

Academic Matters

Spring 2021

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

Who cares during COVID?

Honor Brabazon

The neoliberal response to COVID-19

Soma Chatterjee

Care work during COVID

Jeff Bale

Navigating the pandemic alone

Norin Taj &

Asmita Bhutani

What about students with children?

Chantelle Cruzat-Whervin

Future nurses facing tough choices

Enrica Maria Ferrara

Gender politics in academia

Marc Spooner

The ugly side of performance-based funding



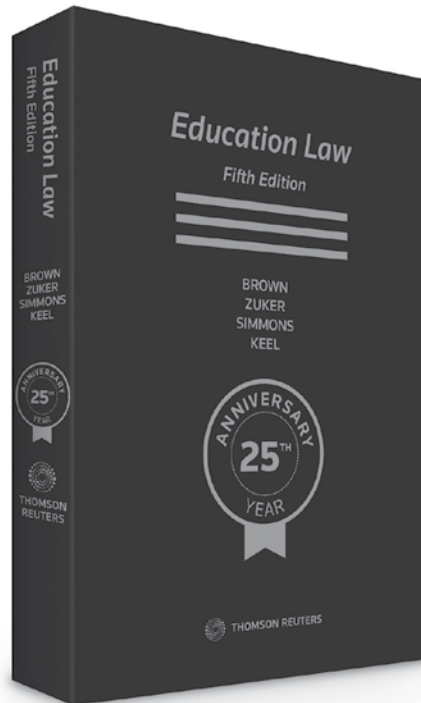
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Order # 30835494 \$196

Hardcover approx. 560 pages September 2019
978-0-7798-9150-4

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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 into 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 on sustainably sourced paper with vegetable-based ink.

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 17,000 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 Ben Lewis at editor@academicmatters.ca.

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Academic Matters accepte volontiers des articles écrits en anglais ou en français.

Publisher:
OCUFA; Jenny Ahn, Executive Director

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ISSN 1719-010X

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

CUPE / Local 1281



Cover illustration: Marie-Claude Carignan



Towards a new normal of collective care

AS I WRITE THIS, I can look out my window and watch the neighbour's kids running around their backyard. During the pandemic, this type of careless joy seems like a revelation. Meanwhile, I sit in my "office" (a crowded spare bedroom) staring at a screen day-after-day.

During this year of pandemic, it has been a constant challenge to maintain separation between my professional and personal life. A side-effect of a smaller world is that everything seems to collapse in upon itself. Caring for myself and those I love seems harder now than ever.

Still, I feel lucky to have a job that allows me to work from the safety of home, to have an "office" with a door I can close at the end of the day, and to be free from the cacophony of renovations that thundered in the apartment above for so many months.

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic are numerous, as this issue's contributors illustrate. However, a common critique is apparent. The most menacing threats facing our university system predate COVID-19 and are, instead, the manifested symptoms of an affliction that has been with us much longer: neoliberalism.

The neoliberal approach to postsecondary education that Honor Brabazon so completely dissects in this issue seems omnipresent—eroding the very foundations upon which our universities have been built and making us all more vulnerable to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In turn, neoliberalism seems to feed off the pandemic, accelerating the privatization and deregulation of postsecondary education (which is now being predominantly delivered through private, for-profit learning systems). And, as we isolate ourselves for safety, we become more vulnerable to neoliberalism and less effective at resisting its advances.

Indeed, many universities seem to treat care work and other systemic concerns as personal grievances. Soma Chatterjee considers these developments and the role of universities in re-shaping society. She wonders if universities have been adopting and reinforcing many of the neoliberal social and economic norms they should be challenging.

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is difficult, whether navigating the pandemic while living alone or caring for others. Jeff Bale calls out the approach of university administrations as they pit faculty against each other and advocates for an empathetic collective response to improve everyone's working and living conditions.

Asmita Bhutani and Norin Taj provide an intimate look at the anxieties felt by university students pursuing their studies while caring for children whose educations are in similar states of flux. They also speak to individualistic university approaches that fail to address systemic issues.

Nursing students have found themselves concerned, not just about completing their studies, but about putting their own health at risk in

order to graduate. Chantelle Cruzat-Whervin interviews nursing students and frontline nurses to find out how the pandemic has affected them.

The pandemic has also had a clear gendered impact. Enrica Maria Ferrara reflects on the patriarchic history of universities and wonders how we can build more equitable institutions. For women to advance in the existing model, do they need to give up the idea of having children and adopt behaviours that reinforce existing patriarchic structures?

Finally, Marc Spooner examines the performance-based funding schemes now being implemented in several provinces. As he points out, research clearly shows that these funding experiments have been largely ineffective and do more damage than good. It should be no surprise that neoliberal ideology is one of the main drivers.

As we struggle with the current reality and the anxiety of what might come next, the need to build collective responses seems vital. It is more important now than ever that we work together to push back against the encroachment of neoliberal ideology and build a university system that serves the public interest.

Thanks to all of this issue's contributors who took the time to engage with these ideas. During the pandemic, it has often felt like we are being asked to do more and push harder to maintain the status quo, but, as Soma highlights in her article, maybe the status quo is not the standard to which we should aspire.

A reminder that all the articles in this issue, and many more, are available on our website: AcademicMatters.ca.

Thanks for reading. ■■

Ben Lewis is the Editor-in-Chief of Academic Matters and Communications Lead for OCUFA.

THE ACADEMY'S NEOLIBERAL RESPONSE
TO COVID-19:

Why faculty should be wary and how we can push back

Honor Brabazon



Neoliberal ideology has been restructuring Canadian universities for decades. This influence has been made clear in responses to the pandemic that have emphasized competitive individualism, commodification, and existing inequitable hierarchies. What can be done to push back against neoliberalism and re-imagine the future of the academy?

The emergency shift to remote teaching that universities have made in response to the COVID-19 crisis has been justified as an exceptional measure for these unprecedented times. Faculty understand and appreciate the privilege many of us have in this crisis and we have been happy to do our part to keep students safe. However, as universities begin another semester entirely online and plan for the fall, researchers and educators must look more closely at the choices administrators are making, the assumptions underpinning these choices, and the vision of the university they advance.

Critique is essential in times of crisis. It is our job and our responsibility to not accept these directives without questioning their impact on the less privileged among us, on the university community as a whole, and on the project of public research and education in which academics are engaged.

A preliminary examination of these questions suggests that remote teaching, as it is being implemented, is not the exceptional response that it has been made out to be, nor is it the only option available. Instead, it is the product of choices that reflect and advance the particular view of society that has underpinned the neoliberal restructuring of universities and other institutions over the past several decades.

Neoliberalism is commonly understood as a market-oriented ideology that is associated with policies of privatization, free trade, deregulation, and public service cuts. The original neoliberal thinkers of the 1930s–1950s sought to devise a way of organizing human interaction that would maximize freedom, which they understood to be limited to the ability of individuals to make self-interested decisions through the market.

Over the past 40 years, there has been considerable variation in how neoliberal ideas have been harnessed by policymakers worldwide, but certain fundamental principles are clear—and a number of these shape the way that

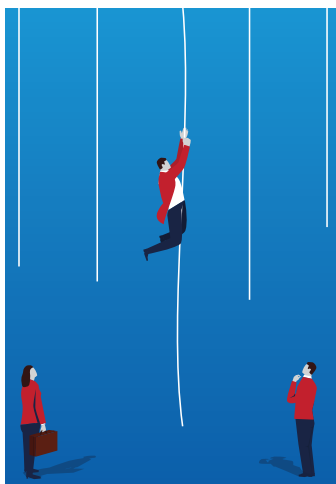
universities have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing these neoliberal assumptions will help faculty both to question the way that COVID-19 era teaching is being implemented and to imagine alternatives that do not put public research and education at risk.

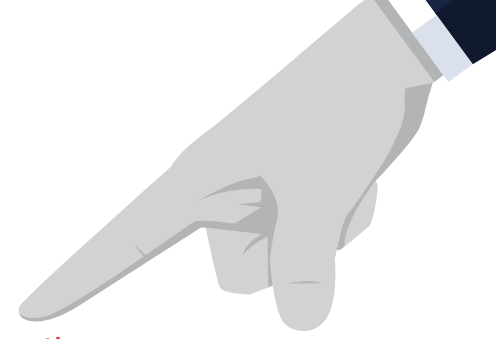
Assumption 1: Faculty are work-ready employees

In the neoliberal economy, workers are seen as commodities and are expected to be trained and “work-ready” before they are hired. The cost and responsibility for job-training fall predominantly on individual workers rather than on employers. This is evident in the expectation that work experience should be a condition of hiring. This is true of the academic hiring process, which no longer involves hiring those who show promise in their field and can be apprenticed on the tenure track, but rather those with the means, privilege, and grit to assemble a tenurable CV on their own dime and arrive to the tenure track work-ready.

The assumption that faculty are pre-trained, or able to train themselves without additional time and support, underpins university directives that faculty move classes online, or into hybrid or blended online/in-person formats, without investing in training to support faculty in this shift. For context, at the University of

Waterloo, the normal supports for developing an online course include one to two course releases, 12–18 months of preparation time, and the help of three staff members—one of whom is an online learning consultant, and each of whom supports only about two other courses. Instead, at universities across Canada, the move online under COVID-19 is not called “online teaching” but “remote teaching,” which universities seem to think absolves them of the responsibility to give faculty sufficient technological training, pedagogical consultation, and preparation time.





Faculty are increasingly encouraged to see themselves as **competitors**.

Assumption 2: All faculty are equal

A guiding principle of neoliberal thought is that citizens should interact as formal equals, without regard for the substantive inequalities between us. This formal equality makes it difficult to articulate needs that arise from historical and ongoing systemic injustices because marginalized groups are seen merely as stakeholders with views equally valuable to those of other stakeholders.

In the neoliberal university, this notion of formal equality can be seen, among other things, in the use of standards and assessments, such as teaching evaluations, that have been shown to be biased against instructors from marginalized groups, and in the disproportionate amount of care and service work that falls to these faculty members.

In university responses to COVID-19, emergency online teaching directives are rooted in the assumption that faculty are equally positioned to carry them out. However, at the best of times, not all faculty can drop everything to redesign their courses, and the COVID-19 crisis has presented additional child care, elder care, mental health, and homeschooling responsibilities, among other challenges that disproportionately affect women (especially women of colour), differently-abled faculty, and contract faculty (who, at some institutions, have put multiple courses online three semesters in a row).

The dual delivery model—in which some students in a course come to class and others participate remotely—requires vastly more work than either in-person or remote courses alone. Some versions of this model divide students into groups that alternate between in-person and online instruction depending on the week, effectively requiring faculty to teach two versions of the course at once, with students continuously switching between them. The failure to accommodate faculty who are not well positioned to transform their courses from in-person to remote teaching—or some combination of the two—actively exacerbates existing inequalities, marking a step backward for equity.

Assumption 3: Faculty are atomized individuals

Neoliberal democracy is characterized by competitive individualism and centres on the individual advocacy of ostensibly equal citizens through their vote with no common social or political goals. By extension, group identity and collective advocacy are delegitimized as undemocratic attempts to gain more of a say than those involved would otherwise have as individuals.

Portraying people as atomized individuals allows social problems to be framed as individual failures. For instance, in the neoliberal framework, poverty is understood to be a result of an individual's poor choices and their lack of effort rather than the collective failure of an affluent society. This shift in thinking has allowed neoliberal governments in countries like Canada to restructure social assistance programs in ways that responsabilize and penalize the poor for their own poverty.

In the neoliberal university, this logic can be seen in the move away from the ideal of the university as a public sphere with collective goals of critical enquiry, equality, deliberation, and the pursuit of knowledge. Instead, faculty are increasingly encouraged to see themselves as competitors who must maintain a constant level of productivity and act as entrepreneurs to sell ideas to potential investors in the form of external funding agencies or private commercial interests. Rather than freedom of enquiry, faculty research is increasingly monitored through performance metrics. Academic governance is being replaced by corporate governance models while faculty and faculty associations are no longer being respected for the integral roles they play in the governance process, but are instead considered to be stakeholders akin to alumni associations or capital investors.

In university responses to COVID-19, these shifts are visible in the continued failure to consult faculty or faculty associations, circumvention of academic governance structures, and prioritization of revenue concerns over the safety and pedagogical concerns of faculty or the workload, equity, and academic freedom provisions of collective agreements.

Instead, in true neoliberal fashion, it has been incumbent upon individual faculty members to identify their needs



In neoliberal thought, education is merely pursued by individuals who want to invest in skills and credentials that will increase their value in the labour market.

and concerns in virtual town halls or to department chairs. Memos and videos from university administrators thanking faculty for their hard work and telling us we are all in this together leave individual faculty members weighing the need to speak out against the potential perception that we are not team players and that we are failing to put students first.

Responsibilizing individual faculty members for the outcomes of the move to emergency online teaching treats structural and pedagogical barriers as minor individual technical or administrative problems that the instructor can overcome simply by watching more Zoom webinars and practising better self-care. For instance, when asked on Twitter whether it was unrealistic to expect emergency online teaching in fall 2020 to be “dramatically better” than it was in the spring because “we’re all still in crisis mode and isolated at home,” the manager of UOIT’s Teaching and Learning Centre responded as follows: “We learn through experience. If we are online/hybrid in that [*sic*] fall we will be better. Panic teaching will be over. If it’s not, the issue lies with the instructor.”

