

# OUTSIDER: THE VOICE OF THE TUTOR

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**CUPE** / Canadian Union  
of Public Employees

## Attend the CUPE 3911 General Membership Meeting

Our next general meeting, open to all of our members, will be Saturday, March 25. Additional information will be sent to all members as needed. Stay tuned.

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## FIRING OF ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT 'POLITICS OVER EDUCATION'

(CUPE 3911 Press Release, 9 February 2023)

### Further labour unrest will follow if UCP keeps interfering in university



EDMONTON – The union representing academic instructors at Athabasca University is coming to the defense of fired President Peter Scott. CUPE 3911 co-chair Ann Reynolds called Scott's dismissal "shocking and disappointing" and noted that the UCP government move had more to do with rural politics than academic standards.

"The UCP prioritized politics over advanced education by trying to force AU employees to relocate to Athabasca, even though the town doesn't have room. At the same time the world is moving to remote worksites, the UCP is trying to take away Athabasca University's greatest advantage: we've been delivering online learning for decades."

Reynolds says the replacement of Scott and members of the AU board will result in more appointments of UCP members and others with little background in running online academic institutions.

"Dr. Scott is an expert in on-line and open education. He vigorously protested using a university to further the UCP's political agenda. He was fired without cause while dealing with the death of his wife. This is undue interference in the running of Athabasca University and is a danger to the needed arm's length relationship with the government of the day."

Reynolds said CUPE 3911 members have always worked from home and few, if any, will move to Athabasca. "Firing Dr Scott will intensify the problems that exist and will create labour unrest."

CUPE 3911 is the only trade union in Alberta consisting wholly of academic instructors. We are part-time, hired to teach specific courses in our academic fields under the direction of faculty coordinators, with whom many of us share the same credentials. This arrangement allows Athabasca University the economic flexibility to have a low ratio of faculty to students while still maintaining academic rigour.

**CUPE 3911, Co-chairs Ronnie Leah, Glynnis Lieb, and Ann Reynolds**



## **AUFA STATEMENT OF FIRING OF AU PRESIDENT PETER SCOTT, FEBRUARY 2023**

The Athabasca University Faculty Association (AUFA), representing Athabasca University's academic faculty and professional staff, condemns the sudden firing of Athabasca University's President by the University's Board of Governors.

AUFA condemns the Board of Governors' callous firing "without cause" of the only president in years to openly defy the government, as we condemn the Board's lack of transparency in hiring a new president. "The Board's actions demonstrate a flagrant abuse of the search process and a disregard for collegial governance," says AUFA President Rhiannon Rutherford. Davina Bhandar, a faculty member and AUFA Constituency Representative, expressed concern that "the Board is not working in the best interests of the University but, instead, to further political gain for the governing party."

"In long service with AUFA, I've seen employer and government misbehaviour you wouldn't believe," says Prof. Mark A. McCutcheon, AUFA past president (2013-14), "but I've never seen things this chaotic, never seen a Board so ill equipped to support our mission and students, or such a leadership vacuum for the union to fill."

The UCP government's interference in a public institution's governance threatens institutional autonomy, disrupts and undermines continuity of governance, drains the confidence and morale of students and staff, wastes inordinate money and time, and has made the Board's composition less diverse.

From deep cuts to public universities' budgets, to interference in collective bargaining, to wholesale replacement of public board members, to this abrupt firing, AUFA reads the UCP's unprecedented interventions in higher education governance as evidence of the Advanced Education minister's political manoeuvring for a tight electoral race this spring.

The Alberta government's interference in a public higher educational institution undermines collegial governance and raises grave questions about appropriate procedure in Board decision-making; as the Tyee has reported, several Board members are on record saying they got no say in the Board's decision to install a new president.

AUFA condemns the Board's lack of transparency, callous disregard, and flagrant abuse of AU policy, procedure, and past practice, all of which are hurting students and causing disruption and demoralization across the University. The Board is not working in the best interests of Athabasca University.

If the UCP government is serious about supporting our University, AUFA urges it to fiscally support the institution in fixing the government-made mess at AU.

