



acifa

Alberta Colleges & Institutes Faculties Association

# Faculty Circuit

February-March 2018

## President's Message



Anna Beukes (President) and Ken Heather (VP External) at CAUT Council Meeting, Nov 2017

### Academic Freedom in our College Context

The meaning of academic freedom in a university context is well established. In that context academic freedom means the freedom to carry out research, to criticize the institution and to exercise one's constitutional rights without fear of institutional punishment. But what does academic freedom mean for us in the college and technical institute environment? At a very minimum, academic freedom means that we have autonomy in our classrooms. Once workload has been

assigned, we have the right to prescribe learning materials and pick assessments/evaluation methods as we see fit. This must happen in collaboration with other instructors teaching the same course, but academic freedom means college teachers have the right to make these decisions without undue influence or pressure from supervisors or management. If you are fortunate to have this level of academic freedom at your institution, you should not take it for granted.

Attempts to erode academic freedom continue to echo through post-secondary policy-making. One of the major reasons for the recent job action taken by 12,000 Ontario college instructors was to assert academic freedom rights. In the Ontario College system faculty had to contend with increasing levels of interference from associate deans in what they teach, how they deliver their classes and how they assess their students.

In addition to the right to pick teaching materials and assessment methods, academic freedom in a college system also means faculty have the right to participate in collegial governance structures. In the university context, faculty had experienced the benefits of bicameral governance structures for a long time. In the college and technical institute sector, we have academic councils that deliberate about academic matters such as program prioritizations, performance measurements/matrixes and so on. However, unlike their counterparts in the university sector, academic councils only have advisory power. ACIFA is lobbying the Alberta government for greater

say for our academic councils. These powers must be enshrined in legislation, similar to the way it is done in BC. An increase in the effective input of academic council will strengthen faculty voices and protect academic freedom.

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Another way in which academic freedom is often limited in our college system is via “respectful workplace policies”. These policies limit faculty members’ ability to speak up by demanding that faculty act in accordance with ill-defined notions of respect, civility and concern for the dignity of others. This often leads to artificial limitations being placed on academic freedom, because these respectful workplace policies bundle the requirement for civility with anti-harassment language to produce a comprehensive harassment policy that covers a broad spectrum of speech and behaviour, from rudeness to sexual harassment. The result is that the obligation to maintain civility is confused with legally mandated requirements to address harassment, discrimination, and workplace violence. Failure to achieve “interpreted” civility is implicitly equated with violation of the law. Faculty Associations should be wary of respectful workplace policies and the peril it may hold for academic freedom.

**Dr. Anna Beukes**

## **Feedback from the Conversation with Minister Schmidt**



On October 17, 2017 ACIFA had the privilege of a face to face conversation with Mr. Marlin Schmidt, Minister of Advanced Education. It was a good meeting. The conversation was real and informative. We asked nine questions of the Minister, and here are his responses:

**1. Can you share any information about changes to the funding model? The rumour is that funding model changes will be tabled in the legislature this fall.**

Minister: It is not possible to give detail information about this yet because the consultant, MNP, is just finishing their report. The timeline for tabling or implementing these changes are being pushed back. What we have in mind is to find a more rational way of assigning funding into the system. The block transfers, as it is done now, does not provide enough accountability or transparency.

**2. How does the Minister think the transition of our sector to the labour code is going?**

Minister: It is important to note that the intent of these legislative changes was not to favour one group over another but only to set up an even playing field. There is a special division set up at the Labour Board now to deal with any post-secondary education issues. Setting up a separate division like that at the Labour Board is the government’s way of acknowledging the uniqueness of the PSE sector.

**3. There is an undertaking to provide training to ACIFA members to help with this transition to the new labour regime. When can we expect that to happen? Maybe at our conference in May next year?**

Minister: We are comfortable sending somebody from the department to attend the ACIFA conference again and provide training to ACIFA members.

**4. Where are things at on governance issues such as the Agencies, Boards and Commissions (ABC) review? Will we still be asked for input on that review, or not?**

Minister: The ABC review had various aspects. Some of it will be tabled this fall, others will be postponed until spring. The conflict of interest has been tabled in the legislature. For more information, please visit the Legislative Assembly’s website where you can read a copy of the decisions regarding roles, mandates, and executive compensation. Board governance and the funding model decisions will be rolled out over the next six months.

[http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=bills\\_status&selectbill=027&legl=29&session=3](http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=bills_status&selectbill=027&legl=29&session=3).