Assumption 4: Education is merely “content delivery”

In the neoliberal worldview, the self-interest that guides individual decision-making is not the kind of self-interest characterized by an understanding of the individual as a social being, whose interests are intertwined with those of others and can be known through research or influenced through education. Rather, self-interested decision making is considered more efficient and democratic when it is informed only by an individual’s unadulterated, uninformed perceptions, which are then aggregated and processed by the supposedly unbiased market.

In this view, a transformative education, in which students develop and practise self-awareness, empathy, social consciousness, critical thought, and collective agency, is not necessary to sustain a democracy but is

a hindrance to it—an undemocratic interference. In neoliberal thought, education is merely pursued by individuals who want to invest in skills and credentials that will increase their value in the labour market.

This view of education is reflected in the ongoing reframing of postsecondary education as an instrumental mode of job training. Increasingly, students are seen by universities—and see themselves—as customers engaged in a transactional relationship—a view that is only encouraged by (rising) tuition fees. Likewise, faculty are encouraged to strip away the transformative pedagogical work that has long been part of their profession and to merely *administer* a course or *deliver* course material, often—as is the case for contract faculty (who now teach over 50 per cent of university courses in Ontario)—with little job security, poor pay, and insufficient benefits.

The notion that faculty can simply move their courses online—or teach them simultaneously online and in person—is rooted in the assumption that educating involves merely delivering information to students, which can be done just as easily online as it can be in person. There are many well-developed online courses, yet all but the most ardent enthusiasts concede that the format works better for some subjects and some students. Moreover, while there are still some advocates for the democratic potential of online teaching, there are strong criticisms that pedagogies rooted in well-established understandings of education—as a collective, immersive, and empowering experience, through which students learn how to deliberate, collaborate, and interrogate established norms—cannot simply be transferred



online. These pedagogies are not optional frills but the product of decades of research and experience, as well as important commitments to equality and reconciliation that are not meant to be upheld only when convenient.

In particular, some of the essential social and humanizing components of education are diminished, if not eliminated, when teaching is mediated through screens and students are learning in physical isolation from each other. An in-person university course is immersive in a way an online course is not. Even attending a basic lecture is a social experience, like going to a play, parade, or sporting event. On the surface, a lecture may seem to be merely a means of delivering information that students consume individually. However, students learn not only from the lecturer but also from the affective experience itself and from observing how others respond to it. Their shared experience provokes further reflection, discussion, and connection—which are all part of their education.

Giving a basic lecture is also a social experience, like a performance in many ways. Lecturers learn from their audiences, feeling the room and adjusting material—often substantially—as they speak, which is far more challenging online, and impossible in the pre-recorded lectures faculty are being encouraged to produce.

Education is a humanizing experience that involves questioning and altering one's sense of self and one's relationship to others. Humans learn through narrative, context, empathy, debate, and shared experiences. We are able to open ourselves up enough to ask difficult questions and allow ourselves to be challenged only when we are able to see the humanity in others and when our own humanity is recognized by others. This kind of active learning (as opposed to the passive reception of information) requires the trust, collectivity, and understanding of divergent experiences built through regular synchronous meetings in a shared physical space. This is hindered when

classroom interaction is mediated through disembodied video images and temporally delayed conversations on discussion boards.

In the COVID-19 era neoliberal university, accommodations are not being made for faculty who engage in pedagogies that involve more than content delivery. Some institutions are even discouraging synchronous teaching altogether and have not scheduled set times for classes. Making these pedagogical methods impossible and expecting faculty to continue teaching without them constitutes a clear violation of academic freedom.

The administrative push for asynchronous teaching, hybrid online/in-person courses, and flexible evaluation methods tailored to each student are justified in the name of ensuring equitable access for students who face very real limitations during the pandemic. However, there is a point at which we must ask what exactly students will be getting access to and if it is worthy of university credit and scholarly advancement, particularly if emergency online teaching continues in some form for several semesters.

When teaching is reduced to content delivery, faculty become interchangeable, which raises additional questions about academic freedom. Suggestions have already been made that the workload problem brought on by emergency online teaching would be mitigated if faculty simply taught existing online courses designed by others. It does not take complex modelling to imagine a new normal in which an undergraduate degree consists solely of downloading and memorizing cookie-cutter course material uploaded by people with no expertise in the area who are administering ten other courses simultaneously.

Likewise, when teaching is reduced to content delivery, intellectual property takes on additional importance. It is illegal to record and distribute lectures or other course material without permission from their creator (in most cases the instructor), but universities seem reluctant to



confirm the intellectual property rights of faculty. For instance, if a contract faculty member spends countless hours designing a remote course for the summer semester and then is laid off in the fall, can the university still use their recorded lectures and other material? Can the university use this recorded lecture material to continue teaching these courses if faculty are on strike (as happened in the UK in 2018) or if they are deceased (as happened at Concordia University in January)? What precedents are being set?

Universities have also been downloading the responsibility to navigate the incredibly complicated process of determining copyright for course material posted online to overworked faculty, which results in some creative and unconventional material simply being scrapped. Students' exposure to a range of rigorous thought is also endangered by the facility with which students can record and distribute course content when faculty post it online. Some websites have used the move to emergency online teaching as an opportunity to urge students to call out and shame faculty they deem to be "liberal" or "left" by reposting their course material. To avoid this, faculty are likely to self-censor, choosing material they feel is safer. As they do so, course material becomes more generic, which diminishes the quality of students' education.

Yet, universities push on, insisting to faculty and to the public that students should and will receive the same quality of education that they would in courses offered in the classroom. This simply is not possible, and it is not surprising that students have demanded tuition refunds and rebates.

Assumption 5: Research is expendable

In neoliberal thought, the public sphere is severely diminished, and the role of the university in the public sphere—and as a public sphere unto itself—is treated as

unnecessary. The principle that enquiry and debate are public goods in and of themselves, regardless of their *outcome or impact*, is devalued, as is the notion that a society's self-knowledge and self-criticism are crucial to democracy, societal improvement, and the pursuit of the good life. Expert opinion is devalued, and research is desirable only when it translates into gains for the private sector, essentially treating universities as vehicles to channel public funding into private research and development.

In response to the pandemic, universities have supported medical and other COVID-19 related research but have left everyone else with no choice but to drastically cut back on their research time. Many faculty have spent the summer of 2020 and many hours since converting courses they had already taught to online formats, and they will likely have to continue doing this work to prepare online or hybrid courses for the fall of 2021. Much of this time would usually have been spent doing research, which faculty have also found to be nearly impossible while teaching online during the fall and winter. According to some calculations, this lack of support from the university, combined with other barriers such as travel restrictions, will decrease faculty research productivity by 50–70 per cent. Notably,

this drop will not affect all faculty equally, with journals noting a marked decrease in submissions from women since the pandemic began.

The expectation that this is something faculty should simply accept diminishes the importance of their research. It suggests that research is a hobby faculty pursue in their spare time when they are finished with their teaching commitments. Research is essential for understanding the human experience, the world we live in, and the nature of our existence within that world—and for holding those in power to account. The free and broad pursuit—and critique—of knowledge is arguably even more important in times of crisis and rapid social change.



The way that we handle the extraordinary,
sends a message about *what we truly value.*



Assumption 6: Faculty are expendable

Since the neoliberal approach views people as commodities in competition with each other, it acknowledges that some people will simply be left behind and considers this the inevitable result of market competition functioning as it should.

The culture of disposability fostered by this view can be seen in the dramatic expansion of precarious contract work and gig labour during the neoliberal period. Just-in-time production and outsourcing have gone hand-in-hand with the casualization of labour in many industries, building an expendable workforce that can be hired and fired as needed to protect profit.

In the neoliberal university, this has meant an increase in the number of contract faculty, who, again, teach over half of the courses at Ontario universities. They have years, if not decades, of teaching experience, and are typically overworked and underpaid.

As universities planned for the possibility of lower enrolments in the fall 2020 semester, many dramatically cut contracts for contract faculty. But, because these were contracts that the university could simply choose not to renew, they were not counted as layoffs—meaning that contract faculty generally were not eligible for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit.

The message that these ongoing plans send to all faculty—contract or not—is that their expertise, societal role, and physical and mental health are expendable.

Assumption 7: There is no alternative

Policies that advance neoliberal ideals have long been justified—and opposition to them discredited—using Margaret Thatcher’s famous line that “there is no alternative.” This notion is reproduced in universities framing their responses to COVID-19 as a *fait accompli*—the inevitable result of unfortunate circumstances. Yet, the neoliberal assumptions that underpin these responses illustrate that choices are being made and force us to ask whether the

emergency we face necessitates this exact response.

Instead, we should see this as but one approach that is rooted in a vision of the university we do not need to support. Liminal times, in which the established social order is suspended, are opportunities, and this is an opportunity for university communities to have a broad discussion about what the university is, what we think it should be, and how to move toward that goal.

Pushing back

Instead of discussing better Zoom learning techniques, we should collectively ask what teaching in the COVID-19 era would look like if universities valued education and research as essential public goods. For instance, what would emergency online teaching look like if we openly acknowledged that it was not an adequate substitute for classroom teaching and reduced both tuition and teaching and learning standards? This would alleviate pressure on both faculty and students and facilitate open conversations with students about the nature of education and the limitations of a tuition fee-based model. It could be supported by acknowledgements from administrations that faculty are not expected to completely reimagine and redesign their courses to suit the online format but merely to offer as much as they can of their existing courses online as a temporary stopgap measure.

Likewise, what would COVID-19 era teaching look like if it were properly supported? It might include course releases and smaller course sections, which would create additional positions for contract faculty; more teaching assistant, technology, and online pedagogy support; postponement of courses with pedagogies that do not work online; extra compensation, job security, and health benefits for contract faculty; strong protections for intellectual property, academic freedom, workload, and research; accommodation for faculty with additional challenges and responsibilities at home; and discussion of the additional support that many faculty members need under normal circumstances—and the precarity faced by many.

Finally, what would COVID-19 era teaching look like if educational institutions made decisions about teaching on the basis of pedagogy instead of neoliberal fiscal policy? So far, we have been buying into the trope of scarcity and deficit-mongering that characterized the cruelest social policy of the 1990s. In this crisis, even conservative politicians have shown that the bottom line can be shifted to fund public priorities. Universities have a tendency to prioritize funding for capital projects, administration, and surpluses, while claiming they are unable to find sufficient funds for their core missions of teaching and research. However, most universities have healthy reserves they can draw on in times of crisis. Further, federal and provincial governments can and should be providing funding to sustain institutions essential to the public sphere, including universities, during this crisis and into the future. Even in the midst of a crisis, it is not necessary, appropriate, or responsible for universities to sidestep collegial governance procedures, to sacrifice teaching and research, or to make overworked, overstressed faculty members feel like they may be responsible for letting their institution's core mission slide.

These are only very basic ideas. The point is that faculty, students, and all university workers can—and should—be having a discussion in which we collectively

imagine a better path forward—one that is consistent with, and moves toward, the kind of university we want for students' education, for quality research, for good jobs, for a thriving campus community, and for a vibrant democracy.

Emergencies matter. Far from occasions that justify suspending our principles, the way that we handle the extraordinary, the unexpected, sends a message about what we truly value. While COVID-19 may seem exceptional, university responses to this crisis are hardly a departure from the neoliberal norm, and university administrations—encouraged by eager consultants—are already making plans to extend online teaching and usher in a new, even more neoliberal normal after the pandemic dissipates. We must be careful not to send the message that the neoliberal university and the worldview that underpins it are acceptable. ■■

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The author thanks colleagues at various universities for helpful conversations on the topics in this article.

A shorter version of this article appeared in the CAUT Bulletin.



