

Academic Matters

Fall 2024

OCUFA'S JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION
LA REVUE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR DE L'OCUFA



*Looking back,
pushing forward*

Carol Anderson

OCUFA at 60: Protecting good jobs
and public education

Nigmendra Narain

How to reject a broken system

An Interview with Lydia Kapiriri

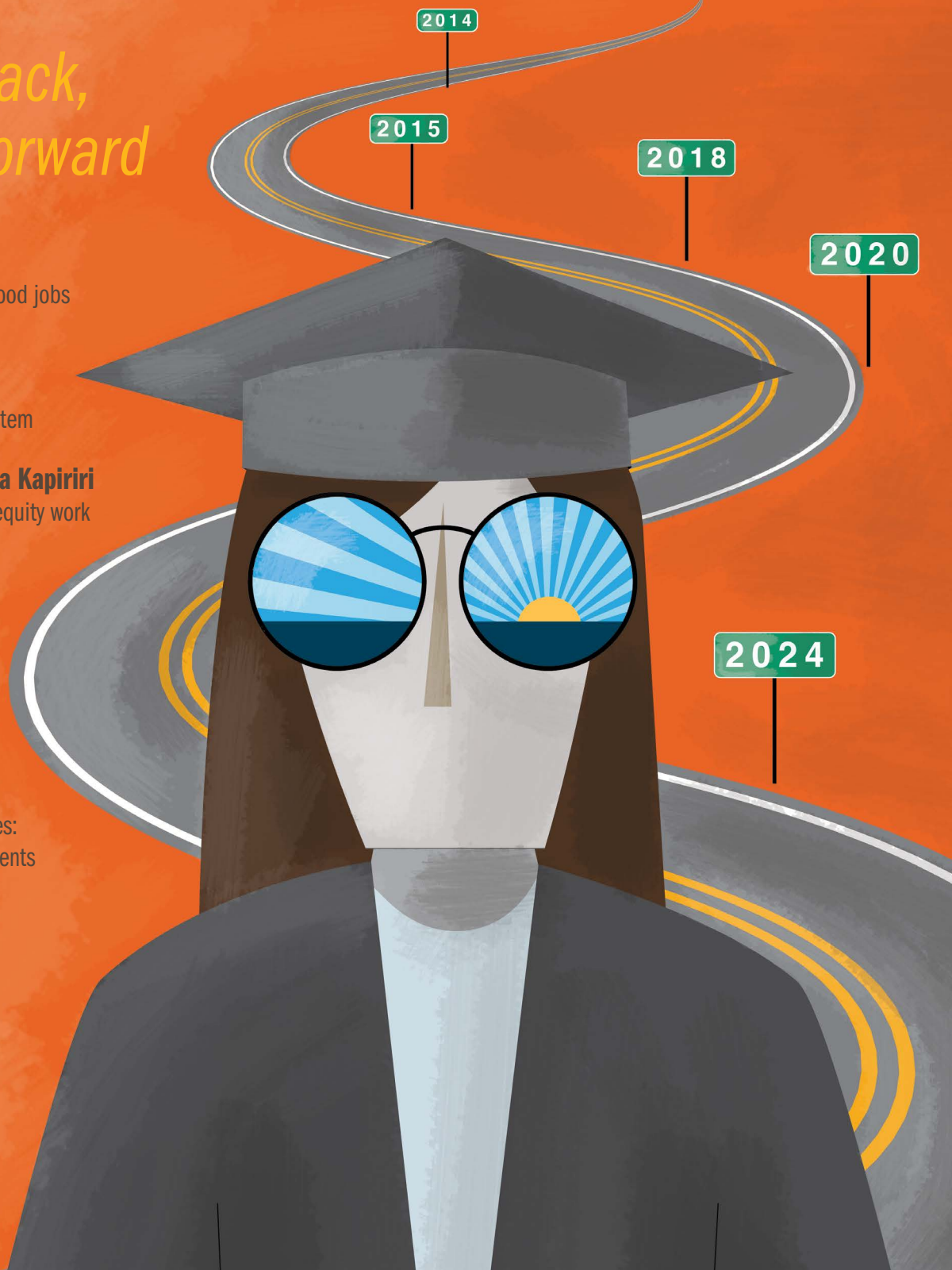
Envisioning a new era for equity work
on campus

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and the first (and last)
CCAA Proceeding in
the University sector

Mohit Dudeja

Transglobal queer identities:
LGBTQ+ international students
in small Canadian cities



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Graduate Fellowship for Excellence in Social Sciences, Humanities, or Arts for doctoral students, explores these questions and more in his PhD research.

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This journal is produced in the Dish With One Spoon Territory, which extends from the Great Lakes to Quebec and from Lake Simcoe to the United States. The territory exists as the result of a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas, and Haudenosaunee that bound them to protect and share the land and creatures within it. Subsequent Indigenous nations and peoples, Europeans, and all newcomers have been invited into this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect. It is in this spirit that each issue of *Academic Matters* is produced.

This journal is printed with union labour, on sustainably sourced paper, and with vegetable-based ink.



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

Academic Matters

OCUFA'S JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION
LA REVUE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR DE L'OCUFA

Academic Matters is published two times a year by OCUFA, and is received by 19,000 professors, academic librarians, and others interested in higher education issues across Canada. The journal explores issues of relevance to higher education in Ontario, other provinces in Canada, and globally. It is intended to be a forum for thoughtful, thought-provoking, original, and engaging discussion of current trends in postsecondary education and consideration of academia's future direction.

Readers are encouraged to contribute their views, ideas, and talents. Letters to the editor (maximum 250 words) are welcome and may be edited for length. To provide an article or artwork for *Academic Matters*, please send your query to Editor-in-Chief Manisha Aggarwal-Schifellite at editor@academicmatters.ca.

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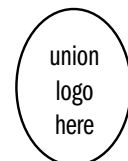
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Looking back and looking forward

IN 2014, *Academic Matters* marked the 50th anniversary of its publisher, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA), with an issue dedicated to “The Future of Faculty Associations.” The issue highlighted some of the challenges, successes, and lessons learned from a half-century of work to promote, preserve, and push forward the public postsecondary education system in this province.

This year, we’re marking another milestone for OCUFA: the organization’s 60th anniversary. To celebrate the occasion, this issue of *Academic Matters* looks back at the last decade in the higher education sector and asks: what has changed? What remains the same? And how can we move forward for a stronger and sustainable university system in this province?

These questions drive much of OCUFA’s work as a provincial organization that provides support to member organizations for campus-based collective bargaining and works with the provincial government to ensure that our world-class higher education system is adequately funded for the next generation of learners and teachers. But the work is not easy, and it is often a fight.

This issue celebrates OCUFA’s work over the past decade and explores some of the major issues—old and new—facing faculty, academic librarians, academic

professionals, students, and staff at Ontario universities.

Researcher Carol Anderson—who first wrote about OCUFA’s history in these pages ten years ago on the organization’s 50th anniversary—looks back on the last decade of challenges and changes in Ontario’s postsecondary education system and how OCUFA has met the moment each and every time.

Building on this historical framework, OCUFA President Nigmendra Narain examines the state of university funding and support for faculty, academic librarians, and academic professionals in Ontario, and how OCUFA and its member organizations across the province have worked to improve student learning conditions, faculty working conditions, and the strength of universities for future generations.

OCUFA’s commitment to tackling issues regarding equity inside the organization and on Ontario campuses has been an integral component of the organization’s recent work. In an interview, Lydia Kapiriri, professor of health, aging, and society at McMaster University, reflects on her personal and institutional experiences with equity work and envisions a future where equity is built into the fabric of a university.

Three years on, the reverberations of the crisis at Laurentian University can still be felt in Sudbury and on the national stage.

As the federal government commits to exempting public universities from corporate restructuring processes, James Harnum, a lawyer at Koskie Minsky LLP speaks to this unprecedented moment in our history and what comes next for universities facing financial challenges.

Finally, the 2023-2024 recipient of the doctoral OCUFA Henry Mandelbaum Graduate Fellowship for Excellence in Social Sciences, Humanities, or Arts, Mohit Dudeja, contributes a piece on his research into the lives of queer international students in small Canadian cities. This is the second such publication by a Mandelbaum Fellowship recipient, and it highlights the vital and new research being done by the next generation of scholars in this province.

This issue of *Academic Matters* also features an original commemorative poster by artist Yaffa Husseini. Yaffa is a young artist who graduated from Algonquin College in Animation and Illustration and holds a Bachelor’s degree in History from the University of Ottawa. She is passionate about social justice and hopes to continue to use her art to support and promote human rights. Yaffa’s poster celebrates OCUFA’s work over the past 60 years and showcases the collective action required to push our sector in new and exciting directions.

Academic Matters is pleased to continue to highlight the research, teaching, advocacy, and learning that fuel the innovations that will lead to a robust, equitable, and sustainable future for public universities. We hope you enjoy these reflections on the past ten years, and stay engaged with our work as we build towards that future.

