

Examiner

Spring/Summer 2021

OPSEU
SEFPO
COLLEGE
FACULTY
Local 240

*When Will We Get
Back to the Classroom?*

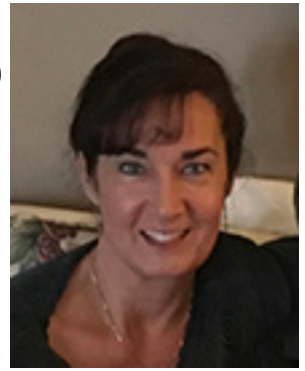


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Prez Sez

by Heather Giardine-Tuck, President, OPSEU Local 240



Hello Local 240 colleagues,

With the winter 2021 semester behind us, I want to congratulate you all on a job well done! You made it. While dealing with numerous challenges, continuous changes and stress, our faculty, counsellors and librarians have continued to uphold the excellent standards for which we are known.

For those leaving for vacation in May/June, I wish you the best. For those getting their break in July/August, you are almost there. For our contract faculty, I hope that the College's decision to close July 2nd will allow you a 4-day break from all you do, too. Please take a much needed and well-deserved holiday this year by turning off the computer, getting away from email and really unplugging. I believe it will do us all a world of good and help us to return in the fall feeling refreshed.

Since my last message, your Local 240 team has been busy filing staffing grievances, supporting our non-teaching faculty to ensure their titles and roles fit within the parameters of the Collective Agreement, assisting faculty in several departments to make certain their managers are providing respectful work environments, and reviewing workloads with faculty to answer their questions and confirm that their assignments are fair and reasonable. As always, I encourage you to reach out to your Steward for assistance whenever you have a question or concern. We are here for you. Specifically, with student issues, I want to remind you that you are not alone. If an issue arises, please let your AD know, contact your Steward or member of the Executive, and reach out to Student Rights and Responsibilities if their intervention is needed. It has been a very

difficult year and we are here to support you to navigate these situations when they arise.

The College's decision to reduce development time and increase teaching loads for the spring/summer semester was very disheartening. At a time when faculty need to revise and develop courses and our non-full-time faculty need teaching work, this has created considerable upset. Post secondary education should not be about maximizing workloads to meet budget goals, cost reductions at the expense of program enhancements, privatization or building reserves. It is about meeting the needs of our students and community; providing our faculty, counsellors, and librarians with the supports they need to guarantee a superior learning experience; and fostering a learning and work environment based on respect and collaboration. Our faculty, counsellors, librarians, and students deserve no less.

With bargaining starting in July, we will continue to send you updates from the bargaining team about the issues they are facing and the progress they are making. It is going to be a busy fall!

Stay safe and healthy. Looking forward to seeing more of you as we start to make our way back to campus once we are able to do so.

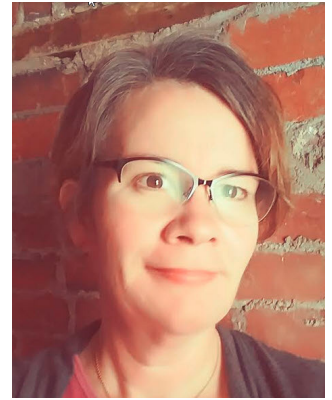
Take care,

Heather

HAPPY SPRING VACATION TO
OUR MAY/JUNE COLLEAGUES!

Contract Faculty: Pandemic Perspectives

by Rebecca Mills, Partial Load
Steward, OPSEU Local 240



Last month, a call went out to NFT faculty to consider completing a two-question survey. The first question asked them to identify if they were part time, partial load, sessional, or not teaching this semester. The second question asked them to share how the pandemic has affected their work. Of the 18 NFT faculty who responded, four identified as PT, twelve as PL, and two as not teaching this semester. Here are their words divided into three categories: the positive, the negative, and the in between.

The Positive

“Last March, the pandemic provided a reset. The manner I was living and working pre-pandemic was not sustainable. The pandemic shut down the complex routines I had set up in addition to my partial-load duties at Mohawk. With a reduction of travel, classroom hours, and side gigs there was time and a need for wellness and professional development (the arrival of MyCanvas was challenging). As the pandemic rolled on, the time spent with learners has become more thoughtful and meaningful. It is time that makes my day better. With partial-load work and the pandemic, there are gaps in time. It is sometimes easy for these gaps to be filled the despair and anxiety. The challenge of the pandemic has been filling those gaps with positive things in these desperate times.”

