

# THE NUFA NEWS

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Murphy / Owens / Peters

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## The President's Report

*Sarah Winters, Associate Professor of English, and President of NUFA*

About a year and a half ago, I was going on a lot of long runs with Gyllie Phillips, a former NUFA President and, in 2019-20, NUFA's Vice-President. Partly because we needed to come up with conversation to sustain us on a 15km run, we talked about her and Nate's efforts in succession planning for the next NUFA Executive. I said, in all innocence, "If you are really stuck, I'll help out—in any position but President." Gyllie pointed out that other people had said the exact same thing to her, to which I replied, "Well, you *might* find someone who'd be willing to be President but only in a non-bargaining year. No one wants to be President in a bargaining year."

As the bargaining year of 2022 approaches, I think back to that conversation often, and even further back to my first experience of bargaining, as a bewildered, harried new hire in 2006, aghast that I was being asked to attend yet another meeting, this time a union one, as I tried to write lectures for new courses, wondering when I would ever make the time for research in order to publish what I needed to for tenure. I also think back to my relieved surprise upon hearing at one of those meetings that my 3/3 load in 2006 was becoming a 3/2 load in 2007. All these years later, I would like to say thank you to the Collective Bargaining Committee and the NUFA Executive of 2006-2007—and, crucially, thank you to everyone in the membership who supported them in any way! And thank you, too, to those faculty in the 1990s who formed NUFA in the first place. I enjoyed and learned a lot from interviewing Deborah Flynn and Lorraine Frost about those days, and I hope anyone reading this reads that interview too, and is as much inspired by it as I am.

My point in these reminiscences is that all of us have roles to play in NUFA's work, even if we've never thought of ourselves as having anything to offer. This is especially true in bargaining years when supporting the Collective Bargaining Committee is the best gift you can make in return for everything the union has ever brought you. So as the months hurtle towards next summer, I encourage you to encourage each other. We are only as strong as the strength we lend to each other in our moments of doubt and fear.

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## **New Faculty Profile**

### **Alisher Mansurov, Assistant Professor, School of Business**

Alisher Mansurov is an Assistant Professor who teaches accounting and finance courses at the School of Business. He obtained his PhD from the Sprott School of Business, Carleton University in 2019. Prior to joining Nipissing University, Alisher worked in the financial industry, in addition to teaching in both undergraduate and graduate programs at universities in Canada, the United States, and overseas. He successfully led and implemented numerous large-scale research projects that encompass the fields of data science, investment management, accounting, finance, and marketing at his prior industry positions.

Alisher's research applies an interdisciplinary approach, which involves accounting, finance, and natural language processing (NLP), to understanding both preparers and users of financial information. His PhD dissertation examined voluntary corporate disclosures and investment discussion board messages to study impression management from both firm and investor perspectives. The firm perspective analyzes narrative sections of earnings press releases (EPRs) of TSX Venture Exchange firms to derive measures of tone management, causal reasoning, readability, and emphasis. These discourse features are then associated with financial statements data (e.g., operating income, earnings, total assets, etc.) to determine the level of firms' engagement in impression management. The investor perspective focuses on investor reaction (obtained from online investment discussion boards) to positive framing of financial performance by firms. Overall, this dissertation makes several contributions including the focus on low visibility firms, which have been often ignored in prior literature, and the investigation of investors' reaction (to impression management) using online investment discussions.

Corporate disclosures, impression management, and user perceptions are also the central themes of two other studies Alisher is currently working on. One focuses on COVID-19 disclosures as presented in financial statements and MD&As to examine how Canadian TSX60 public companies discuss the pandemic in their disclosures. More specifically, it explores whether firm characteristics (size, industry, financial performance, auditor, etc.) can explain COVID-19 disclosures and how these disclosures impact financial performance. This research helps enhance understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on Canadian companies and their disclosures, while making certain methodological contributions such as applications of NLP methods. The second paper examines how post-secondary students (i.e., potential employees of public accounting firms) perceive select photographs from the recruitment websites of public accounting firms. In this study Alisher and his research colleagues analyze students' survey responses using advanced textual analysis and NLP to identify topics, evaluate sentiment, and assess other semantic aspects. This investigation reveals what students view as the most prominent features of these recruitment photographs, whether they discern connotative as well as denotative meanings in the photographs, and how they perceive diversity and inclusion based on the photographs. The study compares students' perceptions of these photographs to analyses undertaken previously by academic researchers. Finally, it examines the impact of students' immigration position, minority status, gender, and other characteristics on our results.

Alisher is also actively involved in service activities at the School of Business. Currently, he is serving on the TSE and Research committees, in addition to helping establish an investment club.

**Katrina Srigley, Professor, History**

It is a sunny late-October Monday as I sit down to write this research profile for the *NUFA News*. As I stare at the blank page, I admit to feeling a mixture of gratitude and not-altogether-positive obligation. I barely have time for research these days. How am I going to manage a reasonable summary of that work? I contemplate recycling past summaries. I wonder how I can make this as efficient as possible. I consider withdrawing. I hum and haw. I stop to consider how to spell ‘haw’. I write a few sentences and then shut the page to take up other pressing responsibilities. I mark, prep for teaching, work on draft academic plans, meet students, communicate with students, edit and return graduate student work, present to NU students, train for recruiting new students, organize a student event, respond to a request to review a journal article, prepare for meetings, and support colleagues. I ask for an extension. Suddenly, it seems, it is Monday morning once again and a new month. I open my still incomplete research profile and sigh. Ask my family, apparently, I sigh a lot.

This opening is not meant to generate sympathy. We are all busy. It is rather to emphasize that designing, maintaining, and realizing a research program at Nipissing University is hard. Over my sixteen years here, I have always found it difficult during the teaching term, particularly when I carry significant administrative and service responsibilities as so many of us do, but I am finding it exceptionally difficult in these times. Demands have increased and there are fewer of us well enough to jump in and share the load. I start this profile then with empathy for and allegiance with everyone who feels anxiety about getting things done these days. Successful research programs are a cornerstone of tenure and promotion and necessary to secure stable employment. I have the privilege of exceptional job security. I have course releases. My home life is stable. Presently, my body and mind are cooperating. And, as such, I find the space and energy to proceed with what is realistically a small but important task, sharing news of my research program with my colleagues.