## ATHABASCA U PRESIDENT FIRING: BOARD MEMBERS RAISE QUESTIONS

by Charles Rusnell, Reprinted from *The Tyee*, February 2, 2023)

After a long power struggle with Alberta's government over the direction of Athabasca University, Peter Scott was on leave after his wife's death when told of his firing. Photo via Athabasca University.

The president of Athabasca University, Canada's top distance learning institution, appears to have been fired Wednesday without a vote by the entire board of governors, *The Tyee* has learned.

Three board members, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they weren't notified of a vote, which was conducted by email, and only learned about the firing of President Peter Scott - three weeks after the death of his wife - after it had been done. Two said they learned about it when a news release was issued Wednesday afternoon.

"If I missed the memo or something, maybe, but I'm not aware that there was a meeting this morning," one board member said, "and as far as I know, there was no vote this morning."

A second board member said "the vote was supposed to be done by email but I never got any email" while a third board member said board chair Byron Nelson had the phone contact information for every board member but they were not contacted.

The board's bylaws allow votes to be taken by email but all three board members assumed there would have been an in-person meeting to discuss the firing of the president and the hiring of a new president.

Reached by phone Wednesday evening, Nelson, a Calgary lawyer, insisted the firing of Scott was a "proper vote based on our bylaws." He said he contacted every board member but he refused to say if everyone had voted.

"I mean, some people can choose to either support, oppose or abstain, or people can choose not to vote in the course of a meeting in the approval process, but everybody participated," he said.

Challenged again with the fact that members had told *The Tyee* they were unaware of a meeting and had not voted, Nelson responded: "I am saying that we had a vote as per our



bylaws that was in line with our governance rules and [it was] binding."

Athabasca University's board of governors lists 19 members including the president.

The firing of Scott brings to an end a campaign by Alberta Advanced Education Minister Demetrios Nicolaides to force Scott and Athabasca University to move more staff to the town of Athabasca to improve economic development in the area.

*The Tyee* has confirmed Scott first found out that Nicolaides' handpicked board of governors was searching for a replacement, and that he had been fired, when he was contacted by Nelson on Wednesday.

The firing comes about three weeks after the passing of Scott's wife, Fiona Brooks, an academic executive who worked in New Zealand. She died in Australia after a short bout with cancer. Scott is in Australia on leave and declined comment.

"He was in Australia not long ago for his wife's funeral so this is, to say the least, heartless and soulless," said Sir John Daniel, a former university board member, when told about the firing Wednesday.

"Peter was very popular and a lot of people had invested great hopes in him. This is a massive loss for the university."

In a statement issued to university staff moments after Scott had been fired, Nelson said Scott would be replaced by Dr. Alex Clark, the university's dean of Health Sciences.

"This is an important decision and comes at an important time of growth and needed stability," the statement said.

"Dr. Clark was a leading candidate in our recent and thorough search for a new president. Using an executive placement firm, we followed an extensive and exhaustive search that involved multiple steps and included numerous international candidates.

"Dr. Clark has impressed the board with his vision of leadership, his strong credentials, and his commitment to the community."

Neither the faculty association nor the students' union was consulted about Clark's hiring.

The genesis of the dispute was Nicolaides' insistence that the university abandon its near-virtual strategy,

which allows senior administrators, including the president, professors and other staff to work remotely from across Canada.

Beginning in March last year, Nicolaides demanded Scott and the board instead produce a plan to force the relocation of hundreds of employees, including Scott, to the town, 150 kilometres north of Edmonton, to bolster the region's economic development.

Nicolaides however, evidently had not consulted anyone before issuing the demand because, as experts pointed out, it would be logistically impossible for the town to accommodate an influx of that magnitude. The town's mayor said they had not asked for that many people to be moved there, and didn't want them.

Still when the board balked at the forced-relocation directive, Nicolaides fired former board chair Nancy Laird and replaced nearly the entire board by December.

Nicolaides issued an ultimatum that 30 per cent of the university's staff, and nearly half its senior executives, must move to the town within three years or he would slash their funding. That was subsequently whittled to four key senior executives and 30 new hires.

