

# THE NUFA NEWS

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Murphy / Murton / Owens / Peters

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## The Time Has Come, the Time is Now

Nathan Kozuskanich, *Associate Professor of History and President of NUFA*

By now you know that Laurentian University filed for court protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA) on February 1. This is an unprecedented response to the financial challenges universities face, particularly smaller and more northern institutions like our own. This is the first time a public institution has been subject to a process meant for private corporations (such as Quest University, which filed for CCAA protection in 2020). Under this legislation, students, faculty, and staff are reduced to the status of creditors, from which the university seeks to protect itself. The goal of the CCAA process is to restructure the entity seeking protection to make it solvent. This means cutting programs and jobs through a closed court process instead of through the Collective Agreement.

There is every reason to be suspicious that the government is allowing this to happen in order to further divest itself from funding public post-secondary education. Ford and Romano could end this whole ordeal. But they won't. Or, at least they won't until there is enough political pressure to do so. That's where we come in.

The core problem with Laurentian (and Nipissing, too) is chronic underfunding from governments both liberal and conservative. Ontario educates about 40 per cent of all post-secondary students in Canada. And yet it has the lowest per student funding in all of the country: \$7,939 per student compared to the national average of \$12,383 per student. Nova Scotia ranks second lowest, but even its government commits \$10,142 per student. We also have the highest student-to-faculty ratio (31:1) in Canada, compared to a national average of 22:1.

It wasn't always this way. In the early 1980s, government grants made up about 83% of universities' operating revenues. By the end of the McGuinty

years in 2013, that number had dropped to about 55%. Now under the Ford government, that number is around 24% across the sector.

Universities larger than our own have looked for other sources of revenue such as semi-privatization, international students, wealthy donors, and endowments. Here at Nipissing, the story is much different: our two major sources of revenue are government grants based on enrolment, and tuition. It is therefore crucial to our survival that we advocate for stable, secure, and predictable funding for Ontario's universities.

The most tangible way to be an advocate right now is to get involved in opposing the CCAA process at Laurentian. Start by going to <https://northernsolidarity.ca/> for a number of tangible ways to get involved. Then, stay tuned to emails from NUFA about upcoming rallies and other advocacy events. I know I say this a lot, but we truly are all in this together and it is only through our collective strength that change can happen.

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## New Faculty Profile

Nancy Stevens, Assistant Professor, Indigenous Studies

Shé:kon/Aaniin/Wachay/Greetings. I am really happy to be here at Nipissing in the Indigenous Studies program. I'm also really happy to be back here, in North Bay. I lived and worked here before, back in 2006, when I took on the task of establishing the Regional Aboriginal Mental Health Service (formerly the Northeast Mental Health Centre). But that's only a part of my journey to this point in time.

I was raised in Guelph. My birth mother's family has part of its roots in the Kanien'ke:háka (Mohawk) of the Six Nations of the Grand River. However, I have spent most of my life in the northern regions of Ontario (Thunder Bay, Parry Sound, North Bay), as well as a couple of years in Old Crow, Yukon - the home of the Vuntut Gwitchin people. The cultural teachings I have gained are primarily Anishinaabe.

I worked for many years as a counsellor and program coordinator in different Indigenous mental health services. The last few years, after returning from the Yukon, were spent in Peterborough, where I had the opportunity to support Indigenous women and their families and while doing the research for my Ph.D. I've been very blessed to have been trusted to walk with people through parts of their healing journeys. My work became the basis for my dissertation, particularly as I and my colleagues would continually encounter cross-cultural challenges in therapeutic modalities, and of course, broader systemic barriers that prevented the people we worked with from accessing support.

Throughout my time as a counsellor, I was also teaching. Starting at the Anishinaabek Education Institute, I taught in programs geared to adult learners already working in their communities. Since then, I have had other opportunities, including Lakehead at Orillia, Laurentian, Fleming College, Trent University and Ontario Tech University (formerly University of Ontario Institute of Technology) to teach in Indigenous-focused courses and programs. As well, Ontario Tech U offered a teaching fellowship, created with the Trent Indigenous Studies Ph.D. program enabling a Ph.D. candidate to gain teaching experience while finishing their dissertation. I was the inaugural Fellow, and it was a great experience, allowing me to finish my thesis.