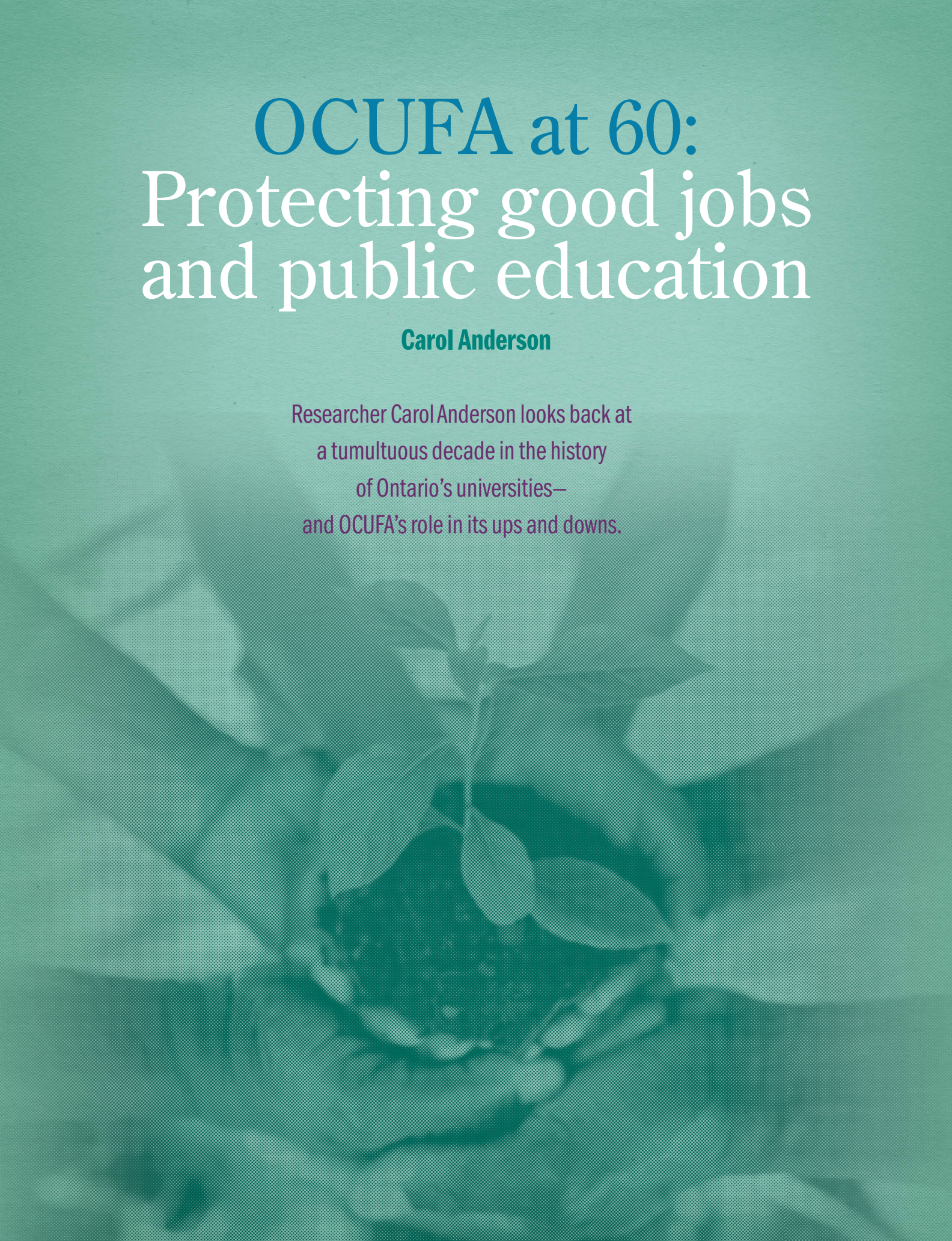
Thank you. **AM**

Manisha Aggarwal-Schifellite is the Editor-in-Chief of Academic Matters and Communications Lead for OCUFA.

OCUFA at 60: Protecting good jobs and public education

Carol Anderson

Researcher Carol Anderson looks back at
a tumultuous decade in the history
of Ontario's universities—
and OCUFA's role in its ups and downs.



Writing our history

In late 2013, I was approached by the prominent labour historian—and a friend and colleague—Craig Heron, about taking on a new project. Craig and I had worked together on several historical exhibits at the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre in Hamilton, Ontario, and so he knew that I would find this new project to be right up my alley: producing a history of OCUFA to celebrate its 50th anniversary. By November, I had met with OCUFA's executive director, Mark Rosenfeld, and agreed to take on the work.

What followed over the next 11 months was an intensive and immersive journey. I became part of an organization that plays a vital role in supporting university faculty, academic



librarians, and academic professionals, and advocating for the public postsecondary education sector in Ontario. And I forged new friendships and lasting connections.

Fast forward 10 years. In the wake of a global pandemic and significant upheaval in the university sector—including deep funding cuts, the decline of collegial governance, the rise in precarious contract faculty work, and so much more—I was asked once again to help the organization celebrate another milestone: its 60th anniversary.

In late 2023, I met with OCUFA's new executive director, Jenny Ahn, to talk about bringing this history up to the present day. Although the issues facing OCUFA had changed in those years, much remained the same—including adequate public funding, affordability of education, the needs of contract faculty, academic freedom, the corporatization of universities, and more.

Ten years ago, I wrote an article for this magazine detailing OCUFA's 50 years of advocacy for its member organizations and on behalf of the university sector. This article recaps that history and brings it up to date.

THE FIRST 50 YEARS

The Birth of OCUFA

In late 1962, delegates from Ontario's then-15 universities met to discuss creating a committee of faculty associations. The Ontario Council of University Faculty Associations, as it was then known, held its first meeting on September 14, 1963, and adopted a constitution on June 16, 1964.

During OCUFA's first few years, the organization responded to the issues created by the dramatic expansion of the higher-education sector, including effective governance at universities, the changing relationship between universi-

ties and the government, and adequate remuneration for faculty. OCUFA's formation also dovetailed with new financial arrangements between the federal and provincial governments that would give provinces greater influence over their postsecondary institutions.

University education after the war

After World War II, and aided by federal initiatives, veterans poured into Ontario's universities, straining the province's small higher education system. By the mid-1950s, the need to expand the system was clear. Between the early 1950s and 1963, the university student population in Canada more than doubled. Thousands of new faculty members were also recruited.

Within this context, OCUFA's mandate was clear: to influence policies and negotiate with the government on behalf of faculty members. Its first major research initiative was the preparation of a 1963 brief to the Premier of Ontario, University Education in Ontario.

Within this context, OCUFA's mandate was clear: to influence policies and negotiate with the government on behalf of faculty members.

OCUFA soon began to put a more permanent team of staff and elected leadership in place to handle the growing demands created by its position within the sector. And in 1969, it moved into its first permanent offices at 40 Sussex Avenue in Toronto.

Late 1960s to the 1970s: Expanding the system

The late 1960s and the 1970s are often remembered as the “golden years” of postsecondary education in Ontario, as the time of the largest expansion of the province’s university system to date.

OCUFA responded to this organizational growth through an internal restructuring process that began in 1979. Many new committees were also struck during this time, including Teaching Awards (1973), Salaries (1967), Pensions (1967), and Status of Women (1972).

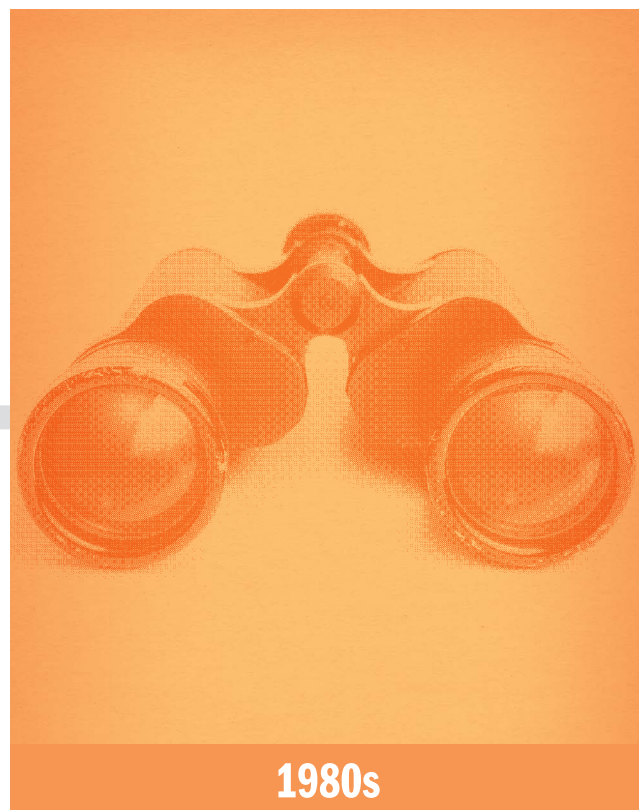
The 1980s: Inflation and Contraction

The postsecondary system expansion came to an abrupt halt by the early 1980s with the onset of runaway inflation that did not significantly decline until the early 1990s. The ensuing economic challenges ushered in a very different era for university faculty by the beginning of the 1980s.

The ensuing economic challenges ushered in a very different era for university faculty by the beginning of the 1980s.

Government efforts to deal with these challenges included 1982’s *Inflation Restraint Act* (Bill 179), which limited annual public sector wage increases to 5%, eliminated the right to strike, and extended current collective agreements by one year, and Bill 213 in 1983, which allowed for direct government intervention in any university that incurred an operating deficit.

OCUFA responded to the new realities in new ways: large-scale advertising, lobbying campaigns, and several



research reports that explored the crisis facing the university sector. OCUFA's "Ontario's Universities, Ontario's Future" campaign was its largest advocacy effort to date. Its advertisements noted that more than 50,000 qualified students could be turned away from Ontario's universities in the next 10 years if the proposed rationalization plan took effect.

The 1990s: "Rae Days" and the Harris "Revolution"

In 1990, Ontarians elected the province's first New Democratic Party (NDP) government, ushering in what many hoped would be a more progressive era. By 1992, however, Premier Bob Rae had begun a program of austerity, culminating in the Social Contract in 1993: public sector unions were forced to implement \$2 billion in wage cuts through 12 days of forced unpaid leave ("Rae Days"). Public sector collective agreements were re-negotiated. And OCUFA member organizations were forced to negotiate 5% wage cuts.

In 1995, Ontarians elected Mike Harris's Progressive Conservatives, whose so-called "Common Sense Revolution" promised a more corporate approach to the public sector and public programs. In 1995, university funding was cut by 16%, programs were slashed, performance indicators were created and applied, and tuition fees rose sharply.

In response, OCUFA began to focus on key priorities. Election-readiness workshops, conferences, and major new research efforts were undertaken once again. And new working relationships with student organizations helped strengthen and extend OCUFA's message.

"Reaching Higher": University education in the first years of the 21st century

The new millennium brought different kinds of challenges to the postsecondary education sector and to OCUFA's member organizations, including demographic changes which increased university enrolment; the resulting expansion of the university system; the impact of technology on teaching; a significant increase in part-time and non-tenured faculty; and the pending retirement of thousands of faculty members.

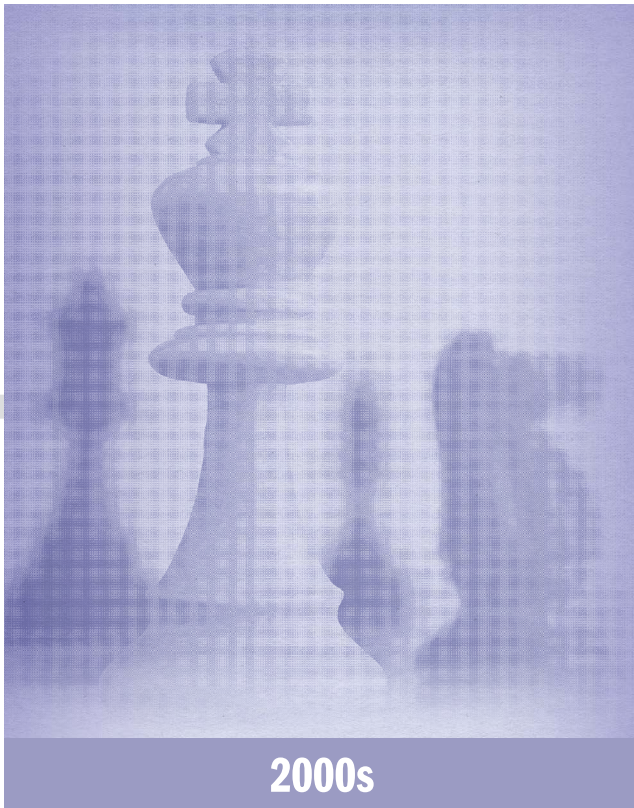
Dalton McGuinty's Liberals were elected in 2003. The government promised to create spaces for 50,000 more students, freeze tuition fees, and expand access to student financial aid. In 2005, the government outlined its "Reaching Higher" plan for investment in postsecondary education, including injecting \$6.2 billion over four years. Yet it was still not enough to overcome the severe cutbacks of the late 1990s.

