

COVID-19 and the academy

***What will the pandemic mean for
faculty associations and their members?***

May 8, 2020

OCUFA

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des associations des professeurs des universités de l'Ontario

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The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations has been the provincial voice of university faculty since 1964. OCUFA represents over 17,000 professors, academic librarians, and other academic professionals in 30 faculty associations across Ontario.

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Introduction

“There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.”
- Lenin

The COVID-19 crisis has impacted every aspect of our lives. In Ontario, we are seeing signs of hope, but there is no indication of when physical distancing measures will lessen or what our new, post-COVID-19 reality will look like. Within academic institutions across the province, the sudden and dramatic shift in course and service delivery had a jarring effect on both full-time and part-time faculty, as well as academic librarians.

Since March, academic staff have been devoted to getting through the term while taking the best possible care of their families and communities. On campus, members have undergone an overnight shift to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), defined as a temporary move of all educational sessions and teaching content to online platforms due to crisis or emergency circumstances.¹

This shift has created a variety of labour relations challenges. Faculty associations heard concerns from their members regarding increased workloads, pedagogical issues such as grading, student evaluations of teaching, research projects, tenure files, sabbatical leave, and job security for contract faculty. Several associations have negotiated Letters of Understanding (LOU) with administrations that address these issues. In other instances, member concerns were discussed on a case-by-case basis with the administration and have largely been resolved satisfactorily. The most significant outlying issue remains job security for contract faculty.

Without sacrificing their members' rights, faculty associations were flexible in their discussions with the administration on how to make it through the first phase of this crisis. The sheer magnitude and challenge of the pandemic fostered a spirit of cooperation at most institutions.

As the summer and fall semesters approach, it appears that remote teaching arrangements are not likely to be as temporary as we all hoped. While some research and campus operations may resume by the start of the fall semester, current public health guidelines indicate that it is likely the fall semester will need to be conducted through ERT. This continued reliance on ERT may create new problems and exacerbate some of the tensions members experienced in the initial move to remote teaching.

Our hope is for this paper to serve as a basis for discussion on how OCUFA can best support member associations over the next period in ERT and post-pandemic realities.

¹ It is important to be clear about terminology. There are clear differences between courses specially designed for an online learning experience and assessment and courses that are urgently moved to remote delivery platforms in response to this public health crisis. The goal and purpose of ERT is not to provide a robust and fully designed alternative learning environment, but to provide access to content and teaching material where in-person delivery is not possible.

Equity implications of COVID-19 on Ontario campuses

Similar to most workplaces in Ontario, universities and colleges have been severely impacted by the global pandemic and resulting economic crisis. COVID-19 has highlighted and amplified existing inequities within the academy. Academic staff with caregiving responsibilities, disabilities, and underlying conditions; with precarious employment, who are largely women and racialized or Indigenous faculty; and with limited access to equipment and internet are disproportionately bearing the brunt of emergency measures on campus.

Faculty members and academic librarians across Ontario have stepped up to play their part in “flattening the curve” by supporting social distancing measures and moving to ERT. However, the cancellation of classes and immediate move to online platforms – while ensuring that students are supported – has led to unprecedented increases to workload and anxiety levels for many academic staff.

How has COVID-19 impacted precarious and equity-seeking academic staff?

Within the membership, the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted existing gendered inequities. Faculty and academic librarians with elder and child care responsibilities, the majority of whom are women and single parents, are experiencing immense pressure to continue working overtime while caring for their loved ones as a result of school and daycare closures.

Academic staff with disabilities, many of whom may already be struggling due to inadequate accommodations, are also being asked to increase their workloads; many without the adaptive technologies, interpreters, and other necessary tools to which they previously had access. These pressures are further exacerbated by the lack of support and consideration from administrations about their mental and physical well-being as they work tirelessly to adapt to new methods of course delivery, support students, and manage their own pre-existing conditions.

Indigenous cultural pedagogical approaches to teaching are also being impacted by these measures. With conversations about the appropriateness of providing culturally specific and land-based courses online, some Indigenous and racialized faculty are seeing their courses no longer offered for the coming semesters. This is also true for community and land-based research projects which, on some campuses, are being placed on hold for the foreseeable future. For Indigenous and racialized faculty who are pre-tenure and contract educators, there are significant impacts on hiring, tenure, and promotion.

Access to high-speed internet has emerged as a significant issue as well. Some Indigenous faculty and rural or remote members who have limited or no access to high-quality internet are experiencing challenges with teaching remotely and working from home. Academic staff who have been asked to work remotely will, therefore, have differing abilities to do so depending on their access to the internet.

These issues are compounded for contract faculty within these groups who are not being compensated for the additional time, energy, and emotional labour they are spending to ensure that their courses are properly wrapped up. Precariously employed academic staff are facing growing levels of insecurity as universities move online and cancel some spring and summer course offerings. Racialized students, faculty, and academic librarians are also experiencing heightened levels of xenophobia and racism as a direct result of this pandemic.

Implications for the fall semester

As conversations around planning for the fall semester begin on campuses across the province, many institutions are signalling a continuation of remote work into the 2020-21 academic year. Adding to this discussion is the concern about drops in enrolment numbers and possible forthcoming funding cuts similar to what was recently mandated in Manitoba. These factors and the way universities respond to them may threaten the job security of a number of different precariously employed groups on campus, including contract faculty, and provide for measures such as freezes on hiring.

The potential shift to remote teaching and use of online platforms for courses in the fall would require faculty to take on additional work to create an effective learning environment for students and maintain the integrity of their courses.

For contract faculty, some of whom would be teaching multiple courses over the summer months and/or receiving contracts for fall courses towards the end of the summer, many will encounter challenges in allocating the time and effort needed to prepare their courses for online delivery. In addition, contract faculty often do not have the same level of access to resources and equipment as their tenured colleagues.

