

News from NowHere

Fall's HERE!

Year 30 Number 3

Editor Gail Osachoff

CUPE3287
University of Saskatchewan Sessional Lecturers

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President's Message

Welcome (or welcome back) to a new teaching term at the U of S.

As usual, it seems, I have both good things and not-so-good things to report.

Let's start with the good things.

For one, 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of CUPE 3287. To be clear, it has been 30 years since our certification order was issued in May, 1989. As you can read for yourself in the interview with our past-president **Heather Wagg** later in this issue, negotiating our first collective agreement took a good deal longer.

In recognition of our anniversary, we'll be holding a celebration on Thursday, October 14th. I'd like to thank my fellow members of the 30th Anniversary Celebration Committee – **Barb Mills, Henriette Morelli, and Eleanor Shia** – for their continuing work to make

this event a success. I encourage all members of our local, especially new members and members who may not have teaching appointments this term, to come out to the event. (If you are planning on coming, please RVSP the union by October 14th so that we can finalize our food and beverage orders.)

Our local has four on-going grievances at the moment. The good news on this front, is that three of those grievances appear to be quite near successful resolution in our favour. The fourth, which may yet go on for some time, brings me to the bad news.

Our Executive has been taking note for some time now of a worrying decline in number of sessional lecturer positions offered at the University. Some of that decline is clearly due to changes in how Spring and Summer session courses are funded, changes which were proposed two years ago and fully implemented this year.

Beginning this term, however, the decline has been truly precipitous. In the 2018 Fall Term 315 courses were taught on a sessional basis, employing 234 sessional lecturers; in the 2019 Fall Term those numbers are down to 230 courses taught by 181 sessional lecturers. In other words, in a year over year comparison, there has been a nearly 27% reduction in classes taught by sessional lecturers and a 22.6% reduction in the number of sessional lecturers teaching. This is obviously bad in a number of respects, not least of which being the impact that this will have on the Union's dues revenue if this situation continues.

In our view there are two main causes of this massive decline. On the one hand, recent changes in the U of S budgeting

framework have, in effect, forced academic units to try to maximize their 'activity' level in order to maintain or increase their discretionary budget allocation. In practice, this puts hiring sessional faculty into competition with nearly all other possible uses of a departmental budget in the quest to maximize 'activity.'

Another cause of the decline, in our view, is the re-introduction of the ranks of Lecturer and Instructor into University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association (USFA) collective agreement in 2018. Prior to the elimination of the rank in 2014, the normal teaching load at the rank of Lecturer was typically five or six 3CU courses per year; as of 2018, the norm is now *ten* 3 CU course per year.

In the fourth grievance mentioned above, our union is arguing that the Employer has violated its legal and contractual obligations toward our union by not notifying CUPE 3287 about these changes and by failing to negotiate with us a workplace adjustment program to address the impact of these changes on our membership. The budgeting framework issue we intend to address in our upcoming collective bargaining with the Employer.

Which brings me to a last bit of what I think of as very good news: We will soon begin negotiating a new collective agreement with our Employer. Some bargaining proposals will be discussed at our upcoming members' meeting on September 27th; others likely will emerge as we survey our membership about its bargaining priorities over the next few months. I want to encourage all of our members to make suggestions and ask questions as the collective bargaining process unfolds.

Our Bargaining Committee consists of myself, Vice-President **Brian Zamulinski**, **Ranjan Datta**, **Jeffery Klassen**, **Barb Mills**, and **Stavros Stavrou**. You can get in contact with any of us at any time through the Union office.

Submitted by William Buschert

Our 30th Anniversary Celebration

You and Your Partner/Spouse
are Invited to Celebrate with Us!

Thursday, October. 17, 2019,

4:00-7:00 p.m.

