



Volume 5 Issue 6

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The CUPE newsletter is published by CUPE Local 3911. We welcome your submissions, letters and comments. Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of CUPE Local 3911

Editor: Natalie Sharpe

Great News from the Alberta Legislature on Reversal of Cuts to PSE Funding - Jolene Armstrong

Friends of Post-Secondary Education in Alberta - If you have been too busy marking to listen to the news this week, here are some of the highlights. Our new government has committed to increase post-secondary funding by \$133 million to provide stability while working on long-term funding solutions. This includes:

- ✓ reversing the 1.4% cut to post-secondary institutions
- ✓ increasing base funding for post-secondary institutions by 2%
- ✓ freezing tuition and mandatory non-instructional student fees for 2 years
- ✓ cancelling market modifiers that were recently approved for 25 programs
- ✓ restoring apprenticeship and targeted enrolment funding.

Meeting and Greeting Kristy Burke, our new CUPE Administrator

Kristy has just joined our local and is being trained and mentored under the careful guidance of Jackie Routh over the next few months. Kristy is originally from British Columbia, and has lived in Alberta since 2005. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science from the University of Lethbridge. Kristy's work experiences are diverse. She was an Environmental Technician and Forestry Worker prior to becoming the Manager of the Youth Science Programs at the University of Lethbridge from 2008 – 2013. Over the last two years, she has been coordinating large-scale programs and events at the University of Alberta for WISEST (Women in Scholarship, Engineering, Science and Technology). Kristy brings seven years of post-secondary administrative experience and is looking forward to working with everyone at CUPE Local 3911. Kristy has additional expertise in website design and social media that will be a definite asset to our local. In Kristy's words: "I work well independently or in a team atmosphere and am motivated to produce a high calibre of work. My passions include education, environmentalism and creating future opportunity for youth." This message ties to the heart of our local. Welcome to CUPE 3911 Kristy.



Fill out the Anti-Racism Survey

Rochelle Sato, CUPE executive member serving on the CUPE Anti-Racism Committee, is encouraging all members to go to the Anti-Racism Survey link below to talk about your awareness and experiences with racism in the workplace and in your personal lives. This will inform the Anti-Racism Committee on their future work commitments in combatting racism in the workplace. Here is the link:

<http://survey.cupe.ca/limesurvey/index.php?sid=92572&lang=en>

We also have a picture of the Anti-Racism bracelet “CUPE Alberta Diversity our Strength” that was distributed to all delegates at the CUPE Alberta Convention earlier in March.



Are you Seeking Professional Development Funds?

Mark Dimirsky, Chair of the Professional Development Fund Committee, wants to make sure you are aware of your professional development fund opportunities. Under our collective agreement, we are entitled to Professional Development Funds. The goals of the PDF committee are: 1) to use the fund fairly and wisely for the good of the most members; 2) to use as much of the allocated funds each year as possible; and 3) to be accountable to the membership. In summary, Mark has provided the following information:

Amount of AU contribution: Athabasca University allocated \$40,000.00 annually to CUPE 3911 to award to its members during the April 1st – March 31st AU fiscal year. If any funds remain at the end of the fiscal year, they must carry over to the next fiscal year.

Approval Process: Approval rests with a committee of four CUPE members; two are elected at the CUPE AGM each year for a two-year term. The current members of your CUPE PDF committee are: Wayne Brehault, Deborah Foster, Teresa Ferguson, and Mark Dimirsky (Chair).

How to Apply: All CUPE members are eligible to apply. Applications are received quarterly – Members will receive notice from AU employee Wanda Pacholok inviting applications. Follow the links to access the needed information and forms for your application. If you have any questions, contact us at cupe3911@gmail.com

Guidelines for Awards: AU and CUPE have agreed on set criteria to be used for awards (contractually binding for both parties) and maximum dollar amounts that can be awarded. For activities within Canada, the maximum award is \$1500.00. For activities outside Canada, the maximum allocation is \$2000.00.



Awardee's Responsibilities: Your responsibilities are to represent the proposed PD activity accurately, to attend a PD activity, and to write a short report about your award activity. Ensure this report is submitted in a timely manner, within the fiscal reporting period. These reports become the joint property of AU and CUPE and are published under the "Tutor Tab" on the MyAU page.

Payment for Awards: Remuneration of the expenses in the amount of the reward is NOT a CUPE responsibility. After you have been notified of an award and have completed your activity, you must submit your expense receipts to AU, using the AU financials reporting systems to get paid. Contact us at cupe3911@gmail.com if you have concerns and are not receiving the pay in a timely way. We will attempt to help you get the support you need to complete this process, but we cannot do any more than that, as this is a separate AU financial report.

