

FA Executive July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2019

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as faculty face pressures limiting meaningful engagement, especially in relation to the casualization of the academy through the proliferation of teaching by



Western Regional Conference delegates and members of the UNBC-FA Executive Committee partook of a special pre-conference outing to the Ancient Forest/Chun T'oh Whudujut Provincial Park. The tour was led by Darwyn Coxson, Professor in the Ecosystem Science and Management Program and former FA President and Chief Negotiator. **Photo: Art Fredeen**

contract academic staff. A great session on indigenizing the academy focused on the challenges faced, but also showcased examples of successful movement towards indigenization such as the Diversity Circles at BCIT and presented excellent perspectives as UNBC continues to address indigenization at our institution. The short- and long-term effects of internationalization were also discussed in an engaging session with examples that seem particularly relevant as UNBC moves towards a more international focus. Other sessions gave pause to reflect on challenges we face in implementing equity; the increasing role of performance metrics related to executing our employment duties and responsibilities; and, very relevant to UNBC's present climate, the positive role that dissent plays in the academy. We wanted to bring these discussions back to our members, and have asked panelists from the conference to provide some details that we can share with UNBC-FA members. I believe that you will find the information both interesting and relevant.

From my personal perspective, one theme that emerged very clearly throughout the conference was that UNBC has an extremely active, engaged, and effective Senate. While I have known this for some time, I did not appreciate the extent to which this is true until having organized this conference. Our Senate is the envy of associations in the west, and I encourage you all to continue the excellent work on Senate and governance matters generally, and would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to all of you who have made our Senate so effective over the years, especially our Faculty and Student Senators – Thank you!



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT: WESTERN REGIONAL SUMMARY

*Matt Reid, Acting President, UNBC-FA
Professor, Physics*

The UNBC-FA hosted the annual Western Regional Conference, a meeting of Faculty Associations from Manitoba to British Columbia, in October. The conference is an important venue to share and discuss relevant issues that presently face our associations, and an opportunity to address solutions to long-standing problems in academia. We were very pleased to have put on a successful conference that is being described as one of the best Western Regional Conferences ever. We feel that we represented our local community well, receiving a large amount of feedback on our beautiful campus and wonderful city, in addition to the agenda of topics covered. Approximately 65 delegates attended, and thanks to financial sponsorship from the Offices of the UNBC President and Provost, Black-Gropper Labour & Employment Lawyers, and the University of British Columbia, we were able to deliver the conference successfully and substantially under budget. I would also like to thank the Khas't'an Drummers and Lheidli T'enneh Elders Victor Joseph and Darlene McIntosh for the territorial acknowledgements, prayer, and ceremonial opening of the conference.

Much of the conference focused on topics that affect our day-to-day activities, including governance issues



UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE: THE ROLE OF SENATE

Douglas Baer
Past President, Confederation of University Faculty
Associations of British Columbia;
Past President, University of Victoria Faculty Association
Professor, Sociology, University of Victoria

For those scholars who see the university as an exemplar – imperfect to be sure – of a workplace environment that has important elements of democratic self-governance, university senates have always been a conundrum. At some universities, faculty have decided to do their best to introduce critical questioning and move debate away from the “Friday afternoon snooze fests” that have, in the past, characterized what has gone on at Senates across the country.

University senates can serve and have served as vehicles through which university administrations can legitimate contentious practices or even attempt to trump the provisions of collective agreements. At UBC, for example, Senate approved a policy on teaching evaluation. The Faculty Association then grieved this measure, but was turned back by arbitrator David Phillips, who in 2008 took the view that Senate had its own statutory authority not subject to the terms in the Collective Agreement (as Board actions would be). This view was upheld by the Court of Appeal for British Columbia in 2010.

While Senates are formally autonomous, there are various methods and techniques by which a potentially unruly elected body can be effectively “managed” by administrators. In BC and elsewhere, the Act specifies that the President is the Chair of Senate, rather than having an elected Senator play this role (as at some US institutions). Debate is often throttled by the agenda compression that results from the President’s wide ranging ability to extend opening remarks into hour-long presentations, though at some institutions, concerns raised by Senators have led Presidents to “keep it short.” Another potent control mechanism is the process by which Senate agendas are set in advance by a committee with a name such as “Agenda and Governance” or “Operations and Agenda.” These committees serve as powerful filters and veto agents. For example, last year, a proposal made by Senators at the University of Victoria to have a brief question period at the beginning of each Senate meeting did not even make it onto the Senate floor for discussion or a vote. Other “control methods” include moves to make some or all of Senate committee proceedings closed and confidential, even if personal information is not involved (as would be the case for student appeal committees).