OCUFA responded to these changes by increasing support for the collective bargaining efforts of its member organizations. It also held communications and lobbying workshops and began commissioning public opinion polls, asking Ontarians what they wanted from the university sector. OCUFA's 2007 "Quality Matters" campaign aimed to ensure that faculty had the resources they needed.

In the wake of the 2007/2008 financial crisis, the federal and provincial government struggled to deal with the resulting financial devastation, deficits, and rising unemployment. In 2010, the provincial Liberal government introduced a two-year wage freeze for about 350,000 non-unionized public sector workers.

By 2011, though the government again pledged to inject new funding into the higher-education sector, it was not enough to "right the ship" in an increasingly under-funded sector. In 2014, although the Liberals pledged to increase the number of government-funded student places in colleges and universities by 60,000 over four years, per-student funding actually fell by 7% over the next three years and tuition fees began to steadily climb.





It was not enough to “right the ship” in an increasingly underfunded sector.

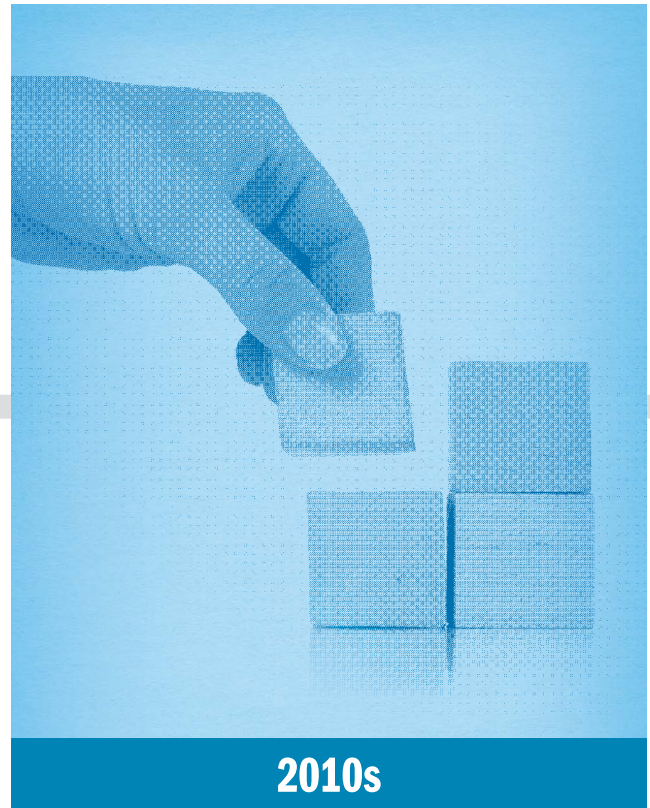
In 2012, OCUFA launched an anti-austerity education and mobilization campaign, highlighting the significant funding challenges facing the higher-education sector and the government’s unwillingness to address the funding crisis.

CHANGING TIMES, EVOLVING PRIORITIES: 2014 TO 2024

The funding crisis accelerates

The funding crisis had become clear by 2015. In response, the government introduced the Funding Formula Review, which re-evaluated the formula by which Ontario’s universities were funded. It included measures to determine “outcomes” to implement a new funding model for universities.

OCUFA’s *Funding Formula Review Handbook*, created after extensive engagement with the government on the



Many universities strained under the weight of the funding crisis, and one broke.

issue, helped guide its member organizations through the review’s principles and laid out its own: “Funding should be: adequate, committed to core activities, student-centred, supportive of good jobs, stable and predictable, equitable, transparent, and respectful of universal autonomy and academic freedom.”

In 2018, the Progressive Conservatives won a majority government and quickly reversed course on several of the Liberals’ initiatives. For example, the *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act*, 2019 (Bill 124) imposed a 1% cap per year on wage increases for public-sector employees for three years.

The government also announced a plan to institute performance-based funding in the higher-education sector, which tied 60% of funding to outcomes or “performance” measures. It argued that this new “business model”-based approach would incentivize institutions to be more productive, efficient, and “in tune” with the labour market’s needs.

In response to the upheaval, OCUFA became more focused on educating Ontarians about the importance of the

province's universities. Its "We Teach Ontario" campaign, for example, promoted the connection between teaching and research in universities through highlighting the research of featured professors. In 2015, OCUFA held its first annual Advocacy Day at Queen's Park.

Unprecedented upheaval

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. The impact of the pandemic had lasting effects on society and on the university

sector, upending teaching methods and challenging faculty and students' physical and mental health.

In response to the pandemic, the Ontario government declared a state of emergency. In the universities, there was a sudden shift to emergency remote teaching and learning. By September 2020, 68% of universities were delivering their courses primarily online.

Ongoing financial constraints and performance-based strictures continued to create lasting challenges. By 2022, provincial funding made up just 24% of university revenues. From 2018 to 2022, university operating revenues from the provincial government and domestic student fees declined by about \$3,200 (in 2020 dollars) per full-time student. Per-student funding levels in Ontario were the lowest in Canada.

Universities looked for ways to increase funding and cut costs. One key cost-cutting measure was the increased use of contract faculty across the sector, a trend that began in the 2010s but which accelerated in the 2020s. By 2018, 58% of faculty positions were contract, teaching-only, untenured, or mostly part-time, with few job protections or benefits.

A key revenue-generating measure was to dramatically increase the number of international-student admissions: by 2022, almost 19% of full-time students were international students; their tuition fees, at about \$40,000 a year (in 2020 dollars) paid 48% of all fees collected by universities.

Many universities strained under the weight of the funding crisis, and one broke: in February 2021, Laurentian University declared insolvency, the first public university in Canada to do so.

The Laurentian insolvency was a key focus for OCUFA. With its allies, including the Laurentian University Faculty Association, the organization launched a campaign to amend the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* and the

Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to exclude public universities from inappropriate, corporate-style restructuring processes. In 2024, it helped secure the passage of federal legislation to do exactly that.

Another area in which OCUFA's years of work finally come to fruition was that of adequate pensions. In 2021, the University Pension Plan became the official pension plan provider for almost 40,000 working and retired university faculty and staff in four Ontario universities and 12 sector organizations.

The last decade also brought into focus new issues and areas of work for OCUFA. The crisis at Laurentian high-

lighted the issue of eroding collegial governance, a shared governance model in which university boards and senates work together to ensure the health and success of the institution. Faculty and their associations also became centrally engaged in working to advance decolonization and Indigenization, as well as equity, diversity, and inclusion within universities. OCUFA has continued to push universities and the government to preserve and create good academic jobs, particularly as contract faculty faced more precarity and uncertainty on campuses.

By 2024, OCUFA's broader political advocacy strategy had become more focused on educating the public about the issues facing public universities and making OCUFA a "go-to" resource for its member organizations and others outside the academy and government.

Today, 60 years after its creation, OCUFA has become a strong voice for faculty, academic librarians, and academic professionals in Ontario. Although some of the issues facing

60 years after its creation, OCUFA has become a strong voice for faculty in Ontario.

the province's university sector seem to have changed little since the 1960s, and many new issues have arisen in recent decades, what has remained the same (which became incredibly clear to me when updating its history), is OCUFA's vital role as a leading advocate for high-quality, accessible university education in Ontario. [AM](#)

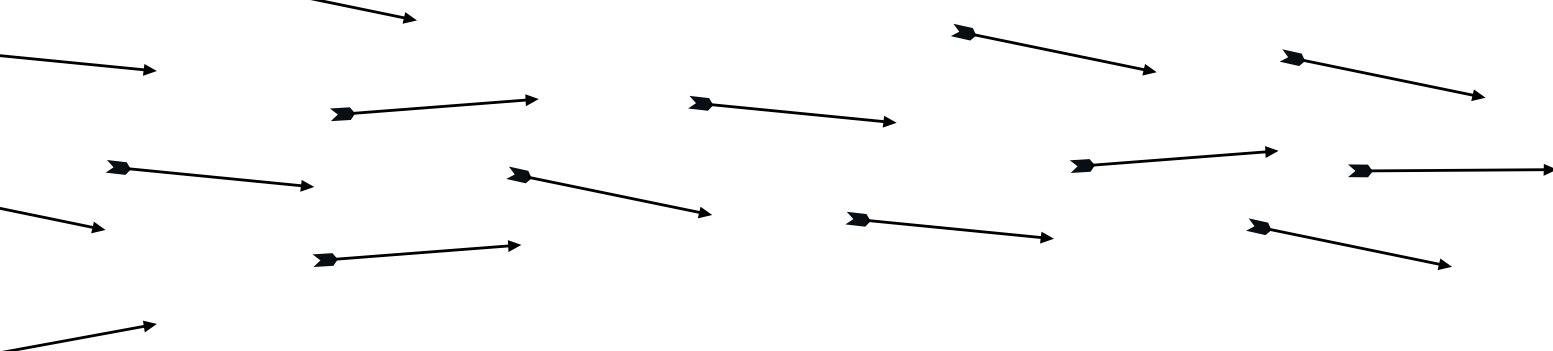
Carol Anderson is a Toronto-based researcher, writer, and editor.

How to reject a broken system

Nigmendra Narain



As OCUFA celebrates 60 years of raising key issues affecting faculty, academic librarians, and academic professionals, President Nigmendra Narain explores the state of university funding and the future of public postsecondary education in Ontario.



As OCUFA celebrates 60 years of raising key issues affecting faculty, academic librarians, and academic professionals, our voice and work remain crucial to ensuring the future of world-class public universities dedicated to teaching and research excellence in Ontario. When the organization celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2014, the role of remote or online education was nascent, a global pandemic had not upended our world, financial bankruptcy and institutional absorption for universities were unheard of, and heavy reliance on international student tuition had not impacted the trajectory and paths universities were treading—and the fallouts they are now confronting. Today, OCUFA members are called upon to do so much more with so much less, inside and outside of the classroom. OCUFA, thus, continues to—and must—play a significant role in seeking solutions to universities’ challenges, providing timely and broad province-level analysis, and developing responses to these changes to guide and assist our member organizations as they work to enhance faculty working conditions and student learning conditions across the province.