Current Issues the PD Committee is Addressing:

1. Ensuring awardees are paid in a prompt and timely manner;
2. Increasing the breadth and diversity of the pool of member applicants;
3. Publicizing the awardees' reports to enhance our CUPE 3911 members' professional profiles.

A View from the Inside of GFC and ALEC

Ann Reynolds offers members a view from the inside. She has been an active CUPE member on GFC and ALEC for quite some time. Here she describes what has happened at GFC and ALEC meetings over the past year.

CUPE is involved in the governance of Athabasca University by representatives on several university-wide committees. I am the representative on the General Faculties Council (GFC) and its subcommittee, the Academic Learning Environment Committee (ALEC) until June 2016. I was also a member of the ALEC Learning Support Working Group, which presented its final report on a comparison of different models of course delivery at the last GFC meeting. Discussion of this report will take place in the October meeting of the GFC; you might want to read this report and its conclusions (available in the GFC agenda for June 17, accessible through the Office of the University Secretariat at <http://ous.athabascau.ca/general/minutes.php>), as they will possibly impact your work at Athabasca University.

Being a member of GFC involves attending eight meetings this year, with three extra "special meetings" – faculty and CUPE instigated two meetings over the University's decision to roll out the Student Success Centre across all units at the University. Although the discussion was spirited and a motion to delay this action was passed, President MacKinnon decided to take the GFC decision as advice rather than direction.



The President does not seem to believe in collegial government, taking direction from the Board of Governors (BOG) rather than from the GFC, even on academic issues. The President characterizes all the changes he is making as administrative rather than academic. During the June meeting of GFC, the President admitted that he proposed to BOG to produce the “Sustainability Report” which was also presented at the meeting (and is also available on the agenda for the June GFC meeting).

The third special meeting has been called for in July to approve new by-laws for the GFC. Regular meetings of GFC keep the university community aware of what is happening at the university, including what budget has been passed, and passing changes to programs, approving new courses and changes to courses, as well as university policies and procedures. As your CUPE representative, I made one motion this year, and attempted to bring a discussion issue to the GFC; however, the Executive (which sets the agenda for meetings) decided that GFC was not the body at which to present discussion about how tutors in FST are impacted by changing their work model to the SSC (Student Success Centre). During the meeting at which the issue was proposed for discussion, the Dean of FST presented a report on the SSC which could have included the impact on CUPE staff, but chose to ignore it. I pointed that out, and the Acting Vice President Academic stated the issue could be discussed at ALEC.

ALEC meetings present any issues concerning learning and teaching at Athabasca University. This includes discussion on e-texts, course materials management, computer issues and technology changes, as well as discussions on pedagogical issues. The Student Relationship Management (SRM) system was presented to ALEC, and a call for academic advisors to the working group was given. Again as your CUPE representative, I offered to join this working group, and did receive one email from the contractors, but was not invited to join.

IBM made a presentation of their new system, Watson, a computing system that is designed so that clients can use self-help and fewer managers can handle more clients. IBM has provided this system to health care providers and business users, and is now interested in moving into post-secondary education. IBM seems particularly interested in gaining access to data from Athabasca University. The issue that was not brought before GFC on the impact of changing teaching models for CUPE employees, did receive good discussion at ALEC. Unfortunately, although there continues to be a promise of real consultation in the future, that future never seems to arrive.

On the other hand, the Sustainability Task Force report, which contains options that the President prefers for Athabasca University, states “The Future is Now”. Other topics that were discussed in some detail this year were learning resources fees, academic misconduct, and the formation of a new committee/task force on course design and pedagogy.

Any academic issues that tutors or Academic Experts wish to be presented at these committees should be sent to me, your CUPE representative: anncupe@gmail.com. Issues can be brought up with items on the agenda even if they are not placed individually on the agenda.



CUPE 3911 Letter to Minister Lori Sigurdson

On June 15, 2015, a member of your Executive hand-delivered a letter Lori Sigurdson the new Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education. The text of the letter was sent out to all our members on June 15 via the AU listserv so it does not need to be reproduced in this newsletter. Check back in your Zimbra email to June 15 if you did not yet see our letter. It is important that all our members keep up to date on what we are doing to serve their interests.

