

ARTICLE 1
EDITOR'S NOTE

ARTICLE 2
LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY INSOLVENCY
REFLECTS A STRUCTURAL CRISIS IN
ONTARIO'S NEO-LIBERAL UNIVERSITY
SYSTEM

ARTICLE 3
CUPE 3911 MONTHLY GRIEVANCE
REPORT

ATTEND CUPE 3911 MONTHLY MEETING, SEPTEMBER 25, 2021

Our next general meeting, open to all members, will be held on Saturday, September 25, 930 AM. Suggested agenda items should be sent to the administrator's email address by 1100 PM, Tuesday, September 21. The meeting will be conducted remotely via ZOOM.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Since many members of CUPE 3911 are likely taking time off in August, this month's newsletter is limited to one major article plus the monthly grievance report. The major article is written by a former Laurentian University professor who has been fired. He also happens to be a former Edmonton City Councillor and a former president of the University of Alberta Student Union. The article is mainly about the Laurentian crisis but while addressing that topic it also provides a very good summary of the current situation in Canadian universities as a whole.

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY INSOLVENCY REFLECTS A STRUCTURAL CRISIS IN ONTARIO'S NEO-LIBERAL UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

by David Leadbeater, former associate of professor of economics, Laurentian University

On February 1, Laurentian University's President and Board got what they wanted from Ontario Chief Justice Geoffrey Morawetz: "This Court orders and declares that the Applicant [Laurentian] is insolvent and is a company to which the CCAA applies."

The Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA) is federal corporate bankruptcy legislation dating from 1933. For the first time

in Canadian history, the CCAA was applied to one of Canada's public universities.

To the court, Laurentian characterized itself as a "publicly-funded, bilingual and tricultural postsecondary institution," with about 8,200 undergraduate students and 1,098 graduate students in attendance. For now, Laurentian is said to be the largest of five universities in northern Ontario. Laurentian is based in

Sudbury, the largest hardrock mining centre in Canada. It has taught many first-generation and working-class students, and has recognized responsibilities to the Franco-Ontarian community and Indigenous peoples in northern Ontario.

Rapid Attack in a Time of Pandemic

Laurentian's CCAA insolvency claim was mobilized as a rapid attack – in the context of a pandemic – to slash academic programs and faculty complement. It enabled the Laurentian board to break important labour protections, especially faculty collective-agreement articles on redundancy and financial exigency.

Numerous reports surfaced that undermined Laurentian's credibility. Alan Harrison of Queen's University, appointed January 22nd as a special advisor to the Ontario Minister of Colleges and Universities, found that the Laurentian administration had been hiding deficits since 2014. Some media reports and angry public letters revealed that research grants and private donations had disappeared, as they had been intermingled with the regularly (mis)managed funds.

Within two months, Laurentian succeeded in slashing programs, full-time faculty, and research. By the official count, 38 of 101 English-language programs and 27 of 65 French-language programs were closed. In total, around 200 faculty members and staff, not including at the universities federated with Laurentian, were eliminated. The faculty association lost about one-third of its 360 full-time members; the staff union lost 42 of 268 positions; and the non-union staff, including administrative, professional, and senior management, lost 37 of 134 positions. Varsity

men's and women's hockey and swim teams were cut. And, of course, arts programs and cultural-values programs were most severely hit.

Another destructive stage in the CCAA process was reached when Laurentian unilaterally terminated its agreements with the three federated universities – Huntington University (United Church), Thorneloe University (Anglican), and the University of Sudbury/Université de Sudbury (Catholic) – thus driving these former partners, which largely provided arts programs, into bankruptcy.

The Université de Sudbury also had a historic relation to the Franco-Ontario community predating the foundation of Laurentian in 1960, housing the second oldest Indigenous studies program in Canada.

Then, long overdue, the provincial legislature's public accounts committee dispatched Ontario Auditor-General Bonnie Lysyk to investigate the Laurentian situation.

During this devastation, and despite protests and waves of community anger and incredulity, President Robert Haché and his communications staff put out releases that overlooked the lack of consultation and accountability with university faculty and students and the larger community of Sudbury and northern Ontario.

