

Resisting Privatization of Teaching at UoG

Faculty Association

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To: Faculty Association <facassoc@uoguelph.ca>

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Dear UGFA Member,

At our mid-January meeting of the Joint Committee (between the Faculty Association and the Provost's Office), Provost Gwen Chapman and AVPA Byron Sheldrick informed the UGFA that they were "exploring a relationship with Navitas." In February, this news was reported at a meeting of Senate, where it was suggested that a deal could be signed by June of this year.

Navitas is an Australian corporation that offers "pathway programs," wherein:

- Using the name of the host university, Navitas recruits international undergraduate students who are "below the bar" for admission as "regular" international students, due to poor grades, poor English skills, or both.
- Navitas hires their own instructors to teach these students, using the facilities of the host university.
- Students who successfully complete the Navitas program can apply for admission to the host university as second-year students.

Presently, Navitas has partnerships at the following Canadian universities: Simon Fraser University (2006), the University of Manitoba (2007), Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) (2020), and Wilfrid Laurier University (2021). Navitas' doubling of their footprint in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic is discussed in [a recent article in the Independent](#). At these institutions:

- Navitas courses are taught by sessional instructors with precarious employment.
- Navitas students pay more than twice what "regular" international students pay for their first year of education.
- The course materials of faculty at the host university are often co-opted by Navitas for their own purposes.
- Students achieve high grades in the Navitas program, and all students who apply for second-year entry are accepted.

A number of Canadian institutions have rejected a Navitas partnership after exploring such a relationship: McMaster University (2008), Dalhousie University (2010), Carleton University (2011), University of Calgary (2013), and Western University (2021).

Since our January meeting with the Administration, we have educated ourselves on Navitas through a lot of reading, and meeting with faculty representatives at a number of the above-mentioned universities. Navitas was also discussed at a very recent meeting of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, where multiple faculty associations, including those with a Navitas relationship, expressed many serious concerns and no faculty association showed support for Navitas.

Navitas is decidedly for profit, with a \$55M profit in fiscal year 2021. It is a multinational corporation that now seeks to

- use the name and reputation of the University of Guelph to sell education for the corporation's own profit.
- use the University's taxpayer-funded facilities to do so.
- compel faculty, through the Administration, to coordinate Navitas courses.

- obtain access to the scholarly work and intellectual property of UGFA members, in the form of course outlines and course materials.

When such concerns and more detailed operational questions were posed to the Administration at the Joint Committee meetings in January and February, the response was that they would have to look into things further. In addition, they seemed to say that faculty members would indeed serve as coordinators, but that no faculty member would be compelled to do so or to surrender their intellectual property to the corporation. (Curiously, at the same time, they say that they must build a database of all course outlines from the past five years, a process for which they use a “negative billing” approach: your materials are in the system by default, but they will tell you whom to contact if you want to find out how to opt out.)

Once the UGFA learned of the potential relationship with Navitas, the issue was discussed at UGFA Council and Executive meetings. Both UGFA Council and Executive have passed unanimously a motion in support of the concerns raised here. The UGFA believes that, should the University of Guelph partner with Navitas,

- the academic standards and values of our University will be irrevocably compromised.
- the high-quality, publicly-funded education that we deliver at the University of Guelph will be devalued in the name of profit.
- students will have the chance to buy, at an exorbitant price, what their academic record has not helped them earn.
- the number of instructors on our campus with precarious employment will grow.
- as is the case elsewhere, UGFA members will see their scholarly work absorbed by the for-profit corporation (which has the stated desire of being a global corporation that offers a full university program, not just a “pathway”).

As the article in The Independent puts it, “Now, Navitas is the target of resistance from critics who say the privatized model of student recruitment and education threatens academic independence, encourages precarious labour, establishes a ‘pay-to-play’ model of education, aggravates racism against international students, and furthers the corporatization of post-secondary education.”

The UGFA is extremely concerned about this initiative. It is doubly exploitative. It will surely impact standards and programs in the long term. It perverts our academic mission, shifting the University from being a not-for-profit public educational institution to a corporate partner in the lucrative pathways industry. It will generate various forms of new work for UGFA members.

The UGFA will be hosting a townhall on March 28, from 2pm to 3pm, to discuss Navitas. We encourage you to attend, using this zoom link: <https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/88640899367?pwd=YohlS1BLVVNWb3laTHpwLzVZbWZkQTo9>

We will also send a reminder email with the zoom link prior to the meeting.

For more information about Navitas:

- The University of Lethbridge’s faculty association has been fighting off their Administration’s Navitas desires. Read their blog for lots of gathered information: <https://www.ulfa.ca/navitas-working-group-blog/>
- The Independent’s article: <https://theindependent.ca/journalism/faculty-students-fight-to-hold-post-secondary-privatization-at-bay/>

Sincerely,

Herb Kunze, UGFA President

Louise Grogan, UGFA Vice-President

UGFA
5 University Ave East
(519) 767-6547
Monday - Wednesday 9:00am - 4:00pm
Thursday - 9:00am - Noon
Friday - 9:00am - 4:00pm

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