For these reasons, it is of utmost importance that universities consult contract faculty on their needs and the kinds of support they require to teach remotely. Administrations must assess the additional workload demands of shifting courses to online platforms and ensure contract faculty are properly compensated for that work. Administrations should also offer as much stability as possible by providing course assignments and contracts for the next academic year in a timely manner.

With uncertainty around when daycares and schools will re-open, academic staff who are also parents of young and school-aged children may require additional support as they continue to manage their work and care responsibilities during the fall semester. These conditions will also impact the capacity of some faculty members to conduct research and publish during this time. Faculty associations are in a unique position to support members by requesting a pause of the tenure clock and by advocating for bridge funding from the employer.

Many faculty with disabilities are already facing barriers due to a lack of sufficient, designated central funding for accommodations and/or due to disability-related stigma in the workplace. As conversations within institutions about financial constraints begin in earnest, accommodations may be seen as a

burden rather than a right. Without interventions from faculty associations, it is likely that existing challenges will continue and possibly worsen with the full move to remote course delivery in the fall.

Consideration must also be made for racialized and Indigenous faculty whose courses may be cancelled due to the pedagogical barriers involved with moving teaching online. Consultation with faculty who are experiencing these cuts is imperative to ensuring equity-seeking members are not further disadvantaged during the fall semester. This is a vital reason why university administrations should not abandon collegial governance in face of this crisis.

Recommendations for faculty associations

It is critical that during this time of crisis we collectively support equity-seeking members to ensure these issues are not entrenched further. Here are a few ways in which faculty associations can play a supportive role and help alleviate some of the burden put on the more vulnerable groups on campus:

- ▶ Reach out to contract faculty and equity caucuses or committees on campus and have a conversation about how best to support them during this time.
- ▶ Ensure your LOU includes provisions that provide financial support and employment security for contract academic staff.
- ▶ Advocate for pre-tenure faculty to be given the option to stop the tenure clock for a year.
- ▶ Create a fund for members to access finances to improve home offices and ease the transition to remote education.
- ▶ Reach out to local campus groups including students and staff associations who may have common interests and shared struggles.
- ▶ If universities are considering financial exigency measures, faculty associations can demand all administrators first take a cut in their own salaries, draw on the institutional financial reserves, and ensure job protection for contract academic staff.

Mental health impact of COVID-19 on academic staff

A global mental health crisis

While the primary concern during the COVID-19 pandemic is the physical health of our community and loved ones, public health experts are also warning of the health toll of the lockdown and social distancing measures enforced to curb the spread of the virus.

Much like the longstanding arbitration rule of “work now, grieve later,” the world is in the process of coping with the new reality of the virus and lockdown now, while the long-term physical and mental health impacts of this pandemic are yet to be fully understood and addressed. Based on previous research, the outcomes are expected to be dire.

Health and economic uncertainties coupled with physical and social distancing measures have resulted in mental distress for many of our members. Needless to say, individuals with a history of mental illness and marginalized communities are most at risk. Unemployment, economic uncertainty, and precarity also have a direct impact on mental health and are exasperated during this period.

Research on economic depressions and recessions points to their negative implications on health, including mental health. Unemployment and recessions lead to decreased life spans and spikes in suicide. A recent Alberta study found that, for every 1 per cent increase in unemployment there is a 2.8 per cent increase in the province's suicide rate. In Europe and the United States, suicide rates rise about 1 per cent for every 1 percentage point increase in unemployment. In addition, there have already been reports that lockdowns are triggering higher rates of domestic abuse and alcohol use.

Professionals have been warning of the mental health impacts of the pandemic, social isolation, and uncertainty about how long it will last. Sandro Galea, Dean at Boston University's School of Public Health, studied the impacts of quarantine during the SARS epidemic in Toronto. She warns that mental illness will be “the next wave of this epidemic” and emphasizes the importance of de-stigmatizing mental illness.

What are the implications for the mental health of academic staff moving forward?

On university campuses, where mental health concerns had reached crisis level prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, the imposed social distancing measures and sudden move to ERT have led to additional challenges for faculty, academic librarians, and students.

The impacts that shuttering campuses and moving to ERT will have on students and faculty mental health have yet to be fully understood, as the last few weeks have been ones of “survival,” and we are not at the evaluation stage yet. The long-term effects of these changes and social isolation will become much clearer in the coming weeks and months. As noted elsewhere, a pandemic holds a mirror up to a society and exploits its weaknesses. Ontario, like most jurisdictions, woefully underfunded mental

health supports prior to the crisis and this crisis has made those gaps even more apparent. The need for mental health support and treatment will only grow as we move through the various phases of the pandemic. Now is the time to start planning and implementing a comprehensive system that fosters mental health on and off campus.

During this time of social isolation and physical distancing, OCUFA's newly formed Mental Health Working Group will be engaged in ensuring that the mental health of academic staff, including contract faculty, is addressed and supported. We will also ensure that educators' mental health is accounted for when the long-term impacts of this crisis are being evaluated. The working group will inform OCUFA's policy and advocacy work on this issue and be used to support faculty association advocacy and bargaining on this issue moving forward.

Collegial governance during the pandemic

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted governance at universities?

In the past few weeks, universities have had to take many unprecedented emergency measures and implement swift changes to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as institutions shift to making longer-term plans about their academic and operational activities for the summer and fall terms, they face challenging decisions about how to carry out the teaching and research that is core to their purpose.

Unfortunately, in navigating these challenging conditions, some administrations are foregoing their responsibility to respect the shared governance structures of their institutions and, instead, are making academic decisions without the involvement of senates and academic councils or proper consultation with faculty. These unilateral approaches have seen the voices of faculty ignored, undermining the collegial governance processes that are vital to the effective operations of Ontario's postsecondary institutions.

Any proposed shift to alternative modes of teaching and learning or to holding full semesters remotely raises many uncertainties, concerns, and challenges. University faculty who do the bulk of the research and teaching at our institutions need to be at the centre of conversations and decision-making processes about the shape of academic activity. Universities also need to consult student groups and ensure that student voices and experiences are heard and respected as decisions about their learning environment are being made. It is only through the collective wisdom and efforts of all members of the campus community that Ontario's universities will be able to chart a path forward that maintains the quality of education and research.