In response to that directive, the university's vice-president of finance and its chief human relations officers both chose to leave the university. The university currently has a hiring freeze so it's not known how the directive to have 30 more people live in the community will be fulfilled.

Nicolaides did not respond to a request for comment.

Experts in post-secondary governance and distance learning called Nicolaides' ultimatum an unprecedented political overreach that may cause the university's collapse. Several senior university executives had said they would quit rather than move to the town.

The Tyee contacted two senior executives Wednesday. Both said they wouldn't move, even if it was required to keep their jobs.

"I am not currently in a position to move," said business dean Lisa Watson. "In another year or so I would see where I was at and consider it then but for my family situation I will not be moving in the near future."

"I am disappointed in the firing of Peter Scott and I am horrified by the timing," Watson said.

University of Toronto professor Glen Jones called Nicolaides' ultimatum "the most egregious political interference in a public university in Canada in more than 100 years," and he said it could threaten the university's survival.

Jones said Athabasca University is commonly regarded as a world class Open University.

He said the university's vision to go near virtual was "highly innovative" and was warranted at a time when the entire world has just experimented with working from home.

On Wednesday, Jones said Scott's firing would have been the board's decision.

"I'm not saying it's not without influence from the minister," Jones said. "I obviously have no sense of that but it must clearly be related to the controversies that took place several months ago now and the assumption obviously is the board is not satisfied with the direction that the university is taking and one would think that community pressure played a role in that."

A group of townspeople, including the town's mayor, had lobbied Nicolaides and former premier Jason Kenney to move jobs back into the town and they hired well-connected lobbyist Hal Danchilla, who had worked on Kenney's election campaign, to press their case.

Sir John Daniel, a world-renowned expert in distance learning, also said the directive would cause "the collapse of the university in the short-to -medium term because of the number of people (senior executives) who would leave."

"I think the university is in for a period of fairly chaotic desertion of staff depending on exactly what the government has imposed, which is still a bit unclear," Daniel said Wednesday.

In firing Scott, Daniel said, the university has lost "someone who had a real vision for what the whole distance-learning technology development meant for higher education."

Daniel said Scott understood, as did the previous board, that the university's survival depended on the need to remake the university with a focus on attracting national, and international students.

"Because one of the keys to success in these distance operations is scale because it requires a fairly large upfront investment to make it run well and Peter understood all that."

In a video posted on YouTube Wednesday, new Athabasca University president Alex Clark said he and his family moved to Alberta 20 years ago from Glasgow but he said his move to Athabasca University in 2021 had been "life changing."

"As president with an active residence in the town of Athabasca I commit to growing AU's contributions near and far and reinforce the foundation that makes this possible."



## ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT FIRED AFTER LONG-RUNNING DISAGREEMENT WITH UCP OVER INSTITUTION'S ROLE IN ATHABASCA TOWN

*(by David Climenhaga, February 2, 2023; Reprinted from Daveberta)*

After months of scrapping with the United Conservative Party government over the role Athabasca University should play in economic development for the Town of Athabasca, university president Peter Scott has been fired.

In a [statement emailed to AU faculty and staff](#) yesterday ostensibly announcing the appointment of a new president, UCP-appointed board

Chair Byron Nelson confirmed that Dr. Scott “has been released from his position as president of Athabasca University.”

While the term “released” was ambiguous, Mr. Nelson soon after told media Dr. Scott had been “terminated without cause.”

Mr. Nelson, a former Progressive Conservative Party leadership candidate, did not give a reason for Dr. Scott's firing in the email, nor did he say in his statement how or when the decision was made, or precisely by whom – factors that could turn out to be important if a satisfactory severance deal cannot be reached with departing president, who was hired only in January 2022.

[According to the Globe and Mail](#), Dr. Scott's five-year contract had a base annual salary of \$305,000 and indicated he is entitled to 26 weeks' salary as severance. Given the circumstances of his firing, arguably for trying to do what he was hired to do after moving from Australia, it's possible that won't be the end of the story.