University Club Fireplace Room
University of Saskatchewan

Complimentary Drink
Hot and Cold Appetizer Platters

Please RSVP to

cupe3287@gmail.com

by October 14, 2019



FALL MEMBERS' MEETING

September 27, 2019, 4:00 PM

Arts 202

AGENDA

1. Adoption of the agenda
2. Reading of the Equality Statement (see reverse)
3. Adoption of Minutes, Summer Members' Meeting of July 18, 2019
4. Matters Arising from the Minutes
5. Motion: Acceptance of new members
6. Executive Report
 - a. Sectoral database proposal
 - b. Negotiations with COPE 342
 - c. Grievances
 - d. Bargaining proposals/membership surveys
7. Secretary-Treasurer's Report
8. News and Communications Officer's Report
9. Parking Coordinator's Report
10. Correspondence
11. New Business
12. Adjournment

In the Beginning: William Elcock interviews Heather Wagg:

William: *I know that you were part of the Union from the early days, so I just want to get your input on what the Union was like in the beginning. How many members were there, how often did you meet, and what types of activities did you engage in?*

Heather: Well, the initial process of organizing the Union and having it legally recognized and certified was quite lengthy. I would say that happened over a period of 2 – 3 years. Then negotiating a first collective agreement took another couple of years. [From] 1986 to 1988 most of the organizing was done by just talking to and trying to identify who was employed as Sessional Lecturers, then talking to them about the value in joining a union. That took, on a volunteer basis of course, 6 months which was the legal time allotted without starting over again.

William: *That is an eye-opener for me*

Heather: The big challenge then and probably even now is to identify who your potential members are. The employer is unlikely to give you a list and then it's up to you to figure it out. A big challenge since, unlike all other unions, we don't have a single worksite.

William: *Yes, all with the different departments.*

Heather: To talk to people in person is rather better than to do it on the phone. That meant figuring out where they lived and going to knock on their doors: the way people do when they're canvassing for political parties. It took a long time, and then the Labour Relations Board was very slow and had a backlog. It took the best part of a year for them to respond and say, "Yes this is a valid application." Then the University of course challenged the validity of the certification. After all these delays we started negotiating the first collective agreement. Since we were novices we had to discuss everything.

William: *Yes, everything from scratch. Well, thank you for doing that. How often did you meet after certification?*

Heather: We met every month. Now, of course, there are only four Members' meetings.

William: *What types of activities did you do?*

Heather: There was the ongoing bargaining and the necessary discussions. And also the bylaws. To be a local of CUPE you have to have that. At member meetings of 15 or 20 people, we actually focussed on every single word of it, so you can imagine how incredibly time consuming that was. But, because it was brand new, there was great participation.

William: *For you personally, what were your reasons for joining?*

Heather: I think job security was important because the hiring of temporary instructors fell to the Head of a department, who might be new to the job or not interested in efficiency or fairness. Often hiring was done at the last minute. With the constant change of Heads, if s/he didn't know you, the job went to someone else. Favouritism also made the hiring chaotic and scary. And also, since the Department Head changes every few years there's no continuity in the way hirings are done. And, of course, the payment was very, very low. I mean it's low now, but it was even lower.

William: *Well, again, thank you for your early efforts. I and all the other Sessional lecturers appreciate it. What were other problems you encountered in the early days? I remember you said initially the University resisted the formation of the Union, but what are some of the other challenges you experienced?*

Heather: The challenge is to keep in touch with people and to know their personal histories and problems. So, at one point in fact, a couple of times since the beginning of the Union, we've actually hired outside expertise to get a survey done of the members to find out their needs. And, of course, back when this Union was organized at the end of the 1980s there was no internet, there was no email, so contact was either by phone or by tracking a person down physically.

William: *What are some of the changes that you notice now compared to your early days?*

Heather: Well, I think the nature of the bargaining unit itself has evolved. The members seem to be a little younger than they were at that time and certainly much more diverse. Membership has always been, in terms of gender, half and half more or less. But it's interesting because, for a long time, it was perceived that sessionals were women earning a second family income or that women were more engaged with their sessional teaching because it tended to be, for them, probably, a larger part (or the whole) of their professional activity. For men who had careers, sessional teaching was more like community service.

William: *You were both the vice-president and president of the Union at one point. Tell me about some of your experiences in these positions.*

Heather: Well, it was a big challenge for me because I had never been the president of anything. Fortunately, I didn't work full time, so I had the time to take it slow and ease into the role. The most fascinating aspect of it for me personally is dealing with people's problems and getting to know lots of different people. A really rewarding experience. Even today, dealing with grievances in one sense sounds bad, but it's very satisfying because usually you can help the person to some extent or resolve the situation in at least a semi-positive way even if it's not winning a legal grievance.

