



COLLEGE
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CONSEIL DES
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DES COLLÈGES

Academic Bargaining 2021

College Chair's Opening Remarks



Presented by:

The College Employer Council

(on behalf of the Colleges of Applied Arts and
Technology)

To:

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union
(for CAAT Academic Employees)

July 8, 2021

Management Bargaining Team Chair's Opening Remarks

As we begin this round of bargaining at an unprecedented time in our shared history, we are looking forward to the opportunity to explore with you issues that are relevant to the faculty collective agreement, and to co-create solutions that will unite us and prepare us for a future together. As a collective, our team brings diverse experiences and perspectives to this round of bargaining, including more than 100 years' worth of combined teaching experience. We all believe strongly in the role that the Ontario college system plays in higher education, and in the importance of keeping students and their needs as a central priority.

Like you, our team has spent the last several months consulting with various groups at all 24 colleges. This has included human resources, academic leadership (including a focused session on apprenticeship), equity, diversity, and inclusion teams, and finance, to name a few. Through College Employer Council and EERC we have also been listening to concerns raised by faculty within the system in the years since the last collective agreement was finalized.

What we have learned through those processes is that both faculty and management would like to see changes made to the current collective agreement. That said, we are also acutely aware that as we begin to emerge from the most devastating pandemic in the last 100 years, the most critical thing we need as a system is for employers and employees to unite for the good of our students and stakeholders. That is why we have created the tagline you see on our backgrounds. Our overarching goal is to bargain for "A Future Together" in which we collaborate to provide students with stability, flexibility, and high-quality education. We are looking forward to hearing and understanding the Union's point of view, and to having our point of view heard. We view the bargaining process as an opportunity for both sides to engage in full, frank and at times direct dialogue to identify issues and ultimately discover terms upon which we can reach mutual agreement.

As a starting point for those discussions, I want to share with you the eight values and goals that our team has developed and will be using to guide our thinking during this round of bargaining.

They include the following key points:

First and foremost, we aim to respect the bargaining process by engaging in rational and informed discussion.

Our team is prepared to listen to you with open minds as we expect that you will listen to our perspective. As previously stated, we view this process as an opportunity for fulsome and frank dialogue aimed at identifying issues and discovering terms upon which we can reach mutual agreement. As in all bargaining, it is this search for common ground through unhindered dialogue that allows us to draft contract language expressing our mutual intention which is what survives the bargaining process. We will take the time to understand your perspectives and proposals so that we can work together on issues that can effectively be addressed during this round of bargaining.

Our second goal is to negotiate a fair and reasonable settlement for our faculty that is within our means and aligned with the entire set of our goals and values.

We are proud of our commitment to invest in faculty, and of the fact that we were able to minimize layoffs of full-time regular academic employees during the pandemic when many members of the wider community were experiencing layoffs and job losses. We know that other industries and jurisdictions were harder hit in this way than the Ontario College System was.

We are also proud of the fact that Ontario college faculty continue to receive one of the highest salary maximums in the country. The current contract provided annual salary increases of 7.75% which, with compounding, provided for an 8% increase over the life of the agreement...as well as step increases for eligible faculty, and benefit enhancements.

The colleges' investments are deliberate. We know that the success of Ontario's colleges depends on investing in teaching and learning. Our faculty deliver the quality programs that our students depend on to enhance their education and skills.

Our third and fourth goals are somewhat connected and grounded in legislation. They are to maintain students as our central concern while balancing the needs of all college stakeholders; and to preserve the sustainability of colleges as public institutions.

As outlined in the legislation that governs our activities, the purpose given to the colleges is "to offer a comprehensive program of career-oriented, post-secondary education and training to assist individuals

in finding and keeping employment, to meet the needs of employers and the changing work environment and to support the economic and social development of their local and diverse communities.”

The *Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, 2002 Act* establishes colleges as agents of the Crown operating on behalf of the provincial government with accountability to the people of Ontario. In other words, colleges are not fully independent entities accountable only to themselves. They are also accountable to the broader public and the government for their actions, for the achievement of goals consistent with government priorities, and for prudent financial management. In this they must operate with a view to long term sustainability.

This is no small challenge given one area in which we have shared concern...that of the level of government funding for colleges.

We all know too well that Ontario’s Colleges are the lowest funded of any post-secondary system in Canada.

Although we have not yet reversed the trend of government investment, we recognize that it is through the hard work and dedication of college employees, including all your members, that we have managed to maintain high standards of education and exemplary results. Working together in a common cause that puts the interests of students first may be our best opportunity to change this trend. Demonstrating conflict, disunity, and disruption of the educational lives of students will not assist in reversing the funding trend.

As I believe has been discussed in past rounds of bargaining, we also note that the effects of the ongoing funding challenges have impacted the Colleges to varying degrees. While many colleges are operating on sound financial footings, there is an uneven distribution of this success among institutions. This uneven impact is a particular challenge for province wide bargaining which focuses on a collective agreement that generally seeks common operating provisions for all colleges.