The shared model of governance in place at Ontario's universities is meant to allow voices of campus community members to be heard and for decisions to be made through democratic, transparent, and accountable collegial processes. It is, therefore, very concerning that some administrations are undermining these principles by ignoring their obligation to follow the proper procedures and respect the long-standing decision-making structures of their institutions. Given the technological capacities universities use to allow ERT and remote meetings, there is no justification for excluding faculty voices by circumventing critical governing bodies and processes.

What is the path forward?

In the coming weeks, universities will be making decisions and solidifying plans for the summer and fall terms. In doing so, respecting the foundational governance structures is not just an exercise in democratic accountability, but the most effective way for universities to address the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As more information becomes available about future enrolment and university revenue, and as further decisions need to be made about course delivery, research, student support, and campus safety

measures, administrations must engage with faculty through existing collegial governance structures to ensure that all decisions with academic implications are made by senates or equivalent bodies.

Recommendations for faculty associations

To ensure that administrations are following proper procedure and engaging in meaningful consultation with campus stakeholders, we recommend that faculty associations:

- ▶ Write a letter to their administration and urge them to bring decisions that will impact the learning and teaching process in the upcoming terms to faculty/academic councils for consultation and senate for decision-making. OCUFA can help with drafting a letter.
- ▶ Request a financial report and enrolment projection from the administration if they have not shared one with senate yet.
- ▶ Contact members or stewards in each department and faculty to ensure that governance meetings are being held. Many members have reported unilateral decisions being made at the decanal level.

Labour relations under COVID-19: Challenges and opportunities

COVID-19 has created a myriad of labour relations issues across the province as faculty and administrations scrambled to complete the term via ERT. The initial implementation of physical distancing orders across campuses demanded considerable goodwill on the part of faculty associations. The unprecedented nature of the crisis called for novel solutions and flexibility from both faculty and administrators. The unique and urgent nature of the situation allowed employers to access emergency provisions in their collective agreements as well emergency orders set out by the province.

As we transition out of the crisis state and begin adjusting to a “new normal,” labour relations challenges are beginning to emerge. While some associations were able to anticipate these issues with detailed LOUs that address the unique challenges of teaching remotely, many associations were unable to strike agreements with administrations and have been left to rely on existing collective agreement provisions.

Faculty have been flexible and innovative in meeting the challenges of this pandemic, ensuring Ontario's universities were able to finish the term; but, as we enter the next phase of the crisis there are short, medium, and long-term challenges for which faculty associations must prepare.

Collective bargaining

Members with collective agreements expiring in 2020 are deciding whether to enter bargaining this year or extend their agreement and bargain at a future date. Bargaining this year would require doing so remotely. To help inform this discussion at the local level, OCUFA has issued a statement on the benefits and challenges of bargaining via teleconferencing and video conferencing software. Most members have elected to bargain remotely, understanding that the crisis will likely extend into the fall. Ontario universities will be facing very real fiscal challenges in the short, medium, and long term, and this has changed the landscape for bargaining in 2020. As monetary settlements become more constrained, there may be strategic opportunities to address non-monetary issues.

Member communication

As the pandemic continues, much of our peer-to-peer communication will be virtual. The crisis has created unprecedented demand from members for support navigating the new realities of teaching remotely. This increased demand provides an opportunity to promote the visibility and value of your faculty association to members who might not have been previously engaged. Staying connected with members will also be vital in holding administrations accountable for any attempts to capitalize on the pandemic by shifting workload and teaching assignments. Where possible, faculty associations should continue to meet with the membership and hold virtual membership meetings to keep abreast of member concerns. OCUFA has participated in several well-attended annual general meetings held by associations virtually, and we are happy to participate in any event member associations organize.

Though the means of communication may have shifted, the fundamental principles of political organizing have not.

Hiring and promotion

To ensure physical distancing is maintained, the processes around hiring and promotions should be reviewed to ensure that candidates, both potential and successful, are not required to physically visit the campus. Faculty associations can also advocate for universities to provide an option for faculty to suspend the tenure clock so that research interruptions caused by the pandemic do not disadvantage early-career faculty.

Course cancellations

Reduced financial forecasts and the shift to remote learning may result in course cancellations. Faculty associations may be a source of support for helping departments and schools identify appropriate modes of delivery for courses that cannot be translated into online delivery methods (i.e. laboratories, theatre courses, etc.). Moreover, where a cancellation is unavoidable, faculty associations are in a position to safeguard the seniority and right of first refusal of members, while ensuring these members are not financially penalized. This is especially important for contract faculty.

Student questionnaire on courses and teaching

Members have raised concerns about the validity of student questionnaires on courses and teaching distributed during this time as the abrupt changes faced by students may unfairly translate into negative responses from student evaluations. This issue is particularly relevant for contract faculty and members who have unreliable home internet access. Moreover, the use of student questionnaires collected during this period for future hiring, promotion, and performance reviews may not be representative of a member's performance. OCUFA has called for suspension of student questionnaires through this period. Where they are conducted, they should not be used for evaluative purposes.

Leaves

Faculty who have sabbatical leaves scheduled for the 2020-21 year should be able to cancel those leaves without suffering any adverse consequences. Most sabbaticals involve travel and on-campus research at libraries. The reality of the pandemic will make such research very difficult, if not impossible. Faculty on sabbatical for the 2019-20 academic should be allowed to either extend their leave by six months or be relieved of all or a portion of the productivity expectation for the leave period for reasons outlined above.

Workload and overload assignment

The shift and subsequent maintenance of remote instruction and support may have increased the workload of faculty or shifted workload realities. Unanticipated changes to the workload of members may negatively affect future performance reviews or hiring and promotions decisions.

