



**Post-secondary  
Education Representatives  
Videoconference—  
COVID-19**

June 8, 2020

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

**Post-secondary Education Representatives  
Videoconference—COVID-19  
June 8, 2020  
1:00 pm EDT**

## **PARTICIPANTS**

**BCGEU/NUPGE**

Cindy Battersby  
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**SGEU/NUPGE**

Marney Robinson

**MGEU/NUPGE**

Michelle Gawronsky  
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**OPSEU/NUPGE**

Anastasios Zafiriadis  
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Duncan McFarlane  
Kella Loschciavo

**NBU/NUPGE**

Paula Trites  
Leslie Hebb

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Darryl Warren  
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**PEI UPSE/NUPGE**

Hans Connor

**NAPE/NUPGE**

Arlene Sedlickas  
Debbie Hawes

**NUPGE**

Larry Brown, President  
Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer  
Len Bush, Managing Director  
Michael Temelini, National Representative  
Nadia Ibrahim, National Representative  
Sandra Megeney, Administrative Representative

## Welcome and Introductions

Michael Temelini welcomed participants to the videoconference, and Larry Brown, NUPGE President, chaired the meeting.

### 1. Opening Statement: Larry Brown, NUPGE President

Larry Brown provided the opening remarks. Brown raised the question about what might happen in September 2020. Many post-secondary institutions are not going to reopen for classes in September, but we're not sure if that's universal. The majority of classes will be conducted remotely. Brown identified a number of factors that might affect the finances of post-secondary institutions as a result of the pandemic. Primary among these is the reduction in enrollments, especially of foreign students, whose differential fees have traditionally been exploited by these institutions as income generation. Brown expressed concern that, as a result of lower enrollments, communities will suffer: local businesses will suffer, for example those offering student housing, pubs and restaurants, and other businesses catering to the student clientele.

With the move to virtual (remote) instruction, Brown expressed concern that there will be a drive to lay off administration workers, custodians, and cafeteria staff, among others.

Other issues Brown talked about related to remote instruction: for educators—their class sizes and student attendance; for students—the variety and quality of education that is offered in universities/colleges; how courses with mandatory hands-on training will be conducted, such as those in the trades and courses with a laboratory requirement. Will educators work from home or in the classroom?

Who will provide the personal protective equipment (PPE) or office equipment if employees are working from home? Will it be the institution, or will it be the responsibility of the employee?

There are also some questions around Workers' Compensation, which is predicated on an employee working in a classic work environment. If an employee is working from home, and is injured, NUPGE has found that WC Boards are not thinking about this properly. Some of the WCB's rules on working from home do not have any relevance for people working from home.

Finally, how do you protect employees' right to not be at work? Does the employer have the right to contact employees after business hours regarding work?

## 2. Component Reports

Component representatives provided updates about the impacts of COVID-19. Some highlights of these common challenges are as follows:

### **What the fall (return to work) will look like: remote or on campus?**

There was a discussion about returning to work in the fall of 2020, and what kind of instruction would be offered. It was generally agreed that for most post-secondary institutions, and depending on the specific institution, as well as, on the particular program offered, the courses would most likely be a hybrid: a mixture of both online learning and in-class or hands-on learning (in small groups). And this would necessarily entail maintaining physical- or social-distancing guidelines, along with robust extra cleaning measures, and personal protective equipment. Some participants surmised that employees will be working from home with technology rather than in classrooms on campus.

Regarding trades, laboratories, and technical programs—most are currently working on completing, or have completed, the theory portion online. For the fall, the plan is to allow smaller groups of students, with masks being mandatory, to undertake their hands-on research and education.

### **Intellectual property**

Some participants expressed concern that there's not a lot of language in collective agreements around intellectual property, and this is a particular problem with the increasing shift to online learning. Intellectual property would include the creation of materials such as:

- syllabi
- slides used in lectures
- lecture notes
- recorded lectures and
- teaching instruction that students can access online

Many post-secondary institutions merely assume that this becomes their intellectual property, while instructors argue the contrary, that it is their proprietary work that should not be used without their express permission.

### **Professional development**

Concerns were raised about employee professional development and the challenge of online technology. In many cases, little or no training is provided to instructors, so many are expected to self-teach. At the same time, instructors are trying to teach students remotely, using the new technical adaptations.

## **Working conditions: workday, workspace, workload, and quality control**

A number of issues discussed had to do with new challenges regarding working conditions:

- establishing a consistent workday,
- accessing (or availability of) workspace at home,
- accessing (or availability of) the internet, and
- managing unpredictable workload demands.

Many participants discussed the challenges of online learning, especially in some remote communities where limited connectivity is a significant concern.