In British Columbia, the University Act calls upon Senates to establish a committee to “assist” in the preparation of the budget. Sadly, the Act does not demand consultation with Senates themselves on budget matters. Budget matters have increasingly determined academic priorities, as university administrations bleed disliked units (through resource reductions and non-replacement of departing faculty) and provide additional resources to new program proposals that appear before Senate as “done deals.” Little of this is apparent in university budget statements (whether audited expenditure statements or budget proposals) because these tend to be released at a high level of generality.



PG-themed events, including jet-boat rides on the Nechako River, were a hit with conference delegates. **Photo: Matt Reid**

At a few universities, “program prioritization” exercises have seemingly followed the extreme form advocated by the infamous US consultant Robert Dicksen (rank-order all units and kill those in the bottom quartile) only to be rebuffed by widespread campus resistance (e.g., at Saskatchewan). But a more pernicious form of program prioritization comes in the form of the expenditure of large sums of money on “enhanced planning tools” exercises; we can call this “program prioritization Lite” and should be careful to critically monitor its objectives and its targets.

Senates can, with the support of elected faculty, demand a greater role in the governance of the institution. It remains to be seen how this will play out, and whether faculty “caucuses” created at some institutions will be effective.



A REPORT ON PRECARIETY'S PROGRESS

*James Compton
President, Canadian Association of University Teachers
Associate Professor, Media Studies, Western University*

Are contract academic staff (CAS) the canaries in the academic coal mine? That was the question I posed to delegates at the 2017 Western Regional Conference in Prince George. I had been asked to join my co-panelists Sandra Hoenle and George Davison to discuss the status and impacts of casualization in higher education. And our panel's survey of the current moment was a sobering experience. There is an increasing awareness that the life of CAS members bears little resemblance to the "groves of academe" idyll touted by critics of university autonomy. Contract academics are paid a fraction of the salaries of their regular academic staff colleagues, work mostly on short-term teaching-only contracts, and struggle to maintain a research profile while putting in extremely long hours. And their numbers are growing.

As Vinnie Mosco and Catherine McKercher have argued, "the psychological contract between employer and workers has been rewritten," and its price is precarity, or what Zygmunt Bauman calls "existential uncertainty." However, in my preparation for the panel I discovered that our CAS colleagues are not alone in their anxiety. A recent 2016 *Times Higher Education* workplace survey of academics found that 39 percent of respondents said they wanted to quit. Why? They reported being overworked and suffering from poor health resulting from work-related stress. I found this to be a shocking finding for a skilled and mostly rewarding profession. And I think it's safe to say most of the delegates in attendance at the Western Regional Conference agreed.



Along the Nechako. Photo: Matt Reid

Twenty years ago, Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter coined the term "academic capitalism," to capture

what they saw as the uneven and contradictory mixture of entrepreneurialism, top-down managerialism, and audit culture being foisted upon universities. They called it Robin Hood in reverse – a situation in which shared public resources in the service of a public good were being inverted to serve private interests. Twenty years later, I believe it's clear they were right.

As we work to lessen the effects of what John Smyth has called "the toxic university," we would do well to remember that striving to improve the working conditions of our CAS colleagues is not an act of charity. Because we're all in this together.



INDIGENIZING THE ACADEMY: A PERSPECTIVE FROM UNBC

*Rheanna Robinson,
Assistant Professor, First Nations Studies
Senior Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Relations*

To open this topic, I would like to acknowledge the territory of the Lheidli T'enneh Nation where I have been fortunate to live, work, and be educated for almost 20 years. Although I am a junior faculty member at UNBC, my history and relationship with the UNBC community began in 1995 when I moved to Prince George from the small town of Smithers in Northwestern British Columbia to begin my academic journey.