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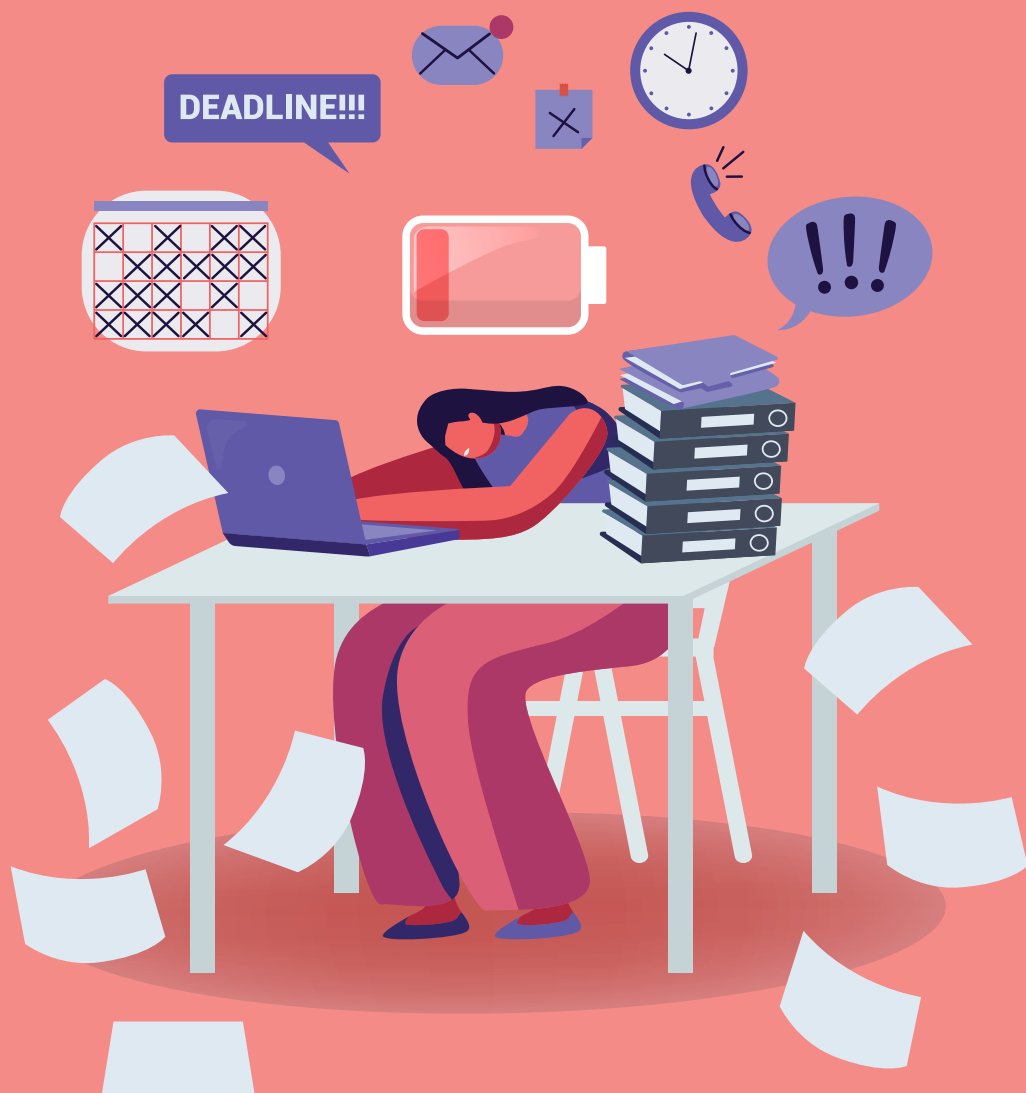
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CARE WORK DURING COVID: A letter from home about privilege, resilience, and capitalism in the academy

Soma Chatterjee

Universities claim to re-shape the social, scientific, and economic contours of society for the better. Has the ongoing exploitation of precariously employed female and racialized academic staff during the pandemic revealed that universities are reinforcing the very social and economic norms they should be challenging?



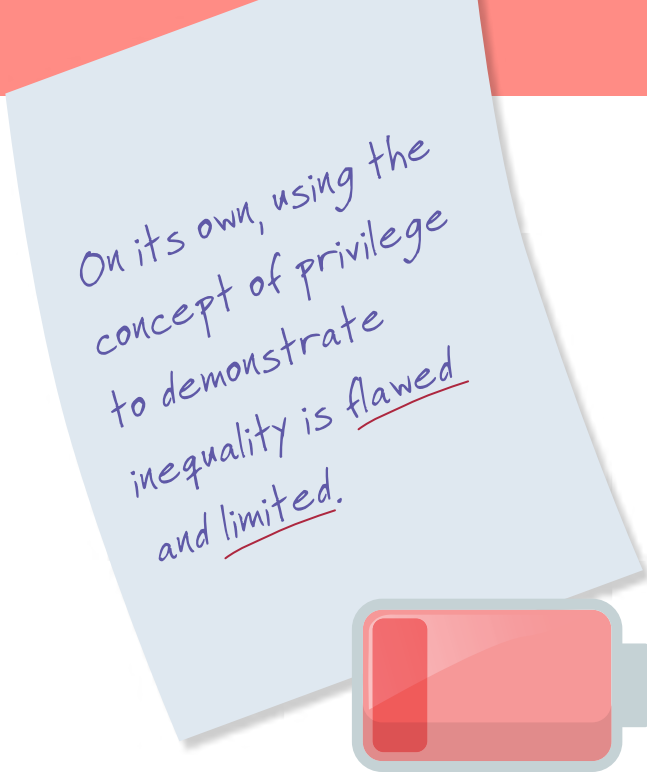
TINY VIRUS, BIG QUESTIONS

The impacts of COVID-19 will reverberate for years and likely decades to come. The threads of inquiry, not to mention the personal, political, and ethical lessons this tiny virus has revealed, are innumerable. Everywhere you turn, opinions, critiques, coping strategies, mutual aid practices, educational initiatives, love, rage, fear, dreams, and apocalyptic forecasts overwhelm. This may be a tiny virus, but it raises some very big questions.

In these days of pandemic, what has preoccupied me, both emotionally and intellectually, is a reckoning with the privilege of being securely employed amidst the widespread devastation in the labour market, especially for segments of the labour force that are not white-collar but sustain the white-collar way of life. I have also been thinking about, and frankly disturbed by, the systems that drive employers, including postsecondary institutions, to push remote work with little regard for the family care responsibilities many workers and academics have faced due to schools and child-care centres being closed.

Let me start with my family as an example. We are a racialized immigrant academic couple (one of us still working on completing their PhD) juggling teaching and research responsibilities while taking care of a six-year-old, and we do so without an extended family care network. Being first generation immigrants, our access to social, cultural, and financial resources is, at best, tenuous. For us, advancement in the academic world has always seemed to meet resistance and indifference alongside a relentless feeling of isolation. As such, the celebratory uptake of working from home, which seems to ignore existing inequities as well as mounting emotional and affective care demands, has increased the feelings of anxiety, isolation, and precarity in my family.

Even considering our so-called privileges, the contradictions I embody—a faculty member in one of the largest universities in Canada who remains invisible in its equity responses to the pandemic—have reinforced the material social experience of only being conditionally welcome to this nation and its institutions of legitimation. This experience is not unique to me, but is shared by many trying to survive in a system that overworks, undervalues, and largely ignores us in favour of the mythical norm in academia, which New School professor emerita Elizabeth Ellsworth has described as the “young, white, Christian, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, thin, rational man” (see *The Equity Myth*, 2017 for compelling scholarship on this).



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RECKONING WITH PRIVILEGE

On its own, using the concept of privilege to demonstrate inequality is flawed and limited. As an educator, I have seen its use backfire too often when individual students, especially young white students, intersperse their laundry list of privileges with “but I am” stories of marginalization that entirely miss the point about structures of white supremacy. It is also deeply disturbing that life under late capitalism skews society’s values to the point where basic human rights, such as decent income and benefits, become privileges for which we should be grateful. This skewed perspective drives the fear of being left behind, creates divisions, and causes us to lose sight of the ongoing crises wrought by the system that is capitalism, which has patriarchal and colonial devastations baked into its core. After all, there are communities that include those who are racialized, Indigenous, Black, and poor; who have disabilities and underlying chronic conditions; and who lack access to housing that live in perpetual crises. Those who find themselves at the intersections of more than one of these communities have their troubles compounded and their privileges complicated.

With millions of Canadians seeking financial assistance and thousands of older Canadians dying in poorly funded nursing homes, the deep structural inequities of our society have become evident—especially as many of Canada’s richest continue to accumulate more wealth. As poet and philosopher Bayo Akomolafe writes with incisive precision, is this so-called war against the virus better not won?

If this is indeed a war, do we really want to win it?
What if winning is the worst possible outcome we

could imagine? Do we want to come out on top, stamp out this viral enemy, and restore agency to the cold ossified tentacles of the familiar? Are we sure this disruption is not what we want, what we've cried for in unvoiced ways? Should we not treat this opening as our grand marronage, our fugitive departure from exhausted cottonfields?

In such a world, corrupted by the disproportionate power of racist patriarchal capital, privilege as a strategy of critique runs the risk of launching us into a rather circumscribed pursuit of individualized ethics of care, conscience, and responsibility.

CARE WORK AND CAPITALISM

The flaws of this system become glaringly obvious when the care services that allow this model to function disappear and yet it remains relentlessly focused on increasing growth/production. Demanding to do but hard to show, this invisibility of care work has been a key challenge for feminist political economists. Erica Michelle Lagalis, a postdoctoral research fellow at the London School of Economics, sums up the core difficulty: "Perhaps it is only because 'care' is implicitly presumed to be *not* work—but rather an act of love—that one need put the

word 'work' after it to suggest its productive and strenuous aspect." Similarly, feminist scholar Nancy Fraser attests, everyday child and elder care work comprise "both affective and material labour, and [are] often performed without pay." As anti-racist feminists (Himani Bannerji, Rhacel Parrenas, Makeda Silvera to name a few) have importantly pointed out, this work is often disproportionately carried by women, especially those who are racialized and immigrant working class.


In its own way, the pandemic has illuminated and clarified the politics of separating economic production from social reproduction (see Federici on this)—a foundational source of modern capital's monstrous profits—and, at the same time, reinforced race, gender, and class hierarchies. You may say there is nothing new or even remotely shocking with this analysis. This economic model's sociopathic relationship with care work is constitutive of the functions of modern liberal democracies. As Fraser writes:

... on the one hand, social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation; on the other, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies.

In other words, while capitalist societies want to benefit from the birthing, the showering, the cooking for, and the caretaking of the home, they do not want to pay for the "fruits of that activity." Considering the deeply profitable yet invisible entanglements of economic and reproductive labour, it is then crucial that the work from home narrative—widely promoted by postsecondary administrations and celebrated in institutional media—is held up against the light and examined for the work it is doing for academic industries. Because postsecondary institutions—entities that regularly claim to be re-shaping the social, scientific, and economic contours of society—are no exceptions to the logic of accumulation.

FALSE NARRATIVES IN THE ACADEMY

It is well known that academia is hierarchized, particularly along gendered and racialized lines. These institutions have historically benefitted from the labour of women—and other equity seeking groups—while employing them in precarious, low-paid work, including as contract faculty, cleaners, and front-line service workers.



The invisibility of care work has been a key challenge for feminist political economists.



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In the wake of the pandemic, a number of institutional narratives and practices have further calcified these hierarchies and fractures. For example, university work from home and remote teaching guidelines have in no way reflected government updates about day care/school closures or the complexities of home schooling that parents continue to shoulder. Although gestures of care and well-being are embedded in institutional missives, our workload remains unchanged even while the emotional and physical demands of family care have increased significantly.

What better reminders that there is no “we” in academia, when concerns about care work are framed as private burdens, considered as opportunities for new training, followed with invitations to share our concerns over and over at meetings without any tangible response, or met with veiled and explicit reminders of how lucky and privileged we are to still have jobs. Then there are the narratives of faculty resilience—many circulating in various academic magazines and blogs showcasing tips on scheduling, tools and gadgets, and encouraging readers to find ways to embrace and prosper in the new normal. Our institutions join in, pressuring us to maintain our productivity by publishing research, writing grants, planning and attending webinars, and finishing books.

While many faculty are able to practice physical distancing, work from home, and continue to be paid; many others have not enjoyed the same privilege. This has often manifested in typical gendered and racialized outcomes.

For colleagues on short-term contracts—who will bear a very disproportionate share of these challenges due to their precarious institutional status, lack of access to health insurance benefits, and lack of control over course and curriculum planning—the anxiety and precarity is acute. They are expected to maintain resilience between

contracts and return for more. The stubborn disavowal of the complexities of working from home in the face of all of this reveals that our postsecondary institutions thoroughly embody the patriarchal racist relations of capital.

WHAT OF RESILIENCE?

What do these institutional narratives of working from home and faculty resilience assume? Who do they silence and make invisible, and at what cost? While we are socialized to think of resilience as that innate human ability to hold lives together and continue to perform in the face of challenge, I suggest that resilience during COVID-19 requires an acknowledgement that not all of us will emerge from this crisis stronger, and that many will actually be challenged to the breaking point. Not because of the pandemic, but because of the rigid neoliberal systems that stood by and demanded more, while providing little in the way of compassion or support.

Resilience requires condemning how I am, and people like me are, typically called on when our institutions need to validate themselves as critical, ethical, and diverse; yet, we are routinely sidelined when we critique the academy’s structured precarities, including its systemic disregard of and silence on how the gendered and racialized manual work of caregiving continues to sustain a largely white male intellectual industry.

Finally, resilience is re-asserting that the collective I want to belong to is not the liberal “we are in this together”—an amorphous whole with no accountability to the myriad intersections within—but a granular, intersecting, conflicting, life-sustaining, human collective that repeatedly tends to absorb the brunt of damage during catastrophes.

PANDEMIC PEDAGOGY

The pandemic, as Arundhati Roy writes, “is the wreckage of a train careening down the track for years.” We knew it was coming and we know it will stay with us—especially because the state will be eager to declare victory over the virus and “re-open” the economy in a rush to return to the normal that was systemically broken to begin with.

I do not have a fever dream of the end of capitalism, but, as an educator, I am looking forward to going back to the classroom and working with my students to understand the big lessons from the tiny virus. COVID-19 has placed the

deep inequities structuring our societies up on a mega social canvas, on our morning news and social media feeds, reminding us daily of who and what we value as society. New Orleans-based writer Tunde Wey compellingly writes that we're "in a moment that feels different but evokes sameness..." That is, elite, white-collar members of society continue to matter more than everyone else, indeed an increasingly minuscule number of them determine whether and how the rest should live. What better forum to examine and critique the shallowness of liberal equality and freedom talk of our societies that the pandemic has unravelled than the classroom?