At the moment, I am working on a variety of Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)-funded projects, all of them have been developed in partnership with Nishnaabeg and Great Lakes Indigenous Communities, as well as colleagues at this university and others.<sup>1</sup> My principal research project developed in partnership with Glenna Beaucage (Culture and Heritage Manager, Nipissing First Nation) documents, examines, and shares the history of Nbisiing Nishnaabeg territory in ways that centre Nishnaabeg ways of knowing, recording, and sharing the past. Over twelve years, our research has taken us to community archives, by which I mean the homes, offices, and personal spaces of Nbisiing Nishnaabeg, as well as national and international archives. It has included storytelling and story listening in various forms. It will (somebody willing it must!) result in a co-authored book titled *Gaa Bi Kidwaad Maa Nbisiing/The Stories of Nbisiing Nishnaabeg*, a social history that explores the following themes: considering stories through time, family and community, governance, education, ceremony and celebration, and land and waterways.

While we are focused on completing *Gaa Bi Kidwaad Maa* the single most important outcome of this research program is – meaningful reciprocal relationships. These relationships have developed through a process of indigenization and decolonization that I have come to call “unlearning to learn”. As former graduate student Autumn Varley (MA 2016) and I note, building and sustaining relationships is an essential outcome of research done in a good way. Over twelve years, I have learned from generous Elders, knowledge holders, friends and colleagues how to “build relationships to story,

<sup>1</sup> I work closely on research projects with university colleagues and community partners, through the Lake Nipissing Beading Project ([lakenipissingbeadingproject.com](http://lakenipissingbeadingproject.com)), a Heritage Canada-funded project on Nbisiing Nishnaabeg guides, and the Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts & Cultures ([grasac.org](http://grasac.org)). I acknowledge with gratitude Drs. Heidi Bohaker, Kirsten Greer, Katie Hemsworth, Cara Krmpotich, Cindy Peltier, Carolyn Podruchny, and many other generous colleagues involved with these projects.

people, and territory”.<sup>2</sup> These relationships have “provided me with the space to unlearn things I had learned at school, learn about the ways of documenting, sharing, and preserving historical knowledge intrinsic to this territory and its people, and reconnect with my skills and training in ways that allowed me to bring them into relationship in a good way.”<sup>3</sup> This is the foundation for my research and pedagogy. Many colleagues have asked me for advice on how to start research or to teach in a good way. My answer is always the same: you must develop, foster, and sustain relationships through your own unlearning and learning journeys.

While relationships result in space to conduct research, they also provide the foundation for meaningful work with colleagues. They foster a variety of initiatives that support knowledge mobilization. From the outset of our work together, Glenna and I have remained committed to sharing what we have learned in ways that are responsive to community needs and interests. For instance, stories are shared with purpose, and they should not languish on your computer until your next publication. As I have been taught, to complete meaningful historical research in the Nishnaabeg way is to complete research that will contribute to the wellbeing of the next seven generations.<sup>4</sup> The Nipissing Warriors documentary produced first in English and then in Nishnaabemwin provides one example. This project continues, as we are now working with Elders and language stewards June Commanda and Evelyn McLeod, and Nishnaabemwin teacher and language steward Tory Fisher to write teaching guides for the documentary in Nishnaabemwin. This responds to direction given to us by Dr. Muriel Sawyer and the goals outlined in the NFN Strategic Plan<sup>5</sup>. It is this ethic that has involved Glenna and me in other projects. I will highlight one here. The Lake Nipissing Beading Project, which is led by Dr. Kirsten Greer, is at its heart about relationships to the lake and its watershed, one another during a global pandemic, knowledge about the history of this place, the technique of beading, and the ceremonial and spiritual aspects of Nishnaabeg creative practice. To be part of this project, beading a square with whatever ability you have, is to engage in relationship. It is to honour this lake and its people. It is to animate the watershed with Nishnaabeg presence (past and present) and with meaningful connections that will take us all forward in a good way.

<sup>2</sup> This research program exists because of the expertise, patience and generosity of Glenna Beaucage, John Sawyer, Muriel Sawyer, Lorraine Whiteduck Liberty, Peter Beaucage, Patty Chabbert, June Commanda, Jane Commanda, Marianna Couchie, Erin Dokis, Terry Dokis, Carol Guppy, John Long, Evelyn McLeod, Cindy Peltier, Joan McLeod Shabogesic, Laurie Robinson, Randy Sawyer, Lorraine Sutherland, Autumn Varley, and many other generous elders, knowledge holders, language stewards, and community members who have supported my unlearning and learning journey over the last sixteen years.

<sup>3</sup> Katrina Srigley and Autumn Varley, “Learning to Unlearn: Building Relationships on Anishinaabeg Territory,” in *Indigenous Research: Theories, Practices, and Relationships*, Eds. Deborah McGregor, Rochelle Johnston, and Jean-Paul Restoule (Toronto: CSP, 2018), 46-64.

<sup>4</sup> I say gchi-miigwech to Elder Peter Beaucage, Elder John Sawyer, and Deborah and Marion McGregor, ‘Ethics and Relationships’, Manitoulin Island Summer Historical Institute (MISHI), 20 August 2020. I wrote about this process in more detail in: Katrina Srigley, “The Ethics of Zaagidwin: Relational Storytelling and Story Listening on Nishnaabeg Territory,” *Journal of the Australia Oral History Association*, No. 42 (December 2020): 5-27.

<sup>5</sup> You will find the documentaries here: [nipissingu.ca/warriors](http://nipissingu.ca/warriors) and the NFN Strategic Plan here: <https://nfn.ca/strategic-plan-2/>

## INTD in the NUFA NEWS: Lightning Strike Edition

**Featuring contributions from Sal Renshaw, Jeff Dech, David Drenth, Wendy Peters, Tony Renshaw (Sal’s brother), Ali Hatef, Sarah Winters, Nathan Colborne, electricity, storm clouds and a no longer very furry fir tree (RIP)**

Sal Renshaw’s house got hit by lightning in July this year... Well, technically, a fir tree (there was nothing furry about this tree by the way) twenty feet from the house got hit by lightning. It exploded, sending tree shrapnel over a 200-foot radius including through her home office windows and the front

walls of the house. It took out the power in the street, her car, even the glass doors at the back of the house were shattered from the reverberation and we have questions... beyond WTF... which of course was the first one.