GROWING OCUFA

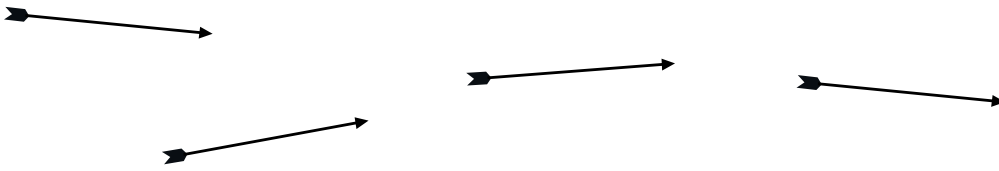
OCUFA has grown as an organization both in size and scope in the past decade. When OCUFA celebrated its 50th anniversary, the organization represented 17,000 faculty and academic librarians in 28 member organizations. Now, OCUFA represents 1,000 more people in 30 member organizations. An important space of growth for the organization has been in its expanded capacity to support member organizations through committees. Notably, OCUFA has established a permanent Contract Faculty Committee and Equity and Social Justice Committee to recognize changing employment demographics in our sector and offer more focused training for member organizations to improve faculty complement, ensure job fairness for contract faculty, and push for stronger equity initiatives on campuses. These issues have been at the forefront of much of OCUFA’s advocacy work on campuses and at the provincial level over the past ten years, and while we have succeeded in bringing issues of precarity and inequity in higher education to a larger stage, much work remains to ensure an equitable future for all faculty.

THE STRUGGLES ARE REAL

OCUFA’s organizational growth and political capacity has grown considerably in a decade. As the organization has grown, so too have the problems facing Ontario’s universities. Significantly, funding cuts have sadly continued in our sector, continuing a tradition of chronic underfunding. In 2014, the government provided around 30% of funding to universities. That already-low amount has only decreased—provincial revenue sat at about 22% of total university revenues in the province in 2022-2023, according to OCUFA research. That’s the lowest in Canada and is about 12% less than the Canadian average: a significant—and disappointing—difference.

OCUFA continues to raise the alarm about the need to change course and properly fund our postsecondary education system.





At the same time, tuition fees have increased for domestic and international students alike. Domestic tuition fees were frozen in 2019, but the government did not increase funding alongside this short-term affordability measure for students. This reduction in provincial funding has thus led to universities looking elsewhere to raise revenue, and many have turned to unregulated, sky-high international student tuition fees to do this. This is an unsustainable approach to funding our university system, and OCUFA continues to raise the alarm about the need to change course and properly fund our postsecondary education system.

OCUFA faced significant tests of its leadership role in education advocacy.

In recent years, the provincial government has also introduced complex Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) for universi-

ties including a controversial performance-based funding model that would tie 60% of university funding to a set of inappropriate metrics of “success,” up from 20% in earlier years. These initiatives increased bureaucracy without providing details, but did not provide resources with accountability. Since the 2018 election, the Ford government has conducted a more severe reduction of public sector funding, which has hit the university sector hard. OCUFA expanded efforts to address this provincial challenge: joining a coalition in defeating the unconstitutional Bill 124 and its attacks on collective bargaining; enhancing detailed provincial budget analyses and sectoral research; providing greater training for member organizations to understand universities’ financial information; and expanding mobilization, communication and bargaining supports as waves of difficult negotiations and strikes rippled through the system.

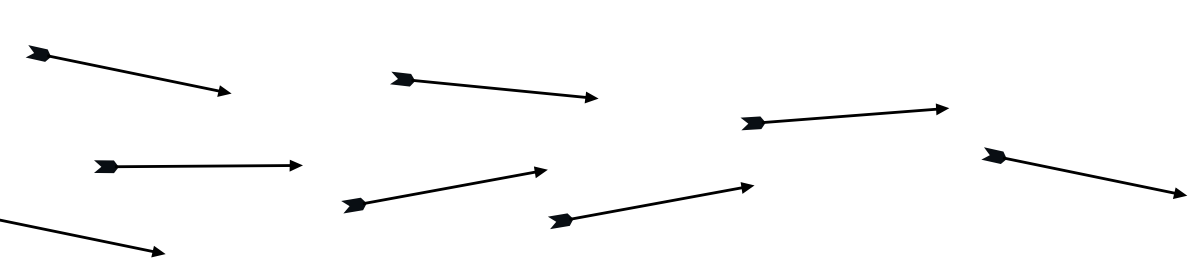
Against this backdrop, OCUFA faced significant tests of its leadership role in education advocacy during the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis at Laurentian University, which ripped through our sector during 2020 and 2021 respectively. As the pandemic raged, OCUFA advocated to address the rapid transition to online education, the exploding workload of faculty and academic librarians, and the health and wellness of the campus community during return-to-campus periods. Simultaneously, negative shockwaves hit the Canadian university sector when Laurentian University’s administration used federal corporate bankruptcy protection to deal with its egregious financial mismanagement, bypassing existing protocol and consultation with the Laurentian University Faculty Association.

OCUFA has grown as an organization both in size and scope in the past decade.

Again, OCUFA and our allies rose to the occasion: Laurentian’s administration was called out in public, the Minister of Colleges and Universities Ross Romano was shuffled out of his

cabinet position following pressure from OCUFA, the Office of the Auditor General intervened and gave a scathing report on the administration’s mismanagement, and OCUFA mobilized to get the federal government to commit to exempting public universities from using corporate restructuring processes to address financial issues.





Indeed, OCUFA and allies made positive shockwaves across Canada! These are important markers over the last decade showing how OCUFA is making a significant impact on provincial (and national) politics, and working across many areas to benefit the university sector.

REJECTING A BROKEN SYSTEM

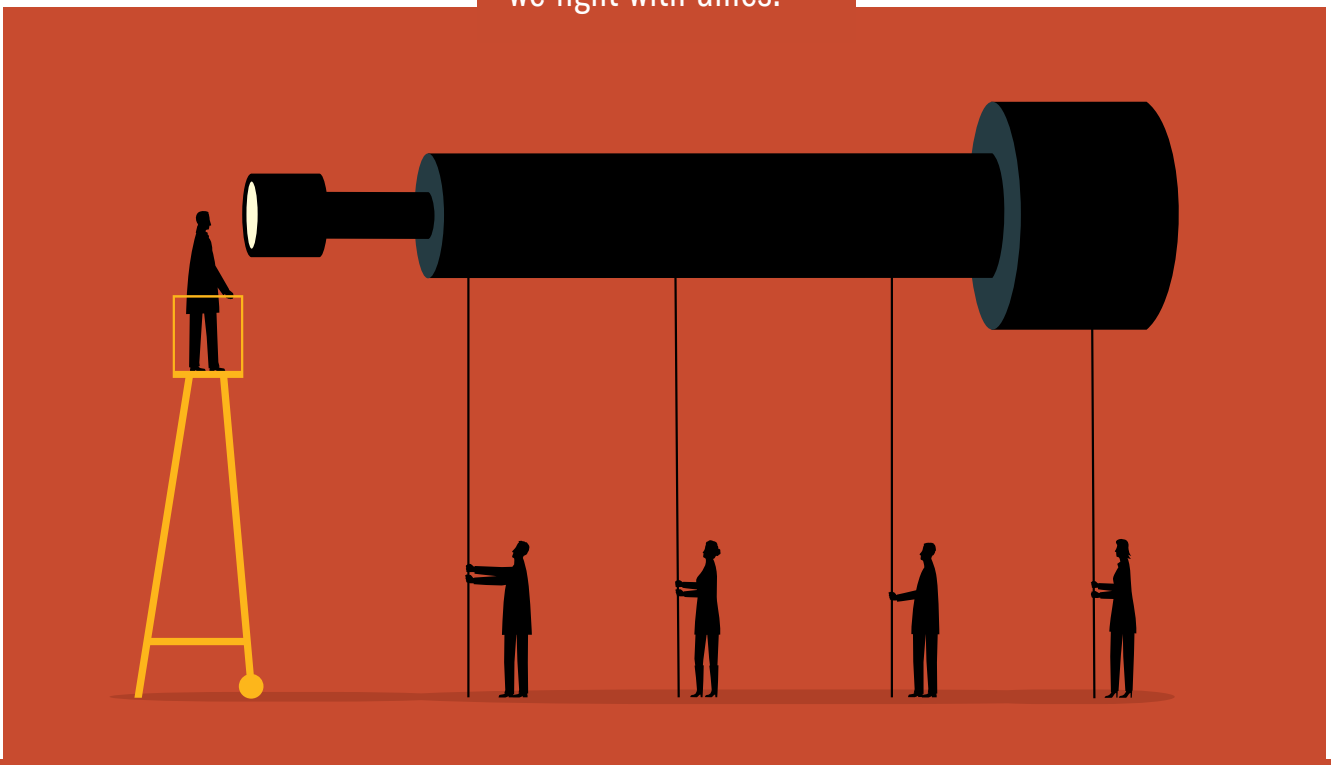
Sitting on past laurels and retrospective nostalgia is not the OCUFA way. We fight forward; we fight hard; we fight with allies. The challenges we face in the next ten years continue from past broken systems: an ongoing and unstable funding crisis; overburdened faculty and academic librarian workloads; precarity in academic jobs; cuts to non-academic support staff who are partners in the university community; a lack of support and services for students to have a successful university experience; insufficient research funding and support for world-class innovation and excellence; the diminishing of our libraries and academic librarians' data and information literacy efforts; and narrowing the university sector's academic, social and economic mission and impact in Ontario and local communities.

New challenges are also emerging: exploding class sizes, growth of vulnerable contract faculty jobs, declining faculty complements and research funding, and exploitation of international students. OCUFA will continue the fight on behalf of and along our member organizations because the fire of excellence in research and teaching in Ontario's world-class public universities burns hot and bright in faculty, academic librarians, and academic staff.