Faculty associations should also remain vigilant as members may be assigned additional workload or overload amounts while not benefiting from the required additional compensation as defined in your agreements. As outlined earlier, the pandemic is exacerbating existing equity challenges and the move to remote teaching has been especially difficult for academic staff with child care and elder care responsibilities. Faculty associations are well positioned to ensure that administrations accommodate members who are enduring specific hardships created by the move to ERT.

Retiring faculty

Academic staff who have retired or who will retire in the near future are experiencing substantial anxiety regarding their pensionable earnings. The financial consequences of the pandemic have resulted in unprecedented price drops across financial markets. Faculty associations could aid in easing these anxieties by encouraging members to speak with a financial advisor. In addition, faculty associations can amplify the promotion of federal COVID-19 support programs, including the [reduced required minimum withdrawals from Registered Retirement Income Funds](#).

Accommodations

The immediate workload and overload requirements for members delivering remote course instruction or who are equally burdened in their service or research requirements may require workplace accommodations in order to maintain their households or the households of extended family. Members may not be aware of their right to request accommodations from the employer. Additionally, administrators may not be granting accommodation requests consistently across divisions and departments, in particular for members who require accommodations for unanticipated family care.

In addition, it is important to recognize that the pandemic is creating accommodation challenges that could not have been anticipated prior to this crisis. The public health order for social distancing means that all non-urgent and non-COVID-19 medical care has ground to a halt. This makes it much more difficult for members seeking accommodation to secure medical documentation and can create unanticipated challenges for faculty who were on medical leave but are ready to return to the workplace. Those return to work protocols have become more complex than anyone could have anticipated. Special care must also be paid to ensuring academic staff's privacy is also being protected and they are not required to disclose specific details related to their disability status in order to attain accommodation. Meeting these unanticipated challenges will draw on goodwill as well as ensuring that both unions and employers meet their legal burden of reasonableness in all accommodation situations.

Recommendations for faculty associations

The communication systems we build for our faculty associations will become more important than ever. We encourage all faculty associations to use this period to strengthen their dialogue with members, which could include recruiting department representatives to aid in communications or hosting a membership meeting via teleconference to discuss the COVID-19 response.

In the interim, faculty associations should continue to engage with administrations to develop letters of understanding that address the labour relations realities created by COVID-19. Given the reality that faculty will likely be teaching remotely through part or all of the fall 2020 term, it is also critical that existing LOU's be updated.

Organizing in the age of physical distancing

As a result of the pandemic, members are turning to faculty associations in unprecedented numbers for guidance on ERT related-concerns. This increased contact with members presents opportunities for engagement and organizing.

Though organizing online presents unique challenges, the fundamentals of organizing members remains the same:

- ▶ Be tactical, useful, and timely in your communication
- ▶ Be a reliable and professional source of information in a crisis
- ▶ Maintain regular contact
- ▶ Provide members with tangible actions they can take
- ▶ Mobilize to protect the most vulnerable members of your association

As the initial shock of ending face-to-face teaching and the almost overnight move to ERT recedes, it is important that associations develop a plan for organizing and connecting with the membership moving forward.

In addition to labour relations advice, members are hungry for information as they adjust personally and professional to these abrupt changes. Faculty associations are uniquely positioned to demand answers on issues of institutional planning, timelines, and pedagogical polices as they relate to remote teaching. Offering this timely information can situate faculty associations as a trusted conduit of information to members. Providing timely, accurate, and empathetic updates to your members further consolidates credibility and generates political capital that can be invested in the long-term goals of the association.

Organizing for the coming year

Members are concerned that university administrations may take advantage of this crisis to engage in program closures or layoffs by claiming financial exigency. Although there will be disruptions to the postsecondary sector as a result of the crisis, any institution claiming financial distress right now is blaming COVID-19 for underlying problems that predated the crisis. Universities have been assured that their provincial funding allocation for the 2020-21 academic year will be maintained and will also be in receipt of all tuition funding for this fiscal year. It is therefore important to communicate clearly and concisely to your members that any invocation of a financial crisis at this time is an attempt to mobilize the crisis in the service of addressing challenges created by employer decisions that pre-date the pandemic by months or years.

In these challenging times, solidarity across campus and in our local community is more important than ever. In many regions, universities are among the largest employers and important community institutions. Faculty associations can reach out to local politicians, businesses, and community

organizations to find creative ways to work together to ensure continued community support for local universities. Universities are well positioned to help communities recover and rebuild after the crisis and it is important to begin fostering those connections now.

Recommendations for faculty associations

- ▶ Communicate clearly and regularly with your members about what you know (and don't know) about the weeks and months ahead.
- ▶ Continue to hold as much union business as possible remotely, including internal committee, Executive meetings, and AGMs.
- ▶ Reach out to other unions, associations, and student groups on campus to check on their well-being and compare notes on how you are serving your members in the crisis.
- ▶ Have a discussion with other unions and associations about employer messaging on financial and labour relations issues.
- ▶ Reach out to progressive allies in the wider community to see how they are coping, with an eye to political alliances during and after the crisis.
- ▶ If your association has the financial wherewithal, consider a donation to organizations serving those in financial distress in your community.

Ontario university funding considerations

The public health challenges resulting from the pandemic have created historic levels of public sector spending to provide emergency income to Canadians. The federal government is providing over \$130 billion in aid and the federal deficit is expected to grow to \$185 billion as a result.

In Ontario, the provincial government has also rolled out modest income supports. Given the gravity of the situation, these financial supports are vital but they are also creating significant deficit levels. The province is spending up to \$20 billion to aid businesses and individuals affected by the pandemic and is projecting a \$21 billion deficit. These levels of public expenditure and debt have not been seen since World War II.

As a result of perennial revenue shortfalls, provincial finances were already in a challenging state when the crisis hit. As OCUFA and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives have regularly pointed out, tax cuts for the wealthiest Ontarians and regressive tax credits left the province very vulnerable.