Needless to say, defending a dissertation just prior to the pandemic locking us all down was a bit nerve wracking. The last few years were challenging as I was generally working multiple contracts, often on top of my full-time job (the outcome of being a single parent of 4 kids). I'm excited to be here – I have tried a few times to get a tenure track position at NU. And while I don't feel fully settled yet, I'm getting there. The students have been awesome and all the faculty and staff that I've met so far have been very welcoming despite the pandemic-imposed challenges! I look forward to getting to

know everyone better and to really begin to take on some of the projects and learning that I hope will really contribute to this community and beyond.

Nia:wen/Miigwetch/Thank you.

## Spotlight on Research

### Mukund Jha, Professor, Biology and Chemistry

Dr. Mukund Jha's research primarily focuses on discovering novel organic molecules critical for the development of pharmaceuticals, agrochemicals and other materials for commercial applications. He routinely uses innovative aspects of synthetic organic chemistry to develop new and practical methodologies to produce compounds with interesting architectures and properties. Over the years his research team has developed several elegant synthetic methods to prepare novel molecules fused with biologically important indole nucleus. His most recent contributions have featured the application of coinage metal (copper, silver and gold) catalyzed reactions in the construction of carbon-carbon or carbon-nitrogen bonds. For instance, working with undergraduate associates in his laboratory Dr. Jha has devised a method for attaining a tunable selectivity for the exclusive formation of a key carbon-nitrogen bond in a series of indoles fused with 5-8 membered rings having interesting electronic distributions (*The Journal of Organic Chemistry*, **2019**, 84, 16095). Likewise, his efforts involving gold-mediated reactions have unearthed an unprecedented indole-sulfide skeletal rearrangement phenomenon coupled with a carbon-carbon bond formation to produce analogs of anticancer carbazole and analgesic morphine molecules (*Organic Letters*, **2017**, 19, 2038). Furthermore, two new molecules recently synthesized in Dr. Jha's laboratory have been found to possess promising anti-proliferative activity against breast cancer cell lines (*Organic & Biomolecular Chemistry*, **2019**, 17, 3914).

Dr. Jha is also involved in examining the biological and commercial importance of mushrooms from forests of Northern Ontario. His research endeavors, in collaboration with local industry partners, have contributed immensely to invigorate public interest around regional medicinal mushrooms like chaga. He has developed protocols for the preparation of chaga extracts especially rich in antioxidants, which are currently sold in the market as a functional food. His work on chaga has been featured in a documentary produced by TV channel *TFO*, on CBC radio's *Up North* and in an article in the magazine *The Walrus*.

Dr. Jha's has published over 35 peer-reviewed articles in leading chemistry journals. He has been successful in attracting external research funding in excess of \$1.25 million as a principal investigator from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada (NSERC), Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), FedNor, Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) and Industry partners. His efforts have been tremendously instrumental in establishing a state-of-the-art infrastructure for research activities pertaining to analysis and characterization of organic molecules at Nipissing University.

Dr. Jha has an excellent record of training students at various levels in his laboratory including a postdoctoral researcher, PhDs, Masters, and over 20 honours thesis students. Most of his honours thesis students have gone on to join graduate programs across Canada. Overall, the application of the knowledge resulting from Dr. Jha's research program is already showing positive ramifications towards addressing several key issues concerning the health of millions of Canadians and worldwide.



## The Board Report

Gillian McCann, Associate Professor, Religions and Cultures

In this missive I am going to focus on the resolution put forward by the Chair of the Board at the March 11 meeting (the text is included below). This resolution was also the subject of an earlier special meeting called as a result of the news about Laurentian filing for protection from creditors.

**Resolution: That the Board of Governors accepts the recommendation of the Executive Committee to direct the University to continue to work towards a balanced operating budget for the 2021-2022 fiscal year, while recognizing that exceptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic may be made with the approval of the Board, and that the University maintains that direction for future years.**

This resolution was drafted as a response to the dire financial situation at Laurentian University. A number of the directors, including myself, were concerned that this resolution was redundant as the board always strives to oversee the budget and ensure there is a surplus. The letter from OPSEU stating their concerns about the implications of potential austerity measures was also top of mind for us.

A number of directors suggested that a sentence be included emphasizing the need to generate more revenue as a way to ensure that we balance the budget. This was rejected as an unfriendly amendment.

We also had a discussion about internationalization as part of this strategy. We also discussed the development of continuing education as another way to generate income. The resolution passed.