My name is Rheanna Robinson. I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of First Nations Studies at UNBC and also the Senior Advisor to the President for Aboriginal Relations. I am of Métis ancestry on my mother's side and very proud to have my BA in First Nations Studies/History and MA in First Nations Studies at UNBC. My PhD is from the Educational Studies doctoral program at UBC.

Conversations around Indigenizing the academy have taken a robust and prominent place in many academic institutions since the release of the 94 Calls to Action put forward by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2015. With these Calls to Action, higher learning institutions have an important responsibility to work towards meeting the goals put forward by the TRC in the spirit of reconciliation and to honour the survivors of residential schools. Not only does this demand action that is respectful in nature, but this action must be embedded within moral and ethical relationships amongst and between all to ensure measures of accountability and responsibility can be realized. Although I believe reconciliation and

Indigenization are not synonymous, these positions influence each other in powerful ways and bolster the opportunity for us to consider how we are working together to make substantive progress to Indigenize educational experiences in post-secondary institutions.

It is important to acknowledge that Indigenizing the academy is a collective responsibility. It does not belong to a single department and it certainly is not just the responsibility of Aboriginal scholars and students within the institutional paradigm. For me, Indigenizing the academy is relational in nature and requires that we build respectful, responsible, relevant, and reciprocal relations with each other and the Indigenous communities we work with.



The majestic "Treebeard" in the mist at the Ancient Forest/Chun T'oh Whudujut Provincial Park. **Photo: Darwyn Coxson**

Intuitively and practically, I believe that we all have something to contribute when we consider how Indigenizing the academy can be achieved. Our individual gifts, knowledge, and insights allow us to facilitate our own educational experiences with each other as we share more about the history of the country we live in and what that history represents for Indigenous peoples. There is an incredible amount of work that institutions all across this country are engaged in for improving the Indigenous and Indigenization experience, but there is still much to be done. This is going to take time and thoughtful and

considerate relationship building so that the goals of Indigenization can be accomplished in a way that is sustainable and enduring. Indigenizing the academy cannot be considered through a process with an "end date." This must happen with patience where we individually and as a collective must work together with trust and understanding to teach the sad history of the colonization of our country's Indigenous people.

I always tell people how proud I am to have attended UNBC. This was one of the first universities in Canada to offer a Bachelor of Arts degree in First Nation Studies and was the first university in Canada to offer a Master of Arts degree in First Nations Studies. As a proud graduate of both of these programs I know they prepared me for the completion of my PhD at the University of British Columbia. My experience of being part of an Indigenizing process in my studies showed me the pathways forward to use Indigenous perspectives and principles in higher education.

On October 19th 2017, Senator Murray Sinclair delivered a keynote address at the 20th anniversary gala for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives entitled, *The truth is hard: Reconciliation is harder*. Like reconciliation, Indigenization cannot be a hurried process. Instead we must take the time to use this opportunity we have for creating an experience of transformative change and ensure that all students learn to appreciate Indigenous principles of treating the spirit in all life forms with respect. I truly believe that it is through authentic and compassionate efforts that Indigenization will prevail and our academic institutions will benefit.



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND
THE *INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE OF*
MANITOBA (NAVITAS): THE UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA EXPERIENCE

Janet Morrill
President, University of Manitoba Faculty Association
Associate Professor, Asper School of Business,
University of Manitoba

In 2007, The University of Manitoba (UM) contracted with a for-profit corporation, Navitas, to establish the International College of Manitoba (ICM), which would offer senior-level high school courses and first-year university courses to international students. The contract was recently renewed for an additional 10 years.

Over this period, faculty have expressed many concerns with the original and revised agreement.

Among those:

- *Professors in Navitas were outside UMFA collective agreement protections, as Navitas was not part of UM.* Therefore, they had none of the academic freedom of intellectual property protections. In fact, under the ICM contract, Navitas retained ownership of all course materials taught at any of its institutions. Under pressure from faculty, UMFA members under the new contract have the same intellectual property and academic freedom rights from Navitas that they have under our collective agreement with the University of Manitoba.
- *As ICM recruits, selects, and instructs the students, faculty were concerned that prospective students have been misled into thinking that they are enrolled at the University of Manitoba, and that students would not meet UM standards.* UM adopted a policy that department heads, or a designate, certify that ICM exams are similar in difficulty to UM exams (a task that adds to heads' workloads). Despite the quality control, the GPA of ICM students drops once they enter UM courses. This raises concerns that ICM instructors "spoon-feed" students more than UM instructors either could or would.
- *The revised ICM contract has an exclusivity clause, which prohibits UM from offering similar programs.* If interpreted broadly, that could stifle other initiatives targeted towards international students.