Dr. Scott [was touted as “an international expert in digital-first learning”](#) when his appointment to lead the 53-year-old distance education university was announced. He had been vice-chancellor at the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia. He holds a PhD in psychology from Sheffield University in the U.K.

However, he soon made himself unpopular with Advanced Education Minister Demetrios Nicolaides and former premier Jason Kenney by publicly opposing their scheme to force 500 employees and their families to move to the Town of Athabasca, population 2,800, 145 kilometres north of Edmonton.

Yesterday's firing seemingly confirms an unprecedented level of interference in the operation of the post-secondary institution by elected officials.

In a [video message posted in August last year](#), Dr. Scott assailed the Kenney-Nicolaides plan as “1980s thinking” that would put AU on “the path to ruin.”

In the 12-minute video, he accused Dr. Nicolaides and the UCP of putting regional pork-barrel politics ahead of the interests of the university and its students. “I'm concerned that the minister has put AU in an unreasonable, untenable position,” he said. “Signing this agreement may set the university back 40 years.”

[Dr. Nicolaides eventually toned down his plans for a large move](#), at least for the time being, but continued to insist he wanted the university's top executives to live in the town. He told members of the AU community he believed it was possible for AU to expand the worldwide “near virtual campus” Dr. Scott and earlier presidents had advocated while still keeping a significant number of employees at the university's two-building campus in the town that few students ever see.

Whether the UCP Government demanded Dr. Scott's removal, the board decided to fire him on its own, or the decision was made by Mr. Nelson and other government appointees on the board, his replacement is presumably willing to live in Athabasca and be easier for the minister to get along with.

Dr. Alex Clark, the new president, was until yesterday AU's dean of health sciences. He was a leading candidate in the search that chose Dr. Scott, Mr. Nelson's email said. But given the state of turmoil, falling enrollment, the fact the university is facing a \$5 million funding shortfall, plus the threats of cuts to funding if the university failed to do Dr. Nicolaides' bidding, a normal executive search would probably have had trouble finding a qualified outside candidate willing to take the job.

Dr. Clark holds a PhD in nursing and is an RN. He is the author of a blog called [“The Happy Academic”](#) and, according to his [official AU biography](#), was once named a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader.

In a [video posted yesterday](#), Dr. Clark said that “as president, with an active residence in the town of Athabasca, I commit to grow AU's contributions near and far.”

# AU RAISES TUITION FEES. AGAIN. AND AGAIN. AND AGAIN.

BY DOUGAL MACDONALD, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Here is the official release re fee increases at Athabasca University with our editorial comments. Note that the CUPE 3911 tutor rep on the Board of Governors (BoG) stood on principle and voted against the increase, as did the two Athabasca University Student Union reps who represent 40,000 students. Thank you, Liam. Thank you AUSU.

Note also that the 19-member AU BoG is set up so the 13 corporate (“public”) members can win any vote on any issue. The claim that the Board operates by democratic vote is a complete fraud.)

“Good afternoon,

Athabasca University’s Board of Governors has approved a 5.5% tuition increase that will take effect Sept. 1, 2023. The increase, which has been calculated using the Alberta Tuition and Fees Regulation guidelines, applies to undergraduate and graduate programs and courses across all faculties.”

(Comment: If the guidelines are set by the UCP they will be anti-education. The UCP has been attacking post-secondary education since it was elected, slashing and burning. Note that tuition fees would become a non-issue if Alberta post-secondary education was free which it is in many countries of the world.)

“The increase comes in response to significant inflationary pressure over the past year, which has seen the Consumer Price Index increase by almost 7% last year and by almost 12% over the past two years.”

(Comment: Strange how the issue of inflation is totally missing from any collective bargaining discussions about the need for an increase in the wages of AU employees to compensate for inflation. Also, it is well-known that the UCP is stealthily interfering in collective bargaining by putting a cap on what AU employees and other post-secondary employees are allowed to bargain for as a pay increase: literally nothing.)