The Negative

“I felt isolated and undervalued.”

“I am constantly working since I have to put so much online. It takes me three times as long to plan anything now.”

“I thought not commuting to Toronto three days a week would give me all this free time. Ha! What a joke. I have never worked so much in my entire life. Putting content online takes so long and I find the marking

takes longer, too. And there is no end in sight. As a PL instructor I don’t get any vacation time. If I am lucky enough to get classes next semester, I will be creating my outline and loading content the week after I am done with this semester – but I imagine that’s everyone’s situation.”

“Pandemic has badly affected me as a Non-full-time faculty. It has drastically reduced the workload to the extent that there is no course available to teach in summer 2021. I’m not sure whether I could get some teaching hours in Fall 2021; it’s highly devastating.”

“There are a lot of things that added to my workload immensely during COVID.

- extra time making sure lectures are videotaped and material posted.
- more academic dishonesty causing more time administering them.
- the College concentrates on accommodating students, but what about faculty?
- AND most importantly with the testing center not accessible. A LOT of time is spent on accommodated test times by faculty who are not paid close to enough to cover the extra time spent as it is. At least, I spend more than five hours on average a week on accommodating test re-writes. It is VERY TIRING and not fair. Finally, thank you for the opportunity, but I wish there was a nicer way of sharing thoughts other than this one-liner text box.”

“This is not the right question. Non-full time and junior non-full-time are two different things. The junior non-full-time teachers are just not cared for. How is that fair that seniors are getting privilege and juniors are just forgotten? If this is the policy, the policy needs to be revised.”

“I have been offered half the number of teaching hours I would normally be offered resulting in a much lower

income.”

“First of all, I am working a ton of unpaid hours due to COVID. I have done a lot of course development due to having to change assignments and exams to the online format. The new modes of teaching are a significant source of stress. It was especially stressful at the start of online learning because we also moved from eLearn to MyCanvas. Dealing with the emotional and mental health needs of students, who are also struggling and stressed, is very wearing. It has been difficult to keep home and work separate because it is hard to tell when work ends and life begins.”

“I was initially assigned partial load, but my contract was changed to part time about 3 weeks into the semester. Having job insecurity puts a great deal of stress on me, particularly with my husband being almost retired, but still cannot completely retired at age 74. I have been employed to teach on and off at Mohawk College since 2009. But, I was never given an opportunity to build my seniority because I do not get partial load continuously in consecutive semesters. I have checked the seniority list and find that there are professors that joined Mohawk after I did, and they have more seniority. I hold a Master’s degree in English and a Bachelor of Education in Adult Education, but these degrees have not helped me to secure a full-time position. Contemplating a different career at this time is very difficult and costly. COVID has made things worse, particularly because student enrolment has suffered, so fewer classes are offered.”

“The amount of hours has reduced me from my usual consistent partial load to part-time status. This means I am not building significant hierarchy to be competitive for receiving courses in an already desperate situation. Actually, I would have made more money on EI, but wanted to try and keep busy and stay active with Mohawk. Because of reduced hours, we could no longer afford daycare, and I work with a toddler at home. Luckily the class happens to be in the evening so I can actually teach. I also had an incident with a student, and instead of casually being able to mention it to a colleague to ask for support, I sent it in an email, and made the problem seem more serious than it was. I feel that any opportunity to get involved with the school and potentially make a name for myself to be recognized as a serious candidate for any FT postings that may ever happen are not available.”

“Last summer I was slated to teach a course for a full semester but due to the pandemic I was given only the back end of a FT’s course. I did not get any work for the fall semester, and only got one COMM LL041 from the School of Communications for the Winter semester. I was able to get two dual credit classes from CCE which bumped me up to partial load. Not having anything for the fall, and the uncertainty of not knowing whether I would get a contract in the Winter was incredibly stressful. I had to apply for CERB, and was desperately looking for freelance work to bring in an income. I also felt very depressed at not being able to teach or work during this period. It’s been very stressful. We were just sent an e-mail that states there will likely be no work available for NFT for summer, but thankfully I now have a part-time job, so at least I have some security.”