The main aims of the letter were to present some of our views on what might be done about the current situation at AU, to counter some of the misleading claims of the AU administration about that situation, and to make it clear that CUPE members need to be included in any meaningful consultations regarding the future of AU. In the latter regard, we hope to meet with the Minister in the not-too-distant future.

We currently believe that the new government has the potential to bring a fresh new perspective to post-secondary education and we are looking forward to working with them in the interests of improving not just AU, but all Alberta post-secondary educational institutions. Please also note that your Executive welcomes the views of any CUPE member on the issues being raised. Feel free to contact one of your co-chairs if you have anything to say, including any comments on the contents of the letter to the Minister.

CUPE-AUPE-AUFA Unity to Protect Learning at AU

CUPE 3911 has in the past worked with our allies in the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE) and the Athabasca University Faculty Association (AUFA) on issues of common interest pertaining to AU. Our most recent collaboration was a June 8, 2015 meeting that resulted in a June 11 Press Release addressing the current situation at AU, sent out under the banners of our three organizations. The Press Release may be found on the AUFA site at <http://www.aufa.ab.ca/>

More specifically, the Press Release briefly addresses Athabasca University's June 1 Report of the Presidential Task Force on Sustainability. CUPE members may recall that CUPE was not allowed to have a representative on this task force. The Task Force Report may be found at <http://www.aufa.ab.ca/uploads/1/3/9/9/13991368/2015-sustainability.pdf>

AU interim President Peter MacKinnon has "replied" to the three-union Press Release; this means that there will be a further press release by the three unions to respond to his reply. The current newsletter



includes an article (below) which addresses MacKinnon's reply. MacKinnon's reply to the Press Release may be found at:

<http://news.athabascau.ca/news/au-president-peter-mackinnon-responds-to-recent-task-force-criticism/>

CUPE 3911 Replies to AU President MacKinnon's Reply by Dougal MacDonald

On June 1, 2015, Athabasca University released its Report of the Presidential Task Force on Sustainability. During the month of June, CUPE 3911, AUPE 069, and AUFA released a joint Press Release regarding the report. On June 16, interim AU President Peter MacKinnon released a statement in response to the three-union Press Release, entitled "AU President MacKinnon responds to Recent Task Force Criticism". The URLs of all these documents are provided in a previous article in this newsletter (CUPE-AUPE-AUFA Unity to Protect Learning at AU).

Normally, CUPE, which was excluded from the Task Force, would not respond to something like President MacKinnon's reply to the Press Release, but given that it is riddled with inaccuracies, accidental or deliberate, we feel we must set the record straight. The document misrepresents CUPE's stand in several important ways, and we will address these individually. Overall, the reply seems to suggest that the AU workers and CUPE in particular have some sort of hidden agenda designed to harm the sustainability of Athabasca University. This is patently ridiculous.

President MacKinnon's reply begins inauspiciously with the erroneous statement that the Press Release was sent out by the four unions at AU. There are actually only three unions at AU (one is technically an association): CUPE 3911, AUPE 069, and AUFA. Perhaps MacKinnon thinks there is another union hiding under his bed, gnawing away in darkness at the sustainability of AU. In any case, this is a rather limp beginning to his "corrective" reply but, as a former premier of Alberta once said, "math is hard".

MacKinnon states that nowhere in the Task Force report is it suggested that "*(the Report) seems to urge shutting down the school and moving its functions to other institutions.*" Yet, on Page 7 of the Task Force Report it is stated that the size of the town of Athabasca "*is an obstacle to the recruitment and retention of professional personnel*" and that Athabasca does not meet MacKinnon's criteria for "*viable small town universities and colleges elsewhere in Canada and the United States.*"

Later on P. 19, the Task Force Report states, "*We are on a path to insolvency.*" Investopedia defines "insolvency" as, "*When an individual or organization can no longer meet its financial obligations with its lender or lenders as debts become due. Insolvency can lead to insolvency proceedings, in which legal*



action will be taken against the insolvent entity, and assets may be liquidated to pay off outstanding debts.” “Liquidation of assets”, for example, instructional technology equipment, would seem to suggest shutting down the school, in most people’s books.

President MacKinnon plays with words by stating that what the Press Release calls “pointing the finger” is really “providing context”. This is similar to his arbitrarily defining the call centre an administrative rather than an academic matter. In other words, it is pure solipsism; the world is whatever MacKinnon defines it to be. MacKinnon at first seems to place some responsibility for “AU’s financial mess” on the administration but that really boils down to saying that the administration’s only financial sin was being too kind to the supposed “greedy” members of CUPE, AUPE and AUFA who, of course, are the real culprits once again.