To provide short-term relief to Ontario universities, Minister of Finance Rod Phillips committed to the June 30th funding allocation during his March fiscal update. The province also allocated \$15 million in emergency funding to support campuses in the abrupt move to remote teaching. However, the terms of that fund are less than clear and the government has not been transparent about the criteria. The next provincial budget, set to be released in November, may contain further spending measures to stimulate the economy; however, there is a possibility that a period of difficult austerity will follow these spending measures.

What are the financial considerations for the 2020-21 semester?

The immediate financial constraint facing universities in the fall is the declining enrolment of international students as a result of the public health directives on international travel. Some institutions are projecting a drop of up to 75 per cent of new enrolments. Conversely, enrolment of domestic students should remain steady if not increase.

Not all postsecondary institutions will experience this loss evenly. The impact of lost tuition for Ontario universities may be less than colleges.² For universities, international tuition fees represented nearly 20 per cent of total operating revenues in aggregate in 2018-19, the latest year for which there are publicly available data. For universities receiving Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) funding directly, the level of reliance on international tuition ranges from one per cent to nearly a third of operating revenues. For affiliated and federated institutions, the range is between zero and more than one third of operating revenues.

Different institutions adopt different strategies, but they do so in the context of government policy: the pre-existing condition for institutional vulnerability is provincial funding and policy. It starts with a more

2 International tuition fees accounted for 60 per cent of total tuition revenue for colleges in 2019-20; Ontario Financial Accountability Office, *Ontario Service Fees in 2019-20*.

or less continuous decline in provincial inflation-adjusted per-student operating funding to universities, the deregulation of some tuition, notably international student tuition, and permissive inflation of other tuition. The inevitable consequence is that universities became more reliant on tuition for operating funds than provincial operating support. With the decline and depreciation of a funding model designed to maintain predictable revenues in the spite of enrolment swings, universities are now at the mercy of unpredictable shifts in enrolment, like the one expected in the wake of the pandemic.

Universities' susceptibility has been compounded by governments' (provincial and federal) strategy to increase international student enrolment, without corresponding support. In the 2010 Ontario Budget, the government announced a target of a 50 per cent increase in international student enrolment at the province's universities and colleges. Full-time international student enrolment at Ontario universities reached that target by 2014-15. As of 2018-19, full-time international student enrolment had more than doubled since 2010-11. Over the same period, international tuition fees for undergraduates rose an average of eight per cent per year, for graduate students an annual average of five per cent. Provincially the proportion of operating funding accounted for by international tuition in 2018-19 is almost three times greater than it was in 2010-11 (the first year Ontario universities started reporting tuition paid by domestic and international students separately).

Except for an average increase of nine per cent in international undergraduate fees and an average of six per cent for international graduate tuition, it is unknown what the level of universities' dependence is on international tuition in 2019-20. Still less is known about what will occur in the coming year. To date, universities are proposing to increase international student fees for 2020-21 at rates well above inflation.³ At present, few budget proposals include enrolment forecasts that venture to estimate the effect on international student enrolment. For example, McMaster University's budget projects a decline in international student enrolment while Windsor University's budget anticipates a reduction of 11 per cent in total tuition revenue based on a 20 per cent decline in graduate student enrolment.

Though we do not currently have tuition data for 2019-20, we can illustrate the effect of decreased tuition based on 2018-19 numbers. The following table demonstrates the increase in the proportion of revenues represented by international tuition from 2010-11 to 2018-19 (before the domestic tuition reduction), the 2018-19 proportion of revenue accounted by international student fees (as if the 10 per cent domestic tuition reduction had occurred), and projected declines in operating funds and combined operating, research and trust/special purpose funds.

3 Based on available proposed tuition schedules, the trend is to increase international undergraduate tuition for first year as much as 12 per cent, for upper years ~5 per cent. For graduate programs, the range is from zero per cent to 10 per cent, depending on program and university.

Impact of declining international tuition fees on university budgets

Revenue	General expendable (operating)				Operating/Research/Special purpose			
	Dependence		If decline of:		Dependence		If decline of:	
	Since	%	20%	50%	Since	%	20%	50%
	2010-11	2018-19			2010-11	2018-19		
Provincial	2.8	19.9%	4.0%	10.0%	2.9	14.6%	2.9%	7.3%
Algoma	3.5	14.0%	2.8%	7.0%	3.5	13.3%	2.7%	6.6%
Brescia	2.4	21.8%	4.4%	10.9%	2.4	21.8%	4.4%	10.9%
Brock	2.8	17.6%	3.5%	8.8%	2.8	16.5%	3.3%	8.3%
Carleton	1.7	19.6%	3.9%	9.8%	1.7	16.4%	3.3%	8.2%
Guelph	2.4	6.8%	1.4%	3.4%	2.6	4.5%	0.9%	2.3%
Huron	3.0	29.4%	5.9%	14.7%	3.0	29.4%	5.9%	14.7%
King's	2.4	35.6%	7.1%	17.8%	2.4	35.3%	7.1%	17.7%
Lakehead	13.1	18.2%	3.6%	9.1%	13.6	15.2%	3.0%	7.6%
Laurentian	1.6	6.9%	1.4%	3.4%	1.5	5.1%	1.0%	2.6%
McMaster	2.6	13.6%	2.7%	6.8%	2.8	8.4%	1.7%	4.2%
Nipissing	2.9	0.9%	0.2%	0.4%	2.8	0.8%	0.2%	0.4%
NOSM	0.0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
OCAD	4.0	20.1%	4.0%	10.1%	4.2	19.0%	3.8%	9.5%
Ottawa	3.8	16.5%	3.3%	8.2%	3.7	10.6%	2.1%	5.3%
Queen's	3.6	12.9%	2.6%	6.5%	3.8	8.6%	1.7%	4.3%
Renison	1.7	2.8%	0.6%	1.4%	1.7	2.8%	0.6%	1.4%
Ryerson	2.8	8.0%	1.6%	4.0%	2.7	7.0%	1.4%	3.5%
Saint-Paul	1.7	11.0%	2.2%	5.5%	1.8	10.5%	2.1%	5.3%
St. Jerome's	0.0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
St. Michael's	0.0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Toronto	2.9	32.6%	6.5%	16.3%	3.2	21.9%	4.4%	10.9%
Trent	1.3	10.3%	2.1%	5.1%	1.4	9.2%	1.8%	4.6%
UOIT	2.1	6.9%	1.4%	3.5%	2.1	6.2%	1.2%	3.1%
Waterloo	2.3	27.9%	5.6%	13.9%	2.3	20.3%	4.1%	10.1%
Western	2.5	15.8%	3.2%	7.9%	2.6	10.9%	2.2%	5.4%
Wilfrid Laurier	3.6	8.5%	1.7%	4.2%	3.6	7.6%	1.5%	3.8%
Windsor	2.8	26.3%	5.3%	13.1%	2.9	23.0%	4.6%	11.5%
York	3.1	22.0%	4.4%	11.0%	3.0	19.6%	3.9%	9.8%