The In Between

“Although teaching online has its challenges, the biggest of which is not being together in one room, Zoom and the other online resources provided by Mohawk help to make the learning possible and better for those who prefer online learning especially those with young children so they don’t need to pay for child care “
“It led to more online courses (which I prefer over in-class) but it also led to Zoom which I despise. It also led to receiving fewer courses (none for the winter 2021).”

“Transitioning to distance education has increased my workload dramatically. Even though some of the courses I teach have blueprints in Canvas that were populated by full time professors, I regularly have to fix or change them (more than I have had to pre-COVID). I have had to create new material for every course, even courses I’ve taught before. I have always been quite adept at technology, but it still takes time to learn new skills. So many students have indicated that they are not comfortable with online learning. There are many reasons, but one reason is that they do not want to have their videos on for security issues (fear of others recording them and posting on the internet), which has made me worry that students are doing that to me, too. Conversely, there are some positive aspects to this situation. I love that I can work from home and that I don’t have to commute. I appreciate how responsive the college has been with my technology and ergonomic office space needs. They seem to be better about

that than they were before when we had communal computers and office supplies in a shared space. I also appreciate that I can attend so many PD events and meetings that are easier “to get to” now that I’m able to attend from home.”

“The good: 1. I have saved on parking and commuting time and gas 2. I have attended many PD sessions, workshops, conferences, and I have learnt a lot about online methodology delivery and methods of student engagement. The Bad: I have worked 20 hours (often times not just adapting but entirely creating course content as the Blueprint contained minimal and/or dated content) a day and got paid for 6, 12, 14, or 8 (paying teachers for contact hours is simply unrealistic, unfair, and shows a callous pretense of seeing teaching as an office job); I taught overcrowded classes of 70 students when in fact, lower class numbers would

have benefitted everyone and would have either created another job or added to my workload so I could get PL status with benefits and seniority accrued. The Ugly: I lost PL status and seniority, benefits, I’ve had to rely on CERB and now EI as sole household income earner. This all has come with an overall feeling of disenfranchisement and not being valued.”

There have been a few bright spots in this glimpse of NFT faculty views, but readers can see that the negative anecdotes far outweigh the positive. Since the pandemic is far from over, the pressures NFT faculty are feeling due to the reduction of hours, the loss of benefits, no seniority units earned, unpaid curriculum development, academic integrity issues, etc. are going to continue. This survey did not attempt to ameliorate NFT faculty concerns, but it did make space for their stories to be heard.

Chief Steward's Update

by Shelley Rempel, Chief
Steward, OPSEU Local 240



I thought I would include a brief update of some of the work done by the Executive of Local 240 over the past year. We very much work as team taking calls and messages from members and Stewards. Most of the inquiries are resolved with the provision of information and discussion, however, some require advocacy and negotiations with managers on behalf of an individual faculty member or a group of faculty. When matters cannot be resolved through these discussions with managers and there is a violation of the Collective Agreement, we will assist members with filing grievances, some of which move on to the Arbitration level when they cannot be resolved within the College at the grievance meeting.

To be clear, most of the calls from faculty are about SWFs and workload issues (Article 11). This has become particularly acute since the start of on-line teaching at the College. As you know, faculty have been challenged to rapidly transition to on-line teach-

ing, on a new learning management platform, and cope with the pandemic personally, all while trying to support dozens to hundreds of students who are also struggling in different ways. A perfect storm, so to speak, but management practices have made it more difficult using the crisis as an opportunity (borrowed from other infamous leaders like Mike Harris) to implement as many austerity measures as possible during the pandemic crisis.

The play book goes something like this, continuously thank faculty for all of their hard work in every communication, including a recent video, and use every method possible to intensify and maximize faculty workloads even though they are aware of the stress this is causing. Here are a few examples - reclassification, collapsed sections, reducing evaluation and prep factors, unrealistic class sizes... I am sure you can add a few of your own here. We recommend faculty refer their SWF to Workload Monitoring, this stops the

clock and allows time to have further discussions with their Associate Dean and seek out advice from their Steward or member of the Local 240 Executive.

Other calls from faculty relate to some managers who show biases and favoritism on workload allocation, development work, coordinator positions, training/P.D. and special projects. Members have reported that some managers are hiring their friends, neighbours and even family members, assigning preferred workloads and choosing coordinators without a fair and open process. Sometimes the mismanagement goes further and manifests as bullying and reprisal when faculty speak out against these manager's practices (Article 4). When these concerns are brought to our attention, we have actively pursued remedies for the members.