I was very pleased to learn that many people have been watching the live stream of the board meetings and I encourage all faculty to take advantage of this. It is very important that we ensure a culture of transparency at Nipissing. One of the lessons to be learned from the situation at Laurentian is that boards cannot be permitted to take decisions in secret and have to always be accountable to their constituents and the larger community they serve. Also, if you have concerns, please contact me at my Nipissing email.

In Solidarity,

Gillian McCann

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## The Grievance – Bargaining Pipeline

Nathan Colborne and Sarah Winters

For a Grievance Officer, few things are more frustrating than hearing the justified complaint of a Member about a clear injustice and then realizing that the language of the Collective Agreement offers no protection or redress. Sometimes this is a result of bargaining battles lost but more often it is because the framers of the CA can't anticipate all situations. Perfectly adequate language in one situation is lamentably obscure or ambiguous in another.

All is not lost, however. Instead of throwing our hands up in frustration (or usually after throwing them up) the Grievance Committee makes a note of the article and the issue to pass on to the Bargaining Committee for the next round. One of the biggest surprises for both of us in working on grievances has been the importance of the Grievance-Bargaining Pipeline; many situations that first arise in grievance files eventually end up being wrestled over in the collective bargaining process.

This is to say, please don't hesitate to bring your grievance concerns to us even if the CA doesn't seem to be on your side. We may be able to help despite this, but even if we can't, your problem may become a longer term project for our Collective Bargaining Committee. And it's better to contact the Grievance Committee first because it meets weekly every academic year, not just in bargaining years. If we don't know, we can't help, and we can't ask the Collective Bargaining Committee to bargain for better language either.

## Union Stories

### Sarah Winters, Associate Professor, English Studies

My grandmother, Sarah (Sally) Hollingsworth born in Liverpool in 1923, was one of nine children from a family so poor that when her sister died in 1951 she was buried in a paupers' grave. Sally worked in a unionized factory, married Norman Winters—a policeman whose vote for the Conservative Party did not stop her canvassing for the Labour Party at every election and holding a position on the committee of the local Labour Party for five years or so—and raised five children. During those years, she was once landed with a donkey to deliver to a destination five kilometers from her house for a party fundraiser. She gave that job to my fourteen-year-old father. Although it was a Saturday morning, he had a half day of school, because he'd passed his eleven plus in 1958 and the school was a fancy grammar school. Not only did the school have Saturday half-days, it sported a school uniform that marked boys out as rising up in the world, one with a vivid purple blazer and cap. My father's consequent experiences running away from being beaten up by the boys in his working-class neighbourhood who had *not* passed their eleven plus led to him being selected to run cross country for Lancashire. But on this particular morning he couldn't run because the donkey, living up to the reputation of its species, would hardly budge. (Since its purpose for the event was to give rides to children one has to wonder just how much money was raised by a donkey that preferred not to.) And since the neighbourhood was not just working-class but Catholic, the banter my father was bombarded with included, among the endless helpful suggestions about carrots and sticks, questions about why there was no pregnant woman riding on the donkey's back, and cheerful observations on how much better Jesus controlled *his* donkey on Palm Sunday. As far as walking in the cause of organized labour goes, I think his morning walk in 1961 much more of a testament to endurance than my three and half weeks on the picket line in 2015.



Sarah (Sally) Winters,  
Liverpool, 1940

Because both he and my mother (daughter of an electrician and a shop assistant, both Labour voting) passed their eleven plus exams, they met at Teachers' College in London in 1967 (where they were taught by Mick Jagger's father, a fact that has nothing to do with unions but is too good to leave out), and as teachers they were of course part of a unionized workforce both in England and in New Zealand where they emigrated in 1975 when I was five. I grew up absorbing the attitude that the unions were the good guys, especially in England where they led the heroic struggle against Margaret Thatcher. In the 1990s my mother retrained as a nurse and became part of a different unionized workforce. Hospital administrators denied that union's request for higher pay for night nursing on the grounds that "nothing happens at night," and told the nurses as a whole that the Government had no money to pay them so they would have to accept a pay cut or go on strike. For the sake of their patients (and my mother was a pediatric nurse), they accepted the pay cut, a few months after which the two administrators they were dealing with both resigned, awarding themselves huge bonuses. My mother was, and still is, furious. From that story, I absorbed the lesson that unscrupulous employers and administrators can use the idealism of the caring professions against them.