“The tuition increase at AU is in line with those approved at other Alberta post-secondary institutions.” (Comment: So, since every other Alberta student is getting ripped off, it’s fine to rip off the students at Athabasca too? Also, note there’s no comparison made with tuition fee increases outside Alberta. That’s because for a full course load, Canadian undergraduates pay on average \$5,754, while Alberta undergraduates will pay \$7,910, including fees [Statistics Canada]).

“In addition, the board approved a decrease of 20.1% for out-of-province learner fees and a decrease of 3.7% for out-of-country learner fees to effectively offset the tuition increase for out-of-province and out-of-country learners. All other unregulated fees will increase by 5.2% for all learners.”

(Comment: Classic divide and conquer. Look at the tid-bit I’m giving you over there while I take away something larger over here.)

“Over the past few years, AU has been reviewing its fee structure in keeping with its mission to remove barriers to higher education for all learners. These fee reductions reflect AU’s commitment to its open mandate, ensuring more equitable access to post-secondary education across Canada.”

(Comment: Again, if AU is so concerned about “barriers to post-secondary education” for all learners why not freeze fees, lower them, and then eliminate them altogether, making post-secondary education free for everyone.)

“AU continues to balance the impacts of inflation and lower enrolment with the need to keep our tuition and fees competitive in the post-secondary sector. AU recognizes that you, our learners, also balance multiple pressures in your lives, and are admirably committed to your education and growth. The university expects to invest revenue from the tuition increase in maintaining services for learners and continuing to improve the learner experience.”

(Comment: More edubabble. Raising fees somehow means making education more competitive? No, it just makes it more expensive. And obviously fees paid to the university will be spent on university operations. Stating that is like saying the Earth orbits around the Sun.)

“Both the undergraduate and graduate students’ unions were consulted on the proposed increase before it was considered and approved by the board of governors earlier today.”

(Comment: As is well-known, all such consultations are completely phoney. Undergraduates and graduates (and tutors and faculty) were asked for their opinion which was then ignored because the increase was already decided on by the Board of Governors which continues to decide everything at AU.)

## UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY STUDENTS PROTEST FOURTH CONSECUTIVE TUITION FEE HIKE

On January 20, hundreds of University of Calgary (U of C) students protested against the university's Board of Governor's (BoG) approval of a fourth consecutive tuition increase. Leaders of the student union spoke out against the increases which averaged 5.5% for undergraduates across faculties, all implemented without any consultation with students.

Maintaining the Canada-wide tradition of using foreign students as cash cows, the university increased fees for international undergraduates from 2-10% for the 2023-24 school year. Domestic graduate students will have to pay 2-5.5% more while international graduate students will see a 2-10% increase.

Residence fees were raised 2-6%, depending on the building and bedroom type. A 7% increase to meal plans was approved. A 4% increase will jack up student parking permit rates.

In a news release the U of C provost peddled the usual neo-liberal nonsense to try to justify the increases, claiming that the increases were informed by student feedback during the phony consultation process in the fall. As is always the case, the consultation was a totally superficial process where no attention at all was paid to students' legitimate assertions that they had a right to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

The U of Calgary BoG chair slavishly echoed the provost, claiming that the fee increases were necessary to meet "budget and inflationary challenges". Of course, one of the main causes of such "challenges" is the UCP government's systematic defunding of post-secondary education and the abject failure of university administrations across the province to stand up for the right to education in the face of the UCP's vicious cuts.

The latest increases raise average tuition fees at U of C to 33% above what they were in 2019, with international students facing a 40% increase in costs. The various "mandatory" fees paid by students, which are just



another way for the university to pick students' pockets have also jumped 20% in that same time period.

A student union survey of 3000 students prior to the fee increases found that 67% of students think that the latest increases will result in financial strain. Nearly one in five said that the tuition increase would make it more likely they would drop out of the university entirely. Inexorably, the UCP and its minions who run the universities are steadily making post-secondary education less accessible rather than more so, contrary to the government's empty claims.

## TWO YEARS IN REVIEW: ACADEMIC RESTRUCTURING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

By Emily Williams, reprinted from *The Gateway*

### \*Part Two (Note: Part One appeared in the January CUPE 3911 Newsletter)

Whole academic restructuring process is "unnerving," administrator said

According to Jones, the issues around contracts were just the beginning. They said they are deeply concerned, calling the whole process "unnerving."