In the contract-renewal discussions, a key concern for UMFA was why UM did not simply offer the ICM directly, rather than contracting with Navitas. This latter argument arose from several observations. First, UM and ICM recruited together, so we did not need the ICM recruiting "machinery". In fact, UM currently had 60% more international students than the level specified in the university's strategic enrolment plan, indicating that we did not appear to have difficulty attracting this group that is important both for the diversity, and regrettably the extra revenues, they bring to our institution.

There were also concerns that ICM recruiting was still misleading: the materials looked very similar to UM materials, perhaps giving the impression that students were actually enrolling at UM. ICM courses were taught by instructors from the Winnipeg community.

Finally, Navitas is highly profitable: University partnerships are 56% of Navitas revenues and provide

100% of Navitas profits. The profits from the university partnerships have increased 52% in the last two years, and every dollar of revenues from the university partnerships provides 24 cents of profit.

We therefore asked if administration had analyzed the option of offering the ICM directly. Their response was that "the costs that would be incurred to create, resource and maintain such a complex program internally would be beyond the current abilities of the university". If that analysis had been done, it is not clear why it could not be shared as it could help overcome our objection. If it was not done, this would seem to indicate a reckless disregard of prudent fiscal management of university resources.

In the end, Senate voted to renew the contract for 10 years. Bicameral governance can complicate these battles. Faculty have considerable influence in Senate. The Board of Governors, where we have less influence, considers the advice of Senate, but also contends that entering contracts is ultimately their purview. It is thus complex to fight battles that have both academic and financial ramifications.

However, we also had some wins in improved intellectual property and academic freedom rights for Navitas professors. Further, this has shown us a playbook for future battles: we asked for the Senate agenda to be released early to give our Senators more time to investigate this complex issue, and we got Senators together to share concerns and plan our interventions in advance. Like all other faculty associations, we will continue to use our influence and knowledge to advocate for quality education at the University of Manitoba.



PG-themed events, including jet-boat rides on the Nechako River, were a hit with conference delegates. **Photo: Matt Reid**



WHAT WAGE EQUITY STUDIES TELL US, AND WHAT THEY DON'T

James Johnson
President, Confederation of University Faculty
Associations of British Columbia
Associate Professor, Economics, UBC

When universities conduct wage equity studies they often find (UBC, McMaster, and SFU are good examples) that full-time female university faculty members are paid, on average, thousands of dollars per year less than males. In BC the Human Rights Code prohibits gender-based discrimination in salary “for similar, or substantially similar, work.” A difference in average salary is *prima facie* evidence of wage discrimination. But in BC differences in salary between employees of different sexes is allowed if the difference is based on factors that would reasonably justify the difference. The function of a wage equity study, then, is to reduce the size of any potential award by identifying such factors.

In performing or evaluating an equity study, it is important for the union to keep in mind the difference between factors that explain a wage gap, and those that reasonably justify it. A wage equity study is designed to discover the former. It is the union’s job to translate the results of such a study into an understanding about what is, and what is not, a factor that reasonably justifies the wage gap.

The standard approach is to estimate, separately for men and women, a model in which salary is modeled as a function of rank, department, year at the university, years in rank, experience prior to coming to the university, and so on, and then determine the degree to which differences in salaries are explained by differences in “factors”. Any mean difference not explained by differences in factors is attributed to pure wage discrimination.

In the three studies mentioned, it was found that about 80% of the pay differential is explained by factors other than gender, and most of that difference was due to the fact that women are underrepresented in the Professor rank, and in the higher-paid disciplines. We should not be fooled into thinking that the unexplained amount constitutes the sum and total of unjustified wage differences. The relevant question is: “do differences in rank and discipline justify wage differences, or do they identify the mechanism by which unjustified wage discrimination is perpetuated?”