There was a thorough and comprehensive discussion about workload Issues: in some cases, teachers are left to create their own work plan, with no direction from employer; in other cases, teachers being given twice the workload. Furthermore, instructors are finding it difficult to manage instructional guidelines and curriculum delivery.

Many participants talked about their concern about maintaining the high quality of education and their fear that replacing instructors with increased automation comes with a risk of sacrificing quality.

### **Working from home**

A question was raised whether employers will provide appropriate ergonomically set-up computers for staff working from home.

### **Personal protective equipment (PPE)**

It's unclear what will be done about personal protective equipment and COVID-19 precautions for staff having to return to the work site. In some cases, where there are many campuses of the same institutions, there's not necessarily any consistency from one to the other because local administrators make these decisions.

### **Wage rollbacks and concessions over pensions**

Some participants reported wage rollbacks at selected post-secondary institutions, and expressed concerns that in collective bargaining, wages and pensions will be up for grabs.

### **Layoffs**

A comprehensive discussion was held regarding layoffs and potential layoffs across the country. There were some reports of layoffs for full-time faculty and support staff (including clerical, food services, and print shops).

The brunt of layoffs is directed at part-time instructors, who have been hit hard across the country. With short-term contracts, the reporting of layoffs is complicated by the fact that nonrenewal is not considered layoff. This is particularly problematic in Ontario, where 75% of OPSEU members teach on short-term contracts.

Some institutions have asked for voluntary temporary layoffs in order for some workers to access the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).

OPSEU reported that while there have been no layoffs for full-time faculty, their part-time support unit has been hit hard: 60% of student contracts haven't been renewed, 30% of casual contracts have not been renewed. As far as the full-time support is concerned, at least 5 out of 24 colleges have started lay-off processes.

### **Federal programs**

There was a discussion about the Government of Canada [Work-Sharing Program](#) and why it is not applicable for post-secondary institutions. Furthermore, federal legislation exempts public institutions from the entities that are eligible for the [Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy \(CEWS\)](#).

### **The student experience**

Much of the discussion focused around students, and how their learning experience is affected by the pandemic.

#### **a. Students' academic outcomes**

Some participants focused on academic outcomes, and the mental well-being of students. There are increasing reports of academic dishonesty, and evidence that some students are struggling because of:

- a lack of self-motivation and time-management skills,
- the limits of technology,
- the lack of the social aspects of learning, or
- an inability to obtain certain services, such as aid and advisors.

#### **b. Vulnerable students—cultural and economic**

Concerns were raised about vulnerable students, for example Indigenous students, students with disabilities, students living in rural or remote areas, and students who do not have access to computers and internet connectivity.

#### **c. International students**

There was some discussion about the challenges faced by international students: a lot arrive without the proper equipment for remote learning such as computers, and there are language barriers. There are also restrictions placed on student residency living, or living in residence is not offered at all.

In some cases it is not clear whether international students will return at all in the fall.

Since universities heavily rely on International students' tuition fees, it's uncertain how they'll address these challenges.

OPSEU mentioned that various provincial governments have chronically underfunded the post-secondary institutions, leaving them to rely heavily on international student tuition fees to overcome budget deficits. Also, the federal department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is granting extensions to allow international students to study online and still qualify for [post-graduation work permits](#). The Component is lobbying the government to continue this policy.

**d. Financial assistance for students**

Student Aid Repayments have been deferred until October 2020, with no interest incurred. The Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) payments are available to eligible students, from May to August 2020, to assist students in financial jeopardy.

**e. Tuition fees**

There's some talk about tuition-fee increases, although students are possibly losing access to services, such as libraries, public transportation, gym facilities, counseling, and health care coverage.

In some institutions, an extra fee was applied for online courses prior to COVID-19.

In some provinces, students have been demanding decreases in tuition fees and fee rebates.

**f. Survey of students published**

An OPSEU participant discussed the results of a survey published May 12, 2020, in *The Star* that found that “almost a third of students have doubts about starting—or returning to—university this fall,” and this is “because of worries about their health and finances—but especially about online learning.”

**3. Closing Comments: Larry Brown**

In his summation of the discussion, Larry Brown emphasized 3 aspects:

First, Brown talked about the question of cost: with the shift to remote/online learning, there appears to be considerable savings for the employer. We need to do some factual digging and compiling of data around this.



Second, Brown talked about the inequity between workers and students in urban centres and workers and students in rural settings with regard to online instruction or remote learning. There appears to be inequalities in working conditions and in accessibility to education due to the uneven availability of, and access to, technology, particularly the internet. Brown asked participants to think about what would be acceptable to our members across the country regarding online learning.