As with the last 60 years, OCUFA will continue to break new ground and chart innovative paths to make lasting positive changes to Ontario's university sector. We should take encouragement from the Taylor Swift lyrics: "You know you're good when you can even do it / With a broken heart." Despite the heartbreaks of chronic underfunding, damaging legislation, and other challenges, OCUFA resolutely and eternally remains hopeful, daring, bold, organized, and active in the face of current tough battles and those in our future. **AM**

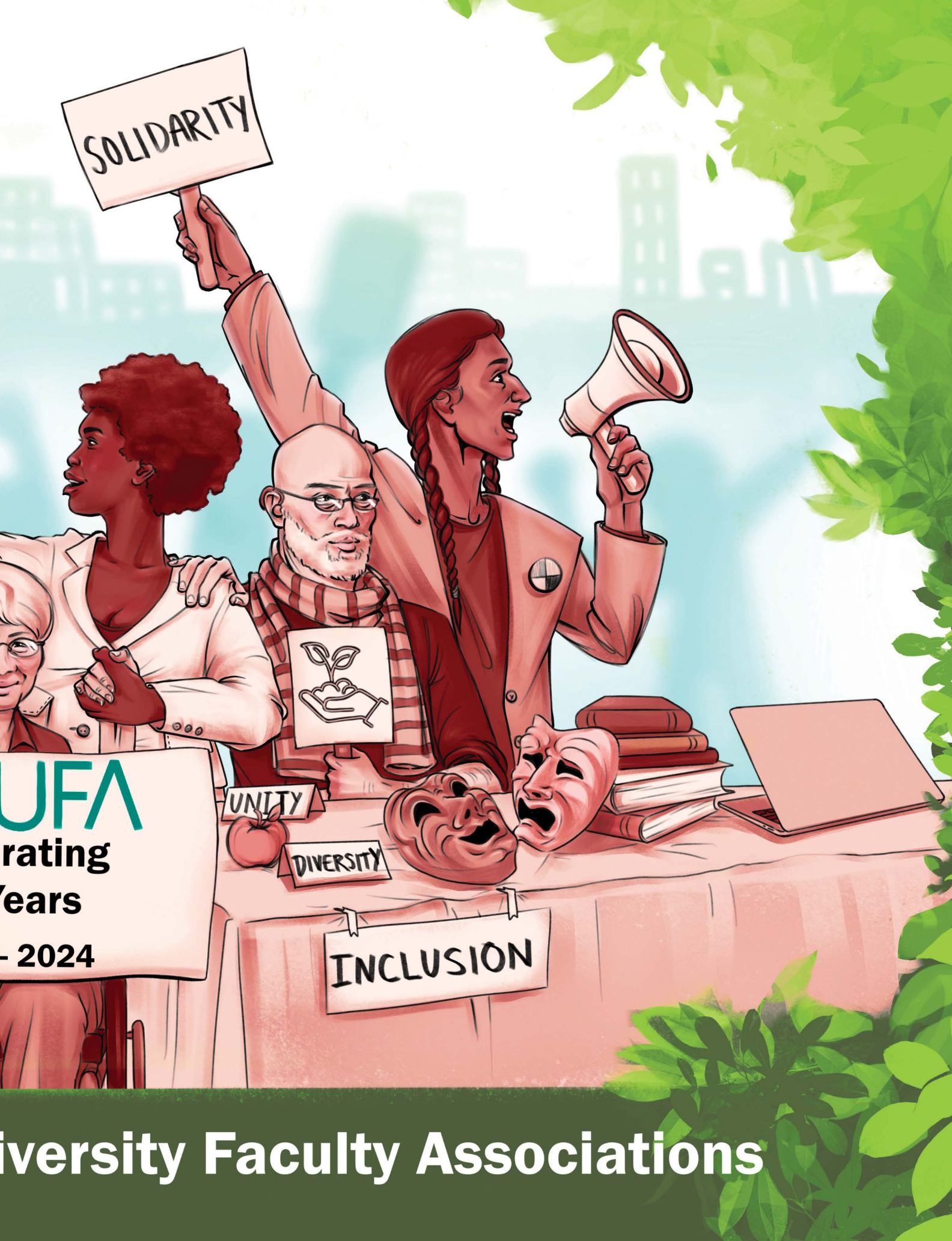
We fight forward;
we fight hard;
we fight with allies.

Nigmendra Narain is the President of OCUFA and a Lecturer and Course Coordinator in Political Science at Western University.





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ENVISIONING A NEW ERA for equity work on campus

An Interview with Lydia Kapiriri

Over the past ten years, equity, diversity, inclusion, and Indigenization have become much more common in university strategic plans, curriculum development, and faculty hiring. But there is still a long way to go before campuses become truly equitable. In an interview with *Academic Matters*, Lydia Kapiriri reflects on her experiences with equity work on campus and how her research expertise in health inequities and personal commitment to social justice informed her commitment to campus equity initiatives.



I wish we, as equity workers, could work ourselves out of a job.

I would like to see a world where these roles are recognized and rewarded by a university.

How did you start working on equity issues on your campus?

When I came to McMaster University, there were only two female Black professors, and my colleague was already doing a lot of the equity work on campus. I was pre-tenure and thought it was interesting but I didn't have time for it. But I also knew that personally, in my private life, I was—and still am—uncomfortable with injustice. Where I come from, people don't talk about equity issues as equity issues. I was just told to treat people equally. In my teaching and research, I was doing equity work, but I didn't have the same language to describe what I was doing.

When I started in my position, I was talking in department meetings and the like, asking questions about decision-making and making sure everyone was treated fairly. A colleague recommended that I join the McMaster University Faculty Association (MUFA). I agreed, and later became an equity representative and chair of the equity committee in the faculty association.

What was it like to transition from doing personal equity work, as you say, to a more institutional role at the association?

I was very fortunate that our faculty association actually took equity issues seriously. Our equity committee was respected and supported. But overall, the position in the faculty association was more difficult than the individual work I was doing on equity and inclusion. When you work on these issues independently, you can put it down and walk away or take a break. With the faculty association position came the responsibility of responding to equity issues experienced by

the faculty members. I could not say 'sorry, that's not what I do,' or 'I can't do this.' We had a very clear process with regards to how to handle issues, and I felt supported, but it brought more responsibility to me. It was also difficult to learn about all the equity issues and injustices that faculty were facing. I really appreciated the times when I could bounce ideas off of my colleagues and use resources like those offered at the OCUFA Status of Women Committee meetings [now Equity and Social Justice Committee].

What would you like to see in the future of campus equity work?

I would like to see a world where these roles are recognized and rewarded by a university. Some changes are happening around this, like the requirement for equity statements from new hires. When I was hired, we didn't talk about these issues, but now people are talking about them. Ultimately, I would like to see a culture change at universities so that, right from the leadership, everyone is thinking about equity and it is a mainstream idea. I would like to see a culture change whereby equity issues are not the burdens of marginalized people who have to advocate to be heard.

Unfortunately, some of these roles end up falling on people who are already marginalized. I'd love to see campuses where everyone—from the faculty, to leadership, to students, to staff—is always thinking about equity and is uncomfortable with injustice. I wish we, as equity workers, could work ourselves out of a job. If, as a society, we agree that any kind of injustice is bad, we would be 90% of the way towards solving these problems. I'd love to see a society like that.



We don't stop learning—I don't believe people are always stuck in their ways.

There are opportunities to do this work everywhere.

Injustice is not good for us as individuals or as a society.

What are some of the challenges you see on campuses today when it comes to creating that mainstream approach to equity?

As educators, we see students expressing discomfort with injustice and demanding certain things from their educators. We need to teach them the cost of inequity because many people think inequity doesn't cost us anything, but it does. I'm a physician, and my background is in health. I know that there are health costs of inequity, for example. We need to train everyone to understand that social justice is not for a few people; it's for everyone. Injustice is not good for us as individuals or as a society.

Another issue is that there are inequalities between universities regarding support for equity officers. Many people were working alone within their faculty associations, without an internal equity committee, and figuring out how to relate equity work to the work of the association, or their faculty association supported them but their work was not integrated into the rest of the university. We need to find ways in which we can equalize the ground to make sure that everyone who is doing this work is supported, because it's not easy work.

How do you approach the issue of equity with colleagues or students who may be resistant to it?

I feel that some people don't care about these issues because they don't feel that they are affected by inequity. I want to give people the benefit of the doubt because if you've been privileged all your life, you may be innocently unaware of inequity and how it affects us all. I've seen it happen with students and with colleagues. We don't stop learning—I don't believe people are always stuck in their ways. I believe most people want to do

good, but some don't want to give away their privilege. We need to find that sweet spot where people want to act but they don't feel threatened.

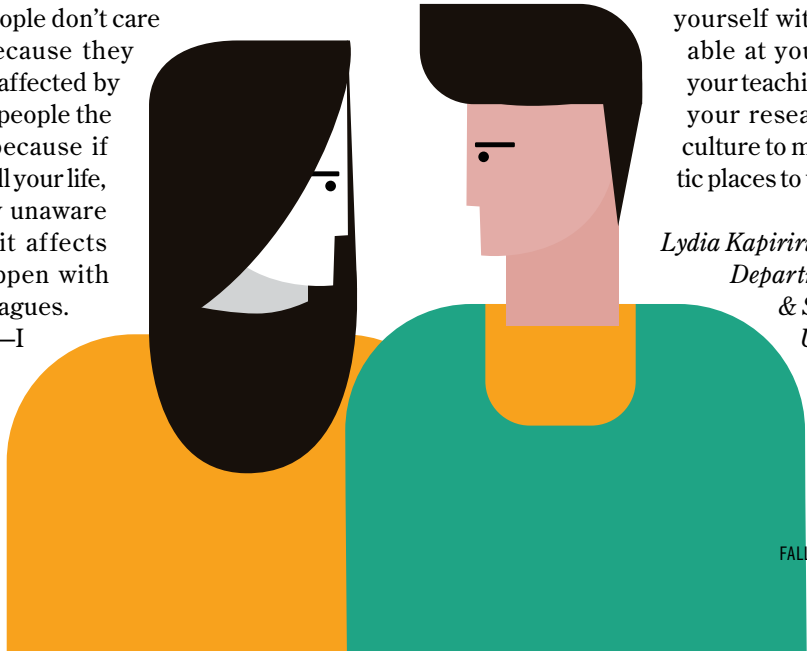
What advice do you have for faculty looking to enter equity work at their institution?

I would tell someone just starting out on campus that there are opportunities to do this work everywhere. At my university, the work is happening at many levels—in departments, at the administrative level, and in the faculty association. It's not a one-person or even one-office job. We all have a responsibility to do this work.

I would also tell people not to forget what they wrote in their equity statements when they applied for their jobs. Once hired, start in your classroom. Talk to your colleagues. Talk to staff. Start from where you are and what makes sense for your life. Educate yourself with the resources available at your faculty association, your teaching resource centre, and your research. Let's change the culture to make universities fantastic places to work for everyone. ■■

Lydia Kaporiri is a Professor in the Department of Health, Aging & Society at McMaster University.