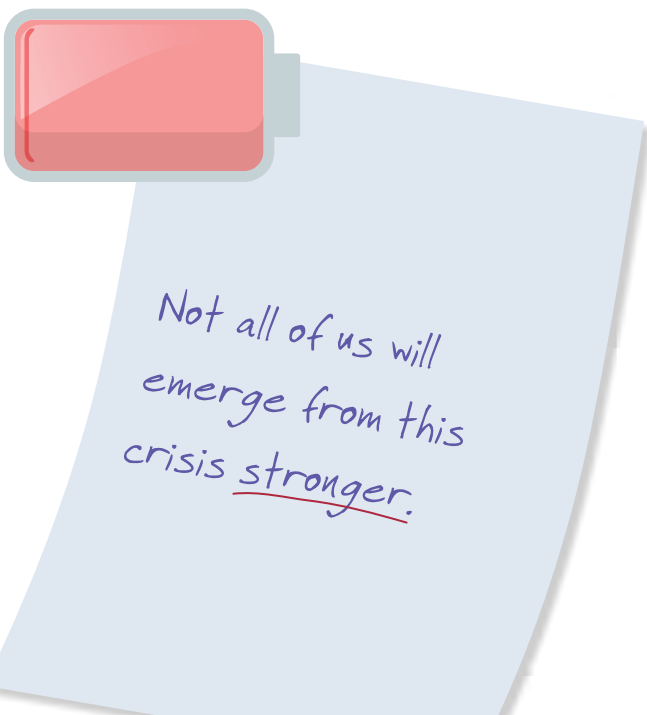
How do we make sure not to forget the lessons we have learned? How do my students—emerging social workers—deploy sharper political economic critiques as they take up jobs in long-term care homes, homeless shelters, food banks, school boards, and settlement organizations (all sites of racialized and gendered care work)? How do we draw on these lessons to determine where our collective emotional, ethical, critical, and intellectual energies should be devoted going forward?

As much as they kill, pandemics also teach life. I remain hungry for pandemic pedagogy.

However, while we are on this journey of remote teaching and learning in an era that, ironically, demands us to, as Adrienne Maree Brown states, "deepen our relationships to hold each other through this, [and] claim power for our communities," we should place the questions of equity in care work at the centre of our experiences and narratives of


working from home. Care work is, inevitably, a raced, gendered, and classed experience both outside and inside academia. Just as the adulations, honking, and pot banging for frontline health care workers do not suffice—they need to be paid for and supported in what they do—academics with young kids and other care demands need tangible support. And yes, some of us—racialized, Black, Indigenous, female—need it more than others. Our academic institutions should come up with adequately sophisticated analyses of these experiences. The onus should not be on us to keep re-telling the challenges we face working from home, but for our institutions of higher learning, to listen, learn, and act to support us. ■■

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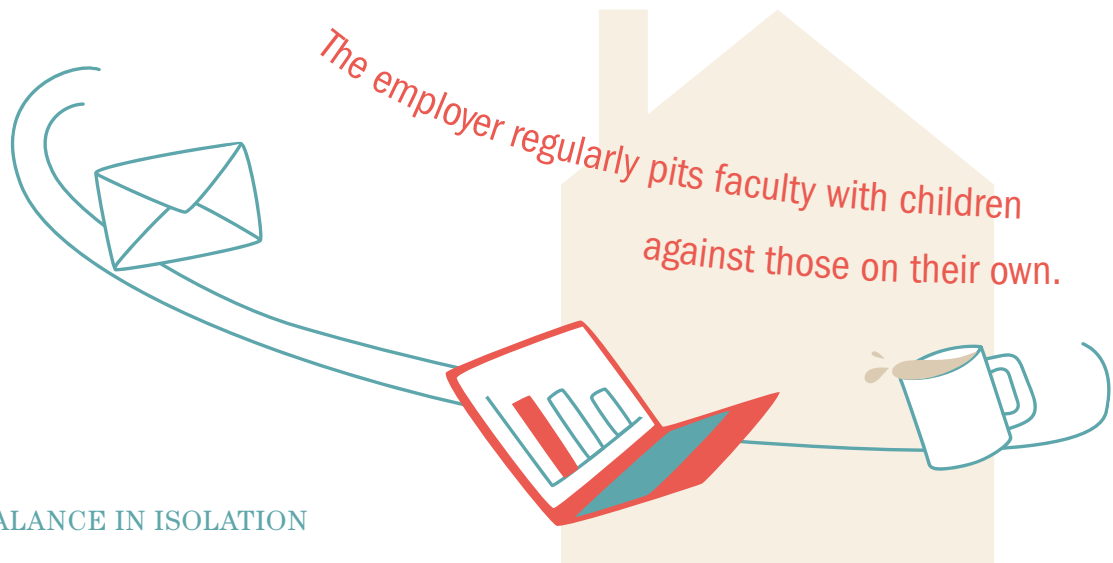
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NAVIGATING THE PANDEMIC: Living alone but needing to stick together

Jeff Bale



Whether living alone or caring for others, navigating this pandemic while maintaining a healthy work-life balance has been particularly challenging. Overcoming these challenges means focusing on what we have in common and supporting each other to improve everyone's working and living conditions.



WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN ISOLATION

As I write this article, Toronto is six weeks into the second lockdown since the COVID-19 pandemic began. A health crisis at its core, the pandemic has revealed and exacerbated numerous long-standing inequities within Canadian universities (and within society more broadly). For many faculty, this has presented acutely in terms of workload—with most universities choosing to download the responsibility of managing the impacts of the crisis to individual faculty members (for example, the expectation that faculty could move our entire curriculum online with little support), while also insisting we maintain research and other kinds of productivity.

Faculty associations and others have worked hard to address these issues and challenge university administrators to act differently to protect the health and wellbeing of students, staff, and faculty. This is important work. Unfortunately, in most instances, faculty associations and other academic bodies engaged in surveys and advocacy in this area have seemed to treat issues of workload and “work-life balance” only as questions of family responsibilities (child care or elder care) and excluded opportunities for feedback from those living in isolation.

For example, my faculty association has conducted two surveys on workload during the pandemic in which “family” implied living with and directly caring for children or elders. The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations’ recent survey did the same. In an open letter from faculty affiliated with the Dalla Lana School for Public Health to senior administration at the University of Toronto, the paragraph dedicated to “the gendered burden...of working from home” focuses solely on issues of child and elder care. Finally, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded survey on COVID-19 and faculty workload asked respondents to indicate their family obligations and provided only child care, elder care, or “other” as options.

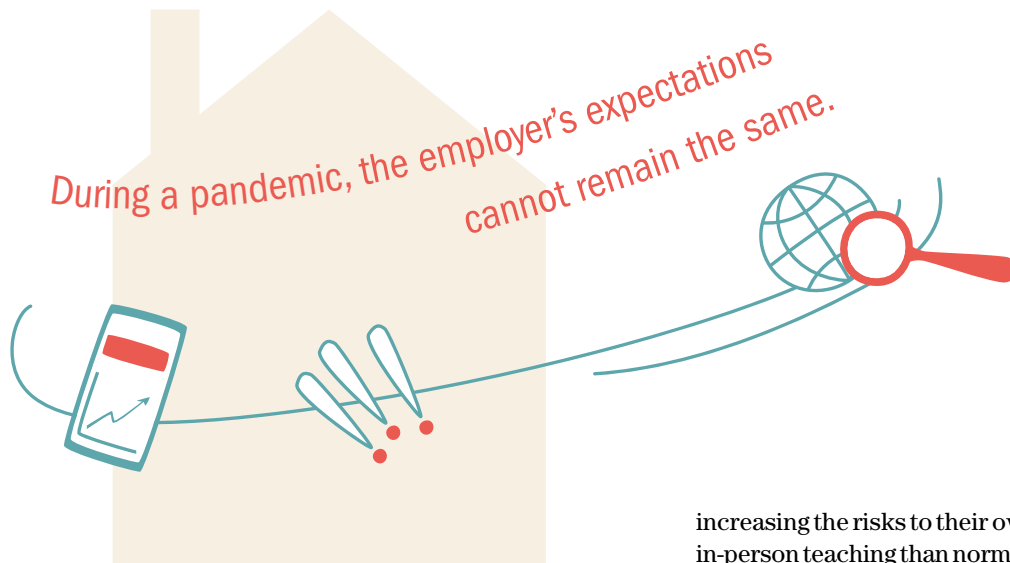
Advocacy and knowledge production like this leave no space for those of us who live alone and are experiencing both the pandemic and the employers’ unreasonable

responses to it by ourselves. No matter how you slice the data, single occupants comprise the largest household type in Canada: the 2016 Census found that 40 per cent of Canadians were single, while 28 per cent of households were “one-person” (the term used by Statistics Canada). And yet, the “care” it takes to sustain single occupant households doesn’t seem to register in the research and advocacy work being done.

This advocacy does challenge the gendered, raced, and classed distribution of child and elder care responsibilities, but it *also* masks other kinds of material and emotional work that a sizeable portion of faculty members shoulder. That is, instead of posing questions that can perpetuate the cisgender, heterosexual, co-habiting “family” as the norm, our advocacy and knowledge production should be framed more inclusively in ways that broaden our definitions of work-life balance and identify our common struggles. While the realities of our home lives may differ, there is much common ground on which we can advocate for safer and more reasonable working conditions for all of us.

YOUR FAMILY VERSUS OURS

At one level, this erasure of singledom is nothing new. In a recent study, Dawn Culpepper, Courtney Lennartz, KerryAnn O’Meara, and Alexandra Kuvaeva reported survey data collected in the United States before COVID documenting how university policies regarding work-life balance regularly overlook faculty members living alone. Their findings confirmed that women are overrepresented among single faculty living independently. Predictably, this gendered pattern correlates with greater service and more difficult teaching loads. Consequently—and belying the myth that those of us living alone have all kinds of time on



our hands for research—this segment of faculty is *less productive* in terms of research than partnered faculty.

This study also confirmed what many of us who live alone already know: The employer regularly pits faculty with children against those on their own. Consider the annual argument about who will teach evening courses. Faculty living alone are often expected to teach these courses, and have often internalized their responsibility to pick up this work so that their colleagues can be home with their children. This example demonstrates a dynamic that I will return to later: The employer will often seek to compensate for the accommodations promised to one set of employees by shifting the burden of that accommodation to their coworkers.

In preparing for this article, I used social media to invite faculty members living alone to share some of their experiences. One colleague reported being asked to take on an administrative role in their faculty. When she said no, preferring to focus on research, she was told the other viable candidates had declined because of family demands. As the last person standing, this colleague felt pressured to take on the role, which she ultimately did. The message this colleague received could not have been any clearer: Her personal life wasn't as important as those of her colleagues with families.

Other cases relate to the face-to-face teaching that continues, despite the pandemic. With schools and daycares closed for much of the pandemic, many faculty members with family care responsibilities have attempted to reduce their teaching loads. Instead of the university administration investing in additional faculty hiring to fill these gaps, they put additional pressure on faculty members without family care responsibilities to carry the extra load. The issue is not simply one of distributing teaching loads equitably. Picking up this slack means other faculty

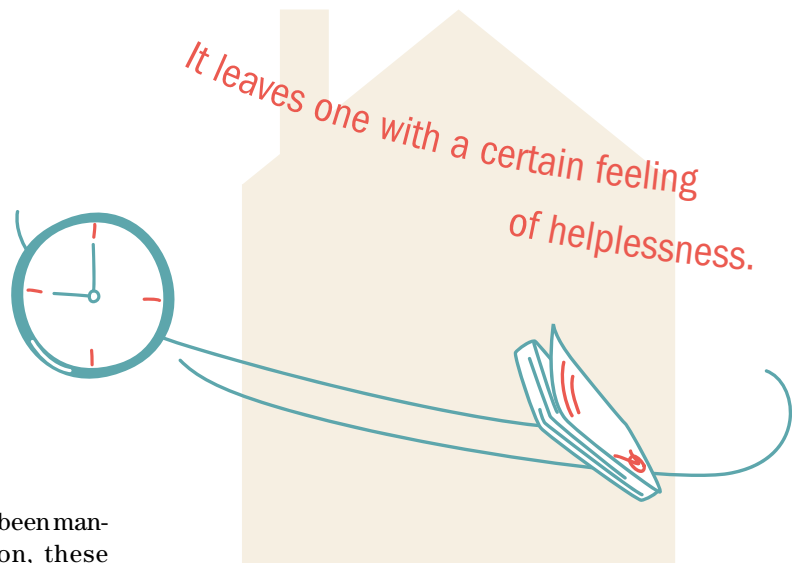
increasing the risks to their own health by performing more in-person teaching than normal. Not only is this expectation unreasonable—during a pandemic, the employer's expectations cannot remain the same—but it also reveals a certain callousness that some lives are simply more important than others, as Todd Gordon notes in his article "Why the Boss Is Happy to Let You Die."

While the employer bears the ultimate responsibility for playing faculty with families against those without, those of us living alone can also internalize that division. In an email from one colleague, they wrote about consciously not asking for help because their co-workers with children "might be annoyed if I chimed in with the challenges I face." I am part of this too. In the endless Zoom meetings that have followed the shift to remote work, we often started by checking in with each other. The only people who "chimed in" were partnered or had children. This was not a rule, but rather a culture. In other words, it has been tacitly understood that check-in's like these are meant for quick updates about those with families. Part of the reason for the silence of those living alone stems from a feeling that what we have to say about our personal lives doesn't really belong and might result in censure.

Narrow definitions of family also render invisible other kinds of family care for which many faculty members are responsible. In some cases, family members live far away, meaning that care work is completely mediated through a screen. One colleague detailed the stress of weighing whether it was safe to travel to visit their parent in a long-term care home. Determining that it wasn't, they were left to negotiate telephone and FaceTime calls with care-home staff to support and advocate for their loved one.

YOUR FAMILY AND OURS

In addition to expanding our understanding of "family" as we advocate for faculty during the pandemic, we also need to consider the work of social reproduction and the challenges faced by individuals living and working through a pandemic in isolation.