So there I was, a middle-class member of a middle-class Faculty Association, romanticizing the working-class nature of the grandmother for whom I was named, and the moral nature of the power struggle between employers and labour, when I found out, a couple of years ago, that Sarah Winters took a job as a meter maid when her children were older and would work for an hour in the morning, then go home to eat lunch, drink cups of tea, and smoke before returning to the job for the one hour before clocking off! (She wasn't caught because the public, funnily enough, tend not to complain about *not* being issued parking tickets.) And although my romanticism about such matters runs too deep to be totally eradicated, this bit of shameful family lore has taught me that union work is not as much a matter of Manichean good against evil as I might once have thought it was, and that good working conditions require honorable behaviour on *both* sides.

The stubbornness of donkeys, however, remains a metaphor that can be relied upon.

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## Your Stories of the Transition to Online Teaching

### 1. Emergency Remote Teaching...Susan Srigley

Faced with the idea of creating online courses that are accessible, interesting and sophisticated, while catering to 15-minute attention spans—the 'nothing longer than a Ted Talk' mantra—and during a pandemic, I panicked. No amount of online teaching resources, books, conferences, and supports could help me do that in short order while trying to pull my courses together. Basically, I didn't have time to learn all of that AND teach my courses.

So, over the summer of 2020 I practiced online teaching with my colleague Sarah Winters. We tried different strategies and platforms and then experimented with recording ourselves, sharing slides and media. But I still felt like it wasn't going to work.

Then, at the start of September, I "walked" into the INTD course on CHAOS via zoom, and I felt an incredible connection to the students in the class, and with my colleagues Sal and Renée (all cameras on and ready to engage). This is what I really feared I'd lose teaching online, and this class restored my faith on how I could make that connection happen. It convinced me to recreate the experience by recording lectures (on Zoom) to a "live" class of any students who want to be there. Not only does this keep me, and my students, to as normal a schedule as possible, it also gives me a sense that I am "in the room" with them as I teach. I upload the recordings to YouTube and provide a link on Blackboard for the students who are doing the course asynchronously.

I don't always have the smoothest transitions from slides to media to discussions, and my dogs bark occasionally, or a cat walks by the screen, but it works and I'm getting better at it.

### 2. Adapting a 20-Year Teaching-Learning Playbook during COVID-19...Barbara Elliott

As a professor who instructs courses virtually, I was not required to adapt course delivery when COVID-19 upended the world. While the pandemic did not drastically impact my teaching, it certainly impacted my students. Receiving feedback from students (who were also frontline workers), I realized that I needed to amend my teaching-learning playbook in order to support my students during the pandemic.

To help students meet academic requirements, I recognized that I had to increase my presence in my online courses. This involved sending reminder emails (almost daily) to ensure that students were kept apprised of course expectations as well as holding extra Collaborate Live sessions (in addition to course related meeting times) as 'check-ins.' This gave students the opportunity to ask questions, with many reporting that they had logged on just to see friendly faces. I also held regular as well as spontaneous virtual office hours for students desiring to meet privately. During these appointments, students talked about course concerns and pandemic issues (e.g., stress, coping strategies). It was through virtual meetings that I got to 'know' my students and appreciate their bravery and versatility. Finally, as an added communication measure, I posted frequent announcements to Blackboard to ensure that students were informed of course related information.

I was also more lenient with course expectations by offering assignment extensions and gently modifying assessments at times. It became clear to me that, along with working full time (and overtime) as well as having to report to work without much notice, many students had to juggle increased family responsibilities because of COVID-19. Ultimately, I believe that the use of the above strategies fostered student success during a very tumultuous time.

### 3. Teaching Online...Sarah Winters

Teaching online in the winter has so far been much more rewarding for me than teaching online in the fall because I have had the brilliantly good fortune of co-teaching both my winter courses. One is a Dialogue Course, ENGL/RLCT2127 The Bible as Cultural Text, and I teach it with Susan Srigley. The other is FYFE1002 Diverse Minds and I teach it with Natalya Brown. While co-teaching is rewarding in the best of times (the best of times now defined as the Golden Age of classroom instruction), it is sanity-saving now. Even if all students turn off their cameras during a synchronous lecture, even if all students maintain what to them might be experienced as a shy silence but to me comes across as a sullen and bored one, I have someone to talk to, someone to listen to, someone who nods and laughs, someone who keeps teaching if my internet fails and boots me off the class, someone to travel this bumpy road with. If I'm ever again stuck teaching online by myself, I'll try to invite friends and colleagues into my classes, and drop in on theirs (but only if I'm invited, of course), for the solace of solidarity. Thank you Susan and Natalya!