As Nipissing's unique INTD classes cross over the ten-year mark, we knew where to turn for some answers. Namely, you, our amazing colleagues. In the INTD courses, Sal Renshaw and Renée Valiquette take a theme, say "lightning" for example, and explore this theme through the disciplines. What might geographers tell us about lightning? What might a botanist know about lightning? How is lightning figured as a metaphor in notions of inspiration? So, in this, the first edition of INTD in the NUFA News, we are going to ask and answer some burning (haha) questions about lightning by drawing on your expertise, starting with why on earth did the tree basically *explode* and not just fall the F over?

Jeff Dech, our resident tree expert who took a few photos of the tree, answers our first question:

*When lightning strikes a tree, the electrical charges will follow the path of least resistance. In trees, this is the path where the most moisture exists. So, if the bark is moist because of recent rainfall the charge will run down the outside of the tree causing little or no damage. If the moisture is contained in the conducting tissues immediately below the bark, the electrical charge carried in the lightning strike causes the water in the wood to vaporize, and the expansion of water moving from the liquid to gas phase blows the bark off the tree in the immediate area. At the centre of the stem, trees often have non-functional conducting tissues that are plugged with resin and stained a darker colour than the surrounding wood. This is called the heartwood, and it can store large amounts of moisture. If trees have moisture concentrated at their core, as do many old trees with substantial heartwood, then the electrical charge flows right down the centre of the stem, and the force of the vaporization of water due to the heat produced will cause the tree to explode. Trees grow from the ground up, [no shit sherlock, tho we love an expert who takes nothing for granted] and are oldest at the base, so it is the bottom part of the trunk that most likely has the highest moisture levels in the heartwood. This is likely why the bottom half of the tree was so forcefully damaged.*



The sadly departed fir tree.

Our non-scientific take on this is the sap basically boiled and turned that 50-foot fir tree into a tree bomb! Fascinating.



Our favorite pic of tree bomb bits.

According to Sal, one of the most challenging things about this experience was knowing where on earth was the safest place to be. With the power out, trees down, torrential rain and the possibility that the cedar house might actually be on fire, where should one go? Should one run screaming to the hills or the basement? For this question we turn to David Drenth, Facilities Director, Engineer and all things Safety expert at Nipissing and he was pretty clear that running to the hills was probably not the best choice.

Here's what he said:

*As for the safest place to be, although both inside and outside are dangerous I would elect to stay inside if there are uncertain power conditions taking place outside. Getting hit or accidentally coming into contact with a severed high voltage cable is certain death. At least with the threat of fire I could find my fire extinguisher and take my chances. An argument might be made to get into your vehicle normally as it is grounded with the tires on the ground but... not much luck in your case if that car was wrecked.*

In case you were wondering, and as per the photo, the car was indeed smashed in the storm. So now we know – hit the basement folks, but take the fire extinguisher. As it happened, there was a fire, but it was very localized. Whew.

Jeff Dech is taking another of our big questions and this one comes from Wendy Peters, who went google rabbit holing after hearing the tale. Like any good critical thinking academic these days googling left Wendy with more questions than answers, but here's our favourite. Someone in googleland said lightning is hotter than the sun. That sounds crazy, but is it? Jeff says, no, it's not hotter, but maybe also a little bit yes?

*Technically speaking, lightning is not hotter than the sun. It is not even as hot as your morning coffee! That is because lightning is a movement of electrical charges, and as such does not have a temperature. However, those charges contain tremendous energy, and it is the movement of these charges through an object that causes the object to heat up. So practically speaking, lightning does cause objects to heat up, and the poorer the conductor, the more the object heats up. Typically, lightning travels through air, a poor conductor, and can heat up the air it travels through by up to 27,760 C, which is much hotter than the surface of the sun which is 6000 C. But don't get too excited by that, even though the sun's surface is hot, the atmosphere just above the surface of the sun is much hotter than the surface or than any lightning strike, reaching millions of degrees above zero!*

Millions of degrees? How is that even possible? So many burning questions from this answer but we're turning now to one of our favourite places to go in a crisis – platitudes. Understandably, Sal is worried, can this happen again? Don't we say lightning never strikes in the same place twice? Turns out, maybe she should be worried. Jeff says, sadly, it can, and it does:

*There is no physical reason why lightning cannot strike the same place twice, although, statistically speaking it is highly unlikely for that to happen, and even less likely that anyone would be around to witness it twice. [Because they're dead? we find ourselves wondering? :o] Nevertheless, some objects are more likely to be struck than others, especially things that are tall and pointed. The Empire State building is struck an average of 23 times per year!*

Some relief here, but also this news caused Sal to temporarily halt construction of the scale model of the Q1, the tallest building in Australia, that she's been building in her backyard. ; ) What a shame, but safety first.



Q1 hit by 16 lightning strikes at once!

Against her own best interests, because she truly hates flying, this last fun lightning fact created its own lightning bolt moment which made Sal reach out to her brother, a 30-year self-described weather warrior (pilot) for Qantas Airlines to ask: "OMG does lightning hit planes?" You don't want to know the answer to this one! Yes, indeed it does, all the time as it turns out. In fact, on average, a commercial plane is hit by lightning at least once a year, sometimes more. Thankfully it rarely brings them down. Of course, all the flightaphobes can hear is the word '*rarely*,' rather than *NEVER* which would be *far more* comforting.



And speaking of being brought down, wedged between two books in her bookcase now is a six-inch sliver of wood from the tree! Had Sal been sitting in her office chair at home, it would have blown right through her head. Let this be a lesson to us all. What is the lesson? Never work at your desk? Never work during a thunderstorm? Never work again? Sometimes interdisciplinary work raises more questions than it answers, but still we definitely know more now than when we started!