MacKinnon also decries the fact that few tutors live in Athabasca. First of all, let us remember that AU also has offices in Edmonton and Calgary. Second, AU courses are not taught in classrooms in a building in Athabasca. The point of an online university is that the location of the students and hence of the instructors is flexible. Further, AU tutors are all forced to be part-time and so require other work to make a living, e.g., contract teaching for other post-secondary institutions. Such work may be more easily found in the locations they have chosen to live in.

President MacKinnon ends his reply with a lame attempt to suggest that the union Press Release “disrupted convocation” and “diverted the spotlight from the students”. What happened? Did a shower of press releases flutter down from the sky onto the graduates in the middle of the ceremony and did they all pick them up and start reading them? Let us remember that it is the members of the three (not four) big bad unions who are mainly responsible for helping the students get to graduation in the first place. The three unions have always supported the graduates and their successes and we always will, as evidenced by the regular messages of thanks that we continue to get from our students.

Education Workers are Not a Cost by Dougal MacDonald

One of the main attacks by AU President Peter MacKinnon and others of his ilk is based on the false notion that education workers are a “cost”. This is usually expressed by saying that paying workers less or laying them off will “save” money, which is an outmoded narrow capital-centered view of the situation. From the modern human-centered perspective, post-secondary education workers are not a cost but a source of value, which they produce within the post-secondary education system. Laying off education workers or cutting their pay reduces the capacity of the education system to produce value, which results in a great loss to the economy and society.



Education workers produce the important service of education, which has a definite value. The value they produce is greater than the previously produced value that has gone into producing them as education workers and greater than all the other transferred-value that is consumed during the production of education and transferred into the service. The specific work-time of teaching, research, community service, administrative support, maintenance, and so on carried out by education workers produces the service of education, and this improves the capacity to work; just think of all those students being educated.

The service of post-secondary education improves students' knowledge and skills. The value they obtain from education is then transferred through work to create even greater value. The more education they receive, the more valuable their work-time becomes. Also, the increased knowledge and skills applied to productive work leads to the reduction of the work-time required to produce a certain quantity and quality of goods and services. The saved work-time can be deployed in the production of additional goods and services raising the standard of living and the capacity of the economy to meet and guarantee the needs and rights of everyone.

Education enables the development and improvement of the quality of work-time, its productive capacity, as well as improvements in education itself. The contributed work-time of the education workers and its value is embedded in the students who have become more educated. The students can then transfer the benefits and value of their education to the economy and society. For example, a recent study by two University of Alberta (U of A) Business professors found that the University of Alberta alone annually contributes \$12.3 billion to the Alberta economy.

The value created by education workers and the benefits this generates is for the wellbeing of all. The general interests of society should be recognized and honoured. The PC government's 44-year practice of cutting government investments in post-secondary education and causing the lay-off of education workers was retrogressive and should be denounced by all. Public education, education workers and the value they produce are an indispensable pillar of modern life. Any administration or government that attacks that pillar is not fit to make educational decisions.



AU in the Media

Lately, there have been several articles and documents published about Athabasca University. We are pleased to see this as we have campaigned in various ways for some time to get more public discussion going on about what is happening at AU. To help keep our members up to date, we are providing the URLs for four of those articles (below).

We caution our members that we do not endorse or agree with everything in those articles but, again, we feel it is important that our members keep aware of what is being said, make up their own minds, and, as often as possible, contribute their own thoughts to the ongoing discussion.

Athabasca University's Troubles Grow. Tony Bates. June 9, 2015.

<http://www.tonybates.ca/2015/06/09/athabasca-universitys-troubles-grow/>

Province May Need to Step in to Save Athabasca University. Edmonton Journal. June 11, 2015.

<http://www.edmontonjournal.com/Province+need+step+save+Athabasca+University+minister+hints/1129290/story.html>

Grim Athabasca University Report Says Future is Now, But faces a Different Future than the One Its Authors Anticipated. David Climenhaga (Daveberta). June 12, 2015.

<http://www.tonybates.ca/2015/06/09/athabasca-universitys-troubles-grow/>

Student Update: The Future of AU NOT According to (Social Media). AU. June 18.