In spite of formulaic phrases about Laurentian's commitments to its bilingual and tricultural mandate, the administration's actions would eliminate the French department, francophone economics, francophone history, and francophone theatre, and dismantle Indigenous studies,

including the program's efforts at Indigenous language preservation.

While extolling Laurentian's role in educating first-generation university students within a working-class community, the administration, at the same time, destroyed the labour studies program. While speaking of the need for a strong university in the region, Laurentian's corporate strategy erased, in both English and in French, such basic university programs as environmental studies, geography, math, music, philosophy, physics, and political science.

Mismanagement at Laurentian and Ontario's Public University System

The Laurentian debacle reflects a structural crisis rooted in Ontario's neoliberal university system, particularly years of privatization through increased tuition fees coupled with corporate managerialism.

The public line of the Laurentian administration has been typically Thatcherite: there was no alternative but bankruptcy or a scorched campus strategy. They continuously repeated that Laurentian had too many courses with low enrolment and that enrolment had declined in recent years.

Little has been said about why enrolments were low or declining, other than fleeting mentions of northern "demography" (declining population). But most students in northern Ontario come from away and, in any case, university participation rates in northern Ontario are far below those of southern Ontario, something that is well known and should be at the top of a serious regional mandate but is not.

Other factors affect northern Ontario: negative enrolment and allocation effects of rising tuition fees and student indebtedness, and deteriorating employment prospects in Northern Ontario.

Northern Ontario has structurally disadvantageous conditions due to its hinterland-colonial history: a population of about 780,000 (about 6% of Ontario) across a land area of 800,000 square kilometres (about 87% of Ontario); a multinational make-up, including Indigenous nations and francophone communities; lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates; weaker educational, media, and cultural institutions; lower educational attainment and university participation; and, not least, the ongoing ravages of colonialism.

The problem of low enrolment or excess capacity in some programs is not historically new for northern universities. However, in certain ways, today's conditions are worse. There is more widespread deterioration in employment and social conditions in northern Ontario, but neoliberal Ontario government policies have also succeeded, to a greater degree, in privatizing the provision of public university education and research.

Ontario governments have reduced their public grants for university operating revenues from a level of about 80% in 1980 to around 50% in 2004, and to only 38% in 2017. Ontario provincial documents and some senior administrators speak openly not of public universities but rather, of "publicly assisted universities" and "publicly supported universities."

Over these years, domestic and international tuition fees and miscellaneous fees paid by

students jumped from 15% of operating funds in 1980 to 56% in 2017, becoming by far the largest source for operating funds.

Ontario now spends less per university student than any province in Canada and has among the highest tuition fees in Canada. At Laurentian University, full-time annual undergraduate arts and science tuition fees had increased to \$6,473 in 2017-18, a nearly 9.4-fold increase in nominal terms and 2.6-fold increase in real terms since 1979-80.

Tuition fees in undergraduate professional programs, such as engineering and business, were “differentiated.” Graduate and post-undergraduate professional faculty fees were increased even further. Miscellaneous student user fees were also increased and new user fees created, such as fees for services in registrars’ offices, athletics facilities, and for materials in some programs.

The primary issue here is not about academic competition among universities, which has long existed. Rather, it’s corporatized, tuition-driven competition on a highly uneven playing field. Increased tuition dependence in a context of slower system growth has intensified competition among universities for students and increased administrative expenditures for advertising, recruiting, public relations, and alumni- and corporate-oriented fundraising campaigns.

The privatization push also became fertile ground for increased managerialism, which was framed as needed for cost control and market-narrowed educational objectives. At Laurentian, this resulted in increased stratification in salary structures and has shifted staffing away from teaching and research.

Results of These Factors

What have the results been for northern Ontario, especially the full-time undergraduate enrolment, which is most crucial to the Northern universities?

For Ontario as a whole, full-time undergraduate enrolment grew in every year from 2000 to 2018 except in 2007 (the end of the double-cohort boom of 2003-06) and remained higher than population growth. Part of this expansion was due to an increased number of international students.

