



Representing Faculty, Librarians,
Veterinarians & College Faculty

News & Views

January 2024

“Why Wouldn’t You Want the Money?” — Provost, April 2023

The Administration has announced a series of College-level Town Hall meetings in January related to what they call a “potential relationship” with Navitas, an Australian corporation seeking to privatize university teaching for great profit. The title quotation from the Provost lays bare the Administration’s true motivation. Publicly, they dress the idea up as a solution to internationalization and EDI, while plainly ignoring that such a deal does not reflect the values of the latter principles since the first criterion is the ability to pay a lot of money.

At each of the Town Hall meetings, we hope that a significant mass of UGFA members will stand together to voice their strong opposition to any “relationship” with Navitas.

Standing together is important to give added weight to our concerns and to counteract the likely short amount of time the Administration will allow for questions.

Summary of Navitas-related Events of 2023

- February 6 Senate: brief mention that the Administration was exploring a relationship with Navitas.
- April 3 Senate: first presentation on Navitas. All questions/comments from Senators were critical. Time ran out. A motion to extend Senate for more discussion narrowly failed. **The Administration said that any Navitas deal would be approved by the Board of Governors (BoG), not Senate, despite the academic and other impact of such a deal.**
- April 20: **Seven employee groups**—UGFA, CUPE 1334, CUPE 3913, OPSEU 231, OSSTF District 35, USW 4120, and USW 4120-1—**co-wrote and co-signed a letter (attached) of “full opposition to any plan to privatize any portion of the teaching at [UoG] through a contract with Navitas or any other for-profit corporation.”** The letter was sent to the BoG, with the BoG Chair responding that the BoG will continue “to review factual data and analysis of the benefits, costs, risks and alignment with Mission, Vision, and Values of new undertaking to assess their suitability.” We saw the letter as being largely about risks and damage to reputation, standards, and more. Other representative groups involved in our meetings shared the concerns of the letter, which was signed by the unionized employee groups. [Guelph Today](#) wrote about the matter.
- April: The Provost asked the question quoted in the title of this document at a meeting between the Administration and the UGFA, exposing the real reason for the Administration’s interest in Navitas and **betraying both the Administrations’ view of international students as highly exploitable revenue generators and their readiness to privatize teaching at the UoG.**
- May: Employee groups at the UoG met with Guelph MPP Mike Schreiner and, separately, with the **Official Opposition (NDP) Critic for Colleges and Universities and London MPP, Peggy Sattler**, to share our concerns, which were echoed by both politicians. Peggy **wrote a letter (attached) to the Minister for Colleges and Universities, Jill Dunlop**, raising these concerns. Peggy surely played an instrumental role in helping employee groups at London’s Western University [successfully fight off](#) their

Administration's attempt to sign a deal with Navitas. Their Administration followed the lead of others, like Memorial University of Newfoundland, in halting discussions with the corporation.

- June 5 Senate: The Administration had previously suggested that a Navitas deal could be presented to the BoG at their June meeting, but, instead, at this Senate meeting announced that they would have Town Hall meetings regarding Navitas in the Fall semester.
- June: **The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) passed a motion “that OCUFA opposes the outsourcing of any of the teaching mission at Ontario’s public universities to private, for-profit corporations.”**
- **Fall 2023: The semester opened with at least two months of highly negative news related to the mistreatment and living circumstances of international students in the Ontario post-secondary education system.** One theme was that they pay exorbitant tuition fees for their education—on average more than five times the cost of domestic students—and then have no money to pay for [living expenses](#), which is further complicated by the ongoing housing crisis. Indeed, many articles discussed the reliance of such students on food banks, leading to [food banks banning](#) them as users and to student food bank drives, including in Guelph. It is unclear whether these reports played any role in the Town Hall meetings not taking place.

Some Additional Items

- **None of the Canadian, British, or Australian universities that have a Navitas “relationship” are considered leading universities, neither internationally nor in their country.**
- **Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU, formerly Ryerson) entered into a Navitas deal in 2020.** A faculty member [described](#) the process: “Ryerson's Administration orchestrated a flawed proposal to be passed at a late night, virtual senate meeting, with almost no discussion or debate. This process allowed little room for collegial discussion and decision making.” Faculty associations across the province report an erosion of collegial governance and largely dysfunctional Senates in which the voices of faculty members, who have career-long dedication to and love for their universities, is muted by transient administrators and, often, the heavy-handed power of the Chair of Senate, who, in many cases, is the President of the university (as is the case at the UoG). **TMU’s faculty association has now proceeded to arbitration**, coming at things from the other direction: the teaching of these students is the work of the faculty association. The argument will depend on precise language in their collective agreement, but it exposes the second branch of **the Navitas formula. Branch one is charging students lots of money. Branch two is paying their instructors little money.**
- **Navitas contracts say that the Administration will supply the corporation with “curriculum materials,”** described as “course outlines which detail topics, learning objectives, teaching strategies, assessments, readings for each module of content, instructional modules and learning activities, discussion area topics and evaluative processes for the courses, course syllabus, and other assets,” granting Navitas license to these materials. This language would bump into the Intellectual Property rights language of our Collective Agreement, but the Administration has recently made clear that they are stockpiling our course outlines. **Navitas contracts also say that a faculty liaison will interact with Navitas and that a “course coordinator” will review Navitas course outlines, advise Navitas instructors, “ensure” equivalency of the Navitas course with the university course, and so on.** Presumably, these people are administrators, since the Administration cannot assign as Service the oversight of the work of a private corporation.