Over this past year, our ongoing funding challenges have been exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are currently seeing a system level decrease in both domestic and international first semester confirmations for Fall 2021. For international students, the enrolment challenge is compounded by pandemic related barriers such as longer than normal visa approval times and ongoing travel restrictions across the globe.

It is in the context of a continued financial challenge along with current enrolment challenges that we undertake our important work together. As we do so, we must keep in mind the unique role that Ontario colleges play within the higher education landscape.

Scholars such as Glen Jones (1997), Michael Skolnik (2010), and others, have published research on the creation and evolution of colleges in Ontario; and on the difference between colleges and universities within Ontario¹. There is historical evidence that the province intended the college focus and objectives to be different than those of its universities and, as such, it set out to create colleges with different legislative and governance parameters to those of universities. Public colleges have a more targeted purpose than that of universities. As the legislation points out, they are required to be “career-oriented” and designed to assist in finding employment as well as meeting “the needs of employers and the changing work environment”. In contrast, universities have objects that are more general in nature, emphasizing the creation and dissemination of new knowledge².

As we engage with you in the co-creation of future focused solutions, it is our responsibility to ensure that we remain focused on our students, and on the Ontario college context as it is laid out in our legislated mandate.

¹ Jones, G. A. (1997). Higher education in Ontario. In J. A. Jones (Ed.), *Higher education in Canada: Different systems, different perspectives* (pp. 137–159). New York: Garland Publishing.

Skolnik, M. L. (2010). A look back at the decision on the transfer function at the founding of Ontario’s colleges of applied arts and technology. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 40(2), 1–17.

² Hogan, B.E., and Trotter, L.D. (2013). Academic freedom in Canadian higher education: Universities, colleges, and institutes were not created equal. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 43(2), 68-84.

Given that context and based on the expressed needs of our various stakeholders, our 5th goal is to continue to work on the expansion of Colleges' ability to deliver quality programming in a flexible manner.

As the nature and complexity of the needs of our learners continues to evolve, we must continue to adapt and increase the ways in which we deliver our programs. This does not mean eliminating the ways in which we have done things effectively in the past; but it does mean adding new options and opportunities so that we are able to continue to meet the needs of learners who are looking for "traditional" programming options, **and to meet** the needs of those who require greater flexibility to reduce barriers to access and success.

Our 6th goal is to be mindful of the fact that delivering programming in a flexible manner also requires us to continue to provide necessary support to ensure the success of our diverse learners.

Just as we need to ensure that we are providing flexible and diverse learning opportunities to our students, we must also ensure that we are providing them with flexibility in terms of time of day, days of the week, months of the year, and delivery methodology of programming and supports.

Our 7th goal is to undertake this round of bargaining with an intentional focus on the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion and the ongoing process of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

We are aware that the current collective agreement must be reviewed with the intention of beginning to collectively identify and address language and process issues which contribute to barriers to creating an equitable, diverse and inclusive workplace.

And finally, I will close my remarks with a focus on our 8th, and one of our most important goals as we head into bargaining...that of fostering an ongoing positive relationship between the union and management.

There is no doubt that we want to avoid labour interruption. Through the experience of the last round of bargaining, and the feedback received afterwards through mechanisms such as employee and student feedback, and the Reg Pearson report, much was learned. One observation that was made as

part of the Reg Pearson Report was that there appeared to be an expectation of a strike and a deference to arbitration as the means to resolve impasses during that round.

We do not want that to happen this time around. Management, through CEC, has been making conscious efforts to learn from the past and to work towards a more positive relationship between the union and management. Over the last 18 months this has included many steps to work together with OPSEU leadership and the EERC, including joint letters to the ministry for vaccination, and time off for testing and vaccination.

As we enter this round of bargaining, we are doing so with a new CEO at CEC, new legal counsel, a new chair, and new communications channels to improve information sharing. During this round of bargaining, we intend to continue to be forthright and open about the rationale for any additions, deletions, and modifications to the collective agreement that we put forward during bargaining. We trust that the Union will do the same. This process is not about posturing for an audience but rather engaging in deep unreserved discussion to find common ground.

I have taken the time today to outline our goals and values so that you can gain an understanding of our approach and thinking. We will reflect on these goals to guide our deliberations and assess proposals that come forward as bargaining progresses.

We have a strong commitment to finding common ground between us and reaching a negotiated settlement that will ensure that we can preserve the integrity and quality of Ontario's college system now and for our future together.

It is important for all stakeholders in the college community to continue to work together for a Future Together. Now, more than ever, we need stability in the system so that our learners, employers, and educators have confidence that we can meet their needs and continue to provide quality public education.

We hope that the exploration of our different perspectives on these matters will provide a foundation for some fruitful discussion during the days that we have scheduled. As we come to understand each other's views we expect to discover common interests that can be used to build a settlement.

We know from past rounds of bargaining and more recent discussions at the EERC that none of this will be easy. The current environment is different from the last round of bargaining and is made more challenging by the current global pandemic. But with goodwill and good intentions on everyone's part, I am optimistic that we can accomplish much together. I assure you that our team is committed to the task, and we look forward to working with you.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.