Although they can help each other, each person's job is so different that another person can't take it on, Jones said.

"That's been a huge myth of this whole restructuring process."

Administration across campus all do things in similar ways. But, the information and functions are specific to the department, and the people within them, who have been in their roles for years.

Now, those people are gone, and there are huge gaps left in their wake.

Despite having 10 years of experience working at the university, Jones said they feel as though they're on day one of the job again.

"Together we make it work and we can pool our wisdom, but when a large segment of that wisdom pool is pulled out, the rest are scrambling and it's very difficult."

There's been an effort to fill holes and gaps, but there's not enough manpower to effectively train and still complete their workload. Jones said that a "sink-or-swim technique" was developed in lieu of training — new hires are just given a set of keys and passwords, and largely have to figure it out on their own.

"I pity the people who are coming into this workplace. [They are] just making mistake after mistake and just having to swallow [their] pride and figure out how to not do it."

Ever since the cuts, Jones said many people tell them that they should be thankful they still have a job. Instead, they find it hard to see the positives.

“That’s a bittersweet thought, because you do get survivor’s remorse. You have to stick around and watch ... processes and traditions that have been so robust and so good in the past, just completely decimated for no good reason.”

The feelings of staff are unsurprising when taking into account the scale of cuts the U of A received since 2019. The effects of lay-offs, retirements, and attrition are felt through the incredible workload of current administrative staff and the now-empty floors and offices where previous staff once stood.

### Effects of managerialism have “demoralized staff”

Associate professor Marko Zivkovic spoke out against the managerial model that the university has headed towards. “From what I can see, it has demoralized staff,” Zivkovic said. “And the demoralization is a part of the restructuring, because ... what managerialism does is put people who know less in charge of people who know more.”



He said that supervisors are missing local knowledge and the only reason there has not been more breakdowns is because of the extra work being put in by existing staff. “My worry is that you are overworking people, and paying them less to do more,” Zivkovic said. “And if they can, they will jump ship.” Like Jones, Zivkovic felt this contributed to a loss of local knowledge. “And I think that’s one of the aims of restructuring: to make people interchangeable,” he said.

The university hired a management consultancy firm called the Nous Group to assist in planning and strategizing restructuring. University of Sydney (U of S) hired the same firm during a similar restructuring process, with staff saying that the restructuring contributed to a decrease in the quality of education and experience at their institution.

Zivkovic said that when the same consultancy firm was announced, faculty knew “this is the worst case scenario” based on the results from U of S’s restructuring process...I personally find that it’s just insulting to our intelligence to have a very highly-paid management consultancy come in and tell us how to do things,” Zivkovic said.

Zivkovic quoted the book *The Management Myth* by Matthew Stewart to describe management consultancy firms: “How can so many, who know so little, make so

much, by telling other people how to do the job they’re paid to know how to do?”

Faculty anxious about direction university is headed, fear a “death spiral of diminishing returns”

Zivkovic said that the U of A will get through this. “I’ll say that universities have been around for about 800 years, that we are obstinate and resilient people,” he said. “And so we will survive. But whether you want to have an institution feeling that [it] is just surviving, is a different question.”

He described how there could be lasting negative impacts on the university as a result of this restructuring. “I don’t think we’re in it yet, but there is also a sense in which we’re on the verge of a death spiral of diminishing returns, in recruiting good students.”

He described this cycle, particularly in light of the university goal of increasing enrolment to 50,000 by 2026. “If you want to have more students, you need to have undergrads, you need to have more teachers, and you need to have more graduate students to have [Teaching Assistants],” he said.

But the issue is that in order to attract graduate students, the university needs to offer more competitive funding, or more graduate courses.

“How do you attract graduate students if they look up the courses that are taught at graduate level and there’s precious few?” he asked. “That’s a death spiral for you.”