**Please plan to attend your College’s Town Hall meeting.
Form a group or groups to speak in opposition to a Navitas “relationship.”**

The UGFA will keep you updated.

Please e-mail us at facassoc@uoguelph.ca if you think we can be of assistance to you.

April 20, 2023

To: The Board of Governors of the University of Guelph

Dear Members of the Board of Governors,

We are writing this letter on behalf of our employee groups, and the employees whom we collectively represent, to express our full opposition to any plan to privatize any portion of the teaching at the University of Guelph through a contract with Navitas or any other for-profit corporation.

Should a deal with such a company be made by the Administration or the Board of Governors, the seriously negative impact will include the following:

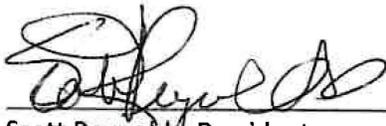
- The University's academic standards, reputation, and degree value will be irreparably damaged.
- The high-quality, publicly-funded education that we deliver at the University of Guelph will be devalued.
- The University's commitment to internationalization and EDI will be undermined and tainted by this initiative, as its principal requirement is the ability to pay high fees. Equity-seeking group members from low-income families are excluded. There are ethical, sincere, and sustainable ways of achieving the University's commitment to internationalization and EDI that actually respect the core values of this commitment and of the University community. The direct involvement of employee group members with expertise in these areas is a great way to produce an Internationalization and EDI Plan that employee groups may embrace, help build a stronger relationship between the employer and employees, and also both identify ethical cost savings and generate revenue.
- These students and their families will be exploited.
- These students will be the segregated international student group, furthering division between students on campus academically, socially, and otherwise.
- The influx of wealthy students will increase the cost of housing for all students and staff in an already expensive market.
- There will be meaningful additional strain on University facilities and resources, which are already unable to service the existing mass of people on campus. This problem extends very seriously to student matters like housing, parking, transportation, mental health, and, likely, ESL and other supports.
- Employees with an academic role risk seeing their efforts serve a for-profit corporation, as the University's principal role—public education—is corrupted.
- The number of instructors on our campus disadvantaged with precarious employment will grow.
- Significant new work and additional workload will land on employees who are already overworked.

The Administration has quite shockingly proclaimed that the values of Navitas are strongly aligned with those of the University community, in an attempt to imply that some sort of natural broad support for this initiative exists. This statement is extremely offensive and dismissive. In fact, the values of our employee groups are such that we do not support privatizing the University's teaching, permanently damaging the reputation of and worth of a degree from the University we love, perverting the

institution's commitment to EDI and internationalization, exploiting students, entrenching precarity, and seemingly countless other horrible things that come with any Navitas relationship. As a result, we find ourselves forced to write this letter to make clear that a large number of employee groups at the University and the employees they represent are firmly opposed to any Navitas initiative.

Only four Canadian universities have entered into a business arrangement with Navitas. The University of Guelph should join the much larger number of Canadian universities that considered such a deal, and then rejected it. The very large list of institutions without such an arrangement includes all universities that are broadly recognized by their peers as being truly elite universities—we should stick with this group and continue to aspire for similar recognition.

We completely and adamantly oppose the outsourcing of the University's teaching mission to Navitas or any other corporation.



Scott Reynolds, President
CUPE 1334

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Scott Duchesne, President
CUPE 3913



Nathaniel Harding, Unit Steward
OPSEU 231



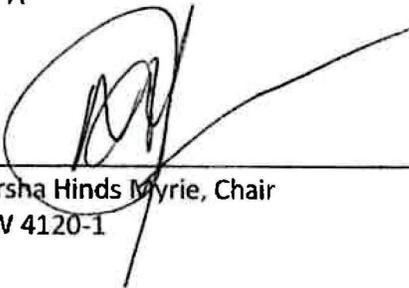
Joe Rooyackers, President
OSSTF, District 35



Herb Kunze, President
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Marsha Hinds Myrie, Chair
USW 4120-1

CC: President C. Yates, Provost G. Chapman



PEGGY SATTLER

MPP London West
Députée provinciale de London-Ouest

Hon Jill Dunlop
Ministry of Colleges and Universities
5th Flr, 438 University Ave
Toronto, ON M7A 1N3

June 16, 2023

Re: Privatization at Ontario universities

Dear Minister Dunlop,

I am writing on behalf of University of Guelph faculty, staff and students to share the strong opposition of representatives of OSSTF/FEESO District 35, CUPE 1334, CUPE 3913, OPSEU 231, UGFA, and USW 4120 to the university's consideration of a partnership with the private pathway college Navitas.