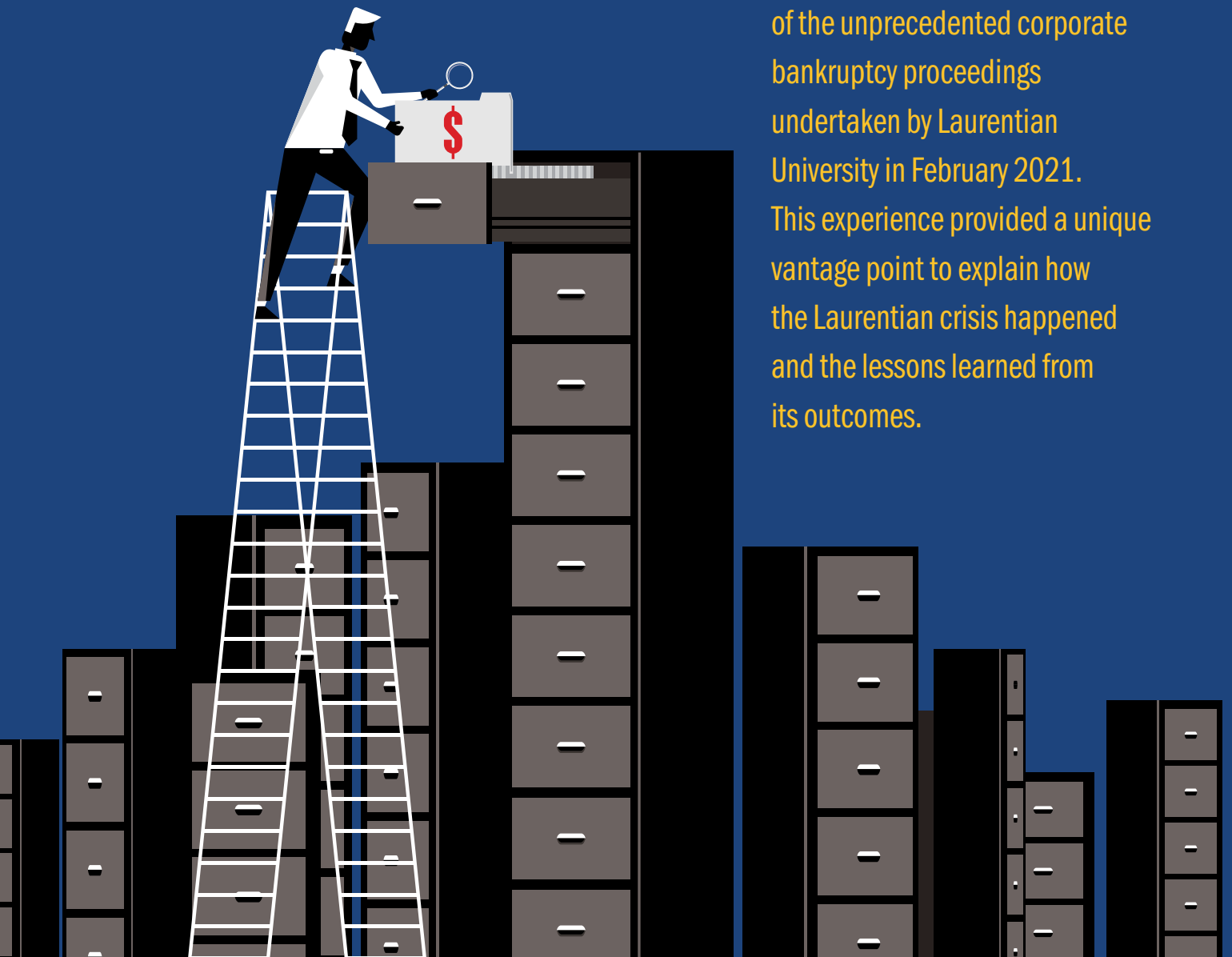
This interview was edited for length and clarity.



OCUFA, Laurentian and the First (and Last) CCAA Proceeding IN THE UNIVERSITY SECTOR

James Harnum

Law firm Koskie Minsky LLP advised OCUFA on the impact of the unprecedented corporate bankruptcy proceedings undertaken by Laurentian University in February 2021. This experience provided a unique vantage point to explain how the Laurentian crisis happened and the lessons learned from its outcomes.

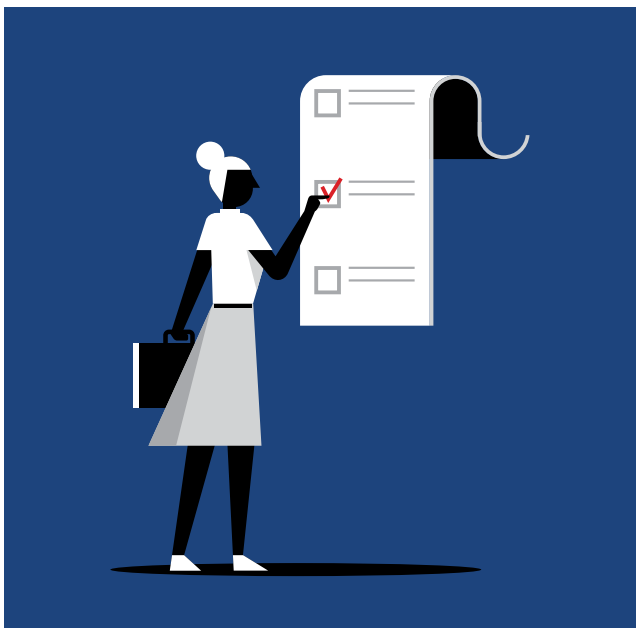


On February 1st, 2021, Laurentian University of Sudbury (better known as Laurentian) commenced restructuring proceedings under the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA). This was the first time that a public university in Canada had availed itself of Canada's principal restructuring law, which until then was largely in the public consciousness as a result of the high-profile insolvency of private sector actors such as Nortel and Sears.

In the days that followed the proceedings, OCUFA retained Koskie Minsky LLP (KM) to advise on the impact of the CCAA proceeding on OCUFA and its members and to represent it before the CCAA Court.

At the same time, OCUFA and KM began strategizing around what steps—if any—could be taken to attempt to mitigate the impact of the CCAA filing. OCUFA and its counsel engaged other stakeholders in the CCAA proceeding, including the faculty and staff associations at Laurentian, as well as other stakeholders such as the Freedom of Information and Privacy Commissioner and Laurentian's Board of Governors.

OCUFA staff and KM concluded that the CCAA proceeding appeared to be based on a very limited evidentiary record, and one that did not properly explain the role of the Ontario Government regarding the causes of Laurentian's insolvency (including decreased provincial funding) and what role it would have with Laurentian's attempts to restructure.



On February 10th, 2021, OCUFA's lawyers attended the CCAA Court and argued that the paucity of evidence on the role of Ontario and its role as chief funder of Laurentian required that the CCAA only be continued with Ontario's participation in the proceeding. OCUFA's lawyers also objected to the sealing of certain letters between Laurentian and the

Ontario government. (called the "Sealed Documents"). The judge denied these requests.

OCUFA instructed its lawyers to seek leave to appeal the decision of the CCAA judge not to unseal the Sealed Documents. KM filed this motion in cooperation with the Laurentian University Faculty Association and CUPE. The Court of Appeal denied this motion on March 31st, 2021. The Sealed Documents would not be released until late 2022.

Laurentian used the CCAA proceeding to fundamentally restructure the university in a host of ways. Collective agreements were renegotiated with both faculty and staff. Tenured faculty were fired with no severance pay. The Laurentian Pension Plan was restructured. Entire programs of study were eliminated—76 in total—including math, music, and philosophy. Longstanding affiliations with federated colleges were terminated.

On top of all this, as of September 2022, Laurentian had paid more than \$30 million for the services of Bay Street financial advisors and lawyers who had orchestrated the use of the CCAA.

In November of 2022, a Special Report on Laurentian University was released by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. Although the Auditor General was not asked to reach a conclusion about the appropriateness of using the CCAA for public entities, she concluded that: "There is a strong argument that CCAA is an inappropriate, and perhaps damaging, remedy for public entities." The Auditor General specifically noted that "despite its circumstances, Laurentian did not have to file for creditor protection," pointing out that "the University could have followed the broader public sector precedent by making

The CCAA proceeding appeared to be based on a very limited evidentiary record.

comprehensive and clear efforts to seek financial assistance from the Ministry, as the North Bay-based Nipissing University had done in 2014."

The Auditor General found that Laurentian failed because of its mismanagement and poor governance. It did not fail because of a change in demand for its educational services, or because changing technology undermined the market for its services, or because of rising input costs or loss of market share—all reasons that commercial enterprises can and do fail.

The Auditor General also noted that Laurentian attempted to place blame on its employees for the University's descent into crisis, and it was this narrative—that it was the University's employees rather than its administrators and governors who were responsible for Laurentian's crisis—that Laurentian placed before the Court and the supervising CCAA Judge.



The Auditor General commented on Laurentian's conduct as follows:

“Throughout its CCAA process, Laurentian's leadership has publicly maintained that high-paid faculty employees were a principal cause of the University's decline. In 2021, University executives called the faculty collective agreement “above market in several aspects” after previously citing “excessive faculty costs” as a contributing factor in the school's insolvency.

Contrary to Laurentian administration's public messaging, our review found that faculty salaries were lower than those of comparable universities and that, collectively, its academic programs had positively contributed to the University, helping to pay the growing costs of debt, senior administration and special advisors.”

In considering why Laurentian decided to file under the CCAA rather than pursue alternative options, the Auditor General specifically cited the influence of Laurentian's external professional advisors and consul-

tants, who advocated in favour of a CCAA filing as early as mid-2019. The insolvency lawyers advising Laurentian were described by Laurentian's Board as “giddy to try something new.”

Faced with the immense human tragedy of the Laurentian crisis—including job losses, learning interruptions, and wider economic impact in Sudbury—multiple actors in the sector, including OCUFA, began advocating for the removal of the CCAA as an option for university administrators who are faced with financial challenges.

There are many reasons why OCUFA believed that the CCAA and other insolvency legislation was (and remains)

Laurentian used the CCAA proceeding to fundamentally restructure the university in a host of ways.

wholly inappropriate in the University sector. Perhaps most importantly, public institutions, such as universities, have a public purpose. They are not commercial enterprises that produce goods or services for commercial use, and they are not profit-generating entities. Rather, they are created by governments or government agencies to fulfill public needs. For this reason, public entities such as universities cannot be managed solely and exclusively to match revenues and expenses and ensure sustainable debt loads—they must be managed, as well, to fulfill the public purpose for which they were created, and upon which society depends.