For northern Ontario universities, by contrast, full-time undergraduate enrolment peaked in 2011 at nearly 18,000 and has since declined. As a share of the Ontario university system, the Northern universities reached a relative peak of 5.2% of full-time undergraduate enrolment from 2004 to 2006 (during the double-cohort period) but had declined to 4.2% by 2018.

Every northern university has been affected by enrolment decline. Full-time undergraduate enrolment peaked at Lakehead University (6,426 students) and at Nipissing University (3,874 students) in 2010, at Algoma University (1,218 students) in 2013, and at Laurentian University (grouped with l’Université de Hearst, 6,624 students) in 2015. These numbers include the southern campuses of northern universities.

Of course, northern universities are not unique in facing enrolment declines, but the northern universities are more vulnerable due to their generally small scale, greater declines proportionate to their size, and greater variability in enrolment.

Overall, rising tuition-fee dependence has had at least four intertwined and negative consequences on northern universities and especially arts programs: (a) decreased student accessibility in the midst of below-average university participation, (b) enrolment bias against arts programs, especially the fine arts and humanities, (c) increased corporate rather than collegial behaviour, and (d) weakened long-term regional development objectives.

For neoliberal administrations, especially in disadvantaged regions, university planning has become less about educational need or even regional development and more about “aligning” programs and faculty complement to student demand and corporate labour-market pressures, which are increasingly systemwide.

By this market logic, Laurentian will cease to be a university with a wide range of accessible programs serving northern Ontario and become a narrow polytech, heavily dependent on limited enrolment programs with more tuition-fee leverage and even higher outside enrolment.

The pattern is clear in Laurentian’s own data on full-time faculty members before and after “restructuring.” Laurentian’s faculty complement was slashed overall by 30%, but for arts it was 55%; compared to education 29%; science, engineering, architecture 27%; health 17%; and management 12%.

What Next?

The present insolvency crisis is a historic turning point. The crisis is framed as confined internally to Laurentian, resolvable by one-time cuts and better management but

separate from failed government policy. This framing does not honestly deal with regional enrolment issues and will disproportionately hit arts programs and francophone and Indigenous programs, although it will also affect some sciences. In the end, however, all programs will be affected; the neoliberal hawks will come after larger programs as long as the path to higher tuition fees and privatization is open.

The alternative path, to halt program and faculty cuts, would recognize two failures: local administration failure and provincial policy failure. This would require emergency funding to save programs and jobs as well as to reform the enrolment system to stabilize and broaden the process, especially full-time undergraduate enrolment.

First, there should be an immediate reduction and eventual elimination of tuition fees (without means-testing) for both provincial and international students, beginning with programs that have excess capacity at all northern universities. The universities should be compensated, per student, by the Ontario government.

Second, the province should regionally balance the allocation of system enrolment to stabilize northern university enrolment. Northern Ontario has about 4.2% (and declining) of Ontario’s full-time undergraduate enrolment. Even a one-percentage point reallocation in the system would have a major effect on stabilizing northern enrolment, including at Laurentian.

Third, there also exists a major federal responsibility in the current underfunding and privatization of postsecondary education in Ontario and northern Ontario. These include

fulfilling treaty responsibilities for educational funding of Indigenous students; strengthened support for French-language programs, regional research and cultural program support; and a non-exploitive approach to international-student exchange that supports both universities and international students.

At Laurentian University, in particular, faculty members have often heard that Laurentian should become “the mining university.” Laurentian University is not formally a mining university, nor should it be. Earth sciences, mining engineering, and related mining programs at Laurentian have an important role, and the region has legitimate pride in these Laurentian activities. But Laurentian students and the region also benefit from arts and other non-mining programs.

Northern Ontario and its peoples are a lot more than mining, and mining itself is in employment decline in Northern Ontario. In practice, the talk of making Laurentian a mining university is a code for abandonment, if not outright destruction, of arts programs. Some university administrators might think opportunistically that continuing to play to mining corporations will solve the current crisis. But such an approach carries little to no prospect for this working out well for Laurentian, while it does carry the prospect of destruction for the arts and crucial areas of science.