These groups, and the employees they represent, are firmly opposed to any partnerships with for-profit corporations like Navitas that effectively privatize the delivery of university education and increase risk for international students, especially in the context of chronic government underfunding. Your government's failure to ensure funding stability for Ontario's colleges and universities is forcing an overreliance throughout the sector on exorbitant international student tuition fees and a reallocation of scarce resources to aggressive international student recruitment. Unfortunately, as media reports have highlighted, the rapid growth of international student enrolment in Ontario has left many international students vulnerable – from unscrupulous recruiters with false promises about job prospects and education standards, from immigration scammers charging thousands of dollars for fake study visas and college admission letters, from worsening mental health and a rise in suicide rates, and from poverty and food insecurity, with international students making up one of the fastest growing group of food bank users.

As you are aware, Minister, Ontario has the lowest per-student university funding in Canada, investing only \$7,425 per student while the average for all other provinces is \$13,000 per student. This has put institutions like the University of Guelph into a precarious financial position, opening the door for private interests to benefit. One such organization is Navitas, a for-profit corporation owned by a consortium of Australian investors and private equity firms. It pays royalty fees to universities in exchange for using their name, branding, and goodwill to operate for-profit

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pathway colleges at a premium price, catering to international students who would not otherwise be accepted into the associated university. No doubt taking advantage of a postsecondary system starved for funding in Ontario, Navitas has doubled its footprint in Canada since the pandemic from two to four institutions, signing recent new partnerships with Ontario's Toronto Metropolitan University and Wilfrid Laurier University. It comes as no surprise that the University of Guelph's talks with Navitas are taking place just as the university announced major cutbacks and enrollment freezes.

Ontario is known for its stellar postsecondary education, but that excellence is diminished when our institutions enter into "pay to play" agreements brokered by for-profit companies targeting international students with unfettered tuition fees and lower-quality education, in exchange for an immediate cash injection. Companies like Navitas use exploitative recruitment strategies that treat students as commodities, and have been found to go so far as misleading students about guarantees of university admission and citizenship eligibility. Once they arrive at the private pathway college, these international students are not assured of an education that meets the high standards for which the affiliated university is known.

Navitas employs its own instructors who may not have comparable qualifications to university faculty, nor have the same academic freedom. In many cases, students who turn to Navitas to help meet language requirements are taught by faculty with little or no experience teaching international students with developing English proficiency. This is unfair to students who are not only in their crucial and demanding first year of university, but have been removed from all their familiar support systems. Furthermore, staff working at these private international colleges have reported being pressured to inflate grades to ensure students pass the pathway program and are granted admission to the university. This means students come into second year inadequately prepared, putting them in an extremely stressful position that contributes to the marginalization of international students, damages their wellbeing and weakens their academic potential, all in the name of profit.

Bringing unprepared students into second year also puts additional pressure on university faculty to provide the skilled support students should have received earlier and need to catch up. This is made even more difficult if the university's internal supports for international students have been reduced and contracted out to Navitas. Private pathway colleges hire their own staff who are not unionized, and are paid less in unprotected, precarious jobs, while taking jobs away from the university faculty who have experience and expertise in supporting international students. Some staff may move from teaching at the university to teaching at the private college, but only at significant personal cost. Worst of all is that we do not even know whether these private pathway colleges deliver on their promises. There is a lack of transparency and accountability regarding the services of companies like Navitas, and very little research or information shared about enrollment numbers, student satisfaction, success rates and other metrics.

Minister, the serious concerns about Navitas outlined in this letter were also raised by Western University faculty in 2020, leading to Western's decision to halt negotiations with Navitas. No Ontario postsecondary institution should ever be forced to go down the path of signing outsourcing agreements with private pathway colleges like Navitas out of desperation to keep their classrooms open. We have not spent nearly 200 years building a world-class public education system just so that it can be leveraged to line the pockets of venture capitalists. I urge your ministry to listen to University of Guelph faculty and staff, immediately increase funding to postsecondary institutions, and commit to advancing more ethical alternatives to achieving the internationalization of Ontario university campuses and embedding core values of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

I trust you will give this matter the urgent attention that Ontario's postsecondary sector deserves.

Sincerely,



Peggy Sattler, MPP
London West

Cc. Herb Kunze, University of Guelph Faculty Association
Scott Duschene, CUPE 3913
Clare Stevenson, USW 4120
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Joe Rooyackers, OSSTF/TARA 35
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