Insolvency proceedings, on the other hand, have a very narrow and specific purpose. As Virginia Torrie explains in the book, *Reinventing Bankruptcy Law: A History of the Companies' Creditors Arrangements Act*, the CCAA in particular was introduced for the benefit of large, secured creditors in 1933, during the Great Depression. Other interests may be represented in a CCAA process, but they occupy a strictly subordinate position. The purpose of restructuring is to repair the distressed entity's income statement and balance sheet to maximize the chance that the debtor can repay its creditors from future revenues. Restructuring proceedings have no other purpose. The Courts that supervise them are ill-equipped to supervise the performance of a public purpose and the accounting firms that are typically appointed as monitors in a CCAA proceeding similarly have no such expertise.

Restructuring proceedings are typically conducted in “real time,” meaning that they are highly time-pressured

and do not engage in public policy deliberation or community consultations. Insolvency proceedings are emergency interventions focused on financial considerations. In such a situation, there is no consideration of the public interest despite the obvious fact that this should be the central consideration in the restructuring of a public entity.

Similarly, a liquidation is antithetical to the public purpose for which the distressed public entity was created. If the distressed entity is to be discontinued, then the decision to do so should be made by publicly accountable persons in the same way as the decision to create the entity in the first instance.

The decision to liquidate a university with a public purpose should not be in the hands of an entity's creditors. The creditors' interests are simply to be repaid without regard for the public purpose of the university, which serves myriad purposes, including providing education to students, and a steady flow of capable and skilled workers to both the communities that those institutions are situated in as well as the rest of the country. If that public interest is to be protected, the future of a public university cannot rest solely in the hands of its creditors. Further, the independent oversight that is supposed to be provided by monitors, trustees, and other insolvency professionals will have little utility in a university sector that such actors have little to no experience in.

The Laurentian CCAA process well illustrates how public interests are ignored in insolvency proceedings. Laurentian University's programs, courses, and professors were terminated without regard to their academic contribution to the University, nor with any regard to the community that the University serves. Rather, a simplistic comparison between revenues and costs was used to justify the termination of programs such as physics, geography, political science, math and philosophy.

While Laurentian University was created and mandated to offer postsecondary educational opportunities to Ontario's francophone, northern, and Indigenous communities, it was precisely these programs that bore the brunt of the cuts during the CCAA process, thereby compromising the public purpose of the University.

Fortunately, the CCAA proceedings of Laurentian should be both the first and last insolvency in the university sector. In 2021, the Federal Liberal platform included a promise to "Protect public post-secondary educational institutions, such as Laurentian University, from being subject to corporate restructuring."

Bills that would have done the same thing were also introduced by Timmins—James Bay Member of Parliament Charlie Angus and Senator Lucie Moncion.

Although the Federal Liberals included the exemption from insolvency laws in their platform, that was far from the end of the story. On December 16, 2021, the Minister

of Innovation, Science and Industry François-Philippe Champagne was mandated by Prime Minister to "[e]ngage with provinces and seek feedback from universities, colleges, experts, lenders and other post-secondary education stakeholders to explore ways to better protect the public interest functions of public post-secondary educational institutions in insolvency and restructuring situations."

This mandate resulted in consultations being scheduled between the Ministry and various stakeholders. In the leadup to those discussions, the Ministry proposed a range of different options for stakeholders to consider. First, the Federal Government could replace restructuring under the CCAA and *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act* (BIA) with an alternative mechanism for post-secondary institutions. Second, it could establish special rules in the CCAA and the BIA for restructuring in the post-secondary sector. Finally, the Ministry could simply remove post-secondary institutions from the ambit of federal insolvency legislation and leave issues of financial sustainability up to the provinces.

For numerous reasons, OCUFA strongly favoured the third approach. OCUFA submitted a brief to the Ministry on this basis. It noted that the idea of creating a completely separate federal insolvency regime, as exists for banks, insurance companies and railways, would not solve the fundamental issue: as public institutions under provincial authority, postsecondary institutions must be overseen by public authorities who are fully cognizant of the public interest and accountable to their electorates. Universities should not be restructured under the supervision of Judges and accounting firms with no experience or expertise in higher education and no democratic accountability. As well, the future of such institutions cannot fall to be determined exclusively on the basis of market-based factors, which are the factors that drive BIA and CCAA proceedings.

OCUFA's arguments on this issue were ultimately accepted, and on June 20, 2024, Bill C-59 was given Royal Assent. The Bill, which also implements various aspects of the 2024 budget, simply amends the definition of "Corporation" in the CCAA and BIA, such that any "prescribed post-secondary educational institutions" are not covered by that legislation. In this context, "prescribed" means set out in Regulations, and those Regulations have not yet come into force.

OCUFA and its lawyers will continue to monitor this issue as it develops, to ensure that the Regulations effectively capture all public universities in Canada. The crisis at Laurentian University was unprecedented and tragic—and it should never happen again. [AM](#)

James Harnum is a lawyer in the Pension and Benefits Group of Koskie Minsky LLP. James and his partner Murray Gold represented OCUFA in the CCAA Proceedings of Laurentian.

TRANSGLOBAL QUEER IDENTITIES: LGBTQ+ International Students in Small Canadian Cities

Mohit Dudeja

How do queer international students in small Canadian cities navigate the intersection of their queer identities with their cultural backgrounds and the local LGBTQ+ community?

Mohit Dudeja, recipient of the 2022-2023 OCUFA Henry Mandelbaum Graduate Fellowship for Excellence in Social Sciences, Humanities, or Arts for doctoral students, explores these questions and more in his PhD research.



IS CANADA DESTINED TO BECOME A HAVEN FOR QUEER INDIVIDUALS?

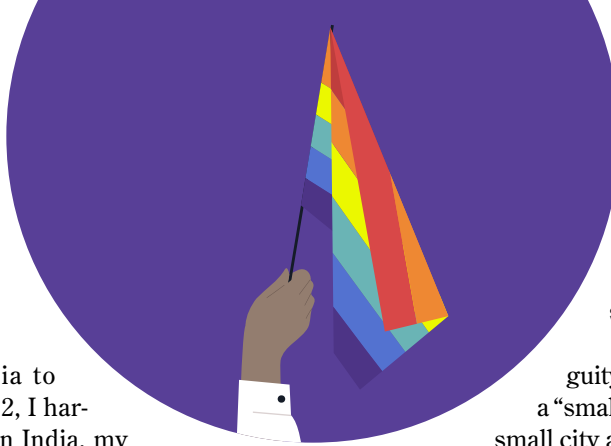
As I relocated from India to Canada for my PhD in July 2022, I harboured the belief that, unlike in India, my queer identity would not subject me to differential treatment in Canada. However, my experiences in Thunder Bay, Ontario, particularly on the university campus where I studied, quickly dispelled this notion. Within the first month, I faced bullying for my feminine expression, especially for my long and painted nails, primarily from fellow Indian students. They perceived it as a joke, often unaware that homophobic slurs are not humorous but rather traumatizing.

Inspired by bell hooks' assertion—"I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing"—I have consistently sought a locus of healing within theoretical frameworks. My lifelong anger, stemming from persistent bullying since childhood, has driven me to find ways to channel this anger constructively. This oppression is often disguised as humour and entertainment by its perpetrators, but it significantly and negatively affects those who are targeted. I decided to address and combat these injustices through theoretical inquiry and activism.

Upon commencing this inquiry, I discovered little scholarship about queer international students' experiences in Canada, let alone in its small cities. Connecting to my own experiences as a queer international student in Thunder Bay, I resolved to investigate the experiences of queer international students in small Canadian cities and to identify the barriers they may encounter.

I discovered little scholarship about queer international students' experiences in Canada.

Due to the paucity of research specifically addressing the experiences of queer international students, I have chosen to construct my arguments by examining how neo-liberal principles have transformed the university, various aspects of university life, the experiences of international students, and the unique challenges faced by queer students



in small Canadian cities. These elements collectively seem to potentially impact the experiences of queer international students in small Canadian cities.

There remains ongoing ambiguity regarding the exact definition of a "small city." For my research, I define a small city as one with a population between 10,000 and 100,000, with limited resources for queer individuals, such as LGBTQ+ support groups, healthcare services, and community events. Factors like population size, proximity to larger urban centres, and the local cultural and political climate influence the availability of these resources. Based on that definition, Thunder Bay qualifies as a small city.

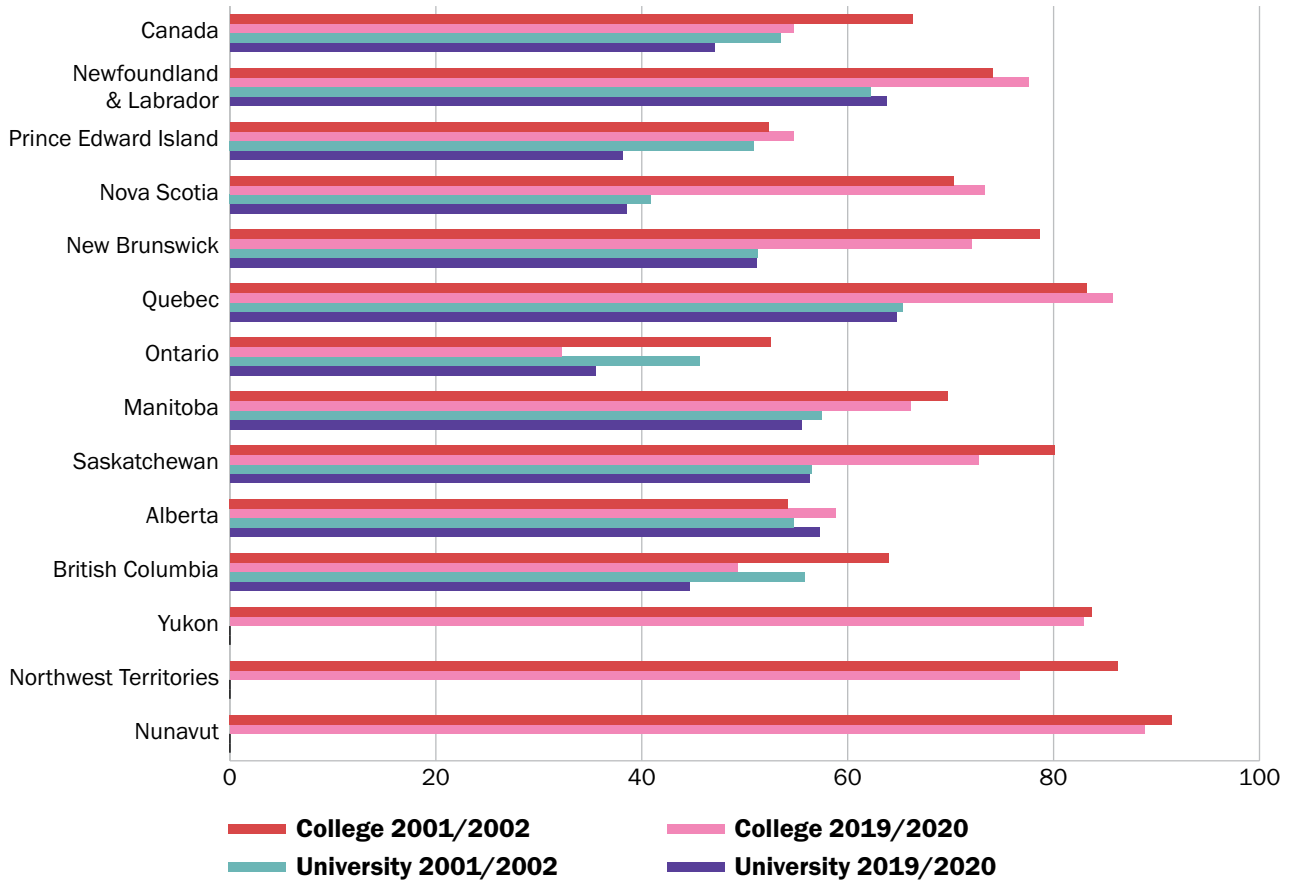
THE EROSION OF PUBLIC VALUES IN CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