Over the coming 6–18 months, government funding for the postsecondary sector may be cut and universities may not have the same access to international tuition fees due to the pandemic. OCUFA's focus will be to demand universities draw on their financial reserves to ensure no or minimal layoffs.

Recommendations for faculty associations

- ▶ Work with administrations to ensure that the introduction of SMA3 is delayed or cancelled altogether.
- ▶ Do a financial analysis of your institution's reserves and deficit policy.
- ▶ Review the financial exigency and program redundancy language in your collective agreement and determine if it should be prioritized in the next round of bargaining.

Government relations

OCUFA's approach to government relations will be multipronged to ensure our members weather this storm. At the provincial level, we will work with coalition partners to highlight the revenue challenges Ontario is facing. OCUFA will advocate for a progressive taxation system that ensures profitable corporations and individuals thriving amidst the crisis pay their fair share of tax.

OCUFA is also calling for the government to suspend needless and risky performance measures, protect the jobs of contract faculty, and support students and their families who have been displaced by the crisis. Despite the grim financial reality of COVID-19, there has been a shift in the perception of the public sector and a respect for public sector workers across the province. Though the focus has largely been on the health sector, universities and academic staff are integral to the province's fight against the virus. OCUFA's message will be one of service and hope as we emerge from the crisis.

As the pandemic has unfolded, Doug Ford's stature and popularity has soared. It was a pleasant surprise to see Ford take guidance from public health authorities and take a principled stance to not lay off Ontario public servants. This is in contrast to the approach taken in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia.

Conversely, this is the same Premier who initially cut over \$80 million from Toronto's public health budget in 2019 and suspended comprehensive inspections of provincial nursing homes. The shameful death toll at Ontario's long term care homes may well taint the province's handling of the COVID-19 crisis, but at the moment, Ford is being lauded for his handling of the pandemic. However, when the crisis recedes, Ford will likely return to his ideological roots and we will be faced with austerity budgets for years to come.

OCUFA will continue advocating for the value of public universities as integral to the fight against COVID-19. We will draw attention to universities, highlighting their importance as hubs for the kind of collaboration and creativity that will be needed in the years to come as we re-build in a post-pandemic world.

Remote teaching and online learning

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted mode of delivery for courses?

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of university and college campuses, institutions had to make difficult and immediate decisions about how the winter term was to be completed. Most universities opted for ERT options to deliver the final weeks of classes through online video conferencing platforms and recorded lectures offered through online learning platforms.

ERT and student evaluations

OCUFA's Working Group on Student Questionnaires on Courses and Teaching (SQCTs) has shown that SQCT results are skewed by factors outside faculty control and endemic bias, and that SQCTs contribute to systemic discrimination, facilitate harassment, and compromise educational quality. In addition, online SQCTs have a notoriously low response rates, further compromising their validity and increasing the risk of compounding already existing biases. In light of the findings of the working group, it is imperative that teaching evaluations not be used to assess ERT.

Several faculty associations have negotiated LOUs with clauses on SQCTs such as cancelling student evaluations in the winter term and using evaluation results based on the instructor's discretion for the winter, spring, and summer terms. OCUFA can support faculty associations who are looking to reach similar agreements with their administrations.

Recommendations for faculty associations

As universities begin to make decisions about course delivery methods for the summer and fall terms, faculty must be properly consulted and included in decision-making processes. Some issues for faculty associations to consider:

- ▶ Ensure that the Ontario Health and Safety Act (OHSA) is adhered to during ERT and work-from-home arrangements.
- ▶ Ensure that adequate technical and IT support is provided to faculty who deliver their course content through ERT methods.
- ▶ Ensure that contract faculty have access to the necessary equipment to engage in ERT.
- ▶ Accommodations and access to necessary equipment should be offered by the university.
- ▶ Consider workload implications of transitioning courses to online platforms. The university should provide compensation where needed.
- ▶ Ensure the intellectual property of faculty members is respected for courses offered through ERT.
- ▶ Consider accessibility and accommodation concerns for faculty, academic librarians, and students –

particularly those with care responsibilities, limited access to computers, and the internet.

- ▶ Ensure student questionnaires on courses and teaching are not used to assess ERT.
- ▶ Some universities have been approached about joining a consortium to offer large undergraduate classes collectively. Faculty associations must be consulted on any such arrangements in order to ensure that the intellectual property of their members is protected and that provisions of collective agreements are respected. It may well be that the time and energy spent negotiating such consortiums would be better spent working collaboratively with faculty associations to develop creative and appropriate solutions for emergency remote teaching.

eCampusOntario and remote teaching

What is eCampusOntario?

eCampus Ontario defines itself as “a not-for-profit corporation, funded by the Government of Ontario to be a centre of excellence in online and technology-enabled learning for all publicly funded colleges and universities in Ontario.” At one point, eCampus Ontario was an enthusiastic proponent of online learning and was the vehicle used by then Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne to push colleges and universities to expand online learning opportunities.

eCampusOntario was launched by the Ontario government in 2015 with a budget of \$72 million over five years. It was an initiative of the Ontario Online Learning Consortium (OOLC), [a web portal](#) where students could find online courses offered by colleges and universities across the province. The OOLC (which no longer exists) was funded by the government and jointly administered by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) and Colleges Ontario (CO).

eCampusOntario's mission is to “support the development and delivery of quality online learning experiences” in Ontario. They do so through surveying institutions to determine their top needs in terms of online educational software and using economies of scale to provide desired technologies at no cost or a reduced cost when third parties are involved.