“Invisible ceiling” traps administrators in their roles, with no hope of promotion

Looking at the bigger picture, Jones expressed worry about the university’s future. For them, there are many feelings associated with academic restructuring: resentment, sadness, and complete distrust.

“[I feel] never ending frustration at the roadblocks that keep appearing in front of me. I just want to enjoy my work and enjoy my workplace as I did before.”

Because of academic restructuring, and the subsequent loss of so much knowledge, non-academic staff are now stuck in their roles. Jones said there’s no room for promotion, since they’re now too valuable to lose.

There’s no real reward for the work they’re doing, they said, and especially not additional monetary compensation. Jones described it as an “invisible ceiling” — they have the credentials, the expertise, and the knowledge to be promoted to better positions, but they just see other people take their place.

“We can just take what’s being delivered down to us. And notice all the holes in it as it comes down and know that it’s gonna be a bumpy ride, and just fasten our seatbelts and hang on with all the power we have to do.”

Despite all the difficulties, non-academic staff who care about students will continue to care. Eventually though, the student-oriented experience will be lost.

“If you’re someone on campus that’s worked with students and you’d like to work with students, you will do



right by them. The university has to stand behind that more.”

When thinking about where the university is headed with this new model, Coleman said she feels worried about the sustainability of their work and their administrative staff. “I’m actually quite anxious and I am not a negative person. I care.”

### **A review of the faculty of graduate studies and research in progress**

Melissa Padfield, deputy provost of students and enrolment, told *The Gateway* that the faculty of graduate studies and research (FGSR) is currently under review. This faculty was not included in the original restructuring proposals. FGSR is a faculty dedicated to providing support and services to graduate students.

“We’ve been pretty open, that we’re doing a review process of the faculty,” Padfield said. “And that’ll help to determine what our next steps are in terms of the FGSR structure and relationship to the new college model.”

Roger Epp, the current interim dean of FGSR, is meeting with deans and chairs about the review, but no formal consultation process has started, Padfield said. She told *The Gateway* that we could expect a lot more information in about three months: “It would be talking about restructuring for [FGSR] so that it is able to be really effective within the new operating model and the new academic structures.”

Coleman said that this review is welcomed, as the faculty was not included in the original restructuring proposal and the faculty is “very hard to work with administratively.”

“I am delighted that they’re doing this,” she said. “One of the constant questions in fall 2020 was: why is FGSR not part of this process?”

Two years in, restructuring seems to have created a lot of anxiety for the university community. People are putting in more work, and have less resources, than ever before at the U of A. While it seems that the worst of cuts and restructuring is over, the impacts will continue to be felt as the university adjusts.

The U of A’s global rankings have started to from the downward trend seen in the wake of budget cuts. That said, many still fear that our university will not be able to sustain the same level of student experience, and academic success, that we had held previously.

The only thing holding the university together is non-academic staff. Even with a nearly doubled workload, they’re doing their best to maintain the same level of excellence students and faculty expect. But many are unhappy. If nothing changes going forward, the U of A could experience an incredible loss of invaluable faculty and non-academic staff, changing this institution for good.

## **UNIVERSITY EMPLOYEES CONTINUE FIGHTING FOR THEIR RIGHTS AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

BY DR. DOUGAL MACDONALD, COMMUNICATIONS

Vigorous strike activity continues in Canada’s post-secondary sector. In Alberta in January 2022, a historic 12-day strike was settled at Concordia University Edmonton. The strike was the first ever of post-secondary faculty in Alberta. Salary gains, job security, and improvements to working conditions for faculty members were part of the new agreement. Soon after in March 2022, a 40-day faculty strike was settled at University of Lethbridge.

In fact, during 2021-22, a record six faculty associations were on strike in Canada. Besides Concordia University Edmonton and University of Lethbridge, faculty association strikes took place at Acadia University, University of Manitoba, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, and Université Sainte-Anne. In addition, CUPE 3912, representing sessional instructors and teaching assistants at Dalhousie went on strike, as well as CUPE 3906 representing similarly classed employees at McMaster University.