Most important among these challenges has been managing an entire household alone. In isolation, these difficulties are small, but during global pandemic, anxieties around health and safety, increased workloads, greater social isolation, and the additional complexities of maintaining a household all add up.

For example, shopping for essentials has been made more difficult and time-consuming due to reduced store hours and longer lines. This has increased the reliance on delivery services, which means ensuring one is available when the doorbell rings, irrespective of work demands. This has meant many have been navigating the numerous challenges resulting from the transition to online teaching, juggling endless Zoom meetings, and struggling to hold onto research work *while also* finding time to stand in line for groceries and obtain additional essentials. Of course, there is also the cooking, the cleaning, the laundry, and the bills.

The struggles of living alone without being able to assume that a friend can lend a hand are compounded in other mundane tasks. No longer can we rely on a friend to pick us up when we drop off the car for repairs, to take us to a medical appointment if we don't have a car or need support, to help us carry groceries home or move a large piece of furniture, and so on. The fact that there isn't necessarily someone around to help not only makes these tasks more daunting, but also more stressful. It leaves one with a certain feeling of helplessness.

Less mundane, but far more stressful, has been the worry about what happens if we do get sick. How does one manage a 14-day quarantine, let alone a more serious outcome, if we are exposed to COVID-19 and living alone?

"Just ask a friend," many of us have been told. Yet, during a pandemic, this is no simple ask. Which tasks are important enough to ask a friend to risk travel and contact? How many times is too many to ask? Which tasks are safe enough to ask for outside help—especially if we are quarantining or infected?

These material dimensions of social reproduction matter greatly, but so does the emotional reality of living without the comfort of regular, in-person human interaction, conversation, touch (hugs!), and intimacy. As an

example: It was months before public health agencies issued any formal guidance on what safer sex might look like during the pandemic. Some of us, like myself, came out at the peak of the HIV/AIDS crisis and have a lifetime of experience of squaring public-health messages against pandemics. In fact, the current messaging around safer sex and COVID is a direct legacy of the grassroots public-health activism among queer and other AIDS activists from the 1980s and 90s, as Alexander Chee writes in "In This Pandemic, Personal Echoes of the AIDS Crisis." Nevertheless, it is hard to overstate the isolation many of us have experienced under COVID, and the stress of having to figure out for ourselves safer ways to overcome it.

I do not want to romanticize the realities faced by colleagues with partners, children, or roommates, but I do want to underscore the real emotional work involved in building the social circles that Ontario public health advised us to create, and then to collapse, and now to create again as the pandemic has developed. Indeed, the idea that those living alone can simply "bubble up" or "just ask friends" assumes that the intimacy and shared ethics of care required to ask for—and give—this kind of help are easy to establish and sustain.

Assumptions like these are yet more examples of downloading the responsibility to navigate the pandemic to the individual, while masking the structures that require us to ask for help in the first place. Consider a recent opinion piece in the *Globe and Mail* written by Stephen Liptrap, the President of human-resources firm Morneau Shepell. He opens by stating that "the group of employees I am most concerned about is those who are living alone." Yet, each of the five tips he offers is based on individual solutions to managing one's own mental health. None involves a concession from the employer (perhaps not surprising from an HR executive) or targeted support from the state.



From managing our household and striking that elusive work-life balance, to seeking out intimacy in the varied forms in which we need it, responsibility for performing this work is privatized and made a burden to be carried by the individual. At this stage of the game, advocacy, research, or policy-making that fails to grasp this basic point is simply not good enough.

THE STEPS UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIONS SHOULD TAKE

Some of what I have described about daily life for faculty members living alone during COVID is, in fact, outside the control of the university. However, there are concrete policies that university administrations can use to foster greater equity for faculty members irrespective of what their household looks like.

For example, if we know that most faculty living alone are women and that this gendered pattern underwrites inequities in service and teaching, then one response would be to make the assignment of workload more transparent and accountable. It is easier to protect one's time when the (im)balance in workload is clear for everyone to see.

A second approach would be to consider faculty benefits in what Culpepper et al. called "family neutral" ways. Some of the most powerful benefits faculty have are related to paid leave and delaying our tenure clock. Yet, these options are most often justified in terms of narrow definitions of family. What would paid leave look like that wasn't rationalized in terms of family, but rather in terms of supporting faculty as we respond to major life events? How do we create policies that prevent the employer from burdening other coworkers when a colleague invokes these benefits? Many universities have offered pre-tenure faculty

the option to delay their clock as a response to the pandemic. What measures will the employer take to ensure that pre-tenure faculty living independently are not held to a higher standard, if work-life balance to date has only been conceived as a question of child or elder care?

Finally, and perhaps most important, is the simple fact that there are too few tenure-stream faculty to carry out the work expected by our universities. The material basis for pitting faculty members with families against those who live alone is precisely the under-resourced workplace. No amount of "wellness" and "self care" tips from HR can solve this basic material problem. In fact, these tips are designed to divert our attention *away* from this material reality and to internalize the suggestion that it is our responsibility to overcome these challenges.

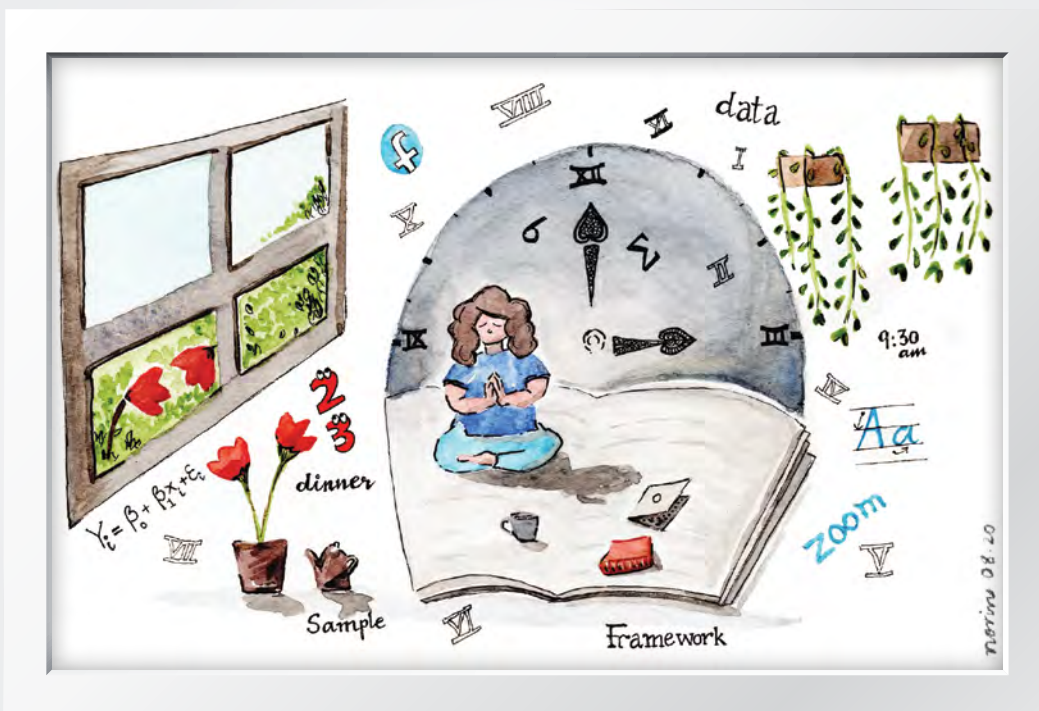
As I've argued above, even the few policies we have that address work-life balance backfire in a certain sense. While they may temporarily aid one set of faculty, in the context of an under-resourced workplace, these policies are usually deployed in ways that increase the burden on *other faculty*. Our response—one that can unite all faculty, whether contract or tenure-stream, whether living alone or with others—should be: *If the employer wants the work done, it is their responsibility to ensure that there are enough faculty to do it.*

These policy ideas reflect the spirit in which I have written this article. The idea is not to create new hierarchies of suffering in which we duke out who has had it worse during the pandemic. Nor is the point to begrudge those colleagues whose families fit the cis-hetero norm, or to dismiss the real demands they face living and working during a pandemic. Instead, my argument is that we must pay specific attention to otherwise ignored segments of faculty—both to get a clearer sense of what the pandemic has meant for their work and lives, as well as to advocate for policies that support all faculty. ■

Jeff Bale is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto.

ARE ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES AND SCHOOLS DOING ENOUGH to care for students with children amid the COVID-19 crisis?

Norin Taj and Asmita Bhutani



Many university students have child care responsibilities that they have had to balance with their academic work. With ongoing uncertainty around in-person teaching at both universities and schools, these students have had to find ways to balance the needs of their children with the expectations of their programs.

The fundamental reorganization of the education system, due to the pandemic, has highlighted some key debates on caregiving in society. The functioning of school boards and universities, as they continue to experiment with online and in-person modes, magnifies systemic inequities of access, achievement, and experience for people with caregiving responsibilities.

Occasionally, in our doctoral research-team meetings, the discussion deviates from writing manuscripts to finding new strategies to manage our academic work while we homeschool our children. These conversations are a little breather that we, as caregivers, needed in our confined spaces and time during the lockdown. What follows are excerpts from discussions between two mothers pursuing full-time PhDs at the University of Toronto during a global health pandemic:

S: How did you feel about Ontario's plan for reopening schools in the fall?

I: They made me worried about the mental well-being of my son. In the first few weeks of online classes during the summer, he lost interest and stopped paying attention to his studies. Initially, I told him to be patient as his teachers transitioned to new ways of instruction. But, I continue to be nervous about his marks...he is in grade 10 and his studies are the primary reason for conflict at home. How about you?

S: With one of my children in kindergarten and the other entering middle school, the fall reopening plans didn't seem viable to me. Sending the kids to school clearly wasn't safe, but the online model forced me to continue working from home. Imagine two kids in a tiny apartment for days and months. All summer, I was creatively planning their activities to keep them engaged and avoid any noise complaints from the neighbours. And, of course, I've been staying up late every night to complete my academic work.

I: How did you feel about the reopening plans for winter?

S: My son was in virtual school through the fall, and I still don't feel comfortable sending him to in-person classes anytime soon, as some COVID cases were reported

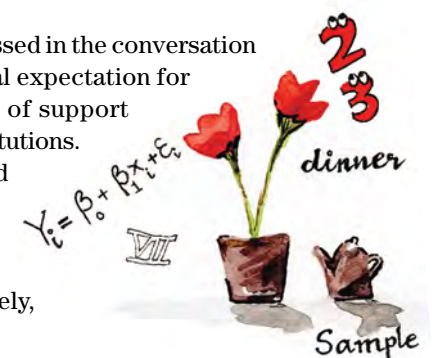
The province, burdened by pre-COVID budget cuts to education, seems unprepared to operate schools safely or effectively.

in his school recently. For my five-year-old, the first three weeks of January is virtual and this is also the time where I'm supposed to start my term, begin a research assistantship, and submit abstracts to academic conferences. A few laptops and limited Wi-Fi bandwidth at home, and the exhaustion from helping my children learn make me think it will be a rough start. And, of course, I have to wait until late night or early mornings to keep up with my academic work. Plus, the online discussions are too formal and somehow lack the warmth of personal connection. What has your experience been like?

I: Bizarre, I must say...classes, papers and deadlines, mine and my son's! I keep switching between my Zoom meetings and preparing breakfasts and snacks for us. And yet, I feel that, as a single mother, I am not doing enough for him and, as a student, I am falling far behind others. I fear saying this out loud...what would my professors think about me? How would my department react? In addition to everything else, I find myself needing to uphold the image of a strong working mother.

S: I agree. The sense of belonging in university spaces was already weak for us and the pandemic has made that worse.

The anxieties discussed in the conversation above highlight the social expectation for care work, and the lack of support available from social institutions. As the province, burdened by pre-COVID budget cuts to education, seems unprepared to operate schools safely or effectively,



parents worry about their children's learning needs and health and safety, especially considering there have been over 1,400 cases in Toronto District School Board (TDSB) itself. The concerns for the health and safety of teachers and staff are equally imperative.

These anxieties, combined with acute feelings of guilt, isolation, insomnia, and imposter syndrome, pose risks to the mental wellness of student parents. Of course, this is not new, but the pandemic has intensified these feelings, which are shared by many parents. A 2018 study conducted at the University of Toronto revealed that student parents commonly reported a marked difficulty in finding a sense of belonging at their university, which impacted their ability to form meaningful interpersonal connections and cope with school and life challenges. The report also exposed that students felt discomfort even disclosing that they had children!

The invisibility of care work has led to the othering of student parents on campuses. For racialized and immigrant student parents in particular, the pandemic has exacerbated longstanding conditions, including a lack of stable employment, financial insecurity, and small or non-existent family support networks. Burdened with multiple responsibilities and more mouths to feed, student parents often cannot make do with the precarious and minimum wage work offered on campus. This has meant finding off-campus jobs, which are often equally precarious and are sometimes the most exposed frontline positions. During the pandemic, many student parents and their partners have had to choose between unemployment or jobs that put the health and safety of their families at risk.

Single parents, new parents, and parents caring for children with disabilities are in unique positions that aggravate the crisis for them, as they lack adequate support from an underfunded public child-care system and may have lost access to important community networks or the type of employment and learning options only available on campus. Several studies point out that a bulk of the care work inside and outside academia is performed by women. Not only does this mean excessive pressure on women to balance school and home but it also, in effect, pushes them out of the labour market, either due to a lack of employment opportunities on campus or a lack of access and feasibility for mothers to engage in that work.

