to see them come through the psych program and then do practical work in the community.

My research focuses on Epigenetics. Transgenerational trauma is an easier term—where early life experiences, can, and do, affect how your offspring grow up, and who they become. Their phenotype. That trauma can also affect their children, and their children’s children. So, three to four different generations out, the traumatic event can actually change how you respond to a future event: level of anxiety, depression, coping mechanisms.

LK: Now, I’m going to backtrack to say, your background is far from typical for an academic, Christine.... your bio includes “volunteer firefighter” and “town mayor.” Please explain!

CL: I’ll add “private investigator” there as well [laughter]. When I was very young, I used to watch “Star Trek” with my grandparents and I was fascinated by astrophysics. And that’s all I wanted to be! A scientist. And I’m part of the cohort that had the “Scully effect” [the heroine from the “X Files” TV show]. So, I think all the little girls who watched it had a greater than 60% chance of going into STEM fields as a result.

I started at St. Mary’s University in the astrophysics program. Life got in the way ... and before I re-entered academics, I was in municipal politics, as a Councillor and then our town mayor, when we came up to another provincial election. And I became mayor of Rose Blanche NFLD. The town had the highest voter turnout in decades.

LK: I’ve never heard of it.

CL: It’s small, but it has a big lighthouse.... I was mayor for some time (that was a learning curve) and then I moved to North Bay. And immediately began my second undergrad, a BBA (online) through Memorial

University, and then I jumped into the psych program here, the Neuroscience certificate ... and decided, well, if I'm not going to stare at the stars, I'm going to play with brains! [laughter].

And I did that while I had two small children, so I did a “bridging” Masters through Laurentian—my supervisor here was Dr. Andrew Weeks and Dr. Michel Lariviere which was great, so I didn't have to travel as much while I was pregnant. So, I completed a Masters in Biology, with a heavy focus on Neuroscience and that's where I started working on prenatal work: hormones, the effects of introducing hormones to animals to see if they would adopt babies faster. So that's where I started, with early life experiences.

I applied for my Ph.D. at Laurentian, again with two supervisors (I guess I'm a handful): Dr. Douglas Boreham and Dr. T.C. Tai. Dr. Tai is a stress researcher and Dr. Boreham is a radiation biologist. Both at NOSM, affiliated with Laurentian.

We did talk about trauma, trans-generational trauma, and radiation as a stressor. Then I got a Postdoctoral Fellowship to work in SNOLAB where you can work without radiation. Radiation is something we've evolved with, so in order to understand the mechanisms, what happens when we take it away? There was a bio-chemistry lab down there where we worked. But that was during COVID, so there were a lot of barriers there.

LK: Barriers within barriers!

CL: Yes. So, then I became the Graduate Studies Co-ordinator here at NU, for a bit ... and then the Graduate Studies Co-ordinator at NOSM University ... and then the Director of Health Services for Nipissing First Nation. A very administrative role but still linked to health and academic research. So, they permitted me to do research and continue teaching at the same time as running four departments!

Then I did a NASA Fellowship—

LK: NASA of the Space Association?

CL: Yes, because of the radiation angle. So, I jumped from a SNOLAB Post Doc to NASA. And I did the “PI” license” while doing my Ph.D. (got bored at some point).

LK: That's the “X Files” connection....

LK: Does it feel different, having your feet on the Tenure Track path, at last?

CL: Yes, once again, good and bad. Different, because now you have the burden, and responsibility, of writing grant applications. And tracking this work for Tenure and Promotion Plus service. I've always been heavy into Service, academic and community. I'm on NUREB, and the Bio Safety Committee.... And I'm the Emergency Warden for this floor! So, I'll kick you out, in a fire. [laughter]

But now the courses can be mine, because Right of First Refusal never really happened as it should. It was also difficult for students, who would ask, every year, if they could be my thesis students, and I had to say “No, because I'm part-time.” Definitely there are benefits—but also, this is now a real job, and I must dedicate myself to it in a real way.

LK: Now, I want to end by asking you: what do you enjoy most about working at Nipissing?

CL: I like the smaller community, having colleagues that recognize you in the hallway, because if you are having trouble with a student, or a particular evaluation, you can just knock on someone's door and ask for their

advice. I like the smaller classes, around 20 to 30 students is good for engagement. Too many students, you don't get to know their names, which helps to mentor them, ... or to catch the cheating!