We wanted to know if this could have killed her; so for this one we turned to Ali Hatef, our resident physicist who gave us a Halloween appropriate answer. Yes, indeed that steak knife sliver of wood could have killed Sal but only if she is a vampire – and this too leaves us with more questions than answers. We have reached out to Sal's people for comment on the question of whether or not she is a vampire, but so far have received no comment.

Now it simply wouldn't be an INTD class without a contribution from English folks – INTD “frequent flyers” as Renée and Sal like to call them – and Lord knows, at this point we could do with some poetic resonances here in this INTD class – the NDE's (near death experiences) are piling up a little high. But alas, we turned to Sarah Winters and she turned to *Jane Eyre* and the wrath of God. Way to lighten the mood, Sarah:

*Hearing that Sal's tree was struck and destroyed by lightning is likely to transport any English professor into the world of Jane Eyre (1847) and the moment in which, with all the hubris he can muster, Rochester, the Byronic hero, declares to Jane, the heroine, that he knows his Maker sanctions what he does and as for the opinions of men – he cares not a whit. Jane wakes up the next morning to find that the tree under which he had made this boast "had been struck by lightning in the night, and half of it split away." Applying this passage to Sal's experience works to turn her into a wildly defiant rebel punished by God and visited by an omen of disaster and while she might enjoy the first part of this characterization, she may not be so appreciative of the second part. Luckily for Sal, lightning can be a metaphor for other human experiences, depending on the text, but the Jane Eyre lightning-struck tree does cast a famous shadow.*

Whoa... singled out to be punished by God? This is taking on more momentous reverberations than we thought, and this is also a great segue to the Religions and Cultures folks. Who better to answer the question of ‘Why Sal?’ Nathan Colborne took a fine swing at this one.

*The anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard notes the role the idea of witchcraft played among the Azande when a granary collapsed and killed a member of the community. Of course, the Azande knew that termites could chew out the supports of granaries, causing them to collapse at unpredictable times. But this doesn't answer the question of why the granary collapsed at this exact time, killing this exact person. Witchcraft solved this problem for the Azande. This is an example of the human mind's tendency towards teleological thinking or intuiting the purpose or intention behind events. This tendency serves us very well when our survival depends on determining what those within our social group want or are trying to do. Like any good evolutionary trick, however, it doesn't reliably turn itself off when it isn't needed. We all know that lightning can strike anywhere. But that doesn't answer the question of why it struck at Sal's house and not at mine or yours or nobody's. It's hard not to wonder, even half-jokingly, about the point being made. Even if I'm not sure who's making it. And that cognitive tendency is at least one of the roots of religion. It's something you may want to ask a scholar of religion like Sal about sometime. But I wouldn't get too close... especially if it's cloudy.*

This brings us to the end of the first INTD in the NUFA News edition. While we've covered a ton of ground, it's definitely true that we still have questions, but here's the one we will leave you with. If you enjoyed this inaugural “INTD in the NUFA News” column, what would you like to see us explore in the next one? Please pitch us an idea for the next edition. Ideally, we'd like to learn more about you, the NUFA members, in the process.

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## The Beginnings of NUFA

**Sarah Winters (English Studies and current President of NUFA) interviews Deborah Flynn (Psychology and NUFA's first President) and Lorraine Frost (Education and NUFA's first Vice-President).**

The current President of NUFA, Sarah Winters (English Studies), interviewed the first President and Vice President of NUFA, Deborah Flynn (Psychology) and Lorraine Frost (Education), over Zoom on October 25, 2021.

Sarah: What year were you both first hired at Nipissing?

Deb: We were hired in the same year, 1990.

Lorraine: I was on an LTA from 88 to 89 then went somewhere else, then returned for a tenure-track. We didn't really know each other that well until we started work on this project of unionization, which we did because we were both seeing that faculty were not being treated fairly always.

Deb: There were a few issues that made us decide we needed a union. One was that our teaching load then was 3/3 and many of us were teaching 4/4 or even 5/5 to keep a program growing. Since there was no formalized way of approaching that, if you were a young, new faculty member and asked to teach overload, you basically had to.

Lorraine: You didn't feel like you could refuse. Sometimes in discussions with your Dean, the threat of not getting tenure was held over your head. I remember a colleague who didn't want to teach



Deborah Flynn in the late '90s when president of OCUFA



Lorraine Frost and her children, circa 1990

overload because she was trying to get her research portfolio together for tenure and was told, in response to refusing, "If you were applying for tenure right now, I wouldn't support you."

Deb: And it wasn't that there was a difference in expectations. We were still expected to publish and do service. You should also understand that at the time Lorraine and I were two of the very few female faculty and because gender representation was wanted I was sitting on six or seven different committees and chairing two or three of them.

Lorraine: We had one colleague who was teaching a 6/7, and he was a part-time instructor!

Deb: That really led us to want to put a limit on the number of individual courses that can be taught by part-time instructors without giving them a limited-term appointment, which we introduced in the first Collective Agreement. Up until that, this poor individual had been at Nipissing for years and years, with all that insecurity and then in order to make a decent salary, he was teaching 12 or 13 [3-credit] courses. So we knew that had to stop. Out of the whole first Collective Agreement, that was what I felt best about, putting a stop to that situation, because we'd seen him abused for so long. We even called that article after him.

Lorraine: In Education at the time you were expected to drive all over the province to supervise student teachers. When I was hired, I had an eight-month-old and I was basically told "We don't care. We'll send you to Cornwall or Timmins or wherever. Don't expect any special considerations because you have a family." But other people would always get practice teaching in North Bay. It wasn't a fair distribution of the responsibilities.

Deb: Another big issue for us was that many of the big decisions around faculty were totally at the discretion of the Dean. I might go in and he might not like me and say "no" and someone else might go in right after me and he'd say "sure!" and that was happening over and over again, with research money, with sabbaticals—if you were a friend, you got a sabbatical; if you weren't, you didn't. It really was that biased and that personal at that point.

