



Concordia University Part-time Faculty Association  
Association des professeur(e)s à temps partiel de l'Université Concordia

Friday March 20, 2015

### **Response to Student Austerity Protests**

The ongoing student actions to protest the Coulliard government's Austerity agenda enters a new phase this coming week, when a number of Concordia student groups initiate their plans to stage short-term strike actions. CUPFA has been asked by students and faculty what position we take with respect to this protest and what guidance we offer to our members. We respond,

**WE** deplore the savage cuts to academic funding which successive governments have enacted since the 'Maple Spring.' These cuts have been both deep in nature and assessed broadly across the University. These cuts shackle education and impose significant barriers to the fulfillment of our mission.

**WE** see the direct impact in both the loss of teaching positions, and the deterioration of the teaching environment (specifically the pressure to increase class size and taylorise the 'delivery' of education).

**WE** deplore the actions taken by the Treasury Board to cut teacher salaries at CEGEPs, while the Government raises the pay of Members of the National Assembly.

**WE** view the lack of any real leadership in Education policy on the part of the government since the Maple Spring as an opportunity squandered.

**WE** agree that student debt levels are intolerable and a real threat to the promise of equality of access for education in the future, as well as a drag on the economic potential of this generation of students.

**WE** acknowledge that the target of student protests is the current government policy, not the faculty, staff or the administration of Concordia.

**CUPFA** publicly states its support for the students concerns over Austerity measures, but reserves the right to express our opposition to Austerity measures in our own voices and on our own terms. CUPFA further states its position that, in all situations, it is essential to prize the safety and well-being of all parties. We can differ in our beliefs and still meet across positions with an attitude of mutual respect and understanding.

### **How are CUPFA members to respond to the student protests?**

At the present time, some individual departments (Liberal Arts College, Philosophy's Sophia student group) and the Fine Arts Student Alliance in the Faculty of Fine Art have already voted to take action. Different units have set a variety of strike dates

and different strike durations. CUPFA will monitor developments on an on-going basis and provide updates (see CUPFA's web page for news). How should you respond?

**First**, CUPFA members are presently under contract and therefore not in a position to withdraw our labour. We have an obligation to report for work as usual.

**Second**, if, when you go to teach your class, there is a student "picket line," ask who is in charge of the picket and identify yourself as the professor. Calmly tell the students there that you are legally obliged to report to your class. Ask them if they will allow you to pass and enter your classroom.

If students refuse your request for access and attempt to prevent you from entering the building or classroom, you must not force your way in. CUPFA will not be responsible for precipitating an "incident" between students and the University. We do not wish to create any incidents which may cause a deterioration in relations between students and the University. We must always be mindful of safety concerns for students, faculty and staff.

If you are unable to teach your class due to circumstances, you must immediately file a report with your unit chair and send a copy of this report to CUPFA.

**Third**, when you report to your classroom, if you find that no students are present, you must remain at your class for 15 minutes. At the end of this period of time, if no students have shown up for class, you are within your rights to cancel class.

If your class has its usual complement of students or near-about its normal complement, you must teach your class as usual. If your class has only a few students (i.e. clearly the majority of students are absent), you must use your best judgment when considering how to proceed.

**Fourth**, while you cannot support the student action by withdrawing your labour, you can support them by other means. You have the discretion to shift assignment dates so as to avoid penalizing students who are out supporting the protest. You might shift materials to the Moodle page or consider adding extra material to the course web page in order to offer students access to materials they were not able to have during the regular class time.

**Fifth**, you cannot move your class to another –off campus- location in order to hold it and 'respect' the student protest. This solution may appeal to some, but it raises some very significant risks to you as the professor. If any student is injured, either on the way to or at the alternate class site (e.g. someone slips on the ice), you can be held liable. If a student is unable to attend the alternate class, they can file a formal complaint about the un-authorized class session. In short, this option is not an option. Don't even think about doing it..

Finally, while the next few weeks will present some challenges for all of us, we must do our best to carry on. The University is a community and when one constituency is under stress, we all feel this. The Students are exercising their democratic rights, and we will respect their rights. When this protest is concluded, we will all return to the classroom together. It is therefore imperative to maintain lines of communications and good relations with all parties.

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