OCUFA's previous advocacy on eCampusOntario

In the last few years, OCUFA has worked with the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario (CFS-O) and the Ontario Undergraduate Students Alliance (OUSA) to request student and faculty representation on the OOLC Board of Directors.

OCUFA also worked alongside CFS-O and OUSA to advocate for online access to free educational resources like textbooks and other course materials. In the summer of 2017, eCampusOntario launched the [Open Textbook Library](#), which was adapted from the BCcampus model used in British Columbia. The library acts as a repository of Open Educational Resources (OERs) from a range of disciplines that are available for use by students and educators at no cost, including for use as course materials.

In response, OCUFA conducted a survey to gauge faculty interest in eCampusOntario's new Open Textbook Library. Many professors expressed an interest in using open textbooks in their courses, but found the available offerings were not adequate. Either no textbooks were available for their field or the ones that were available did not adequately meet their teaching needs. Other faculty noted that they were interested in contributing to the writing of new textbooks relevant to their courses, but that current policies at their institutions did not recognize that work as research or service to the university.

OCUFA's analysis at the time was that online learning was a complex endeavour and required substantial resources to be done properly. In addition we made it clear that there was no great demand for online teaching; despite the ubiquity of technology and increasingly tech savvy students, students vote with their feet and consistently choose face-to-face instruction when provided with the option.

The recent eCampusOntario proctoring service agreement

The move to ERT has also increased the relevance and visibility of eCampusOntario, leading some faculty to believe there would be a renewed push to move more courses online permanently.

On March 31st, the Ontario government announced an agreement with eCampusOntario that will provide postsecondary institutions with technology to conduct year-end exams and assessments. The automated, artificial intelligence-assisted online proctoring will be provided through [Proctortrack](#), a private, US-based, for-profit company, and will be provided on an opt-in basis to Ontario's 44 public colleges and universities.

Since the government's announcement is lacking in detail, OCUFA held meetings with eCampusOntario and sector partners to gather more information. From eCampusOntario officials, we learned that:

- ▶ The agreement between eCampus Ontario and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities is private, although individual institutions could request to see specific, data-security related parts of the agreement.
- ▶ Proctortrack is meant to be used in exams that require a proctored exam experience, especially in programs that have obligations to external bodies like nursing and engineering.
- ▶ Proctortrack is fully funded by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, and there is no cost to institutions for using it. Similar online proctoring solutions can cost up to \$50 per student.
- ▶ While eCampusOntario provides this software to institutions free of charge and they have included several security measures in their contract with Proctortrack, institutions have an obligation to ensure their usual privacy and security protocols are followed. In other words, even if using the software, institutions are responsible for the security and privacy of information for their faculty and students.
- ▶ This is a pilot project that is currently being tested at seven institutions, including a few universities. It is unclear if it will remain available to institutions after the COVID-19 crisis.
- ▶ eCampusOntario said they selected a US-based company since no Canadian companies offer remote proctoring services. Data from Canadian institutions gathered by Proctortrack will be stored in Canadian cloud storage.
- ▶ eCampusOntario has provided institutions with a Q&A to address privacy questions and concerns.
- ▶ Institutions are most interested in transcription and captioning services, and eCampusOntario is in the process of finalizing an agreement to address this need. eCampusOntario also indicated that these services will become more important with the move to remote teaching. This service will be provided on an opt-in basis at a reduced cost to institutions, and not for free, as a third party is involved in the procurement process.
- ▶ eCampusOntario will survey institutions' to determine their need for educational technology for the spring and summer terms.

Despite heightened visibility and an increased role for eCampusOntario during this period of ERT, there does not appear to be any widespread move to compel universities to transfer courses online when the crisis passes. Further, we have no reason to believe that eCampusOntario will be expanding its mandate. OCUFA will continue to monitor the situation, but the primary concern at this point would appear be privacy issues with software that eCampusOntario is sponsoring.

Concerns regarding the use of Proctortrack

There are some significant concerns regarding privacy and security issues given that the software would require sensitive personal data from students to verify their identity. When asked about these concerns, eCampus Ontario noted that they have included several security measures in their contract with Proctortrack and that data from Canadian institutions would be stored in Canadian cloud storage. They emphasized that, ultimately, it is the obligation of institutions to ensure their usual privacy and security protocols are followed.

In April, York University students raised concerns over the Liberal Arts and Professional Students Faculty's decision to use Proctortrack, prompting the faculty to reverse its decision and cancel its use of Proctortrack.

Students raised concerns about data privacy, especially since Proctortrack collects a wide range of students' personal data – including copies of government-issued ID and biometric data, such as scans of hands, knuckles, faces, and keystroke patterns – putting students at risk for data breaches and identity theft. The software also requires students to have a webcam and microphone recording them.

In explaining its decision to use the software, York acknowledged that some students may not have access to the requirements to use this service (a computer, webcam, and microphone). The administration asked students to arrange to borrow a laptop from the university's IT Helpdesk even as public health officials repeatedly asked everyone to shelter in place, putting students at risk.

In an email to students, York University confirmed Proctortrack has been vetted by the University's Counsel, Privacy, and Information Offices. The email also noted that any data retained by Proctortrack will be "securely stored on Canadian servers in compliance with Canadian privacy legislation."

Several days later, the administration wrote students an email apologizing that students' personal information submitted to Proctor has been stored on a US-based server due to a "configuration error," and that the university is in the process of retrieving and purging the data in question.