So far, the University of Toronto's response to the pandemic has been disappointing. Both mothers expressed their apprehensions and concerns.

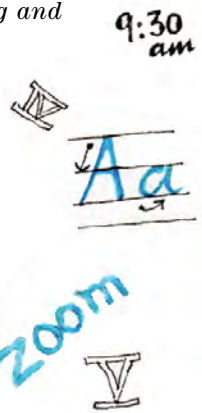
Real change is only possible by reaching out and working with students in need.

I: During the summer, the university's reopening plans troubled me. They had proposed in-person classes and teaching assistantships, which created a lot of fear of endangering my family and others. The university's transition online was hasty and the courses continue to be designed as if for in-person classes, with limited opportunities to connect in meaningful ways. I feel the university has been slow in understanding and responding to the needs of student parents, as policies are not designed with us in mind.

S: I see online yoga and mindfulness sessions being offered, but those activities don't address the challenges I'm facing or the anxiety I'm feeling. Real change is only possible by reaching out and working with students in need. The university has a long way to go.

I: Absolutely! Even the university's long emails packed with resources were burdensome. Navigating the resources alone takes time. It took me three separate sittings to collect the relevant documents for a bursary application. With employment uncertainty and unexpected financial pressures driven by the pandemic, each dollar counts right now. I may need to pay for private daycare if TDSB continues to switch between online and in-person modes. The city daycare scenario seems so grim. The ones near me are functioning with half the capacity and getting subsidies and spots is extremely difficult.

I: Thankfully, my kids enjoy calls with their grandparents every day, but that has been my only child care and community so far. But yes, being a student parent certainly means having limited access to resources. I am



A good first step towards democracy would be to meaningfully include student parents in the development of university policies.

often unable to take up the work on campus as it takes a lot more hours of labour than the work-hours mentioned.

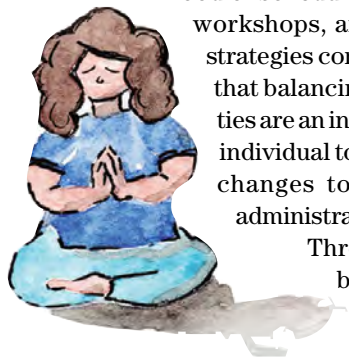
S: Right! And, considering my mothering work, those opportunities at the university are highly competitive and inaccessible for me.

The University of Toronto's aggressive fall reopening plan was disconnected from the reality that student parents (and faculty and staff parents) faced, causing major burnout amongst students. The virtual mode alienates students from their social networks and reinforces hierarchies of race, ability, class, and gender, since the participation and success in this mode is strongly influenced by one's social and economic position.

In response to students' needs, the University of Toronto administration continues to offer individualized solutions. Students with families are currently juggling children, dissertations, frontline work, and, for many first-generation students, long-distance care of relatives in other parts of the world. As a result, we are unable to access supports if they require bureaucratic labour. Moreover, the online support from the university comes in the form of a

flood of scheduling resources, time management workshops, and mindfulness sessions. These strategies contribute to student parents feeling that balancing school and family responsibilities are an individual's problem and require the individual to make behavioral and scheduling changes to accommodate the university administration's needs.

Throughout the pandemic, a lot has been said about the lack of democratic consultation processes



at the University of Toronto and other post-secondary institutions. Time and again, this superficial approach to consultations has yielded inadequate results. A good first step towards democracy would be to meaningfully include student parents in the development of university policies beyond the tokenistic-feedback mechanisms that are common and widespread. Additionally, as universities continue their plans to revitalize campus spaces, there is a chance to create caregiving areas that student parents can access at no additional cost. Some examples include play areas in green spaces, visible kids' corners inside buildings and cafés, breastfeeding areas, day/evening care options, and inexpensive sports facilities for children.

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen increased demands for program extensions and flexibility for all students pursuing their studies. These are longstanding needs that student parents repeatedly articulated before the crisis and will continue to need after it ends. Further, any financial assistance offered by institutions, provincial, or federal governments must consider the higher unmet financial needs of racialized and immigrant parents, single parents, and parents with children with disabilities.

As an institution that sees itself as a leader in Canadian higher education, this is an important moment for the University of Toronto to demonstrate that leadership by stepping up for its students. Supporting and normalizing student parents, children, and caregivers on campus, and including students in financial and administrative decision-making, is an urgent policy intervention that all universities must consider. It is time that we work together to shift institutions away from practices that have isolated their students as individuals but towards behaviours that foster community and care. **AM**

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Asmita Bhutani is a PhD student at the University of Toronto and is a mother of two.

This article is an updated version of one published in August 2020 that has been expanded to reflect on experiences during the Fall term and reopening plans for Winter 2021.

The artwork in this article is © 2020 Norin Taj.

NURSING STUDENTS FACING TOUGH CHOICES in order to graduate during the pandemic

Chantelle Cruzat-Whervin



The COVID-19 pandemic has put incredible strain on healthcare systems around the world. In Ontario, healthcare workers are in high demand. However, nursing students are now faced with the reality that, even before they graduate, they may need to put their own health at risk.

While healthcare workers are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, nursing students find themselves having to make some tough decisions. To earn their degrees, future nurses are required to take placements in hospitals and community health centres—current hot spots for COVID-19. Given this reality, some students are considering the implications of putting their own health at risk to complete their degrees or whether to stay safe and potentially wait another year to graduate.

“Transitioning to online school has been difficult, especially as a nursing student, because the majority of our classes can’t be taught online,” Selena Ki says. Selena is in her last year of nursing at Ryerson University. “A lot of my peers agree that we feel like our skills are lacking because we don’t have access to the resources we usually have—like our skill labs or patient simulations in person.”

In the end, both registered nurses
and nursing students are asking for the same thing:
MORE SUPPORT.

With the transition to online classes already putting strain on postsecondary students, the additional anxiety of being asked to work on the front lines of the pandemic in a hospital or community health centre has created more stress.

“Clinical [work] is a lot harder this year than other years,” Ki adds. “A lot of facilities aren’t taking students because of COVID related closures/risks. The ones that are taking students are understaffed.”

With placement hours required to complete their degrees, nursing students are put in a tough position. As Ki states, “we’ve been told that if we want to graduate this year, we have to attend placement and, by attending placement, we are accepting the risks associated with COVID-19.”

She says that nursing students are feeling pressured by faculty members, departments, and hospitals and clinics offering placements to take what is available, no matter how unsafe they feel. Students who are immuno-compromised feel additional anxiety.

“The nursing faculty at Ryerson University has told us that ‘there is no way to avoid exposure from COVID-19 during this time,’” Ki says. She worries that students doing placements are not just putting themselves at risk, but the family members who they continue to live with.

This is concerning for students, not just because of the potential that they may become sick, but due to the concerns they have about getting sick and transmitting the virus to their patients or family members.

Recently, there was an outbreak of COVID-19 at Windsor Regional Hospital, with five students contracting the virus. Although the virus was contracted outside of the hospital, it was the students who ended up putting vulnerable hospital patients at risk.

Many students still living at home are also concerned about getting sick and passing on the virus to family members, some of whom may be older or at higher risk.

Another stress point for nursing students is the lack of compensation they receive for their labour. They are expected to work in healthcare facilities without compensation and may be working other jobs to pay for expenses in addition to school, including paying for food, rent, or supporting their families, as is the case for many first-generation students with immigrant parents. Students who don’t qualify for OSAP, but cannot afford to pay for school up front, may

have difficulty staying in their program, a problem that pre-dates COVID-19, but has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

“We’re working for free, providing care for COVID suspected patients during a pandemic,” Ki says.

Students currently in their final year at Ryerson who are not able to complete their clinical work have no choice but to defer their year entirely and not graduate this year.

Melanie Holjak, a preceptor for nursing students in the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit and local coordinator for the Ontario Nurses Association, says that students have not been accepted at her location.

“We have experienced a decrease in nursing students within our public health unit since the start of the pandemic. In fact, we have had none this year. Nursing students would be a tremendous asset in public health right now, as they could assist with ongoing workload issues and would gain experience with outbreak management,” says Holjak.

The main concern for nurses are the cuts the Ford government has made to healthcare funding during a pandemic.

“The government can protect and support health care workers by adequately funding all health care sectors, including public health, hospitals, and community [health centres],” said Holjak. “In public health, there have been zero increases to base funding for mandatory programs and services and, earlier this year, we experienced changes to the funding model which resulted in decreased funding to public health.”

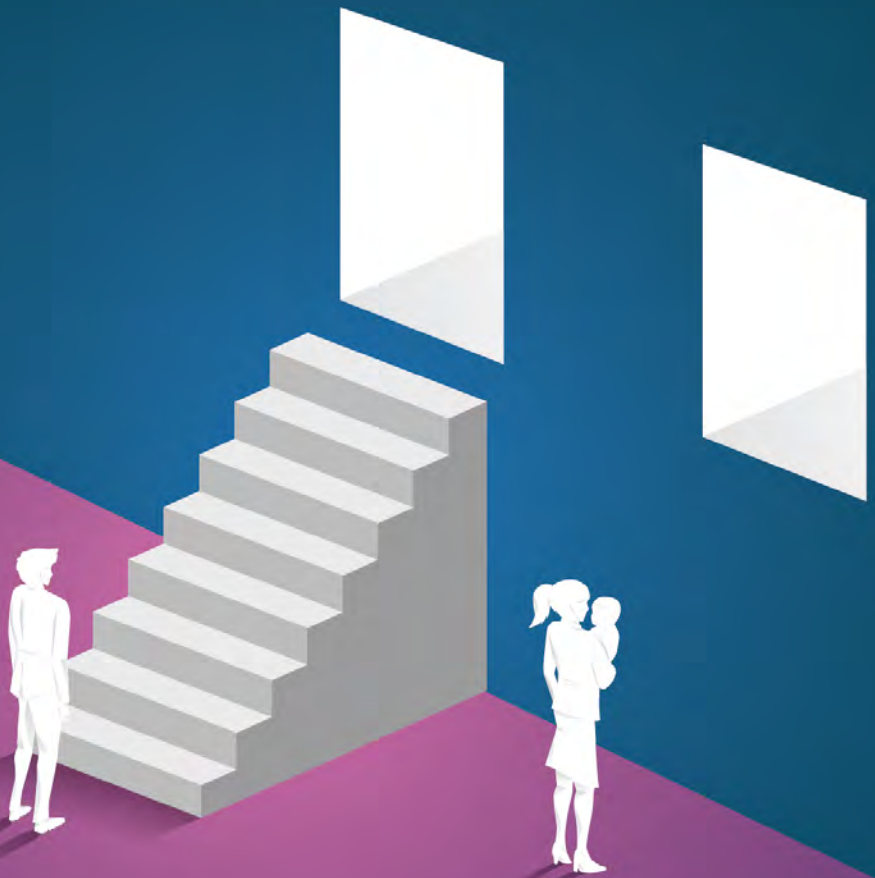
In the end, both registered nurses and nursing students are asking for the same thing: more support.

Healthcare workers are the backbone of the province’s healthcare system. They play a central role testing and treating those affected by COVID-19 and need to feel both heard and supported. That means more funding for the healthcare system so that nurses have access to required personal protective equipment, mental health services, and so that hospitals and community health centres have enough staff to reduce the immense workloads nurses are currently facing. And that will require qualified nurses graduating this year. ■■

Chantelle Cruzat-Whervin served as an associate editor and journalist at Academic Matters during her internship as a fourth-year student in the Ryerson University School of Journalism.

BABY MATTERS: Gender politics in academia beyond COVID-19

Enrica Maria Ferrara



Systemic inequality still dominates academia. Male academics continue to hold most senior positions while female academics are overrepresented amongst the precariously employed. Yet, it seems that gaining tenure often means acting in ways that reinforce existing patriarchal structures. How do we build more equitable institutions?

The enduring “baby penalty”

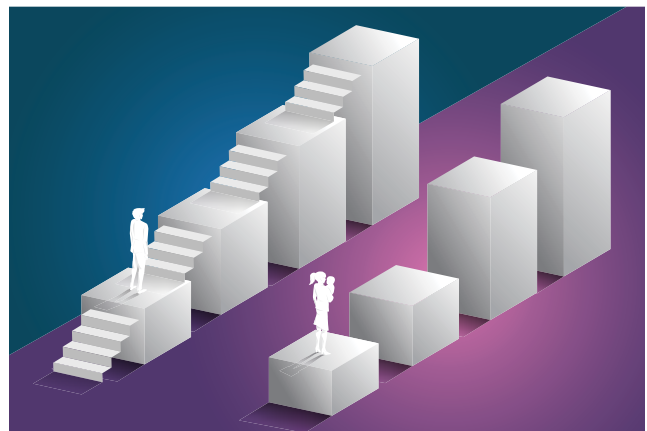
Having children is exciting but challenging. Economic uncertainty, environmental anxiety, and lower fertility rates are among the contributing factors that lead many to opt out of parenthood. Babies have also been damaging to women’s careers from time immemorial, especially in traditionally male-dominated fields, including academia. Recently, a plethora of studies and reports have demonstrated the harsh reality of the gender gap in the number of men and women holding senior academic positions. According to statistical data made available by the global non-profit organization Catalyst, women are a minority among senior academics worldwide, holding an average of 24 per cent of full professorships in Europe, 28 per cent in Canada, and 34 per cent in the United States.

