

UGFA President's Report

I want to focus my report on three disheartening trends of the past year(s), sadly all ongoing as we transition to the next UGFA leadership team:

- the utter erosion – to the point of elimination – of collegial governance and the fundamental role that UGFA members should play in the academic decision-making of the University;
- clear attacks on the academic freedom and individual autonomy of faculty members in how they teach, not just a lack of support or recognition of these principles but a regular push to undermine them; and
- a Senior Administration with no honour, in my opinion rather routinely breaking its word, which is what the Collective Agreement captures.

The Utter Erosion of Collegial Governance

Collegial governance matters so much for many reasons, but for me a huge one is that we UGFA members almost all spend our multi-decade careers at the University of Guelph while Administrators come and go as they climb their ladder. Their often shorter, transient visit to UoGuelph is focused on getting resume items that enable their next ladder climb elsewhere, and, as our experience documents and as many members have more colorfully described to me, the rest of us are left to live with the dung-heap residue of those great ideas.

The “program pauses” were implemented by the Administration without any real consultation or UGFA member involvement, explained as being a move that saved money, despite being reported by the Provost as saving no money in the short term and perhaps saving something in the long term. They did not discuss the short-term and long-term damage of the move, of course. It is truly remarkable that we look back to 2012's Program Prioritization Process and remember positively the fact that that Administration asked for significant member input, with the outcome being that the ludicrous nature of the exercise was completely exposed and no PPP recommendations were implemented.

The push for Navitas, with all of the clear issues, was thwarted a bit through Senate, but ultimately halted due to the government's move on international student enrolments, not the unified voice of opposition across campus. The response to that opposition was to mount Town Halls where lower-level administrators spoke during question period to prop up the idea of their admin bosses.

With no discussion with UGFA, the Administration embarked on planning a joint venture with Lakehead University, “OVC North.” In the Fall, they told us that 20 or so students in the vet program, counting as Guelph students, will be housed at Lakehead, which will hire three

veterinarian faculty members. The Administration's plan is to force faculty who teach in the DVM program to teach via a hybrid mode of delivery to both students in their Guelph classroom and students at Lakehead, with this model applied to the first two years of the program, after which the Lakehead students will come to Guelph for their final two years. For clarity, we all recognize that the Administration can generally make business arrangements as they see fit, but when the matter impacts UGFA members there is an expectation of meaningful consultation with the UGFA in advance of the development of a plan, and when the plan impacts the academic mission of the University there is the expectation of such consultation with the UGFA and passage of the plan through Senate. Worse yet, when a plan includes ideas that violate existing rights in the current Collective Agreement, for which there is a clear and strong understanding through rounds of Collective Bargaining and the LOUs of the pandemic, developing it rather fully with the selected business partner is a clear sign of the elimination of collegial governance. The situation is not appropriately dealt with by suggesting that the parties quickly develop an LOU that grant all of the powers the Administration desires. I will come back to this topic under the next heading.

Senate remains dysfunctional and a phony arena of governance, so carefully stage-managed and controlled.

We constantly experience Administrator-driven hiring plans, with departments desperate to have another person being forced to "grow" in new directions that strain their curricula, course offerings, and graduate programs.

The Administration routinely unveils grand plans that affect UGFA without having talked in advance with UGFA, like their incentivized retirement program.

I was told that the Wellness@Work report would be released in full, as written by the external consultant, to the University committee this month and that it will go back to 2017's results, which, you will recall, divided employees into categories with faculty being strong negative outliers on key concerning questions on workload, work-life balance, and trust in the Administration, among others. Surely, the new report will show an even worse situation, all rooted or reflected in the issues discussed in this report.

Clear Attacks on Academic Freedom and Teaching Autonomy

Our course outlines are the item through which we initialize our relationship with the students in our class. Sure, they should include information on assessment, so that students are aware of how well those details match their desires, and Senate resolutions on grading discuss this aspect of outlines. But the Administration has to "strongly recommend" so much else be included, such as the "standard statements" that really should be communicated to students by the Administration, not (repeatedly) by faculty members. Looking at US institutions, we might anticipate an additional push for statements of commitment to a cause du jour, despite the fact that people may reasonably disagree on such things and our individual positions on such things are nobody else's business.

Our UGFA member survey routinely shows that faculty members do not want the Administration to tell them how to teach, including imposing an alternative mode of the delivery, and that members do not want to be forced by the Administration to record their lectures. As detailed above, the Administration told us last Fall that they wish to have these powers, for OVC North surely, and perhaps even more broadly, and we can anticipate hearing about those desires during bargaining in the next months. The recently signed CUPE 3913 Collective Agreement, for sessional instructors, now includes the alternative modes of delivery definitions from the LOU in the UGFA Collective Agreement. But the CUPE CA also refers to mode of delivery being specified in course postings for sessionals; that is, the Administration has acquired the power to impose an alternative mode of delivery on sessional instructors for any non-DE course. Expect them to want to impose a mode on you, too, while having the Office of Teaching and Learning tell you that how you have decided to teach your course, as the expert in your discipline, your course, and your students' best interests, is ineffective, not warranting the granting of tenure and promotion.

Our Tenure, Promotion, and Performance Assessment processes are governed by the Collective Agreement and the local Guidelines documents mentioned therein. This process includes two levels of peer review (through the two committees, with your Dean being the only non-UGFA member involved), student feedback or in-class peer observation, and external assessors from a list you define. Yet, we see Administrators and their offices – with no involvement in the process, whatsoever – suggest strongly that they are the arbiters of how teaching is to be assessed. Nonsense.