After significant student pushback, including a petition signed by over 1,200 students, the Liberal Arts and Professional Students Faculty decided to discontinue its use of Proctortrack. This was later followed by York University discontinuing use of the software entirely.

While ensuring exam integrity is important during this period of emergency remote teaching, using problematic software with substantial privacy concerns is not the only solution. Institutions can explore

other options that provide information privacy, including employing teaching assistants to proctor exams of a limited number of students online.

Recommendations for faculty associations

Given the security concerns with Proctortrack, OCUFA recommends that faculty associations:

- ▶ Contact their university administrations to inquire about the institution's use, or future use, of Proctortrack.
- ▶ Request copies of the security and privacy-related documents provided by eCampusOntario to institutions.
- ▶ Contact the campus union that represents teaching assistants to share information on Proctortrack and coordinate responses. Unions representing teaching assistants will likely have an interest in maintaining jobs and may have additional reasons to oppose the use of Proctortrack on campus.

The impacts of COVID-19 on students

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, students at Ontario universities were already stretched thin and asked to bear the brunt of astronomical tuition fees, eroding public funding, and dwindling student aid.

Last year alone, the Ontario government cut over \$671 million from the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and changed the eligibility criteria. This cut largely negated any benefits from the simultaneous 10 per cent tuition fee cut, and has left students even more disadvantaged and with increasing debt levels.

These changes are, by definition, regressive because those most adversely affected are those already forced to borrow for their education. They have made postsecondary education less accessible for students in Ontario, especially for low and middle-income students.

Undergraduate tuition fee levels in Ontario are an astounding 58 per cent higher than the average for the rest of Canada. Ontario's undergraduate international tuition fees have increased by 100 per cent over the last decade, resulting in the province having the highest level of tuition fees in the country (\$38,276 at the undergraduate and \$23,770 at the graduate levels).

In addition, as of 2016-17, tuition fees surpassed public funding as the single largest source of university revenue. Currently, 55 per cent of Ontario universities' operating income is provided through student fees. This figure was only 20 per cent in 1990, demonstrating the increasing reliance on user fees and the gutting of the public funds provided to universities over the past three decades.

How have the students been impacted?

Needless to say, the problems with this flawed policy have been pushed to the forefront of the debate on campuses in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

While students are still required to pay for their summer tuition fees, many have lost employment and access to the summer jobs they were relying on to pay for their school and living expenses. Campus and residence closures have adversely impacted international students and those without alternative housing options. In addition, the move to emergency remote teaching has proven challenging and inaccessible for many Indigenous students on reservations, students with care responsibilities, and those from low-income households.

The pandemic has also created particular challenges for graduate students. With campus facilities closing and restricted access to laboratories and libraries, many graduate students are struggling to meet their research and academic requirements. At the same time, with course and tutorial cancellations, many graduate students are feeling the financial burden of losing their employment opportunities as teaching and research assistants. The ability of parents to work, complete courses, and finish teaching or research assignments has also been compromised by daycare and school closures. As a result, student groups are advocating for an immediate tuition waiver for the spring and summer terms for all graduate students who have to remain registered, as well as extensions to

time to completion timelines and scholarships, including Tri-Council grants. The OCUFA Executive has expressed its full support of the graduate students' demand by signing onto a letter written by the National and Ontario Graduate Caucuses of Canadian Federation of Students.

What supports have been offered to students?

The provincial and federal governments have announced an interest-free moratorium on student loan payments until September 30th, 2020. Earlier in April, the federal government also announced a temporary expansion of the Canada Summer Jobs Program to allow for up to 70,000 youth between the ages of 15–30 to be employed over the summer and to allow employers who hire summer students to apply for a subsidy of up to 100 per cent of the provincial minimum wage.

In addition, on April 22nd, the federal government announced a \$9 billion aid program for students, which will include a \$1,250 monthly payment for postsecondary students and recent graduates to make-up for lost work and cut hours. Students with dependents or who have a disability will receive up to \$1,750. The program will run from May until August. The prime minister also announced that student grants will be doubled for the coming academic year.

Student groups welcomed the federal government's aid package but expressed their disappointment that the benefit is much lower than the \$2,000 available to CERB applicants, noting that “students have the same expenses as everyone else.” Students also appealed to the government to include international students who are not eligible for the benefit.

Recommendations for faculty associations

This crisis has impacted every aspect of society and the campus community. We recommend that faculty associations reach out to the students' and workers' unions on their campus to offer support and share perspectives on the information being communicated from university administrators. Several universities have campus coalitions bringing together the different unions on campus, which have been extremely useful in sharing information and coordinating joint responses to issues arising on campus. It may be useful for associations to engage student unions on some of the pedagogical and collegial governance issues bound up with the rapid move to emergency remote teaching.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 crisis has imposed additional hardship, loss, and uncertainty on our members. It has also magnified the scale of existing challenges on our campuses and communities. Many Ontarians have lost their jobs and many more fear the financial and health challenges that lie ahead. Friends and neighbours have lost loved ones. Most experts concur that we are only in the first phase of this pandemic. Many challenges lay ahead for Ontarians, including faculty. Despite the difficult times we are living through, this pandemic presents numerous opportunities to focus on what matters most. The enduring lesson thus far is how interconnected we are all are locally, nationally, and globally. Universities, at their best, have always understood that interconnectedness. Academic staff have a vital role to play in maintaining the teaching and learning process during these difficult times, and in the economic revival once the crisis passes.

A pandemic holds a mirror up to society and much of what we have seen has been a disturbing and predictable result of the fraying of our bonds of collectivity. However, it has also been an opportunity to deepen and renew what is most healthy and vital about our work. The pandemic is a visceral reminder of the value of public services and the labour of public sector employees. The research, teaching, and service of OCUFA members has never been as important. As we move through this pandemic, it is vital we highlight the value of universities while deepening our solidarity with those most affected by this crisis.