Rank is not an exogenously determined characteristic of the members, like age or gender, but something that is awarded through workplace processes that may

contain unconscious bias. Standard statistical analysis may demonstrate that some of the gender differences in promotion are unjustified by any reasonable factors, and in such cases differences in rank cannot be taken as a justification for wage differences.

Salary differentials within departments are sometimes attributed to gender-based differences in bargaining effectiveness, external offers, and prior salaries. Across departments they are attributed to the external labour market for faculty in different disciplines. We should not uncritically accept either argument as a defence. Disciplinary salary premia may explain gender differences in salaries, but they do not justify them. An employer paying higher wages to employees in a male-dominated job classification than in a female-dominated job classification cannot mount a defence by claiming the difference is due to market conditions, if the two jobs are substantially similar.

In summary, wage equity studies are an important tool for discovering pure wage discrimination, and for identifying other factors that explain wage differences. What such studies do *not* do is identify which of those other factors constitute a reasonable justification for wage differentials and which do not.



THE (MIS)MEASUREMENT OF EXCELLENCE: STUDENT SURVEYS, BIBLIOMETRICS, AND FACULTY ASSOCIATIONS

Jacqueline Holler
Past President, UNBC-FA
Associate Professor, History/Women’s & Gender Studies

Excellence is surely an uncontroversial aspiration; after all, most faculty members strive to be the best researchers, teachers, and university citizens possible. Challenges emerge, however, whenever we seek to measure and quantify what constitutes excellence in any of the domains of academic work. At the Western Regional Conference, I was fortunate to share the podium with Helga Hallgrimsdottir, President of the University of Victoria Faculty Association, to discuss these issues as they currently play out in our academic units and institutions.

Dr Hallgrimsdottir spoke at length about the merit process at the University of Victoria, noting the associated challenges: difficulties in reconciling forced rankings with fair assessments, effects on collegiality, and the number of person-hours required to adjudicate merit assessments at all levels.

My own contributions were focused on two areas where over time, metrics have come to play a strong

role in how academics are assessed for career decisions including renewal, tenure and promotion, and merit. The first of these is the use of student surveys of teaching. Over the past thirty years, these surveys have come to be widely used in employment decisions, and they are generally viewed favourably by administrators. However, mounting evidence suggests that the validity of these instruments is questionable. For example, a recent systematic review of medical education found that exam difficulty and student topic interest, not teaching effectiveness, were the most important determinants of positive evaluations (Schiekirka and Raupach, 2015). Other studies have found other determinants unrelated to teaching effectiveness; even meteorological conditions seem to play a role (Braga et al., 2011). Thus there is growing consensus that while student surveys undoubtedly represent student satisfaction, they may *not* accurately represent how well an individual faculty member teaches.

More troubling, perhaps, are studies that indicate how student surveys can serve as vehicles for the transmission and reproduction of biases against members of equity-seeking and otherwise marginalized groups. Some scholars have examined racial and ethnic bias in evaluations. Others have examined sexism. While some scholars believe that gender bias in evaluations is negligible or non-existent, many more have found evidence of sexism. For example, a widely reported recent study found that simply altering the name of an online instructor produced a significantly higher (for a female instructor “renamed” as male) or lower (for a male instructor represented as female) student rating (Macneil et al., 2014).

While many of us—academics and academic administrators alike—may recognize the limitations of student surveys, they *do* provide one clear benefit: they result in standardized teaching scores that can be used to compare disparate faculty both to one another and to norms for acceptable and/or meritorious performance. The quest for a similar standardized process for comparing scholarly performance has led to the creation of bibliometrics. Originally a tool for librarians, bibliometrics have become widely used in tenure, promotion, merit, and even hiring decisions. H-factors, g-factors, and i10 factors are now routinely enumerated in multiple arenas and disciplines. In addition, many scholars now track altmetrics, their mentions in social and popular media, downloads, bookmarks, etc. The blossoming of research metrics led to Hicks et al.’s delineation of a new disorder, “Impact-Factor Obsession,” and to the articulation of the Leiden Manifesto, which warns of “the pervasive misapplication of indicators to the evaluation of scientific performance” (Hicks et al., 2015). Particular dangers identified by the manifesto include the potential for “gaming and goal displacement.” Instead,

the manifesto’s authors recommend ten principles to guide holistic assessments.