Very recently, strikes were settled at Cape Breton University and at Memorial University Newfoundland (MUN). At Cape Breton, a 12-day strike was settled on February 7, 2023. The agreement includes a nearly nine per cent salary increase over three years, along with room for annual bonuses. At MUN, on February 10, 2023, a tentative agreement was reached after a twelve-day strike. The next steps include ratification by the board of regents and the faculty association. The university said it wouldn’t share terms of the agreement while the ratification process is underway.

According to the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), more than one-half of faculty unions in Canada are in collective bargaining this year. Some of this is due to the fact that some previous contracts were extended during

the COVID pandemic. Now new negotiations have come due. Given the numbers engaging in collective bargaining, it would not be surprising if 2022-2023 sets a new record for the number of faculty strikes.

Of note during all the strikes was the manner in which other unions from other universities picketed in solidarity, including travelling to the sites where the strikes were being held. Other unions not directly connected with post-secondary education also showed strong solidarity. The strikes give fair warning to those in power that workers at universities are not going to be pushed around. Instructor working conditions are student learning conditions. We will stand up and fight for our rights and for the right to education no matter what.



## BILL 124 RULING STRUCK DOWN – FOR NOW (by CAUT Staff)

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) welcomes an Ontario Supreme Court decision to overturn Bill 124, legislation which capped public sector wage increases at one per cent for three years. The Court found that the bill violates the Charter-protected collective bargaining rights of workers, including academic staff at universities and colleges.

“This is a big win for public sector workers, including university and college staff,” said David Robinson, CAUT Executive Director. “Once again the courts have upheld the principle that when governments substantially interfere in collective bargaining, they are violating rights guaranteed in the Charter.”



A coalition of labour organizations, including the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, challenged the law, arguing that it limits freedom of association, freedom of speech, and equality rights under the Charter. The Court agreed that the act infringes on freedom of association.

The ruling, if it stands, opens the door for back pay for the approximately 780,000 workers who were affected by the one per cent limit since 2019. The Ford government says it intends to appeal the ruling.

**(Editorial Note:** What Ford is trying to do by passing Bill 124 in Ontario is being done in Alberta by the UCP without legislation. The UCP is stealthily interfering in post-secondary collective bargaining by dictating to the universities and technical institutes that there is a strict maximum limit to what monetary compensation their employees can bargain for. That limit is essentially an “increase” of zero per cent!)

**Random Thoughts:** When I was young, I was taught to clean up my own messes. Later as an activist I

learned a little mantra called “Polluter pays”. Neither guideline seems to apply to the mostly foreign energy monopolies who have for decades plundered our resources and labour and then ran away with their profits, leaving behind a huge environmental mess. Now the Premier has come up with the brilliant idea known as the R-Star program whereby the energy monopolies which have left messes all across the province are going to get paid to clean up after themselves. This is at a time when the energy monopolies are making record profits and Smith can’t seem to find enough money to properly fund education, health care, affordable housing, and other hugely valuable social programs. But, yup, there’s always enough money around to slip into the pockets of the deadbeats of the energy business. In 2018, an Alberta government regulator estimated the cost of cleaning up Alberta’s orphaned oil and gas wells could be up to \$260 billion. Meanwhile, the funds collected by Alberta regulators from oil companies to clean up their mess totals just \$1.6 billion. The upshot is clear. As is always the case, when businesses and the governments that shamelessly shill for them evade their responsibilities, it is the rest of us who pay the costs.



# CUPE 3911 Monthly Grievance Summary Report

(By Ernie Jacobson, CUPE 3911 Grievance Officer, January 15, 2023)

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.

## GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 2023

There is no grievance report for February. The next issue of the newsletter will include a full report and update.

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## Announcements

**CUPE 3911 Monthly General Meeting.** Saturday, March 25. 9:30 AM.

**CUPE Alberta Convention,** March 22-24, 2023

**International Women's Day.** Rally and March will be held on Sunday March 5. Meet at 100 PM on east side of Corbett Hall, University of Alberta, 112 St and 82 Ave. March along Whyte Avenue to Wilbert McIntyre Park.

**May Day.** May 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Alberta Provincial Election.** May 29.

**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](http://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.