<http://news.athabascau.ca/news/student-update-the-future-of-au-not-according-to-social-media/>

COCAL XII, August 2016 To Be Held in Edmonton

COCAL stands for the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labour. COCAL is a grassroots coalition of activists primarily from Canada, Mexico and the United States, working in the interests of contingent faculty: sessionals, adjuncts, part-time, non-tenured, and graduate teaching faculty. COCAL seeks to bring greater awareness to the precarious situation of contingent faculty in higher education, organize for positive action, and build solidarity among our colleagues.

Every two years, COCAL holds an international conference to bring its activists together. Prior to 2012, all COCAL conferences were held in the United States and Canada. In 2012, COCAL X was held in Mexico City. Then it moved back to the US In 2014, COCAL XI and was held in New York City. The next COCAL is



destined for Canada. As we have previously announced, COCAL XII will be held right here in Alberta in the City of Edmonton on the weekend of August 5-7, 2016. This is the first time COCAL will meet in this province. CUPE 3911 has taken on the welcome task of organizing this exciting international conference.

While the beginning of the conference is over a year away, we are already moving forward on some of the long-range planning for the conference, we welcome any suggestions from our members regarding the conference and its contents. We suggest that members begin by going to the COCAL website to get some sense of what has happened at previous conferences. Clicking on “Events” will bring up a description of the August 2014 conference in New York.

<http://cocalinternational.org/>

Why CUPE Did Not Initiate Bargaining

On May 6, 2015, your CUPE bargaining committee met at the CUPE Alberta offices to discuss the issue of a potential new round of bargaining to reopen our collective agreement with Athabasca University. Legally, to begin bargaining, either CUPE or AU had to serve written notice of the intention to do so by May 1. In summary, the University did not serve notice to bargain and neither did we so the current collective agreement remains in force. Our main reasons for not bargaining were the general negative climate at AU and the overall situation in the province, relating in part to the decline in oil prices. We also were aware that AU administration asked AUFA for a 5% pay cut when their new round of bargaining opened earlier this year.

The other factor we had in mind was the possibility of a new government that would be more friendly to working people such as ourselves. As everyone knows, the NDP won the May election and has now formed a majority government. Honourable Lori Sigurdson is the new Minister of Advanced Education. Already she has given us some good news. She announced on June 18 that Alberta's NDP government has committed to increase post-secondary funding as noted in our first article in this newsletter.

The prospect of bargaining with AU administration next year looks like a much better option, after the new government has established itself, gathered the relevant information, and laid out its priorities. It may even be the case that anti-union AU President Peter MacKinnon will no longer be president by then and that at least some of the members of the PC-appointed Board of Governors will have changed. So it is extremely likely that we will bargain in 2016. Given this current situation, any of our members who have proposals for bargaining next year should save them to assist us in the next round.



Potential CAUT Censure of AU Addresses Call Centre Imposition

Recently we notified our members that the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) was considering censuring Athabasca University *“unless they agree to remedy violations of basic university governance principles and address concerns about academic freedom. Delegates to CAUT’s Council meeting this month voted unanimously to give notice to the institutions that unless the situations are suitably resolved censure will be imposed at the next council meeting”* (CAUT Bulletin, Volume 62, #5.)

The CAUT Bulletin article concerning the possible censure goes on to specifically address the issue of the imposition of the call centre at AU: *“In February, CAUT warned Athabasca University’s interim president Peter MacKinnon about ‘serious allegations of a violation of collegial governance’ concerning approval to set up student call centres that faculty warned had pedagogical implications.”*

In his letter to MacKinnon, CAUT President David Robinson wrote: *“I am aware that your administration informed all staff last year that it has ‘settled on’ a ‘Student Success Centre’ model which will eventually be used in all faculties across the campus. In its communication, the university made clear it knows that the call centre model will directly affect teaching and learning. Consequently, we would expect that the decision would need to be approved by the General Faculties Council.”*

Robinson’s letter continues: *“On Sept. 17, 2014, the GFC passed a motion that effectively directed the university to suspend implementation of the student success centre model until the matter was brought back to GFC to consider the issue and make recommendations. We are particularly alarmed to hear that you took this GFC motion to be advice only, and not a directive. This changed the intent of the motion and undermined GFC. This heavy handed approach is contrary to the traditions of collegial governance in Canadian universities generally.”*

To find out what a CAUT censure of AU would actually involve, please go to <http://www.caut.ca/about-us/caut-policy/lists/administrative-procedures-and-guidelines/procedures-relating-to-censure>

Also, note that the complete CAUT Bulletin article about the censure of AU (and of UManitoba) can be found at: https://www.cautbulletin.ca/en_article.asp?articleid=4007