

Academic Freedom in the Colleges

Why it Matters to You.



**COLLEGE
FACULTY**

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Background: A Challenging Time for College Education

In June of 2014, college faculty will enter contract negotiations. Although there are several issues on the table, academic freedom is arguably the most pivotal. In a fast-evolving educational landscape defined by scarce funding and technological change, a strong faculty voice in academic decision-making is more important than ever.

The Ontario college system is facing intense funding pressure.

- In the 1980s the provincial government provided 75% of operating funding for community colleges
- today government's contribution accounts for less than 50%.
- student enrollment has been steadily increasing

In the face of the widening funding gap, college management have enacted cost-cutting strategies that are compromising education. These strategies have led to:

- fewer full-time professors, counselors and librarians
- increasing pressure on class sizes, workload, and evaluation methods
- a drive to expand online course delivery

Increasingly, both college faculty and students are concerned about the quality of education being delivered, and the quality of the learning environment.

As faculty, it's time we gained more control over the terms and conditions of our work.

“...academic freedom is a far more broad ranging issue than simply acting as a catalyst to research. It extends through the depth and breadth of the professional life of academics and effects classroom teaching, selection of course materials, and teaching style.”

- Thomas Fleming (2006), “Blood from a Stone: Institutional Barriers to Fostering Academic Freedom and Research in Ontario's Community Colleges.”



The Corporate College Model

What money is flowing into the college system today is increasingly coming from sky-rocketing student tuitions and corporate sponsorships. This money is going to more managers, higher management salaries, and new buildings. It is not going to the classroom. Incredibly, **in the college system today there is now one administrator for every three full time faculty. By comparison, in the Ontario high-school system, there is one full-time administrator for every 12 full-time teachers.**

These changes to the college system aren't happening in isolation. As with healthcare and social services, college education is being re-shaped according to a corporate model. Proponents of this model are hostile to the concept of public service and public good. They seek to:

- cut funding to public services in order to privatize services and reduce quality
- eliminate full time jobs

- de-skill and de-professionalize the workers who deliver public services
- increase the number, salaries, and power of managers.

Under a corporate model of education, faculty are pushed out of academic decision-making at all levels, whether controlling the terms of their work in the classroom, or having a voice at the table when management and the provincial government decide the future of the college system.

Academic Freedom – Protecting Quality Education

In post-secondary education, the professional standard that enables faculty to do their jobs effectively and protect the quality of education is academic freedom. While to some faculty academic freedom can seem like an abstract concept that only applies to university professors, **it concerns every aspect of what college faculty do in their job.** It is about professional integrity, job security, educational standards, and student success.



“Academic freedom means that academic staff must play the predominant role in determining curriculum, assessment standards, and other academic matters.”

- the Canadian Association of University Teachers Statement on Academic Freedom (2005)

Aspects of Academic Freedom



Quality Education and Control Over Academic Decisions

- With no academic freedom, managers are:
 - changing faculty grades
 - imposing textbooks on faculty
 - developing and designing courses
 - making direct deals with publishers to purchase “courses in a can” for faculty to teach
- Without academic freedom, faculty can’t challenge management’s manipulation of course design and evaluation factors to fit budget constraints
 - written assignments are being removed
 - multiple choice and “in process” evaluations are being mandated

1

Online Learning and Workload

- Without academic freedom, faculty are unable to determine when and how online learning is used
 - faculty are being forced to put courses online, over their professional objections and over student objections
- Without academic freedom, management can mandate delivery methods that increase workload.
 - faculty are given insufficient time and resources to develop and deliver online courses.
- online courses are used to expand class sizes and reduce the number of sections
- online courses are more easily assigned to part time faculty

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Intellectual Property and Job Security

