

FROM: OPSEU CAAT-Academic 2021 Bargaining Team
TO: All OPSEU CAAT-Academic Members
DATE: February 22, 2021

Dear Members,

On February 16th, OPSEU received an offer from the College Employer Council regarding the Collective Agreement negotiations for both our own CAAT-A bargaining unit and the CAAT-Support-Part Time bargaining unit. That offer would see the Collective Agreements of both units extended by an additional two years, with 1% annual increases of salary/wages. The offer proposes no other improvements to the current Collective Agreement.

This offer fails to address current and critical needs, its timing is highly unusual and premature, and it is an attempt to circumvent our established democratic process.

Our current Collective Agreement expires after September 30, and the legislation that governs our collective bargaining specifies that this process would commence with either side providing notice to bargain on July 2, 2021 at the earliest.

Despite the untimeliness of the Employer's offer, your bargaining team consulted the Local Presidents from each of the 24 Colleges, as well as our Bargaining Advisory Committee (consisting of both Full-Time and Partial-Load faculty from around the province) before responding to it. The message that was communicated in those consultations was clear: Transparent communication with the membership is vital.

We are therefore grateful for this opportunity to communicate the reasons why we as an elected bargaining team cannot entertain the Employer's offer at this time.

The first reason concerns its failure to address current, critical needs: The urgency of this moment in Ontario's Colleges requires that both Union and Employer sit down at the appropriate time to have a productive and much-needed discussion about the immediate workplace needs that are dictated by the massive shift to online teaching, and by our students' changing needs.

These needs – as articulated by our members thus far – include the need for workload measurements that ensure the quality of online teaching and learning, the need for students to have adequate access to counsellors, the need for intellectual property language that promotes faculty innovation and excellence, the need for faculty to have meaningful say in academic decisions, and the need for the equitable treatment of all faculty, including both contract faculty and marginalized groups.

The Employer's current offer addresses none of those things: It is designed explicitly to prevent those matters from being discussed at the bargaining

table. It is designed to maintain for another two years a status quo that features the ever-growing exploitation of contract faculty, an outdated workload measurement system that fails to account for the true work associated with performing our work online, and the imminent threat of outsourcing in the face of digitization, privatization, and new funding formulas.

By contrast, the bargaining team looks forward to promoting needed updates to our working conditions that will enhance the stability of the system and improve the student learning experience. **Our members deserve to have their demands – many of which can be implemented at no cost to the Employer – heard with the respect that is owed to the people who are actually performing the mission of Ontario’s Colleges.**

We believe that Ontario’s economic recovery depends upon a healthy College system, and a healthy College system depends upon making the changes necessary to promote sustainability for the next 50 years.

The second reason concerns timing: We are still in the process of consulting faculty about the changes in your working conditions, through the Local Demand-Setting meetings. Faculty (including full-time and partial-load professors and instructors, counsellors and librarians) from approximately 17 Colleges have already met to discuss what they and their students need from the next collective agreement. Faculty from 7 Colleges have yet to have that opportunity to establish and prioritize their Local demands for the upcoming round of bargaining.

The Local demand-setting meetings thus far have featured record-setting attendance, fruitful and engaged discussion, and sensitivity to the challenges that the pandemic presents to both our teaching and bargaining environments.

There is a pre-bargaining process for our division that includes a final demand-setting meeting. Delegates from all 24 Locals arrive at a final set of demands from the list of local demands that reflect the needs of all members provincially, and then task the elected bargaining team with negotiating those demands. The offer presented by the Employer seeks to short-circuit that process of representative democracy.

The third reason we cannot entertain this offer is that it would be simply premature to do so. This represents the Employer’s first offer, not their best or final offer. This is a first pitch, and a wild pitch, at that. **It would be foolish for us as a bargaining unit to let it distract us from our own project of compiling Local demands and building Local solidarity, as we seek to build upon the profound gains that we achieved in the last round of bargaining.**

Remember that the Employer has the right to force a membership vote on an offer once during the process of negotiations. They have done this twice in the past. While they may choose to force a vote on this particular offer during the appropriate time for bargaining, we do not believe that they will do so, since it fails to respond to the needs of the moment and the demands that our members and our students are plainly communicating.

We look forward to continuing to hear from all faculty through your Local Demand Setting and Final Demand Setting meetings. Based on these discussions, we will do what we were elected to do: negotiate a Collective Agreement that addresses your demands, and one that we can recommend you vote for. This offer does not meet that standard. We have written to the College Employer Council with our intent to finish our process and meet them at the table.

Yours in solidarity,

Your CAAT-A Bargaining Team