William: *Overall would you say these were fulfilling positions?*

Heather: Yes, yes. There's also collective bargaining: working with a small group to meet the challenge of the bargaining process successfully is a very steep learning curve. We've generally been fortunate with our CUPE national representatives whom we have used as our chief negotiating person over the years.

William: *All in all, that experience was positive. Backtracking a little: tell us a little about yourself. What made you decide to get into the teaching of French?*

Heather: Yes, I did. I started teaching when I was still a graduate student and just continued.

William: *How did you decide on French?*

Heather: Well, I think when I was young, there was an idea that this would be a very practical thing to do, that it would open up employment opportunities--professional opportunities--so I just continued. Probably I started because, when I was a child in school, I had a teacher who was French which was very unusual in those days, but I'm sure that had a great deal to do with why I continued and managed to be functional in French. It wasn't very common. Immersion didn't exist when I was young.

William: *And what made you choose the University of Saskatchewan?*

Heather: There was a job opportunity advertised here and interestingly, initially, it was a term appointment, a term appointment but a full-time position, which got downgraded to sessional lecturing. That's how I ended up here.

William: *Could you tell us a bit about your teaching experiences at that time?*

Heather: Well, I "sucked" basically – some of the time, not all of the time, and then it gradually got better.

William: *Well, I can identify [laughter].*

Heather: Oh, I don't know about that [laughter]. What do you teach William?

William: *Physics. I think one of my problems was that I assumed the students knew more than they did or what they should know at their level, but I kind of picked up on that so, I think, I was able to do a decent job.*

Heather: Oh, I'm sure. I mean it's hard, if you come from somewhere else as you have done. If you haven't experienced university here for example, then you don't necessarily know the culture or really understand people.

William: *I have learned, so now I have some experience for the future. In terms of students, do you notice a difference between students now compared to when you first started? Besides having widespread access to technology.*

Heather: I think that's a lot of it. Unfortunately, there may be a bit more of a literacy problem now than there used to be in terms of being able to write and communicate in writing in general, and that is going to show up in practically anything you're teaching I guess, but it certainly does in French. It's not universal, but it's sometimes surprising how difficult it seems to be for students to communicate in writing. Apart from them getting younger and younger and younger every year.

William: *That's an interesting point. For your French classes, is everything done in French such as communicating to the students?*

Heather: It depends on the course. I teach beginner courses, but I also teach courses for people who have graduated from the immersion program or the program for francophone students ending in Grade 12, so those students should be functional in French, at least in oral communication, so then we speak French.

William: *So, Heather, what are you up to these days? It's summer right now [laughter].*

Heather: [laughter] Well, I'm just looking forward to the fall and going back once more to teach and hoping I get enough enrolment in those courses. I've just been resting over the summer.

William: *Just to wrap up, do you have any advice and/or wise words for the younger sessional lecturers who are currently part of CUPE 3287 today?*

Heather: People need to be involved with the Union and sometimes, unfortunately, as a member you need to take the initiative to inform yourself without waiting for someone to get in touch with you and tell you everything. For instance, there are some things that members don't know but should, such as the existence of a Professional Development Fund. It's very shocking to discover that people are sometimes here for years and don't even realize that it exists and that they could have had access to it and travel to a conference and have it paid for. Apart from the larger problems such as your general comfort and security in the job, there are some practical things that are helpful. People might expect to be handed complete information, but in this kind of a dispersed working environment it's hard for the Union to do that, and so the more proactive people can be the better. It'll be worth your while.

William: *That's great advice, especially when you brought up the Professional Development Fund which I discovered before I was informed. I am still glad that the Union communicates as well as it does. When I first joined, everyone was very warm and gave me a lot of information, partly to your credit, Heather. Just one more thing: do you teach French classes for novices like me?*

Heather: Oh yes, we teach, and I myself teach, people who have no background in French at all; there's a course.