- 5. ACIFA's strong request regarding governance is for greater say for our Academic Councils. Academic Councils make academic decisions while the Board of Governors is responsible for business decisions. An increase in effective faculty voices in the deliberation around academic issues (such as program prioritizations or performance measurements/matrixes and so on) will be beneficial for quality teaching. Can greater power for our Academic Councils be enshrined in legislation, similar to the way it is done in BC?**

Minister: We are open to receiving more information in this regard. If Colleges and Technical Institutes are granted these greater powers will they use these opportunities well? Universities have had bicameral governance for a long time and yet it does not seem to give them the satisfaction or result they were hoping for. Will it be different for the Colleges and Technical institutes?

[Note: We assured the Minister that we have learned a great deal from universities in this regard. If greater say is granted to our Academic Councils, we will respectfully optimize the right to engage on all academic matters.]

- 6. The consultation on roles and mandates – the six sector model – happened in June, 2017. What does the Minister see as “next steps” following that consultation? Does the government aim to table those changes soon? Or what can we expect to happen next?**

Minister: We do not expect significant changes to the six sector model. The government's impression is that the six sector model by and large has served the sector well.

[Note: ACIFA concurred with that impression.]

- 7. When will the tuition freeze run out? ACIFA is concerned about the lack of regulation for international student tuition fees.**

Minister: We do not want international student to crowd out local students. The announcement about the suspension of the tuition freeze will be coming out soon.

- 8. We reminded the Minister that the process of “administrative densification” is continuing across the system. We explained that this means taking faculty roles and responsibilities out of association/union purvey and supplanting that by managers. Should there not be concern about more managers, greater duplication of administrative tasks and greater surveillance of faculty?**

Minister: We are looking at the administrative functions as part of the funding model review. Government is committed to ensure that public resources are directed to educating students and are not supporting “administrative densification.”

- 9. We pointed out that the process of “corporatization” is alive and well. We explained that this means management is obsessed with the reputation of the “the brand” and in the process does everything they can to minimize risks. Does this not lead to attempts to control faculty, to limit faculty from questioning ideas or speaking out inside or outside the classroom?**

Minister: The reputation of any school is very important for students. To find good positions with qualifications for that particular school, its reputation is critical.

[Note: We concurred with that and added that the reputation of any school should be based on the quality of education it provides and not because the school becomes an “entertainment centre” of sorts. We explained that the role of good teachers, like our ACIFA members, are to challenge students and, if necessary, to push them out of their comfort zones. This occasionally creates some discomfort for students. Limiting teachers' ability to ask difficult questions from students limits teachers' ability to broaden students' minds and perspectives.]

The Minister thanked us and said we gave him a lot to think about.

## LAPP Contribution Rate Reduction Announcement

Through prudent planning and effective risk management, the LAPP Board of Trustees has significantly improved the funded position of the Plan over the past few years to where it can now make a reduction in the contribution rates paid by employers and employees of the Local Authorities Pension Plan.

The Board voted unanimously at a recent Board meeting to reduce contribution rates by 1% for employees and 1% for employers, effective January 1, 2018. This is the first contribution rate reduction in sometime because we had a funding shortfall position to work down.

**For a LAPP member earning \$90,000 a year, this will mean a \$900 reduction in contributions in 2018, before taxes.**

The Board conducts an actuarial valuation once every year to ensure the Plan is adequately funded to meet its pension obligations and that it has made adequate funding provision for future risks that might impact the Plan. This year the Board was able to reduce rates as well as strengthen benefit security by improving its capacity for dealing with future risks, like market volatility or a sudden downturn in the economy.

In 2018, the Board will be conducting a review of its long-term funding strategy in addition to doing another actuarial valuation. After that work is done, the Board will have a better sense of where contribution rates will be in the future as well as the ongoing funded-status of the Plan. It is the Board's ultimate goal to reduce contributions further and this review will help provide information on how soon that can happen.

## The ACIFA Conference this year is at Jasper Park Lodge!

### Find Your North STAR



Interpreting our theme:

*"Find your North Star"*

STAR represents....

S - Sustainability  
T - Technology  
A - Accessibility  
R - Resiliency.



To register, please click on the link: <https://www.acifaweb.com/shop>

**Looking forward to seeing you there: May 13 to 15, 2018**



## Article from ACIFA Award Winner Jason Boyd

Given how conferences can go...the ACIFA conference was excellent! I was able to take away many great ideas that I put directly into my culinary class at SAIT.

I am Chef Jason Boyd and I am a culinary instructor at SAIT. This year I am teaching Breakfast Skills in a fully functioning kitchen classroom. My class size is about 16 students in a class and my class length is 3 weeks. We are serving up to 100 guests a day.