One of the assumptions is that motherhood and household responsibilities take up a considerable amount of time during the best part of women’s early careers, substantially impacting their ability to produce published research or applications for research funding.

Data from a 2013 survey conducted by Georgina Santos and Stéphanie Dang Van Phu in the UK, suggest that parenthood has a negative impact on the rank of women academics, unless babies are carefully timed with career considerations in mind. In addition, a 2013 study of a large sample of PhD students reveals the full impact of the “baby penalty” paid by women in academic institutions across all disciplines. The data collected through both a National Science Foundation survey and the University of California Berkeley goes back to 1973. It shows that mothers of children under 6 years of age are 16 per cent less likely than fathers with similarly aged children and 21 per cent less likely than women with no children to achieve a tenure-stream post. Only one out of three women who enter the tenure stream before having children will become a mother. In fact, the study shows that while 70 per cent of tenured academic men have a family, this is only true for approximately 40 per cent of tenured academic women.

Further investigation is now being conducted in an attempt to capture the impact that intersecting vulnerabilities, including the combination of ethnicity and gender, have on the career advancement of academic mothers. Current data show that women of colour represent less than 20 per cent of full-time female faculty in the United States, with 3.5 per cent of tenured positions going to Asian women, 2.3 per cent to Black women and 2.6 to Latinas. Elsewhere, the gap between white staff and those from underrepresented minorities might be even wider, but we have no documented evidence. In Ireland a lack of figures prompted the Higher Education Authority to make it compulsory for universities to publish data on the ethnicity of academic staff as of December 2020.

A plethora of studies and reports have demonstrated the harsh reality of the gender gap.



Indeed, the annual report *Higher Education Staff Profile by Gender* clearly emphasizes the gender gap in senior positions among Irish academics, but it does not provide any clear data on the demographics of women academics who are also mothers or a breakdown of figures by ethnicity. This should not really matter, we are told, as long as female academics are allowed to progress up the ranks.

This disadvantage has recently been highlighted in the media. The restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have shown a steep decrease in research papers submitted

by women, while the number of research papers produced by men has increased.

What the COVID-19 pandemic has done is lay bare the fact that systemic inequality still dominates universities. The lockdown has helped debunk the myth that liberal society is succeeding in tackling the issue of gender and race inequality.

The dehumanizing legacy of the patriarchy

In a sector riddled by dehumanizing casualization, in which between 50 per cent and 75 per cent of the teaching load is held by staff on fixed-term contracts and off the tenure track, female academics continue to be overrepresented in the ranks of those precariously employed.

The recent attempt to regularize some of these casual jobs by creating permanent teaching-only posts, instead of providing access to tenure-stream positions that allow these staff to engage in research, has exacerbated the feeling of exploitation. These workers, predominantly women and people of colour, will suddenly be parked in dead-end jobs without a proper career path, despite the fact that they hold similar qualifications and research portfolios to more fortunate, and mostly white male, colleagues.

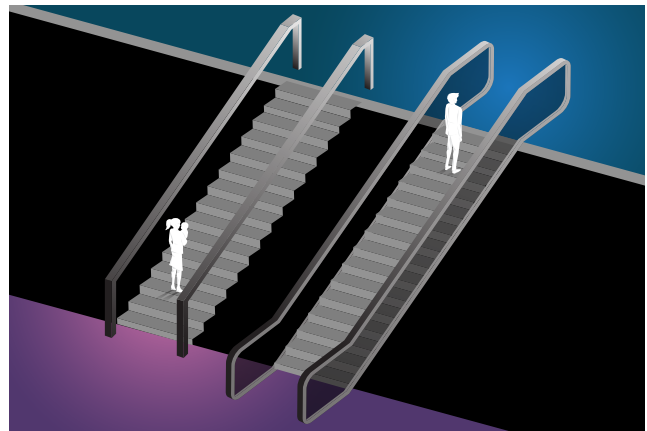
It may be argued that the situation is improving, and this is true, but we are still very far from closing the gap. A traditionally male-dominated environment, academia has been shaped by a patriarchal culture that aimed to control social institutions and the workplace through a gendered division of labour. Its organizational practices are fraught by discrimination, gender bias, misogyny, and racism. Among the powerful patriarchal practices that oppress and prevent women from accessing tenured posts in academia are a lack of maternity support, child care accommodation, teaching load reduction options, and administrative relief for new mothers. Even when policies are implemented to address inequality, those responsible for enforcing them sometimes end up being caught in underlying systems that actually reinforce and protect the patriarchy rather than confronting and dismantling it.

This is partly due to the fact that some female policy-makers are senior academics who have managed to climb the ladder by emulating the lifestyle and productivity of their male counterparts. For many, this has meant giving up or putting off plans to have children. For instance, a 41-year-old woman academic recently confessed to me that she was considering having her eggs frozen until she achieved tenure. She had been waiting for the right time in her career to start a family, a time that had not materialized. Now she felt that the best way to ensure her dream could still be realized was to freeze her eggs.

Reproductive politics in academia are very complex and so are the levels of support that women provide to other women. To be successful in the academic sector, even as a

PhD or a postdoc, scholars must demonstrate enormous dedication and spirit of sacrifice. This means devoting an average of 60 hours per week to the profession. No time for sterilizing bottles, changing nappies, or other housework. Mothers don't have that kind of time in normal circumstances, let alone during the COVID-19 pandemic when the increased pressure of home-schooling and other caring responsibilities typically delegated to older family members and childminders has disproportionately landed on parents' shoulders. The unfair treatment of those who identify as mothers in this prolonged emergency has confirmed academia to be a terribly misogynistic playground.

Systemic inequality still dominates universities.



Now, one would expect that those female academics who made it to the top would be supportive of others who are still lagging behind. Sadly, this is wishful thinking when looking at reports and anecdotal evidence about line managers in other business sectors. In most cases, women are not kind to other women—especially mothers. Why would academia be different?

Women's betrayal

To understand this betrayal, I believe that everyone should read *The Testaments*, Margaret Atwood's sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, which was awarded the Booker prize in 2019.

In the second part of this dystopian tale, Atwood reveals the net of power discourses holding together the totalitarian regime of Gilead. In particular, Atwood focuses on the reproductive politics that keep women apart and allow the surveillance and exploitation of women who are made to embrace motherhood by those who are not. Amongst the latter are the so-called Aunts who are the real

blood and nerves of the patriarchy. In fact, the patriarchal regime of Gilead and the celibate world of the Aunts proceed hand-in-hand. One could not exist without the other. The Aunts are instrumental to the regime because they have a better sense than the ruling men of how women think and emote, what they need and what they fear. This knowledge is transformed into power that keeps the system alive and perpetuates further abuse.

Interestingly enough, the Aunts are also devoted clerics. They spend most of their lives educating themselves, reading books that are kept locked away, as Gilead's power—let us never forget—is rooted in female illiteracy, in women's inability to access a proper education.

Atwood's description of the Aunts' power dynamics, and of the abuse they administer to subjugated and commodified Handmaids, reminds me of the way academia operates. True, Atwood's allegory is vaster and cannot be confined to the academic world; however, the similarities and correlations are too big to be ignored.

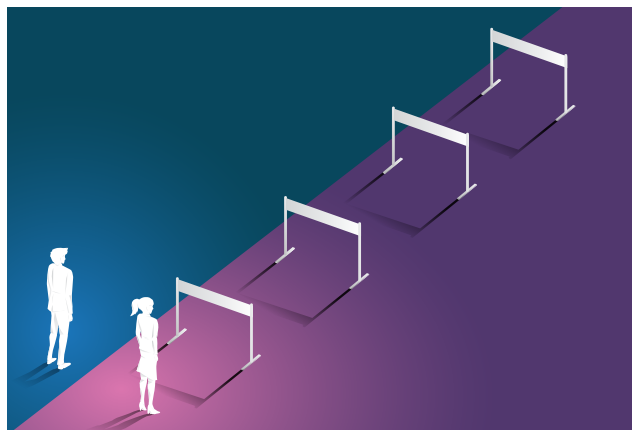
Academia: A handmaid's tale

In academia, the problem is systemic and difficult to overcome because, despite the new Athena Swan charters introduced to measure equality in the UK and Ireland, and despite the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) committees that have sprung up in academic institutions around the world, many women involved in policy-making seem like the Aunts of The Testaments. They pretend to look after the weakest, to protect underrepresented minorities, but are often agents perpetuating inequality.

I know one female colleague who would have been the perfect candidate to instill some wisdom into new EDI policies that her college was putting together. Let's call her the Handmaid.

The Handmaid has been on precarious contracts all her life, despite being an incredibly well-achieved researcher and mother of three children. The Handmaid should have been granted a tenured professorship many years ago, but every time a job came up, she was passed for promotion. Male or childfree female colleagues had spent endless evenings networking with the right people, promising and returning favours, and going abroad to conferences. Meanwhile, the Handmaid was at home changing nappies.

Universities need to substantively improve their employment equity hiring, tenure, and promotion policies.



When the Handmaid responded to a call for volunteers to participate in the new Athena Swan committee, she received no reply for a few days. Then, the head of the committee, let's call her the Aunt, knocked at the Handmaid's door and told her that due to her precarious position—she was on a two-year contract—the Athena Swan administrative role was probably not the best use of her time. Surely, the Handmaid would be better off enhancing her already lengthy publication record and applying for yet another research grant. My friend nodded and said, “fine, if you say so,” and wondered how the other woman had managed to get tenure.

Later that day, the Handmaid bumped into the Aunt in the staff room, where they sat awkwardly drinking coffee

together. The Handmaid asked the Aunt if she had any children. To this the Aunt replied, frustrated, that her job was too demanding, but that she admired those women who chose to have children, even though it was likely to curtail their careers. She envied them—she admitted—but had decided to have her tubes tied because she loved her job too much. This is where reproductive politics in academia become very complex.

As recently highlighted by Theresa O’Keefe in a three-part report about precarity in higher education developed by Maria Delaney for *The Journal*, “The rhetoric that higher education institutions (HEIs) often use is that this flexibility suits women, because they have caring roles.” So, precarity is presented as a choice rather than a discriminatory trap in which mothers find themselves carrying out the “housework of the academy,” as O’Keefe calls the bulk of teaching and administration allocated to these women. Given this scenario, the Aunts of my tale cannot lend a helping hand to their less fortunate sisters unless they are prepared to recognize that they are also the victims of a traditional patriarchal system based on a gendered division of labour, and that the only way to protect vulnerable mothers and diverse staff, especially during this pandemic, is to challenge the system, redistribute excess workload among staff—male and female—and hire additional resources.

Now, more than ever, it is crucial to implement the right practices and procedures to support women who decide to become mothers, ensuring that equal opportunities are available to them at every stage of their careers.

Promoting real equality

When I read articles, such as those published about the impact that COVID-19 has had on the productivity of female academics, I feel both relief and despair. Relief, because they correctly highlight how the pandemic differentially affects women, especially women of colour, due to an unmanageable burden of home-schooling, caring responsibilities, administrative work, and teaching duties. Despair, because these articles often fail to address some important questions: *How many of those women publishing research before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic have children? How many have tenured jobs in academia? How many have both? How many are involved in policy-making at their institution?*

Current data on the gender of academics by age, ethnicity, publications, rank, and number of children must be gathered and made public. Until these questions are asked and these data are collected, a full picture of the impact that having children has on women (and men) within the academy cannot be realized.

Additionally, universities need to substantively improve their employment equity hiring, tenure, and

promotion policies. For example, Ireland established 20 women-only professorships in 2020, with a further 15 due in 2021, taking a significant leap towards the attainment of gender equality. However, this is not enough. There should be further concerted efforts to assign these posts to those who are more vulnerable, including mothers, disabled women, and women of colour.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that systemic inequality is alive and well within our postsecondary institutions. More than words are needed to move us forward, and everyone in the academy has a responsibility to step up and play a role building more fair, more compassionate, and more accommodating institutions.

While emergency funding is needed to address these contingent challenges, we should, as suggested by Honor Brabazon earlier in this issue, use these “liminal times, in which the established social order is suspended” as an opportunity to revise and re-think the market-driven fiscal policy of the neoliberal university, promote equity, and advance the goals of postsecondary education right around the world. ■■

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OSSTF/FEESO

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200 DIFFERENT JOB CLASSES
WORKING IN ALL AREAS OF
PUBLICLY-FUNDED EDUCATION**

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The image features a grid of 20 small photographs showing diverse individuals in various professional and educational settings, such as teaching, research, and administrative work. The grid is arranged in 4 rows and 5 columns. The top left corner of the grid contains the OSSTF/FEESO logo, which is a stylized bird or wing shape. Below the logo is the text 'OSSTF/FEESO'. To the right of the logo is the text 'PROUDLY REPRESENTING OVER 200 DIFFERENT JOB CLASSES WORKING IN ALL AREAS OF PUBLICLY-FUNDED EDUCATION'. Below this text is the website address 'osstf.on.ca'. The grid of images shows a variety of people of different ages, ethnicities, and genders engaged in various activities related to education, such as teaching, research, and administrative work.

The ugly side of performance-based funding for universities

Marc Spooner



Several provinces are overhauling how they fund postsecondary education.

Research shows that these “performance” based funding approaches have been largely ineffective in other jurisdictions. What is the real reason for this funding shift and how will it influence the mission of our universities?

It is difficult to see these exercises
as anything more than heavy-handed ideological attempts
to redesign the fundamental mission of our universities.