William: *All right, maybe that's something that I and some other Union members can check out.*

Heather: Well yes, and you could get a tuition waiver [laughter]!

William: *[laughter] Yes, all the positives about CUPE 3287 are coming out today. Thank you very much for your time, Heather.*

Heather: You're very welcome, William. Thank you for asking me.

(This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)

Chirps

Sessional Lecturer Numbers Diminishing

The September 7 *Star-Phoenix* reported that, according to Statistics Canada, there are 13,000 more jobs in Saskatchewan now than a year ago. That increase, however, seems not to apply to sessional lecturers working at the U of S. Final figures are not available yet, but it is certain that the number of sessional lecturers will be less than a year ago. In September 2018 we had 228 members employed at the U of S, whereas the figure is now 189. The hiring of fulltime Lecturers, however, has begun, and that puts our jobs in jeopardy.

Student Diversity

At the University Council meeting in May, Marcel D'Eon (a faculty member in the College of Medicine) proposed a motion that the U of S Board of Governors find ways to make tuition affordable to low-income students as a way to increase diversity. In June the motion was tabled for further study, and the Council "voted not to talk about it." Professor D'Eon will not give up. He plans to reintroduce his motion at the next Council meeting. (Ana Cristina Camacho, August 29, *The Sheaf*)

Beware

There is a border that separates Saskatchewan and Alberta, but now with compatible governments in the two provinces, that border will become even more porous than before. Both governments want to save money on such essentials as health and education. In Alberta The Jason Kenney government has been recently provided with 26 recommendations that aim to cut costs and reduce deficits. One proposal of this task force headed by Janice Mackinnon, is a radical restructuring of the financing of kindergarten to grade 12 education which would tie government funds to "scholastic outcomes" rather than to enrolment numbers, as it is now.

The only way to put this idea into action would be to institute standardized testing which would, of course, ignore individual differences of students in terms of the financial and social status of their parents. Some people would support this drastic change and call it "accountability" of the education system while others would judge it as "fundamentally inequitable and unjust." (Gary Mason, September 7, *Globe and Mail*)

As for post-secondary education, the taskforce had its sights focused on “underperforming” universities, and it appears that judgement depends on students’ “performance”—that is on completion rates. It is a more than a little horrifying to think that university administrations would pressure professors not to fail students so that they could leave university with a degree. As it is, judging from my first-year English classes, I see that many students should not have passed grade 12 much less receive a degree.

The other problematic aspect of these recommendations is that government funding of universities should be drastically reduced since “it has not led to stellar outcomes.” Their focus is a comparison of Alberta and Ontario (otherwise known as Ford Country): \$36,500 is spent on each student in Alberta but only \$21,500 in Ontario, and the Ontario number should be the goal.

And finally, it is the finding of the taskforce that universities in Alberta should “develop a revenue mix less reliant on the public purse...student tuition and alternative revenue sources should be the focus along with adopting more entrepreneurial approaches to how programs are financed and delivered.” (Emma Graney, September 4, *Star-Phoenix*)

Will all this come to pass in Saskatchewan – and even without the expense of a taskforce?

Submitted by Gail Osachoff

Equality Statement (CUPE National)

Union solidarity is based on the principle that union members are equal and deserve mutual respect at all levels. Any behaviour that creates conflict prevents us from working together to strengthen our union.

As unionists, mutual respect, cooperation and understanding are our goals. We should neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

Discriminatory speech or conduct which is racist, sexist, transphobic or homophobic hurts and thereby divides us. So too, does discrimination on the basis of ability, age, class, religion, language and ethnic origin.

Sometimes discrimination takes the form of harassment. Harassment means using real or perceived power to abuse, devalue or humiliate. Harassment should not be treated as a joke. The uneasiness and resentment that it creates are not feelings that help us grow as a union.

Discrimination and harassment focus on characteristics that make us different; and they reduce our capacity to work together on shared concerns such as decent wages, safe working conditions, and justice in the workplace, society and in our union.

CUPE’s policies and practices must reflect our commitment to equality. Members, staff and elected officers must be mindful that all persons deserve dignity, equality and respect.