A Senior Administration with No Honour

Under this President who was previously the Provost, UGFA has routinely had more live issues – grievances, arbitrations, investigations – than any other faculty association in the province. To be clear, our members are awesome and the first sentence in no way reflects badly on our members. It does reflect that the Administration cannot be trusted to adhere to their commitments. Some details of these matters will surely appear in the Grievance Officer's report.

I must mention one particularly shameful action. As you know, when UGFA agreed to convert from the Professional Pension Plan to the University Pension Plan, we bargained a growth hiring commitment of 40 permanent UGFA members. Two years ago in bargaining, we agreed to stagger the growth requirement, extending the clock by 6 months for part of the commitment, due in part to the pandemic but also to allow for new September arrivals to be part of the growth count. In the end, the permanent member count barely increased on the two counting dates, July 1 and January 1. The Administration denied our grievance, and, in their response, essentially rewrote the commitment, counting advertisements instead of members and saying that the deal they had signed was unreasonable. In in-person meetings, they shamelessly said that we have to agree to disagree. We have an arbitration date scheduled in November.

It is worth pointing out that the deal was signed by me on behalf of UGFA and then-Provost now-President Charlotte Yates on behalf of the Administration. The Administration's "system memory" of this commitment rests with President Yates, as does the reprehensible lack of honouring it and instead attempting to completely modify it in the legal response to our grievance. At a recent meeting of employee group leaders and President Yates, she asked each of us what she could do to help our members: I said that she could honour the commitment she made to them in signing this deal, since not doing so, and instead denying what the commitment is, demonstrates great untrustworthiness. The response: "Thank you, Herb."

Two years ago, the Administration admitted repeatedly during bargaining that they have no system memory because so many Senior Administrators have left the University, all under the current President. Most recently, President Yates commented at a meeting that a Senior Administrator (who said they have been at UoG for around two years) was perhaps the person in her administration who has been here the longest. While it is worth noting that they spent some \$2M on job searches to replace all of the people who have left the administration, I want to highlight their response to the abandoning of the ship. They could see the high number of departures as evidence of a problem in their house. They could see the lack of system memory due to these departures as motivation for building a good relationship with a strong level of collegial governance with the much more stable and willing UGFA. But instead, they see it as an opportunity to creatively reinterpret or redefine the Collective Agreement, rewrite commitments, and ignore past practice.

Moving On to Other Things

I have built many amazing and diverse relationships in the university ecosystem over the past decade: UGFA members, other UoGuelph employee group leaders, student leaders, faculty members at other Ontario universities, chief negotiators elsewhere, trade union leaders elsewhere, OCUFA staff, lawyers, financial advisors, actuaries, more. During the past two years as UGFA President, I've been able to call upon members of this network when needed, and I think that has been really helpful. The long duration of many of these relationships brings a high level of trust, respect, and candor, in all directions. I've also had members of this network call on me with assorted queries.

University Pension Plan

The UPP is humming along. This Fall, their pension portal will go live, and I think you will be impressed if and when you decide to check out your current pension status. I think that the system is state of the art, based on a recent demo. And it will be wonderful to have the "agency agreements" with the four member universities expire, as the UPP takes over member services that up until now they farmed out to the universities. For whatever reason, the University of Guelph has been the one university to have some bumps, as a small number of members of other employee groups had some trouble initiating their pension payments.

At the end of April, 2024, two very small groups joined as employers: OCUFA and APUO (the faculty association at UoOttawa) brought their staff into the UPP. Wilfrid Laurier University is on track to come in, with both the faculty association and the OSSTF local having consented. Trent University already converted their faculty plan, and their staff plan will come in next January. There are a number of institutions expressing interest in the UPP, and I anticipate that growth of the plan will be a focus in the next year. I will remain a member of the Employee Sponsor Committee, holding one of the 12 UPP Joint Sponsor seats, until January 2028.

Thanks

In closing, I want to thank Lezlie Cunningham for her past two years of work as the Vice-President. I wish her much success, and offer her all of my support, as the next UGFA President. Thanks also to Jing Lu, who will step into the Vice-President role.

In addition, I want to thank the UGFA Executive members, Lezlie (VP), Jing (Treasurer), Andy Hathaway (Grievance), Mary DeCoste (Past President and additional Grievance support), Steve Gismondi (Economic Benefits), Pavneesh Madan (Health & Safety), Helen Booker (OCUFA), Sue Chuang (Academic Freedom), and the members of UGFA Council (long list of names omitted, with apology). The UGFA operates strongly when Executive and Council are unified in their support of all members and their need to hold the Administration accountable.

Finally, my deepest thanks to the staff of the Association: Sue Hubers, Jon Ferris, Denise Sanderson, and Kirsten Sanderson. They are all incredible.

In Closing,...

Think about this: The Administration has told you that they are in financial distress. They have created the phrase “compensation inflation” to describe what we might say is “Bill 124 restitution and a reasonable salary increase.” In the round of bargaining that will start in a few weeks, they have told us that their team will include a lawyer out of Hamilton, with a previous role in the administration at McMaster University during the time that President Yates was there as an administrator. Yes, they want you to cut, cut, cut, but they will spend money on a lawyer who has no previous connection to UoGuelph, with a reputation of seeking extreme concessions from the trade unions he bargained against at Mac. There is more to come on this character soon...