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## Thank You NUFA

*Timothy Sibbald, Assistant Professor, Education*

Hidden in the collective agreement is a detail that highlights foresight and provision of opportunity by NUFA and the years of Collective Bargaining Committees. The provision for tuition exemption not only covers dependents and spouses, but also ourselves as faculty members in NUFA. While I am not an expert on the details, I do appreciate an opportunity when I see one and this particular detail is win-win in my opinion for allowing faculty personal growth while strengthening the internal capacity and connections in the institution. In my case, the math department was accommodating when I began taking graduate courses. This led to a thesis and finally a master's degree that was recently conferred.

While an argument can be made that I already possessed a terminal degree (i.e. a doctorate in education), all teachers have an area of expertise and mine is mathematics. Specifically, grade four to twelve mathematics. There is no doubt in my mind that the pursuit of graduate studies in mathematics enriched that expertise and has led to insights about new areas for research and opportunities that are relevant to my specific area of scholarship. On the personal side, it has facilitated achieving a goal within my life-long learning.

Thank you NUFA for having the foresight to make this opportunity available.

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## A Tribute to Muriel Sawyer

*Erin Dokis, Service Course Instructor, Gender Equality and Social Justice*

Muriel Sawyer has been called by our ancestors to the spirit world. I cannot express how hard it is to type those words. I trust our ancestors and their intentions but it is sometimes difficult to reconcile that with feelings of great loss. Muriel is finished with her earthly work and began her journey on February 6, 2021.

Many have written beautiful tributes and articles about her accomplishments. The list is a long one and includes contributing decades to teaching, from kindergarten to university. She created and

taught several courses at Nipissing University and was a long-standing CASBU member. She performed countless hours of work on education councils and education policy, and has acted as deputy chief of Nipissing First Nation.

Whether you have met her once, or have known her for years, you know that Muriel was a force!

She used her time here very meaningfully. She was an innovator who instilled a sense of pride and dignity in hundreds of Indigenous young people and dedicated her life to language, education, and community.

Muriel and I worked together on many different projects in different settings over the years. She had an incredible wealth of knowledge and we connected through a shared passion for education for Indigenous learners. She was an excellent teacher and was so much fun. She was so skilled at creating a sense of community. Sometimes she would gather learners in the community centre kitchen to prepare meals and speak the language. She would hold some classes around the dinner table at her home. I was a student in one of Muriel's Nishnaabemwin classes, where she asked students to write a short scene in the language to present to the class. We knew that Muriel loved a particular soap opera, so for our assignment, my partners and I wrote and performed a very silly soap opera style piece. We knew that the best reward was making Muriel laugh. If you knew her, you know that laugh was uninhibited and very infectious.

As much as she loved to share a good laugh, Muriel loved to sing and she used this in her teaching. She could get even the most reluctant among us to sing aloud in public, often using old-timey country songs translated into Nishnaabemwin. In 1997 she took a group of Nishnaabeg students to sing the national anthem at a Blue Jays game. Two of those children followed the path she laid down and are now teachers of Nishnaabemwin. This is just one example of how her work has meant that the language will carry on for future generations.

Muriel was many things to me: teacher, elder, mentor, auntie, and friend. I will miss her dearly.

She fiercely supported me and many others. When folks around her experienced challenges and setbacks she would say: "If it is good, and it is right, and it is just: DO IT. And don't give a @%\$# what anyone else thinks. If it is good work, it needs to be done." I hope Muriel knows that I am doing my small part of the work she started. We all have work to do. Every one of us has a gift and something to offer to make things better. Muriel had so many! She left teachings with me and others all along the way and those are what I am carrying forward.

So, as my wise friend reminds me, I have not lost Muriel. I have gained a spiritual helper. Muriel was pure positive energy and that energy is not gone; it is in every one of us who were lucky enough to have known her while she was here.

Chi-Miigwech Muriel.

Baamaapii.

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# NUFA

Nipissing University Faculty Association