- College ownership of faculty intellectual property means that managers can:
 - more easily hire part-time workers
 - contract out more teaching work to technicians
 - sell programs to private colleges in direct competition with faculty at community colleges – curriculum licensing
 - outsource our work to Ontario Learn and Ontario Online
 - force faculty to put their course material on learning management systems (LMS); these materials are then owned by the college, and accessible to them at all times
 - record faculty lectures without their permission, which makes it even easier for faculty to be replaced in course delivery

3

A Voice in our Work Environment and in the System

- Without academic freedom, faculty can’t challenge poor management decisions that lead to low workplace morale.
 - professors can’t criticize their employer, even when management decisions are unethical, clearly degrade the quality of education, put students at risk, or undermine professional standards
- Without academic freedom, counselors and librarians don’t have their professional expertise respected concerning student mental health, and the support of student learning
- Without academic freedom, professors have little input into how the Ontario college system develops.
 - faculty can’t ensure that academic integrity, student success, and good public sector jobs are at the forefront of system priorities.
 - colleges are creating academic freedom policies, but they can be changed, revoked, or ignored at management’s dictate

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Protecting Our Students, Protecting the Public Trust

Because college faculty currently have no academic freedom, we can't effectively counter-balance management cost-cutting and privatization directives, nor can we effectively defend academic standards. This lack of faculty voice in academic decision-making should be of broad public concern.

- Would the people of Ontario tolerate managers with no healthcare experience deciding what medical procedures should be taught to future nurses?
- Would they be comfortable if sky-scrapers were built and inspected by tradespeople whose training was designed by financial managers instead of by certified building professionals?

- Would they be comfortable flying if their airplane was maintained by mechanics whose education was determined by budget constraints as opposed to academic and professional standards?

These scenarios may seem absurd, but they describe exactly what is happening in college education today. The faculty at Ontario's 24 community colleges provide a critically important public service. College professors train students to become nurses, paramedics, electricians, engineers, airplane mechanics, child and youth workers, business executives, and a host of other key jobs.

From media and computer technology, to food service and wildlife management – there is not an aspect of Ontario's economy that is not dependent on the education provided by college faculty. Given this, it is imperative that faculty have the ability to make academic decisions and set academic standards.



What You Gain with Academic Freedom

- The ability to determine how best to teach your skill, trade, occupation, profession, or academic discipline.
- The ability to decide how best to use new learning technologies to complement your work and support student success.
- The ability to protect and increase full time staffing levels.
- The ability to determine how and when your intellectual property is used, and to share in any of its proceeds.
- A strong voice at the table with the colleges and government in determining the future of college education.
- Acknowledgement of your expertise as an educational professional.

We Can Win This

Some faculty are under the impression that, while incredibly important, academic freedom is an unattainable goal. However, there is a very simple change to the current Academic Employees Collective Agreement (CA) that would lay the groundwork for this achievement.

On page 144 of the CA, it defines the job description of a college professor. The overarching definition is someone “responsible for providing academic leadership and for developing an effective learning environment for students”. The definition then goes on to describe almost exactly the vision of academic freedom laid out in this document.

The one catch is that the professor job description is preceded by the following sentence: “Under the direction of the senior academic officer of the College or designate...”. Because of this one line, all aspects of a professor’s role are secondary to Article 6.01 of the CA – management rights. Ultimately, because of this one line, the VPA, Deans and Associate Deans can dictate academic policy.

This one line stands in the way of academic freedom for Ontario college faculty. Changing it, along with other aspects of the Collective Agreement, will go a long way toward advancing our rights and protecting quality education. However, it will take a united faculty in the coming round of negotiations to make academic freedom the line that we are willing to take a stand on. Our bargaining team is ready to come to the table to defend the interests of college faculty, of quality education, and of student success. Let’s give them the mandate they need to get the job done, and to make 2014 the year that faculty make a breakthrough on academic freedom.

It’s time we reaffirmed our position as experts in quality education and student success.



“We also conclude that collegiality, academic freedom and professional development are important objectives in any college system.”

- The joint College Council and OPSEU CAAT-Academic Workload Taskforce (2009)



*Together, we can
make a difference.*



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