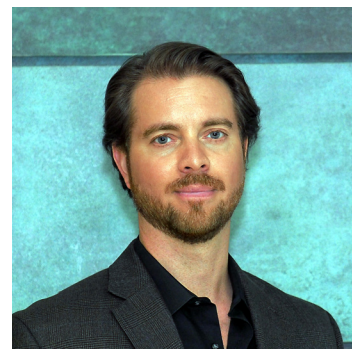
A third area where faculty frequently bring concerns forward is questions about Copyright and Academic Freedom (Article 13). Members report managers overstepping and trying to pressure faculty to change grades, overturn appeals and charges of academic

dishonesty. In addition, managers are claiming that a faculty's intellectual property (i.e., power points and lecture notes) belong to the College. We have helped these members stand up for their rights in the CA and in some cases filed grievances.

A lot of the work at the College is still assigned to PT, PL and Sessional faculty. While we value our contract faculty colleagues, we strongly advocate for turning these assignments into fulltime positions. Article 2.02 of the Collective Agreement says the College will give preference to full-time positions. Most recently we filed 23 staffing grievances for full time faculty positions across the College based on the large number of hours assigned to PT, PL and Sessional faculty. Grievance meetings are scheduled for late April and early May.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns and do not hesitate to contact myself or other members of the Executive. We will do our best to help.

Online Learning was Necessary During the Pandemic: *Moving Back to the Classroom is Equally Necessary*



by Kevin MacKay, Vice President, OPSEU Local 240

In March of 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic spreading rapidly across the country, the entire college community embarked on an emergency process of transferring education from the classroom to a virtual environment. No-one disputes the need for this unprecedented change, and yet no-one would also dispute the challenges it presented to faculty, students, and administrators. In the spring of 2020, faculty went above and beyond to transfer entire programs to an online format. Much of this condensed course development was done outside of standard Collective Agreement frameworks, instead addressed by an unevenly applied and largely inadequate allocation of

"COVID hours" on faculty workloads. These hours ranged from zero to three or four in the spring semester, with a smaller number of faculty also getting hours in the fall.

Despite a condensed time-line and lack of hours, faculty acted in good faith, pulled off the online transition, and enabled the Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 semesters to go almost fully virtual. A small number of necessary lab and placement activities were allowed to continue in-person, with strict class sizes and COVID safety protocols in place. The minimization of on-campus activity seems to have largely worked, with only a small

number of COVID outbreaks at Mohawk campuses since Spring 2020.

Back to Campus?

One year after the initial COVID scramble, we are faced with uncertainty regarding when it will be safe for faculty and students to return to the classroom and how this transition will occur. The hope was that fall 2021 would see a return to normalcy, but several variables have made a clear prediction hard to achieve. The spread of more lethal and contagious COVID variants has once more made lockdown's necessary, while Canada's vaccination program, at first stumbling, seems to be picking up speed, promising wide-spread vaccination by the summer. The relative strength of these contrary trends will determine whether it is safe for a large-scale return to campus in the fall, or whether it will have to wait until the Winter or Spring of 2022.

The main criteria for resuming in-person study must first be safety. However, when safety has been established, the next criteria have to be education quality and student success. To date, student and faculty feedback on a fully online College education has been decidedly mixed. Some students and faculty have appreciated the schedule flexibility that fully online course delivery provides, and some students have been able to learn effectively online. Having said this, a significant number of students and faculty have pointed to deficiencies in online learning and affirmed their preference for in-class instruction.

Issues With Online

For students, issues with online have included insufficient highspeed internet service, a lack of suitable space at home to engage in learning, and struggles with technical support concerning the college LMS and other online platforms required for testing or accessing course materials. Students have also complained about the sense of isolation they are experiencing – feeling cut off from faculty and their peers, and missing the socialization that is so central to a post-secondary ed-

ucation. A final issue is that a majority of students simply don't learn effectively in the online environment. These students need in-person interaction with faculty and fellow students in order to effectively process information, to stay interested and motivated in their studies, and to keep their schedules on track.

For faculty, the complete shift to online has presented other challenges. To many professors, the act of teaching itself has lost much of its immediacy and impact. The inability to interact directly with students and to engage in lively classroom discussions can make what was once an energizing, enriching experience seem flat and one-sided. Other issues include widespread cheating on online tests and assignments and challenges with students engaging in groupwork.