Chicken of the woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) at the Ancient Forest/Chun T’oh Whudujut Provincial Park. **Photo: Darwyn Coxson**

Faculty associations, like their members, support achievement in both teaching and scholarship. But supporting excellence means recognizing the diverse and myriad forms in which it comes rather than imposing regimes of measurement that offer little but speed and ease of use. The Leiden Manifesto calls for a more robust and holistic approach to assessment: “a suite of indicators is always preferable” (Hicks et al., 2015). The role of faculty associations, then, is to continuously support and defend holistic assessments that are valid and that do not reproduce existent processes of marginalization.



PATHOLOGIZING DISSENT: WAS IT ALWAYS THIS WAY?

KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF THE 2017 WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE

Brenda Austin-Smith
Vice-President, Canadian Association of University Teachers
Associate Professor and Head, English
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The curtailing of academic freedom on campuses around the world appears on the rise, with the arrests and imprisonment of hundreds of professors in Turkey by President Erdogan as one of the most recently

horrifying examples. Though the threats faced by academic staff in North America are nowhere near as dire, we are not immune from attacks on democratic processes and systems in which post-secondary education plays a critical role. It is nevertheless tempting to think that surely it hasn't always been this way, has it? Unfortunately, history shows us that there has never really been a time when academic dissent was not pathologized and punished. These controversies erupt most often when academics run afoul of authority, either in the course of research and teaching—their “intramural” activities—or in the course of actions as citizens, their “extramural” activities.

Whether for what they have done inside the classroom, or what they have said in public, academics have been hauled up before tribunals, deans, and Respectful Workplace Investigators. They have experienced pressure from donors, Boards of Governors, drug companies, and even from branches of government, to stop their research, stop teaching, or stop talking in public. Academics have been banned from their campuses, had artwork confiscated and smashed, and have been fired from their jobs, all because they dissented.

The badge of “dissenter” has been widely distributed. Philosopher Bertrand Russell was fired from Trinity College, Dublin and City College, New York, for refusing to be quiet about his views on war and sexual morality. Historian Angela Davis was fired from UC Santa Cruz for what the Board of Regents called “inflammatory language.” Mathematician Lee Lorch (after whom CAUT has named an award) came to York University in Toronto after being fired twice in the US for his anti-segregationist activism, and his refusal to testify before HUAC about his alleged communist activities. What these examples demonstrate is that while circumstances vary, dissent has always been an ingredient of academic work, and it has always meant acting and speaking in the face of opposition.



“dissent has always been an ingredient of academic work, and it has always meant acting and speaking in the face of opposition.”

What's different now?

How, then, did just doing your academic job become so controversial? Is there anything different in the current academic environment that accounts for the increase in the kinds of situations we read and hear about? Social media, for example, has amplified the range and volume of controversy, and in the case of

Steven Salaita in particular, provided the vehicle by which an opinion entered the public sphere of debate, much as Harry Crowe's letter (albeit opened by someone else) communicated his criticisms of United College in 1958. But there are forces associated with the contemporary university that make just doing our jobs more likely to become controversial. The decline of public funding and the consequent reliance on private dollars, the substitution of institutional autonomy for academic freedom, and the obsession with managing risk and reputation, all contribute to the pathologizing of much of what we do as academics, re-framing it as dissent.

The release of CAUT's investigation into conflicts of interests at the University of Calgary and Enbridge illustrates the first of these pressures. Emails quoted by the report trace the increasing pressure from an external donor for more influence over the Centre it is contributing to, and the willingness of administrators to allow that pressure to determine the academic direction of the Centre, even at the cost of the Director, Dr. Joe Arvai, remaining in his position. As the CAUT report makes clear, agreements with private donors can be felicitous for both academic institutions and corporations, but it is incumbent upon administrators to protect the academic integrity of the institution's programs from interference by donors, and to protect the academic freedom of staff who work in those areas.