In the spring of 2017, I had the opportunity to represent SAIT and to attend the ACIFA Annual Conference as a recipient of the **ACIFA Distinguished Instructor Award 2017**. It would be hard to articulate all the wonderful concepts and visions presented in the ACIFA sessions I attended. However, I will attempt to summarize my three main take-aways and how I have implemented them in my classes.

The first take-away is that peer learning is an exceptional way to engage and inspire students. Students retain so much more when they are actively involved in discussions, brainstorming and when they are actively participating. In my classroom this year, this involves students taking leadership roles by being responsible for teaching their peers about their previous breakfast station when they rotate. This has made our breakfast rotation so much smoother (for my students and my customers) and also helped to create a team environment where all students are responsible for learning in the classroom.

The second concept that I took from the conference was the need to effectively use technology to support, reinforce and enhance students learning outside of class. In my class students are expected to complete a series of 20 quizzes (10-15 questions each) and one cell phone video assignment outside of class using D2L in a 3-week class. Students in my breakfast class are asked to video themselves (maximum 3 minutes) explaining and demonstrating how to cook a perfect omelet from start to finish. I have enjoyed watching these videos and seeing how students rise to the expectations that are set for them. These videos show the students are engaged and having fun and even teaching me a thing or two. It is very interesting listening to students talk about their omelet videos and how many times it took to get it perfect and, if nothing else, I know that every student that comes through my breakfast class leaves being able to cook a fantastic omelet! This allows students to work at their own pace, reinforces classroom ideas outside of class, and helps ensure that students come to class prepared and ready to put their learning into action.

The third major idea that was reinforced for me at the ACIFA conference through peer conversation is the idea of a *flipped classroom*. I have been teaching with this style for 8 years and it was wonderful talking to other educators about ideas relating to this classroom strategy. Understanding why and how this has been adopted by our students, as well as how to use this to maximize individual student strengths, reinsures me that I am confidently moving in the right direction. It allows me to personalize my teaching not only for my class, but for my individual students and embracing all their diversities in regard to learning.

Thank you so much to ACIFA for the award and the opportunity to attend the conference. I am very grateful for the chance to continue developing as a teacher and improve my effectiveness in and out of the classroom.



Jason Boyd  
Instructor, SAIT

Winner of ACIFA Distinguished Instructor Award  
2017

## Article from ACIFA Award Winner Dong Ye

It has been a while since I attended the ACIFA 2017 in Canmore last year. When asked about the experience, I always felt that I could not do it justice.

Yes, it is true that I had an excellent experience in connecting with with multi-disciplinary colleagues from Alberta. Some names no longer only exist in paper. I began to know the “old acquaintances”, with whom I had communicated in the past via electronic methods. Moreover, I got to know “new” people I would otherwise not. We shared teaching anecdotes, mishaps, and more importantly, laughter. I have no doubt that some inter-collegiate partnerships could have started from here.

At the ACIFA annual conference, we connect with each other.

Yes, it is true that I was most impressed with the conference focus of integration of content expertise, and use of innovative pedagogical strategies. The sessions I attended encouraged participants to explore various platforms and consider how the tool/strategy could be applied in their disciplines and courses. I wish I could have attended ALL the concurrent sessions. I love that the ideas were all about improving our teaching. As a teaching faculty member, I love the fact that the conference provided a great opportunity to really get at the nitty gritty of how to get students engaged in class. We shared, discussed, and more importantly, proposed various active learning strategies. I have no doubt that some great teaching professors could have started from here.

At the ACIFA annual conference, we learn from each other.

With all these descriptions, I do not feel I have captured the essence of the conference. Nor did I manage to convey the warm feeling I had during the event. What stands as the core of conference is the welcoming atmosphere and a sense of belonging.

We are building a community here with ACIFA, which is reflected abundantly at the conference. The workshops gave us opportunities to discuss the current issues pertinent to us, such as Bill 7; the after-conference touring activities afforded us opportunities to feel the Albertan pride; the keynote speakers, union leaders from other provinces, brought us to speed of what had been going on in other provinces. At the conference, we clarified understanding, shared concerns, and more importantly, started to envision future together for the colleges and institutes in Alberta. I have no doubt that we are stronger as an expanded family. The family re-union ALWAYS has a lot to offer. ☺

I am proud to say I am a member of the association and I was a part of the ACIFA 2017 annual conference!



Dong Ye  
Instructor, NAIT

Dong Ye is the first ACIFA member who is a recipient of two awards in the same year:

- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award 2017
- Innovation in Teaching Award 2017