LK: Ever since I've been here—thirty years plus!—that's been our selling point. Small has its benefits. So, in a *good* way, we're never going to be U of T.

CL: Exactly, at U of T, you'd just be—washed out.

LK: It was a pleasure getting to know you today, colleague.

## Sabbatical Corner:

### A new NUFA NEWS feature offering highlights with photos from recent faculty sabbaticals

In this new section we want to showcase two NUFA faculty members each issue, who have recently returned from sabbatical: one from the Faculty of Arts and Science and another from the Faculty of Education and Professional Studies, and so it seemed fitting that we as editors would go first ☺.

#### Susan Srigley's (July 1, 2024- June 30, 2025) Sabbatical

This was my third full-year sabbatical at Nipissing University where I devoted much of my time to my developing research and teaching interests in death studies and death awareness pedagogy. The sabbatical began in late June/early July with an online course facilitated by Dr. James Rowe on “Radical Mindfulness: Why Transforming Fear of Death is Politically Vital.”

In September I did a road trip back to Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, Georgia where I gave a presentation on my research for a new book project on Flannery O'Connor. My paper at the conference, celebrating the centennial of O'Connor's birth, was from the first chapter of my book focusing on “Death and the Imagination in Flannery O'Connor's Art.”

In October I completed the Children's Grief and Bereavement Certificate Program with Sick Kids, facilitated by Andrea Warnick, on “Children at the Bedside: Preparing Children for the Death of Someone Close.” I teach this subject in a few of my courses, but this training was for further research and the development of a new course focused on grief and kids.

After being asked to give a webinar on death education by the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals, I was also invited to attend their annual meeting in October. The conference featured a series of talks and roundtable discussions and there was a tradeshow featuring caskets, memorial jewelry and QR codes for gravestones. My webinar in February of 2025 for the OACFP was titled: “From Outsourcing to Resourcing: Meeting the Needs of a Death Positive Generation,” which focused on the changing needs of a death savvy generation looking for more equitable and informed hands on deathcare, including non-traditional funerals and environmentally friendly disposition options.





In November I travelled to Mexico City for a week-long celebration of *Dia de los Muertos* (day of the dead). Mexican traditions and death aware cultural practices feature in both my teaching and research, and I've taken the opportunity during the past two sabbaticals to make the trip to Mexico for the holiday. I have also explored the possibility of a future experiential travel course to Mexico for students.

On my return I did a guest lecture in Sal Renshaw's PETS class in late November on "Pet Death and Dog Guides in Mexico's *Dia de los Muertos*."



In June of 2025 I co-hosted my 4<sup>th</sup> International Flannery O'Connor Conference in London, UK at the Fordham University Campus in Clerkenwell. The conference was focused on "Flannery Abroad" and featured papers dedicated to her influence in the UK and Europe. I presented a paper at the conference from the second draft chapter of my book project, in a plenary session titled: "the death panel."

The conference featured a contest for scholars to take photos with O'Connor's books in London. John Hayes of Augusta University and I won the contest with our photo in a local pub dressed as two characters from the novel *Wise Blood*.



Last ☠️ - but certainly not least, as part of my *memento mori* death awareness practice and teaching, I had my casket commissioned and helped choose the wood and make it from beautifully hewn reclaimed northern white pine. The casket is now serving as a blanket box in my house, till I need it for a natural burial one day. I am currently writing an article about the experience.



## Pat's Sabbatical Adventures (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)



This 5-photo collage represents a few key locations in my sabbatical journey – from big city lights to amazing natural sights.

Photo 1: Taken from the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. I enjoyed a few days here on two occasions: first as a facilitator for the annual 3M National Teaching Fellows Summit (Nov. 2024), and again as a presenter and host for the *Take Me Outside* National Outdoor Learning Conference (May 2025).



Photos 2 & 3 are from the Westfjords of Iceland. I took 3 trips here during my sabbatical. First as a Visiting Scholar at the University Centre, then as a Grímsson Fellow, and finally as part of a new research project – titled, *Cruise Ship Sagas*.



Photos 4 & 5 are from some “Big City” travels. It started with a research meeting outside of Oslo (Photo 4) and then continued with a 51-hour train trip through Stockholm, Copenhagen (Photo 5), Hamburg, Basel and Milan – ending in Rimini on the Adriatic coast of Italy for a keynote at the European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning conference (April 2025).

For more details, come to my April sabbatical talk, organized through the Office of Graduate Studies, Research and Innovation.