Lorraine: Another big issue was appointment letters. The university would advertise a tenure-track position and then the person would get an appointment letter that said you have a limited-term appointment in a tenure-track position. These people thought they had a probationary appointment and were then told they had a limited-term one. The position would be advertised again after two years and the people had to compete again for it. So we had good people who would leave for jobs elsewhere. That's what I felt best about fixing with the first Collective Agreement, because it was so dishonest.

And the only forum we had to talk about these issues was in Senate. I raised this appointment issue and was told by a former administrator that he did not want to hear my "half-baked ideas." I was ruled out of order but two thirds of the Senate gave me the support to continue.

Deb: I was stopped one day at the mailboxes by a senior faculty member who said "Oh we haven't seen you having coffee downstairs and if you don't start having coffee with the right people, then you won't get tenure." It was so biased! We had a full Senate then and everyone voted on your tenure. It was a popularity contest! If they didn't like you, then they voted against you. Many people didn't even read your CV.

Lorraine: I remember one time there was a very strong application for tenure and three people voted against it. So, again in the mailroom, I said to someone "I can't believe anyone voted against that application," and the person said back to me, "Well, if you say 'good morning' and you never know if you're going to get an answer or not, you ask yourself, do I want to work with this person?"

Deb: In some ways, though, it was very collegial: everybody knew everybody. When we unionized there were about 64 faculty. Some of us started chatting among ourselves and thought—Lorraine and I thought it would be a really good idea to get the union started, so I literally took the cards and went from office to office. This was in 1992. Some of the faculty I talked to would basically kick me out, some of the older ones who'd been there a very long time. I was told by someone, "I'm not a meat-cutter, I'm not going to join a union like a meat-cutter, I'm a professor, you'll unionize over my dead body, get out of my office."

Lorraine: Some of the older, senior faculty had been there long enough, they'd worked out their own deals.

Deb: Lorraine and I said to some of our biggest opponents, "If you don't want a union—because it's going to happen—the best way for you to control us if you don't trust us is to become part of the union." Two of our biggest opponents became big advocates of the union as a result.

Lorraine: That's attributable to you, Deb. That was your good thinking.

Deb: It worked out wonderfully. They became very supportive. One of those people called the Ontario Labour Relations Board the day after we unionized and tried to start the de-unionization process.

Lorraine: That person ended up being on the Executive.

Deb: So we started immediately writing the first Collective Agreement. I wrote that agreement in my office, mostly at night, staying there until 11 or midnight. I remember an administrator at the time knocked on my door one night and said "What are you doing in there, writing the first Collective Agreement?" And I said "Yes, actually, I am." And he thought it was a joke.

When we went to the first negotiating meeting with them, we handed them a 130-page document, and they went ballistic. They were so upset with us that it had been written, but we felt the best position was not to be the one responding, but to be the one making the offers, and let them respond. They postponed the meetings then for two months and then because we didn't have a lot of negotiating experience on our team we hired—actually he volunteered—a Chief Negotiator for the Carleton University Faculty Association. It worked out very well—we only bargained for about 12 days in the end.

Lorraine: That was in '93. Then in '96 was when we negotiated money for the first time. You were President then.

Deb: Yes, and then in 97 I became Vice President and then President of OCUFA.

Lorraine: The reason for the Collective Agreement was that it was very loosey-goosey before that and people felt that if they wanted tenure or promotion they had to toe the line, they couldn't stand up for themselves. Those were interesting times, Deb.

Deb: Oh, they were! They were challenging, but fun, because we were all very committed to the institution—so even in your time, Sarah, you know how much the place has changed.

Lorraine: I think the way our offices were set up back then, not in departments, helped with the formation of the Faculty Association because people were so connected, they talked to each other so much. I learned that in Senate I could start predicting how people would vote based on where their offices were!

Sarah: Speaking of offices, I'm amazed that you did everything you did without a designated space on campus and without an Executive Assistant.

Lorraine: Yes, we had to store everything in our offices.

Deb: Yes, there was nobody to do research so we did it ourselves for that Collective Agreement. We wrote it from scratch using other Collective Agreements. We would call other faculty associations and ask "Did this article work for you? How would you change it?" That document was an enormous task to write, but it's still the foundation of the existing one.

Sarah: How did you form your first Executive?

Deb: Once we were certified by the Ontario Labour Relations Board, we called for nominations, had elections, followed Robert's Rules and based our union on what we knew other universities had done.

Lorraine: No one from Education volunteered, so Deb approached me. So I was the Vice President.

Deb: It was a bit risky because we were not tenured.

Lorraine: There was Doug Franks, who wasn't tenured either, Chris Sarlo, and Roman Brozowski.

Deb: Other universities were a huge help. I would pick up the phone and ask for advice. And CAUT and OCUFA were always good resources for us. We fumbled in the dark, Sarah, we didn't really know what we were doing. I think we pretended, we took the role on and eventually became recognized as a real



**Negotiating a Collective Agreement in the 90s. Back row: Jack Jones, Ted Chase, Murray Green, Roman Brozowski, Unknown Member of the Board of Governors. Front row: Allan Sparkes, Deborah Flynn, Allan Reynolds**

union and everything was working the way that it should, and I think the administration came to like it.

Lorraine: Deb was the big driver. She was the one that kept it together, the unifying force.

Deb: I was very passionate about it at the time. I really felt that it needed to be done for faculty. Faculty needed to know that they would be treated fairly.

Lorraine: And that you didn't have to go and play nice all the time—

Deb: Beg! For everything!

Sarah: I'm so impressed with you two, our first President and Vice President, and I think we all owe you a debt of gratitude, and I hope that when this interview gets published, people will be really fascinated. Thank you.

## LOOKING BACK...LOOKING AHEAD

### Todd Horton, Associate Professor, Schulich School of Education

As I sit at the computer writing this entry for the NUFA News, the Association's first employee, Angela Fera, is retiring from full-time service to start the next chapter in her life journey. Though I've known this day was coming for about 18 months or so, I've been in denial for most of that time. Alas, the day has arrived. Angela is moving on.

I cannot help but think of the many roads we've traveled together over the last number of years and as I wish to pay tribute to our Executive Assistant who was so much more than that, I am struck at how intertwined her story is with the maturing of NUFA itself. Let me explain.

