Bargaining information for OPSEU members in the CAAT-Academic Division

Academic Freedom

Q: What is "academic freedom"?

A: Academic freedom is the belief that the freedom of inquiry by students and faculty members is essential to the mission of a learning institution, and that academics and scholars should have freedom to teach or communicate ideas or facts, including those that are inconvenient to political groups or authorities. Academic freedom is a widely accepted principle in post-secondary institutions. All Ontario university faculty association collective agreements have a specific clause guaranteeing academic freedom.

Q: Can you give some concrete examples?

A: The right to speak freely without fear of reprisal, the right to determine specific teaching methodologies, the right to transmit knowledge openly, and the right to research in one's field are some examples. See page three for the complete text of the union's proposal on an academic freedom clause.

Q: Is there a cost for academic freedom?

A: There are no costs. Academic freedom is a change in thinking about the place of faculty in a post-secondary environment. It has no monetary consequence.

Q: Is this something new for OPSEU?

A: No, it is not. Other OPSEU bargaining units such as the Michener Institute and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine have academic freedom language in their collective agreements.

Q: Is it new for the Colleges?

A: No. Academic freedom has been a bargaining priority for college faculty for several rounds of negotiations. This February, delegates from the Colleges made academic freedom the third highest priority after workload and salary.

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Q: What did the Workload Task Force say about academic freedom?

A: The Task Force says: "We also conclude that collegiality, academic freedom and professional development are important objectives in any college system and our recommendations have taken these objectives into account. We must note, however, that we detected some distrust between the parties that was present at all of the regional meetings. We hope that our recommendations may alleviate that distrust." One of the four main recommendations of the Task Force is that the parties address the matters of "collegiality, professional development and academic freedom."

Q: The Colleges don't have academic freedom?

A: That's right. Some Colleges have policies that provide some level of academic freedom. Some have partial academic freedom for conducting research but not in teaching or developing curriculum. Most have nothing at all. More importantly, policy can be changed by the College at any time, unlike contractual language which must be negotiated.

Q: How does this affect Colleges and College teachers?

A: Ontario's Colleges have expanded far beyond their trade school roots. That was nearly 40 years ago. Colleges not only partner with universities, but have many articulated programs leading to post-secondary degrees, and grant degrees themselves. Recently, Colleges were given the right to grant baccalaureate degrees and are no longer restricted to "applied" degrees. Colleges are now firmly established within the post-secondary domain in Ontario.

Q: Is there any other support for academic freedom?

A: Yes, there is. The General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), at its meeting in 1997, passed a recommendation concerning the status of higher-education teaching personnel. The recommendation contained an international consensus on the meaning of academic freedom. It also deals with the link between academic freedom and collegial self-government. The recommendation is administered jointly by UNESCO and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The following statement is in the Recommendation:

> "To do so, the principle of academic freedom should be scrupulously observed. Higher-education teaching personnel are entitled to the maintaining of academic freedom, that is to say, the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies. All higher-education teaching personnel

(Continued on page 3)

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(Continued from page 2)

> should have the right to fulfill their functions without discrimination of any kind and without fear of repression by the state or any other source. Higher-education teaching personnel can effectively do justice to this principle if the environment in which they operate is conducive, which requires a democratic atmosphere; hence the challenge for all of developing a democratic society."

Q: What has the union tabled on behalf of Ontario College faculty?

A: Academic Freedom.

a. The parties agree that the unimpeded search for knowledge and its free expression are vital to learning at the post-secondary level.
b. Employees have the right to academic freedom which includes the freedom, individually or collectively, to develop and transmit knowledge and opinion through research, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation, teaching, lecturing, and publication, regardless of prescribed or official doctrine, and without limitation or constriction by institutional censorship.
c. The parties agree to uphold and to protect principles of academic freedom, not to infringe upon or abridge academic freedom as set out in this article, and to use all reasonable means in their power to protect that freedom when it is threatened.
d. Academic freedom includes the following interacting freedoms: the freedom to teach, freedom to evaluate, freedom to research, freedom to publish, freedom of expression, freedom to acquire materials.

Academic freedom ensures that:

- Employees teaching courses have the right to the free expression of their views and may choose course content, use teaching methods, and refer to materials without censorship or reference or adherence to prescribed doctrine except subject to the requirements of any legitimate external accrediting bodies.
- Employees have the right to carry out scholarly research without interference or adherence to prescribed doctrine.
- Employees have the right to publish the results of their research without interference or censorship by the institution, its agents or others.
- Employees have the right to freedom of expression, including the right to criticize the government of the day, the administration of the institution, or the Union.
- Employees have the freedom to exercise professional judgement in the acquisition of materials, and ensuring that these materials are freely accessible to all for bona fide teaching and research purposes, no matter how controversial these materials may be.

Academic freedom does not require neutrality; rather, it carries with it the duty to use that freedom in a manner consistent with the scholarly obligation to base research, teaching, publication and other forms of scholarly expression in the honest search for knowledge. Academic freedom does not confer legal immunity; nor does it diminish the obligation of employees to meet their obligation to the college. In the exercise of academic freedom, employees shall respect the academic freedom of others.

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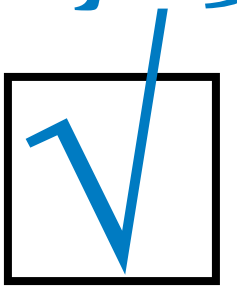
(Continued from page 3)

On January 13, vote **Yes**



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