Volunteer-built boardwalks at the Ancient Forest/Chun T'oh Whudujut Provincial Park. Photo: Darwyn Coxson

The second of these themes, the substitution of institutional autonomy for academic freedom, manifests whenever the institution issues a statement that purports to offer “the College's point of view,” or “the University's perspective” on an issue, when the institution, unlike the people who constitute it, cannot possibly have a singular point of view, and cannot claim to speak in an authoritative voice on any issue. Opinions and positions are what academics are for. Claims to institutional autonomy in these instances are elisions of the academic institution's position as independent of government, *and* the academic freedom that belongs to the individuals who research and teach there. It is not surprising, then, to find “institutional autonomy” in the revised statement on

Academic Freedom released in 2011 by Universities Canada (formerly the AUCC), where it functions explicitly as a limit to academic freedom by elevating the “integrity” and autonomy of the institution over the right of academic staff to choose their own research and educational priorities. Invoking “institutional autonomy” is also a way for administrations to invent for themselves a fictive immunity to public scrutiny, particularly by bodies like CAUT, again deliberately equating political interference by government with demands for public accountability and transparency.

The third of the features of the contemporary university is an obsession with minimizing risk, and with protecting the institution’s reputation. Most of us work at institutions with an Office of Risk Management, and nothing creates reputational risk quite like academics in full possession of their academic freedom. Controversial research projects or results, refusal to accommodate the wishes of donors—all of these threaten to damage the brand that our administrations spend so much time and money cultivating.



“the notion of dissent has come to include activities that once would have been usual, typical, within-the-realm-of-normal academic comments, actions, and engagements.”

All of these elements are part of the corporatization of the university, and all of them contribute to the production of academic dissent, by pathologizing what we do as academic staff. In short, the notion of dissent has come to include activities that once would have been usual, typical, within-the-realm-of-normal academic comments, actions, and engagements. This is a function of changes in university governance and financing that have slowly and steadily re-defined what a professor is and what a professor does in more and more corporate ways.

The growth of managerialism, the expansion of the ranks of administration, the obsession with rankings, both national and global, and concerns with marketing, all merge to produce an emanation, a spectacle of sorts, of the idealized, fully branded university. One outcome of this is the expectation that good and effective academics are attentive to institutional priorities, and that academics should defer to administrative pre-occupations with the maintenance of a good public reputation over academic risk-taking. A breathtaking example of this perspective appears in comments made by Suzanne

Fortier, Principal of McGill University, in the wake of reactions to the publication of a column by Andrew Potter, then Director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada: “We have an institute that is there to promote discussions between people who come to the table with very different perspectives,” Suzanne Fortier said in an exclusive interview with *The Globe and Mail* in March of this year. “It is not a role to provoke, but to promote good discussion.” Against this backdrop, critical commentary, controversy, debate, and other forms of academic interventions in institutional and public matters become re-framed as “dissent,” something extraordinary and unconventional, undertaken in opposition to a reputable authority—the College or University—rather than what we are trained to do as academics.

What we can do

De-pathologizing dissent means re-articulating debate and disagreement as core academic activities. Disputation, critical analysis, speaking up in and outside our classrooms are more than normal: these activities are essential to the work we do as academics, wherever we do this work. To leave the definition of dissent in the hands of others is to accept a reactive position in relation to our administrations. Questioning why things are the way they are is not a pathology; it is not, or should not be, unusual or surprising. Respectful workplace policies have a role to play in this dreadful development, this pathologizing of academic modes of inquiry and interaction.



“Wayne Peters... wrote these words: ‘All academics, not just scientists, have an obligation as public intellectuals protected by academic freedom to speak out on public policy issues even if — and perhaps especially if — it means they will be the voice of dissent.’”

To de-pathologize dissent involves re-connecting with our long history of upheaval and contention, recognizing and welcoming it as critical to inquiry. We begin in these ways to push back against the claim of administrations that they are the institution, and that they speak as and for it. To accomplish this, we first need to win back some of the ground we have lost to this pathologizing of academic work, and begin to actively reclaim the necessity and creativity of dissent. Wayne Peters, in a *CAUT Bulletin* President’s Column from 2013 entitled “Dissent: An Academic’s Obligation,” wrote these words: “All academics, not just scientists, have an obligation as public

intellectuals protected by academic freedom to speak out on public policy issues even if — and perhaps especially if — it means they will be the voice of dissent.” He was echoing and extending an observation from the Guardian newspaper’s Sept. 30 article, which read “For scientists in a democracy, to dissent is to be reasonable.”

It is past time for us to be reasonable. Let’s take back dissent.



October in Jasper. Photo: Ted Binnema.