Third, Brown talked about the question of intellectual property. There seems to be a real concern about how instructors can protect the work they create (such as PowerPoint slides, lecture notes, videos of lectures). He called for more research on this question.

# APPENDIX 1

## Component Report

### MGEU/NUPGE

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

- Pallister's grandstanding with the announced cuts was a very stressful announcement and he took so long to get back to post-secondary institutions it was ridiculous, and then when he does, each and every one of us were treated differently! This may cause some dissension among the management of all institutions, as they tried to work collaboratively during this crisis, but Pallister is now attempting to divide and conquer with cuts anywhere from 0% to 10% depending on the institution.

#### ACC (ASSINIBOINE COMMUNITY COLLEGE)

- *March 20<sup>th</sup> our world begins to change...*
- ACC pivoted rather quickly, we shut down the college to students officially on March 27<sup>th</sup>, staff were encouraged to take what they needed to work from home
- Instructors immediately moved as much of their course materials over to Moodle our LMS (Learning Management System)
- Everyone took a crash course in Zoom and Teams
- IT updated and expanded our VPN and Remote Desktop networks
- By March 30<sup>th</sup>, there was about 30 of us left in the building and most of us were here by choice
- Trades instructors were Zooming their classes from home shops
- Students were completing their assignments online
- The Library was shipping videos and books to students
- Early May nursing students were brought on-campus in small numbers to do some hands-on skills training
- ACC worked hand in hand with management to pro-actively protect as many jobs as possible, during Pallister's form of hunger games. No one was laid off unless they

chose to be laid off. No jobs were lost at all, other than a few terms that were not renewed. We were able to help a few people get on to the federal governments' Work Share program, so that they were able to still be employed by ACC, still getting funds from us and the gov't and we were able to negotiate protection for their benefits to continue at 100% and their seniority would not be impacted by a shorter work week. The college will close for a total of 13 ½ days between June and December, but members will "choose" how they pay for that time. The members aren't exactly happy about this, but no jobs were lost and they feel they have some control.

- ACC has expanded our language on PPE to include \$50 per year for every member, during the COVID crisis, to cover facemasks and coverings if a member so chooses.
- *Today, where are we at...*
- Plans are in place to make some hallways, one-way corridors
- They are planning as if the 2-metre rule will still be in place
- They are looking at what courses could be done completely online, 50% online or 75% online
- How best to work the timings for face-to-face instruction
- They are considering having students stay in the one classroom they start the day in, and at change of classes, the instructor moves to another room and then only one person is leaving the room instead of the students
- They are considering only having students on campus for a maximum of 3 hours, then it will negate the need for issues of foodservices and people socializing in the cafeteria
- All comfortable seating areas are being removed, only solid surface, single seated furnishings will be left in the public areas to negate socializing

### **RRC (RED RIVER COLLEGE)**

- RRC is not re-opening until closer to September, so early on 26 people were laid off, (16 foodservice workers that would normally get laid off in late June)
- RRC's Language Training Centre is not renewing 31 instructor contracts at the end of June. This program is federally funded. Because of the ESL "norms", funding in the past was never guaranteed more than a few years, allowing the college to keep so many on term for over 2, 3, 4 years. Right now, we have a contract for 5 yrs, as of April 1, 2020.

- RRC management didn't seem to be working collaboratively with the union during this crisis. The RRC report I received to share with you was...  
"New president, layoffs, college closed, members mad and scared!"  
This really just sums it up in one sentence.

### **UCN (UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF THE NORTH)**

- UCN has currently entered into 2 MOA's that are specific to COVID and temporary layoffs. They are currently negotiating a possible 3rd MOA.
- UCN has completed voluntary temporary layoffs and has moved forward with the completion of the first round of temporary layoffs due to work shortages - this is in addition to the voluntary temporary layoffs.
- There are additional positions that UCN is reviewing for possible layoffs as well.
- With things changing so rapidly at UCN, the members don't feel comfortable trying to predict what fall will look like.

### **BU (BRANDON UNIVERSITY support staff)**

- BU only received a 1% cut and have made no firm decisions on how it may affect its members
- They definitely will not be imposing university closures on their staff
- A number of food service workers were laid off early on
- Two members in the Healthy Living Centre were laid off early on as well
- The printshop/mailroom staff have had drastic cuts to their hours of work
- Most staff are working remotely
- At this time BU is not planning on having face-to-face classes in the fall, but the details still need to be worked out

## **ST. BONIFACE**

- No layoffs so far
- Everything will be online in the fall

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberley Lynn  
MGEU Post-Secondary Component Director



## NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

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