Picture it, December 2009. I was President of NUFA and we had just averted an 11<sup>th</sup>-hour strike in negotiations (Remember the days when a 3% raise was more the sector norm, children?) and flush with a new three-year agreement, I felt no joy. I was standing in my bedroom at home looking at piles of NUFA papers that needed attention – grievances, Association donations to various causes, requests for support, financial reports, bargaining language that needed review before the final Collective Agreement was printed – it seemed endless and there didn't seem to be enough time in the day to get to any of it and still

fulfill my professor obligations. Remember, this was a time when there were no course releases for Members of the Association. That had just been agreed to in the new contract and would not come into effect until the next year. In short, I was overwhelmed. Yes, the Executive was as supportive as they could be. Fantastic people are always there to help, but they were volunteers as well and many of them were well on their way to tenure, promotion, and incredible research programs. Not surprisingly, NUFA's business was not always a top priority. Something had to change if we were to continue to keep all the balls in the air let alone grow as an Association.



Past Presidents Susan Srigley and Gyllie Phillips with Angela at her farewell party.

I and a few others on the Executive began to plan for the hiring of a full-time Executive Assistant. It was a radical idea at the time. Many did not see the need but they also didn't know what actually goes on behind the scenes at the institution, requiring NUFA's attention. Others supported the idea, feeling we



Past Presidents Nathan Kozuskanich and Todd Horton with Angela at her farewell party.

were slipping a bit and needed to assert ourselves more. Those people immediately began suggesting names of highly qualified people who might be interested in the position. Angela Fera's name kept coming up whether I spoke with Faculty, university staff, or Administration. I didn't know Angela very well at the time. She had come to Nipissing in 1991, fresh out of our Bachelor of Education program, and had worked in Academic Advising out of the Dean of Arts & Sciences office. Our paths had little opportunity to cross, save in Senate. The problem was she had been let go from the university about 18 months prior under controversial circumstances and no one knew for certain if she was available or even interested in passing through the doors of Nipissing University ever again. Still, the seeds had been sown and the possibilities were there.

However, one little obstacle stood in the way of the plan. I had to find the money to pay a full-time employee for each year moving forward, including benefits! A slight feeling of sympathy for the challenges facing the Administration came over me. The only answer was to go to the Membership and make the case for an increase to the mil rate (an anachronistic name for the % of salary paid in union dues), our first increase since the formation of NUFA in 1994. Asking for money is never easy and certainly not right after you've just secured a raise for people in a new contract!



Angela and her husband Tim with Mary Pat Sullivan at her farewell party.

Thankfully, the Membership saw the logic that you have to invest if you want to professionalize, and with the resources available to hire our first employee, we set out to finalize a job description, consult Revenue Canada on employer obligations, secure a benefits package, and, of course, advertise the position. Many thanks to Susan Srigley who was on this journey with me. Together we interviewed some great candidates but Angela's institutional knowledge, skill sets, work ethic, social justice spirit, and personal initiative shone through. We offered her the job in mid-2010 and she accepted. It was the culmination of eight months of work and I was ecstatic that NUFA would have a permanent touchstone for the Membership, students, and Administration to connect with daily. Now, I just had to learn how to be an Employer!

Suffice to say, Angela, the Executive, and I found our footing pretty quickly. That personal initiative became the driving force for many changes over the coming years. She organized our files, put me and the Executive on a schedule, streamlined data management, and financial reporting, made phone calls on our behalf, the list is endless. She showed herself to be so much more than an assistant. I was ever so grateful and, I think, the Membership was as well.

On a personal level, I vividly remember the day I walked into the office after a meeting with a particular administrator and I let out a stream of colourful words. Angela's eyes got as big as saucers which seemed to be saying, "so this is how we roll, is it?" I had forgotten she came from the other side of the "house" where such things didn't happen, at least not in front of staff. I broke down laughing, saying

something to the effect of “you know, professors are just like the Teamsters but with better haircuts”. She laughed and we found an ease of operating as a team that would carry us through many a difficult time over the years.

As time went on, I stepped down from the Presidency of the Association and was followed by a succession of superior individuals who worked with Angela and the wider team to elevate the professionalism of the Association to new heights. I moved into other positions, Vice-President, Past President, Grievance Officer, Collective Bargaining, even another stint in my initial NUFA position, Member-at-Large for Education. But even from afar, I could see the impact Angela, as the constant presence in the office, was having on who we were and would become. I saw her transform how minutes are taken at meetings (no one takes more accurate and thorough minutes, I can assure you), how information for grievances and bargaining are managed, and how we interact with the wider university. Angela was always committed to the success of the institution, the students, and the staff, and she firmly believed Faculty should be involved, if not front and centre, in all institutional discussions and decisions. You have to appreciate that kind of belief and faith in us.

I have three short stories to share that illustrate Angela's commitment to NUFA and to the University. The first involves the securing of the NUFA Office. That was largely Angela's doing. When I was President, we worked from home. Then we obtained a small space with movable walls in a common room in the A-wing, then we obtained a small, windowless office on the second floor, but the move into the former Owl's Nest was due to Angela and a former administrator working together to push our relationship along a better, more collegial path. What started out as a modest improvement project evolved into what we have today. A place that actually looks like a proper place of business. Angela sold said administrator on her vision for the Association and, much to the chagrin of many in the institution, worked to make it happen. I was simply in awe of what she was able to accomplish on that project.

The second story involves the 2015 round of collective bargaining and subsequent strike. We were deadlocked at the table, communication had deteriorated to such an extent that scheduling a meeting became difficult. Everyone was frustrated and Angela took on the anger, frustration, and anxiety for all of us. Bargaining is wearing at the best of times and that was a particularly difficult round. The night that conciliation broke down (Hallowe'en as I recall), I remember Angela and I carrying boxes and computers out of the office for a move to a new off-site location. She simply said, “I can't believe this is happening”. None of us could. It was gut-wrenching and for her most of all. She believed in the promise of Nipissing like no one I'd ever met. Almost like it was a shining example of what a university should be. But she also saw that all was not well—corners were being cut, people were being taken for granted, undermined, and mistreated, and pettiness and mean-spiritedness had infiltrated the negotiations. So we moved to our off-site location and a woman who could never have imagined being on strike when working in the Dean's office only a few years before threw herself into organizing an office and team that ensured everyone knew when and where they were supposed to be, who was meeting in what room, who needed to be called back on the phone, when and how we'd all get paid, and when and where to get food for everyone. It was a sight to behold. No one wanted a strike but when it happened I saw many people find their best selves and pull together during those three-and-a-half weeks in November. Angela was one of them.