The online environment has also led to an increase in workload for many faculty, with the amount of email communication increasing significantly and with online marking of written assignments taking longer. Increased workloads have particularly impacted contract faculty, who have seen ballooning class sizes. Without the protection of a Standard Workload Form (SWF), contract faculty can see their course evaluation work double or even triple, with no additional time or payment given.

Finally, faculty have also had problems with reliable internet connections and trouble-shooting technical issues with the LMS and with third-party testing and courseware platforms.

To highlight the myriad issues raised by students and faculty about online learning is not to argue that this method of course delivery has no place. Pre-pandemic, online learning was an important vehicle for students to access a college education when their physical location, work commitments or family obligations made it difficult for them to attend in-person classes. After the pandemic, this choice must still be available for students, and lessons learned from the emergency move to online can be used to make the experience even better than it was before. Having said this, it is equally important that all of the courses offered in-class before the pandemic be returned to the classroom as soon as it is safe to do so.

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Who Decides?

Given actual student and faculty feedback, returning to the classroom would seem like a “no-brainer”. However, for the past year administrators at Mohawk and at other colleges have been indicating that the COVID-fueled online shift would be continued to a certain extent in the post-COVID period. Administrators have lauded the “increased flexibility” of online delivery, while simultaneously suggesting that many faculty and students actually prefer it to in-class delivery. Always absent from these communications are the many operational efficiencies that online learning provides college management.

Online learning enables increased class sizes for contract faculty and facilitates greater management control over faculty intellectual property. In turn, this enables managers to rely more easily on a growing army of precarious part-time faculty instead of hiring full time professors. It also enables faculty curriculum to be sold to private career colleges via P3 partnerships. Finally, online learning facilitates the outsourcing of credit courses to continuing education or to Ontario Learn.

Given the cost-cutting and privatization potentials of online learning, it is no surprise that college managers, Conservative politicians, and educational corporations have been steadily pushing for its wider use. This push is currently entering a new, critical phase, as discussions about “back to campus” plans are happening in departments across Mohawk and across all 24 Ontario community colleges. Given the stakes, it is crucial that faculty and students have their voices heard in these discussions, and that the centrality of face-to-face college education be reaffirmed.

Faculty academic freedom means that professors have the ability to determine how best to teach their subjects. If a faculty member thinks academic standards and student success is best served by an online or hybrid delivery method, then their decision should

be supported. If a faculty member thinks that in-class course delivery is the best for their pedagogy and their students, then this should also be supported.

Apart from faculty expertise, the other necessary factor in deciding how college courses are delivered must be student preference. To this end, it is imperative that college faculty and administrators directly and honestly seek student feedback on how they best learn. This feedback must be solicited in an unbiased way, and the results must inform any decision about post-pandemic course delivery. Simply asking students what they prefer might appear to be another “no brainer”; however, there is little evidence that college management are interested in doing it.

In a recent conversation with the head of a provincial college student organization, the reluctance of administrators to ask students about online learning became clear. The student advocate said that they had not been approached by the College Employer Council (CEC), Colleges Ontario, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) or any College administration on the issue of online learning because, in their words: “They don’t want to ask the question because they don’t want to hear the answer.”

For the past year this student association leader had heard countless complaints about online learning from his members, yet lamented that the feedback seemed completely invisible to college administrators. It may be that we can excuse this lack of interest from parties that are more concerned with the “business” of education, with its fixations on cost-cutting, privatization, internationalization, and flexibility. However, as educators and subject matter experts, faculty can, and must, do better. Only through listening to our students, consulting research, and relying on our lived experience and expertise, will professors ensure that the post-pandemic college system continues to prize quality over austerity.

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OPSEU Local 240 Mohawk College Faculty Area Stewards September 1, 2020 - August 31, 2022
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FUN FACTS ABOUT THE RECENT MOHAWK COLLEGE BUDGET...

- **\$70,069,031** - the sum of Mohawk College's budget surpluses from 2015 to 2020
- **\$103.3 million** - the size of Mohawk College's 2021 accumulated budget surplus
- From **2009 to 2019**, the number of Mohawk College managers making over \$100,000 grew from **45** to **88**
- From **2009 to 2019**, the total salary paid to Mohawk senior administrators increased from **\$5.9 million** to **\$12.1 million**