With the economic and labour disruption wrought by COVID-19, for a time it seemed Ontario and Alberta had realized the folly of judging their universities' performance against metrics over which the universities themselves had little or no control. Refreshingly, both provinces made an about-face and rightly pressed pause on their plans. However, this apparent change of heart was short-lived. In November 2020, Ontario announced its intention to push ahead and fully implement its performance-based funding plan as previously detailed in April 2019, joining Alberta, who had already vowed for the need to press on with its plans back in June 2020.

Both province's proposed indicators for determining university performance are linked to labour-market and economic outcomes. For example, among the 10 indicators Ontario plans to use are "Graduate employment earnings," "Graduate employment rate in a related field," and "Research funding from industry sources." Alberta previously suggested it intends to use similar indicators, but has not officially announced the final set of metrics it will employ.

At stake is nothing less than the hearts and souls of our universities

Let's not bury the lede here. It is difficult to see these exercises as anything more than heavy-handed ideological attempts to redesign the fundamental mission of our universities.

Under such schemes, universities will be coerced away from their traditional aspirations of fostering critical, creative, and well-rounded citizens—while performing research in the public interest—toward drastically retooled, narrowly conceived "outcomes" focused on trying to serve the current labour market and performing corporate-styled research and development.

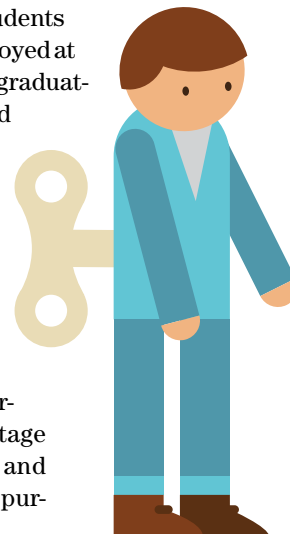
Performance-based funding simply does not work

There is a compelling body of evidence for permanently shelving the implementation of performance-based

funding for universities, with the most significant finding being that it simply does not work. For example, in a recent study published in December 2020 in the journal *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Justin Ortagus and his team undertook a systematic and comprehensive review of 52 of the best peer-reviewed studies published between 1998 and 2019 that examined outcomes of performance-based funding in the 41 U.S. states that adopted the funding model. After meticulous review, they concluded that performance-based funding (PBF) "is generally associated with null or modest positive effects on the intended outcomes of retention and graduation, but there is also compelling evidence that PBF policies lead to unintended outcomes related to restricting access, gaming of the PBF system, and disadvantages for under-served student groups and under-resourced institution types."

Labour force discrimination and university admittance

Indeed, Ortagus and his team's research confirms what many of us feared. Tying student enrolments to specific outcomes, such as "Graduate earnings" and "Graduate employment rate" will skew funding towards institutions that enroll students with the best chances of being employed at the highest pay immediately after graduating. Such an approach, as is planned under Ontario and Alberta's performance-based funding models, will happen at the expense of prospective students from Canada's most marginalized groups, since equally qualified, but racialized Canadians are hired with less frequency and for less pay than their non-racialized counterparts. Thus, these plans will sabotage any hopes for equity, diversity, and inclusion gains amongst students pursuing a postsecondary education.



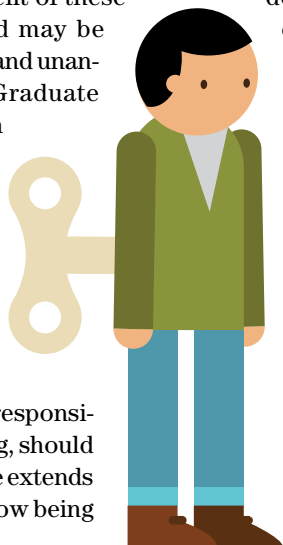
To imply that universities
are currently unaccountable
is not just misleading, **it is untrue.**

Today's labour market

There are also persistent questions about the metrics used by these schemes. For example, the rationale for using current labour-market realities to direct future postsecondary education funding is questionable at best. The labour market can change swiftly, making a shortsighted degree program ineffective by the time students graduate. A case in point is Alberta's optimistic investment in petroleum engineers ten years ago and the stark reality that that job market has dried up.

Moreover, as highlighted by the federal government's 2017 Expert Panel on Youth Employment, the nature of work is changing. We are shifting away from manufacturing and towards service and knowledge economies with a greater emphasis on problem-solving, communication, interpersonal, and critical thinking skills. The report concludes, perhaps obviously, that "the world of work is transforming rapidly" and that the key to navigating such a future is to remain flexible and fluid; it goes on to state, "Some of the next job opportunities may not even exist today."

Universities excel in teaching flexible thinking and problem-solving skills, with a main benefit of these skills being that they *are* portable and may be applied in many different, ever-changing, and unanticipated contexts. Why the metric "Graduate employment in a related field" would even be considered seems regressive, harkening back to an age when freshly minted graduates might have had the luxury of remaining in their newly acquired jobs until retirement. Sadly, this does not correspond with the current nature of work and the reality of Canada's growing gig economy. It also conveniently overlooks the reality that industry must bear some responsibility for worker development and training, should they require specialized skills. This critique extends to ill-considered micro-credential plans now being floated in both provinces.



Governments should not be judging or punishing universities for graduating students who might choose lower paying careers that they find more meaningful and fulfilling—especially when many of these professions are vitally important to society. Given that students are increasingly asked to shoulder a greater percentage of the cost of their degree programs, tackling the growing cost of tuition would seem a better government priority.

Standardized testing for universities

The ironies continue as one considers the "Skills and competencies" metric. Here the government is actually planning to expand standardized computer-based testing beyond K–12 and into postsecondary education. Do we need to look any further than the high-stakes testing craze that has all but strangled sound pedagogy in so many other countries for clues to what could go wrong? Externally developed standardized tests undermine traditional collegial authority, autonomy, and education quality.

It seems foolhardy to privilege a few computerized tests over the many authentic assessments professors have developed to best evaluate performance in their courses—assessments that are reviewed by expert professionals and subject matter specialists. How any standardized test could be more heavily weighted or even compared to a university degree's existing course and program requirements betrays a cynical de-professionalization agenda. A standard four-year undergraduate experience includes approximately 20–40 "second-opinion" expert evaluations of student achievement and subject matter coverage as students progress through their programs. No one-size-fits-all, quantified, out-of-context test administered via computer could ever compare.

Then there is the internal inconsistency of rewarding universities for higher graduation rates while incentivizing the removal of challenging courses and subject matter. Instead, it would be much better to look at year-to-year retention, identifying areas

Making matters worse is the
perverse incentivization of competition
between universities rather than collaboration.

of concern, discerning potentially under-served groups, and directing resources to better support these areas and groups. Indicators showing what percentage of resources are allocated to student supports would also be more effective, as would examining whether or not there is a year-over-year increase in the percentage of students enrolled from non-traditional groups. The extent to which faculty teaching is supported by teaching and learning centres is also an important measure of an institution's overall excellence.

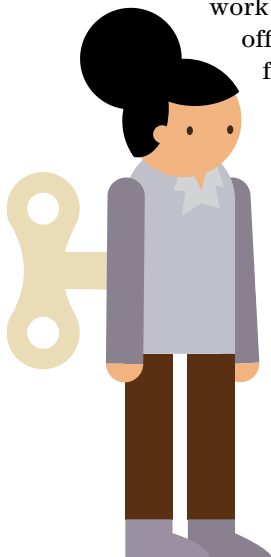
Universities are already accountable

To imply that universities are currently unaccountable is not just misleading, it is untrue. External and internal program reviews, scholarly peer review, student teaching evaluations, professional accreditation bodies, and strict financial audits all act as existing accountability measures.

Universities already commit a great deal of resources toward gathering and responding to data and publishing their performance to better serve, attract, and retain students—and ultimately to better serve society. Such

work is organized through dedicated research offices. Universities Canada also tracks data, for example, in the area of Indigenous outreach, leadership and academic programs.

In Ontario, one of the new metrics will be “Experiential learning,” and similarly proposed as “Proportion of students who participate in work-integrated learning” in Alberta. Here, again, is an area where universities do not need incentive to engage. As universities look for ways to attract students, they are constantly seeking to improve programs, courses, and learning formats. One area where universities have been focusing efforts in recent years is work-integrated learning, where students can enroll in co-op internship programs as part of their education.



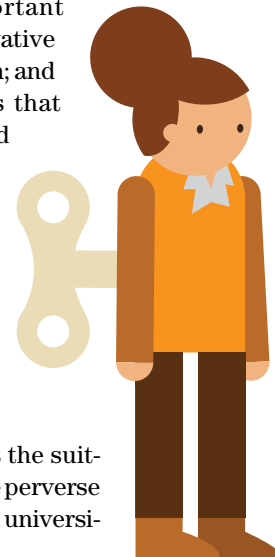
Popular with students, postsecondary institutions have been investing in these programs, with enrolments increasing from 53,000 in 2006 to 65,000 in 2013 to 75,000 in more recent estimates from Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada—all without the punitive stick of performance-based funding.

Corporate research and development

Judging and funding universities on their success attracting research funds (in Alberta under “sponsored research funding”) could well lead to a narrowing of scholarship, both in teaching and research. As the pressure placed on institutions invariably trickles down to the individual level, academics will be encouraged to focus on what is rewarded instead of what matters.

In Ontario, a similar metric rewards private research funding from industry. Somewhat perversely, this approach will tie public funding to private funding and clearly incentivizes the further commercialization of university research.

Such an emphasis impacts society by devaluing less costly but no less important scholarship, including risky, yet innovative research; community-engaged research; and other valuable research endeavours that cannot easily be measured or reflected by a simple financial calculus. Rather than uncovering ground-breaking new ideas, following uncertain but innovative paths that become potential game-changers, or working in the service of the communities in which they reside, scholars will be incentivized to get in and out of research initiatives and funding cycles with something (anything?) that ticks the suitable boxes. Making matters worse is the perverse incentivization of competition between universities rather than collaboration.



Growing administrative costs

Imposing performance-based funding systems will invariably lead to the addition of another layer of costly bureaucracy at both institution and ministry levels. Universities will need to create new or re-classified management positions whose sole purpose will be to assess, report, target, and, ultimately, game the new metrics. On the government side, bureaucrats will be needed to gather, evaluate, monitor and, in the longer term, respond to the manipulated metrics as well as to their unintended consequences.

Unintended outcomes: The U.K.'s Teaching and Research Excellence Frameworks

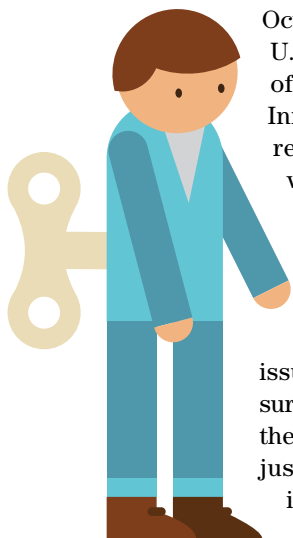
The United Kingdom offers an example of the distortions and ever-increasing costs that occur when coercive metrics are imposed. Various iterations of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) have led to unintended consequences, such as ballooning costs, increasing publish-or-perish pressures, and a de-emphasis of university teaching. The government followed this by creating a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to add to an ever-expanding set of auditing frameworks.

Although the TEF is, for now, still voluntary, it was linked to how much universities would be permitted to raise tuition—something revisited following criticism. It is still too early to determine what effects the TEF's gold, silver, and bronze ratings will have on teaching. What we do know is that the TEF was suspended in January 2020 so that it could be redesigned and redeveloped.

Now, the REF is going through its own re-forming.

Tellingly, in a speech published on October 20th, 2020, Amanda Solloway, U.K. Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Research and Innovation stated: “the processes researchers use to communicate with each other have now become so ingrained into the recognition and reward system that publication and citation seem to have become ends in themselves.

This gives rise to related issues—we know people feel pressured to show significant results from their work, to get it published, just to justify the effort and investment involved. This could be having a profound effect on the very



integrity of science itself—leading to questionable research practices and evidence of a growing crisis in the reproducibility of research. A crisis which over half of surveyed academics recognize as significant. We have created this situation, in part because of the way we evaluate success.”

It is no surprise that these frameworks have led to drastic deformations and growing bureaucratic bloat, while diverting larger and larger pieces of the pie away from teaching, research, and service—the very budget line items that best serve students and society.

Campbell's Law

It is not difficult to predict what will happen under performance-based funding exercises. These are classic examples of “Campbell's Law.” Put simply, the more an indicator becomes a target the more it distorts that which it set out to measure. In discussing examples taken from the former U.S.S.R., Donald Campbell relays accounts of nail factories overproducing their biggest nails when targets were set by weight and overproducing small nails when targets were set by quantity. As performance indicators were used as quantifiable and enforced production targets, they would inevitably lead to the underproduction of needed items and the overproduction of redundant items.

It's time to just say no

Let's face it, whenever governments start floating performance-based funding schemes, one can be certain they will be quickly followed by budget cuts. It is so predictable. The fact is that these are tired, costly ideas adopted by unoriginal and cynical governments copying other governments and jurisdictions where these ideas have already failed. Let's not be drawn into a government-run version of The Postsecondary Hunger Games. The public deserves and should demand better.

Universities are much more than entrepreneurial training centres to be rewarded for performing short-sighted corporate-styled research and worker development. With that mandate, they cease to be universities in any sense of the word. To create a future where we can all thrive, our citizens need to not only have the skills to prosper today, but be capable of imagining and implementing a better tomorrow. ■■

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