My final story involves the Grievance Committee. That is one of the epicentres of NUFA business. Most things become secondary when a grievor's livelihood is being undermined or is potentially at stake. I remember she and I discussing one of the main criticisms of unions once. Someone, I can't remember if it was a Member, staff person, or an administrator, had come into the office and cast aspersions on NUFA as only protecting those who don't deserve it. I guess it can seem that way from the outside sometimes. Angela was upset by the comment, so we talked about it. I told her, for me, I don't see it that way. NUFA can't protect a Member who has genuinely done something wrong. There are contract language, policies, and laws that give the Employer a lot of power to address wrongdoing. NUFA's role in grievance is to ensure that Members get clear and fair due process. Full stop. Nothing more, nothing less. Then, the chips fall where they may. Angela modeled that viewpoint when she came to the

grievance table. She ensured that we considered issues from every angle, often challenging us to go deeper and further, to flip the question on its head, and when needed supported us dipping into the purse to fight the good fight in front of an arbitrator. More than once the Grievance Committee saw her hand go up, followed by the question, "can I speak?". Angela was often the "outsider" voice, the non-faculty member who would give us what I like to call the "shake your head a minute" perspective, and I, for one, am glad she was there and willing to do it.

NUFA has come a long way and Angela was a critical part of its story. I am so grateful that she was with us these past eleven years. Angela helped us raise our game, helped me be a better President and Member of the Association, helped mentor many of us in our jobs, both in and out of the Association, and helped us navigate many difficult problems along the way. She cared. She cared *a lot*. Angela and I have laughed and cried and cheered and celebrated and even bemoaned a thing or two. We went beyond employer and employee or even co-workers to being friends. Friends who care and support one another. I'll miss walking into the office to talk about the latest tennis tournament, the books we are reading, or to simply visit with her and her sometime sidekick, Bobo. But time moves on and she and her husband, Tim, have a new path to follow down the road in Sault Ste. Marie. I am so happy for them. I am happy that she is staying on with us part-time, working from a distance, and I am happy that Rhiannon Don, our new Executive Assistant, is building on her years of experience with NUFA to help us forge new paths into the future. Thanks for the memories, Angela. I know we'll make a few more down the line.

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## **What is your NUFA Communications Officer doing?**

### **Geoff Hartley, Associate Professor, Physical and Health Education**

I am currently serving in my second term on the NUFA Executive Committee in the role of Communications Officer. As the first person to hold this position since its creation in July 2020, I have been working with the Member Engagement Officer, Community and Labour Relations Officer, and NUFA Communications Committee to develop and implement our Association's communications strategy.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic 19-months ago, the NUFA Executive has been working on several priorities for the membership. Public health restrictions and closure of the Nipissing University campus have resulted in significant changes to the working conditions of our members. Therefore, the NUFA Executive published several COVID-19 Bulletins addressing issues ranging from tax deductions for home office expenses, course caps and increased workload, and other issues pertaining to our collective agreement.

In February 2021, Laurentian University's Administration took the unprecedented step of filing for creditor protection under the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA)*, resulting in cuts to essential programs, and the termination of many faculty and staff. NUFA took an active role in advocating for our colleagues at Laurentian University, through various social media campaigns, phone zaps, and letters to politicians. Although the CCAA process continues at Laurentian University, NUFA will continue to call on our government and Minister of Colleges and Universities to provide stable and long-term funding to support post-secondary institutions in Ontario. Looking forward, my focus as Communications Officer will be to support the NUFA Executive and Collective Bargaining Committees in negotiating our new collective agreement. Communication will be of utmost importance throughout this process, and I aim to engage our membership throughout this critical period for our association. I look forward to working with you all as we collectively build a strong future for Nipissing University.

## What is your NUFA Community and Labour Relations Officer doing?

### Reade Davis, Associate Professor, Anthropology/Sociology

I was pleased to join the NUFA Executive for the first time this year in the role of Community and Labour Relations Officer. I am the second person to serve in this role, taking over from David Borman who is continuing to serve NUFA as our appointment to the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Defense Fund.

My job as Community and Labour Relations Officer is to foster connections with labour groups on campus and in the broader community. I also represent NUFA on the North Bay and District Labour Board (NBDLC) which includes representatives from a variety of unions and other labour organizations in the greater North Bay area. The regular meetings of the NBDLC have been invaluable in giving me a broader sense of ongoing labour struggles in our region and helping me to identify opportunities to collaborate with other unions around issues of common concern. The NBDLC also plays an important role in lending support to a variety of charitable organizations in our community, both through fundraising and through the organizing of public events and demonstrations.

I am also tasked with mobilizing membership support for labour and community issues as they emerge. As part of that role, I coordinated NUFAs information campaign for the federal election in September including contacting candidates from all parties to assess their policy positions related to post-secondary education. Like many in our membership, I have also closely monitored the troubling developments at Laurentian University and have been involved in many of the campaigns developed by OCUFA and other groups in response to this situation. I also participated alongside the other members of the Executive and our Chief Negotiators in a two-day workshop organized by OCUFA to ensure that we are as well-prepared as possible for bargaining.

I would be delighted to hear from any of you regarding community events or labour-related actions of possible interest to our membership or to discuss any questions or concerns you may have.

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## What is your NUFA Member Engagement Officer doing?

### Susan Srigley, Professor, Religions and Cultures

Thanks to the initiative of *past* past President Amanda Burk, NUFA made some important constitutional changes to the structure of the Executive, namely, creating specific roles for our previous member-at-large positions (we had three, one for each faculty at the time they were created). Part of the reason for doing this was the fact that these positions were not always clearly understood or defined in terms of active service to the Association, but the changes were also meant to alleviate some of the workload that inevitably falls on the President and Vice-President when it comes to communication, engagement, and local labour relations.