Faced with deteriorating university conditions, Ontario university administrations, faculty associations, and student

organizations, from their varying perspectives, have been critical of the inadequacy of provincial funding and the consequences of protracted austerity.

Inadequate total public funding has done major harm to Ontario’s universities and the system is faced with further damage as the current Ontario government implements “performance-based funding.” However, a simple return to enrolment-based funding in a tuition-fee-driven system is not a solution to the deepening crisis, especially for northern Ontario and for arts education. Neither will it be enough to save Laurentian, nor another public university from becoming the next predictable debacle. •

(Note: This article first published on the *The Monitor* website, and will appear in the Summer 2021 issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves*.)

(Note: David Leadbeater was an associate professor of economics before being one of about 200 employees terminated by Laurentian University.)



Random Thoughts: On Sunday August 15, the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau announced an early and quick federal election which will take place on September 20. This came as a bit of a surprise as the general feeling in the country right now seems to be that this is no time for an election, let alone an early one, what with major questions about COVID and the fourth wave still unanswered, rampaging forest fires, and so on. It is no secret that the Liberals called the election because they hope to gain a clear majority in Parliament. At the same time, some recent polls suggest that the Conservatives have gained ground, as well as the NDP. For workers, it's a sheer waste of money because as a result of the cartel party system of elections and government, they have no say whatsoever on choosing candidates or who wins or what is the agenda. So, let us together renew the political processes in this country by making sure that the voice of the workers IS heard loud and clear both during and after the election. Because the fact is that only the workers themselves can represent their stand against the ruling elite's anti-social offensive, privatization and war agenda which are the result of Canada's integration into the U.S. economy and war machine.

CUPE 3911 Monthly Grievance Summary Report

By Barret Weber, Grievance Officer

A grievance results from a violation of the Collective Agreement, Human Rights, Occupational Health and Safety Act, Labour Relations Act, or other University policies. If you feel there has been a dispute or difference of opinion or interpretation between yourself and the employer you should contact your administrator and/or your executive immediately. If the matter cannot be resolved informally then a grievance can be filed.

There are three types of grievances: individual, group, and policy.

- An individual grievance is a complaint that an action by the employer has violated the rights of an individual as set out in the Collective Agreement, law or by some unfair practice. E.g., discipline, demotion, timesheets etc.
- A group grievance is a complaint by a group of individuals all affected the same way, e.g., all employees in a particular department.
- A policy grievance is a complaint by the Union that an action or failure or refusal to act by the employer is a violation of the Collective Agreement that could affect all members covered by the agreement.

CUPE 3911 is working hard on a number of individual, group and policy grievances on behalf of members. Here is a brief summary of the recent activity. Note that activity does not mean that previously listed grievances were not active but just that they were not active this month. Many of these activities were carried out in collaboration with our CUPE National Representative

- Supported numerous members on understanding their rights and contract challenges, especially around workload, performance appraisals, coordinator criticisms of work performance, and workplace accommodations
- Worked on arbitrations with National Representative, CUPE National, and union Co-chair
- The union currently has 1 active grievance, 5 grievances going to arbitration, and several areas of discussion with the employer

Barret Weber
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Announcements

CUPE 3911 Monthly General Meeting. September 25. 2021.

Municipal Elections, Alberta. October 18, 2021. Co-chair Glynnis Lieb is running in Ward Ipiihkoohkanipiahtsi.

CUPE 3911 Website. We have a shiny new CUPE 3911 website which we urge all our members to visit and use. The URL is CUPE3911.ca



Editorial Policy: The Outsider

The Outsider is the voice of CUPE 3911. It is our vehicle for communicating with our members, on a regular (monthly) basis, about the issues that concern and confront us as workers. The Outsider is also the voice of our members. We encourage and welcome relevant contributions from members. While contributions are welcome, they need to contribute positively to the welfare of our union local and our members. They also need to contribute positively to the advancement of public post-secondary education in Alberta. We will not accept or print attacks on any of our members or our union leadership/executive. We also reserve the right to reply to any submissions that seem to reflect a misunderstanding of CUPE 3911 and its policies. Please direct all articles, letters, comments, and ideas to our administrator.