Public universities in most Western countries seem to be moving away from what it means to be "public." Among the multiple meanings of "public" in English, one of the strands is "the public good" as a condition of universal welfare, well-being, or beneficence. John Dewey, the American philosopher, advocated for the idea that education serves a public purpose and benefits society. Dewey emphasized that education is a public good, crucial for both individual development and for the well-being and progress of society.

While allocating resources and public funding effectively is essential for the successful reform and transformation of the higher education system, universities in Canada, among other Western countries, have faced a significant decline in public funding. For instance, in Ontario, student fees accounted for more than half (54.0%) of all college revenues in 2019/2020, while public funding sat at 32.2%. For universities during the same period, tuition fees made up about 41% of total revenue while public funding was about 25%.

The withdrawal of government support has prompted universities to adopt strategies such as tuition fee increases for international students, such that they are paying three to four times more than domestic students and are often referred to as "cash cows." Despite the acknowledgment of these practices, there appears to be a continued lack of substantive measures to mitigate the exploitation of international students amidst the funding crises facing Canadian postsecondary institutions. How might these financial pressures impact the experiences of queer international students, who may face unique challenges and vulnerabilities within an increasingly market-driven higher education environment?

Figure 1: College and university public funding as a percent of total revenue (Statistics Canada, 2022)



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITHIN NEOLIBERAL CANADA

The shift away from viewing higher education as a public good is the result of the neoliberal context of Canadian higher education, which emphasizes the marketization of higher education and the pursuit of financial gains. International students occupy a unique and increasingly significant position within this context. As per a research report by MPOWER Financing, international students contributed \$36 billion to the Canadian economy in 2022 and are projected to contribute \$42 billion in 2024. Despite their economic contributions, international students face various challenges, including high tuition fees, limited access to financial aid, and precarious immigration status. Moreover, the emphasis on revenue generation may prioritize recruiting international students for their financial benefits rather than ensuring their academic success and well-being.

Furthermore, the neoliberal context exacerbates inequalities among students, particularly concerning access to resources and scholarship opportunities, including grants from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada

(NSERC), and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). These funding opportunities are primarily available to Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

Moreover, the commercialization of education can foster a consumerist mindset among international students, where the pursuit of credentials and employability often takes precedence over critical engagement and intellectual growth. In this neoliberal context, it becomes imperative to critically examine the situation of international students in

International students occupy a unique and increasingly significant position within this context.

Canada and reflect on the broader implications of market-oriented approaches to higher education. These students face financial pressures from their home countries,

the expectation to succeed in a market-driven society, and mental health challenges arising from the intersection of these pressures. For both universities and the government, understanding the complex dynamics that shape the experiences of international students is vital for creating inclusive and equitable academic environments that treat education as a public good rather than as a commodity.



cities. Studies indicate that the process of identity development and the ability to form community connections are significantly influenced by geographic settings; youth in small cities face distinct challenges in navigating queer identities and experiences due to different logistical realities compared to their urban counterparts. The limited availability of LGBTQ+ resources, combined with a less visible queer community and potentially greater societal conservatism, can create environments where queer students may feel isolated, unsupported, and misunderstood. Limited “queer space” in small cities (often dominated by gay men) can have a direct negative

QUEER STUDENTS IN SMALL CANADIAN CITIES

When examining marginalized populations, various analytical frameworks can be applied to understand the significance of city size, the proximity to larger cities and rural towns, and the interplay of regional, national, and global dynamics over time. Small Canadian cities like Thunder Bay (with a 2021 census population of 95,266 and a population density of 1,253 per square kilometre) serve as a unique backdrop for understanding the experiences of queer students.

Such small cities offer a particular cultural and social environment that can shape the experiences of queer students in distinct ways. For instance, stigma in non-urban environments significantly impacts access to primary health care for queer individuals, often deterring them from disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity to providers. This lack of disclosure, coupled with a general lack of LGBTQ+ awareness in these settings, can result in reduced utilization of primary and preventive health services, leaving trans patients in the city and surrounding region with few options. And LGBTQ+ advocates in Thunder Bay say Canada’s laws aren’t protecting them from hate.

Queer students in smaller Canadian cities may face a unique set of challenges that differentiate their experiences from those in larger, more cosmopolitan areas. However, the limited research on LGBTQ+ experiences in small Canadian cities hinders our understanding of the broader social, political, and economic contexts for queer individuals in these communities. For instance, in a 25-year review of literature on sexual orientation, scholars Karen I. Fredriksen-Goldsen and Anna Muraco found that participants were recruited exclusively from urban areas in 34% of the studies, from both rural and urban settings in 20%, and exclusively from rural settings in 5% of the studies. In 41% of the studies, the setting was unclear or not stated.

As these results indicate, there is clearly a lack of data about queer student experiences specifically in small cities, with their unique set of conditions. However, from the limited research available on this topic, we can determine that there are some unique issues that affect queer students in smaller

Queer students in smaller Canadian cities may face a unique set of challenges.

effect on queer individuals. In my review of existing research, I found that in contrast to small cities, big cities have better availability of “queer space,” including access to gay clubs and cafes among other support networks, which has shown a positive influence on sexual identity expression.

QUEER INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Intersectionality theory highlights the interconnectedness of social identities and emphasizes that various forms of discrimination and privilege intersect to shape individuals’ experiences. For queer international students, their identity is not solely defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity; it intersects with other aspects of their identity, such as nationality, ethnicity, and religion. While the intersectionality of identities contributes to the complexity of experiences, influencing mental health, social integration, and academic success, there remains a significant gap in research concerning the specific experiences of queer international students within small Canadian cities.

International students in Canada, in general, face challenges in social integration, language barriers, and academic adjustment. When considering queer international students, these challenges are often compounded by the need to navigate unfamiliar cultural and social norms alongside their sexual orientation and gender identity—often termed as a double barrier. In a news interview, Struby Struble, the coordinator of the Missouri University LGBT Resource Center, underscores that queer international students experi-

rience social alienation within their international student circles due to their LGBTQ+ identity while simultaneously feeling isolated within the campus community owing to their status as international students.

Assaults on queer rights within Canada and globally have further exacerbated the challenges faced by queer international students, who are already susceptible to social, political, and educational challenges. While Canada is often perceived as a progressive and inclusive destination for LGBTQ+ individuals, the experiences of queer international students within this framework are multifaceted and influenced by intersecting identities, systemic inequalities, and neoliberal dynamics. Canada's legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals, such as marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws, may attract queer international students seeking a more accepting environment than in their. But while living in Canada, they carry a constant fear of exposure to their home country's hostile environment, both during their stay and when they return. As one participant in a CBC report on international LGBTQ+ students lamented: "It is extremely hard. Every time I have to visit my home country, there is a major identity crisis, and I have to constantly switch between who I am and who I have to pretend to be."

Even queer campus groups fail to address the diverse identities and experiences of international students. Queer campus groups in these universities should tailor their services to better support students who may not have had the same level of support in their secondary education as their Canadian peers, thus helping them to adjust and feel more secure in their identities as they begin their higher education

The committee is dedicated to developing a tailored peer support program for students at Lakehead University.

journeys. The neo-liberalization of Canadian higher education introduces further challenges for queer international students, as universities prioritize revenue generation and marketization over equity and inclusion.

Identity-specific resources and the presence of supportive individuals are essential elements in the eradication of discrimination and victimization, both of which can undermine the overall safety of marginalized individuals. For instance, a peer support program that is culturally sensitive



and linguistically diverse, with peer supporters from diverse backgrounds, can help. I formed a peer support committee at Lakehead University that comprises members from student health and wellness, the student union, faculty, and staff from other universities that run peer support programs.

The committee is dedicated to developing a tailored peer support program for students at Lakehead University.

The marginalization queer international students experience at home and on their campuses underscores the urgent need for universities to develop comprehensive strategies that address their specific needs, fostering an environment where diversity is truly embraced and equity is a fundamental priority. By understanding and addressing the barriers faced by queer international students, universities can take significant steps toward creating a more inclusive and supportive academic community. This requires not only policy changes but also a cultural shift within institutions, ensuring that all students, regardless of their background or identity, feel valued and supported. As I reflect on and continue my doctoral research into these issues, several critical questions emerge:

- How can universities more effectively support the intersectional identities of queer international students, ensuring their experiences are validated and their needs met?
- What specific policies and practices can be implemented to mitigate the impact of neoliberal economic priorities on the inclusivity and well-being of marginalized student populations?
- How can the broader academic community engage in meaningful allyship and advocacy to dismantle systemic barriers and promote genuine inclusivity for all students?

These questions challenge us to rethink the role of higher education institutions in fostering not only academic success but also social justice and equity. Addressing these questions may pave the way for a more inclusive future where every student can thrive without the fear of marginalization or discrimination. ■■

Mohit Dudeja is a queer international PhD student in the Joint PhD in Educational Studies program offered by Lakehead University, Brock University, and the University of Windsor. He currently holds the position of President of the Lakehead University Graduate Students' Association. Mohit recently co-founded a non-profit organization called Mendlife Canada, dedicated to supporting queer BIPOC and international students.

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