I am the second person to serve in this new role of Member Engagement Officer (MEO), following our current VP Natalya Brown. According to the NUFA constitution, the primary task of the MEO is to engage with our membership and to help them become more active participants in the life of the Association. That means that I'd like to see *more* of all of you.

In recent conversations I've had with newer members of the Executive, particularly those who serve on grievance, I've heard the surprise in their voices about how much effort is involved in the perpetual fight for maintaining the integrity of our working conditions. The most obvious and public moment for this happens during bargaining new collective agreements, but issues arise constantly that potentially impinge upon the conditions of our work, and when these things happen to individual members, the grievance team takes them on and seeks to remedy them for the sake of all our members. Over the years of working on the Executive and grievance, I've come to think that most of our members are unaware of how their working conditions are being protected and fought for every day.

Over the summer and into this fall I have been in meetings with the folks at OCUFA, along with our Chief Negotiators (CN) and our President, to discuss the needs and priorities of our membership as we prepare for bargaining. While the Collective Bargaining Committee Members and our President and VP are also attending bargaining workshops and training to prepare, my role is to make sure that we engage with all of you, hear your issues and concerns, and integrate these into our action plans in the lead up to bargaining. That is why Exec and CBC members have been visiting each of your departments these last few months.

I would like to suggest that your participation doesn't need to end there. Without burdening your departments just yet with more meetings involving NUFA, I welcome hearing from you, and I am eager to meet with those who are interested in becoming more actively involved with our Faculty Association. There is much work to be done in the months ahead, and we need all of you to help us with that.

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## **News from your Collective Bargaining Committee (CBC)**

### **Jane Barker and Evan Hoffman, chief negotiators for the CBC**

With the Fall 2021 semester well underway, the topic of negotiating our collective agreements (FASBU & CASBU) is front and center for the Collective Bargaining Committee (CBC).

The current collective agreements will both expire in April of 2022 and the CBC has been very active over the last six months in preparation for that. The team has been strategizing and has attended several training workshops organized by OCUFA and CAUT. Plus, the CBC and NUFA Executive have been holding consultations with many departments and schools at the university throughout the start of the fall semester. These consultations have been an important part of the negotiation process allowing us to hear from members about their hopes, concerns, and priorities.

The two chief negotiators for this upcoming round are Jane Barker and Evan Hoffman.

This is Jane's second time leading the FASBU collective bargaining team into negotiations. Previously, Jane served as a co-chair of the strike preparedness committee. "I think we have assembled a talented and committed group of faculty members to serve on the CBC for the upcoming round. Some of our members have been part of multiple bargaining rounds, while others are new to the process. I am looking forward to working with this very engaged group of NUFA members as we strive to make gains for the membership."

While this will be Evan's first time negotiating a collective agreement in a unionized environment, he's no stranger to negotiations having taught negotiation and conflict resolution courses in political science for the last six years. He also has 20 years of experience working on a wide variety of conflict resolution projects both here in Canada and overseas. "It's been a fascinating process so far and I'm really interested in seeing how this next round of bargaining will go. Our team looks forward to bringing CASBU members' priorities and concerns into the process, so we can hopefully reach a new collective agreement which meets our unique needs as contract staff."

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## **In Memoriam: Diana Walton**

### **Kristen Ferguson, Professor, Schulich School of Education; J.W. Trussler Proficiency Award for Classical Studies, 1999**

I could write about Dr. Walton's lengthy career and her impact on provincial and national organizations. I could write about her influence on Nipissing University, her contributions to the early years at the university, her involvement in the creation of the coat of arms and how the fact that there is an Athenian owl on it is no coincidence. But I will always remember Dr. Walton as an incredible professor and for what she meant to my graduating class.

It's common for students to like a teacher so much that they take more courses taught by that instructor. But we took entire degrees in Classical Studies because of Dr. Diana Walton. There were

about ten of us that graduated together. We simply adored her and took every class we could with her. She was *smart* and we all knew it. She could recite lines of poetry or plays at the drop of a hat and in multiple languages. She could talk about the *Odyssey* for hours and was such a good speaker and had such insight, we absorbed her lectures and loved every word of them. If you knew nothing about Classical Studies or literature, by the end of a single course you would know plenty, and you would also love Classics. She was that good of a teacher; her love for literature was forefront. She was also a powerhouse. We knew she was a strong cancer survivor, and she had our utmost respect. We always called her Dr. Walton.

But what made Dr. Walton an incredible teacher was her humanity. She cried in class during the song, "Remember Me" from the opera, *Dido and Aeneas* and wasn't afraid to let us see her tears. She also had a wicked sense of humour and an infectious laugh that I'll never forget. She howled with laughter when a student presented Ovid's *Art of Love* and explained how he tried Ovid's techniques to pick up girls in the library (he got an A+, by the way). She ate pizza with us and joyfully laughed at all the jokes while watching *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, a movie she'd seen countless times. She loved telling us about her son who was a Snowbird pilot, whom she frequently reminded us with a tinge of annoyance was named "Marcus" not "John Boy," which was his Snowbird nickname. She beamed with pride the day her grandson was born.

In our final year, the Classics Club arranged a trip to Toronto to the ROM. Dr. Walton was busy doing Tai Chi in one of the large halls in the museum, and we snuck away to buy her a gift from our graduating class. We went to the World's Biggest Bookstore where they had one classical book that we knew she didn't have - a collection of plays by Menander. We all signed it with messages of how much she meant to us.

The years came and went after graduation. She attended my wedding. I even had the privilege of being a faculty member with her during her last year at Nipissing. One of the last times I saw Dr. Walton was at a social gathering, unexpectedly. Surprised to see each other, we beamed smiles at one other, hugged, and just looked at each other for what felt like a long time. There were no words, just the warmest of feelings.

I remember all these things and more. Dr. Diana Walton was simply a wonderful human being who had an immeasurable impact on Nipissing students.

*O magister, meminarimus te.*

# NUFA

Nipissing University Faculty Association