

WLUF ADVOCATE

Building community through dialogue, discussion and debate.

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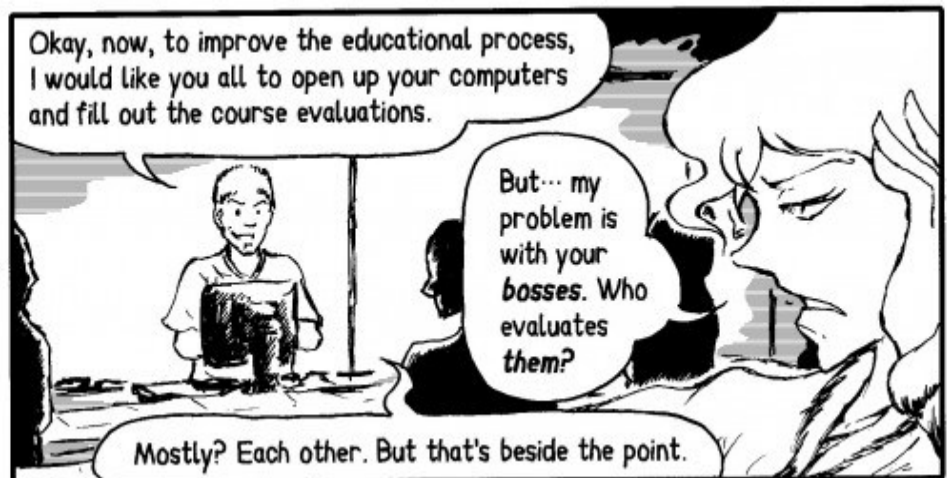
Student evaluations of university teaching

Kari Brozowski, Community Health, Public Health and Health Administration

The validity and reliability of student evaluations of university teaching is a perennial question—especially as they are used as a component in determining whether or not to promote or re-employ university professors. Because student evaluations are often developed by committees with no expertise in survey methods, it is difficult to trust their results. And, as a recent study at Lander University in South Carolina finds, students are frequently inattentive when they are filling out the evaluations (see *Further Reading* below). Another study by [Anne Boring et al.](#) reveals how student evaluations do not measure teaching effectiveness. Among other things, their study finds that student evaluations are biased against female instructors by an amount that is

large and statistically significant. While student opinions of faculty teaching are helpful, to institutionalize them in formal career assessments is highly problematic. Although most faculty members are not formally trained in bona fide teaching programs, we are well trained as researchers and as experts in our fields. As such, we should know better than to accept that student evaluations of faculty

a contract faculty member at the University of British Columbia, provided excellent insight into this issue at the Harry Crowe Foundation Academic Freedom Conference in Toronto on February 26-27. Bose argued that marking or rating professors' performance on the basis of student evaluations produces a market value of a contract faculty's teaching skills.



Credit: <http://laverne.edu/campus-times/category/2-opinions/>

teaching can determine the future of our careers. But that is exactly what occurs when student evaluations are included in assessing tenure and promotion decisions or when they affect decisions to re-appoint a contract faculty member. Students—with no training in job evaluation or teaching—are granted the responsibility of possibly making or breaking a faculty member's career. This situation is a particularly damaging reality when it comes to the careers of contract faculty who depend on these evaluations for their next course hiring. Sarika Bose,

This “commodification” of student evaluations creates problems for contract faculty who are constantly walking on a tightrope: the pressure exists to design their courses to be edgy, up-to-date and current, but not too difficult or controversial so that students might rate them negatively. As well, pressures to follow department expectations about evaluation benchmarks (which are not necessarily stated formally) can lead contract faculty to choose safe topics and stay away

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It's about fairness

In this series of articles, the Advocate explores the relationship of Contract Faculty members with the University, taking on prevalent misconceptions or “myths” about their working conditions, and providing some hard facts and figures so readers can assess the fairness of the two-tiered employment standards that are now well entrenched at Laurier. As we prepare to renew the Part-time Faculty Collective Agreement this spring, all faculty have the opportunity to press the Administration to address these and other issues.



Myth #4: More than just academic infill

By Kimberly Ellis-Hale, Sociology

Our Administration is quick to report—and with rock solid consistency—that the ratio of students to full-time faculty

is absolutely within the dictates of the [Full-time Faculty and Professional Librarian Collective Agreement](#). In other words, Contract Faculty (CF) are hired only in proportion to what is contractually permitted: 25 (full-time equivalent) students for each (full-time equivalent) faculty member (Article 18.2.3.1). The Administration also insists that, as stated in that Agreement, CF teach no more than 35 percent of courses (Article 34.4(a)). It is not unreasonable then to conclude that CF are academic infill—a supplementary workforce, reinforcing the principal, full-time, permanent mainstay of the university.

By the letter of the law, the Administration is correct. With such a consistent and concise message borne out by irrefutable calculations, why question it?

Well, there is a matter of reality. We know a little about this because a comprehensive review of CF teaching undertaken in preparation for the last round of contract negotiations found that CF were responsible for 55 percent of student course spots in 2012-2013. That is, of all the individual student course registrations, more than half were for courses taught by CF. Fast forward to today and, despite the significant stipend cuts in 2015, the situation remains largely unchanged: CF continue to teach unprecedented numbers of students in a growing number of courses. Yet the Administration steadfastly refuses to publicly acknowledge this, and repeatedly states that teaching by CF does not exceed the 25:1 student-to-faculty ratio, or the 35 percent cap.

Is it possible that WLUFAs numbers and the Administration's are both correct? Yes.

Let's go back to the letter of the law, for that is where we can begin to unravel this numeric conundrum.

The law—as set out in the CA—defines a course in a very curious way. Apparently online and sprummer courses (with the exception of certain SBE offerings) are not *really* courses. Funny that, because that's just where you'll find a lot of Contract Faculty. The law also excludes adjustments accompanying provisional appointments (the first stage in a tenure-track appointment), retirement replacements, and labs and tutorials from its definition of what comprises a “course.”

These may all look and smell and walk like a course, but they are not—according to Article 2—courses. Insofar as it is precisely these non-courses that are taught overwhelmingly by CF, this restrictive definition skews the calculations of ratio and caps dramatically. And, more to the point, when all the “exceptions” are included, it becomes clear that CF are *not* academic infill as the Administration would like you to believe. They are very likely the new workforce majority—comprising the solid ground under Laurier's feet.

Why has WLUFAs gone along with and agreed to include this definition in the Collective Agreement? Well, “it's a tricky issue” for the Association, says WLUFAs Executive Director, Sheila McKee-Protopapas. Were the definition of a course to change, it could reduce the number of courses available to CF to teach. That is, if online and sprummer courses are defined as courses, then the total number of courses taught by CF will go up, which means CF teaching would exceed the 35 percent cap. At that point, financial penalties for the Administration kick in. As a result, the Administration will do all it can to avoid this scenario by lowering the number of courses taught by CF—maybe by increasing class sizes or pushing regular faculty to teach more on overload.

WLUFAs does, however, raise the issue at every full-time contract negotiating table, proposing that sprummer and online courses are included in the definition of a course. “We feel that this teaching should be recognized and placed on an equal footing with other courses taught at Laurier,” explains McKee-Protopapas.

At first glance this issue may seem relevant only to Contract Faculty. But the cap restrictions clearly make it an issue for permanent faculty, too. As things stand, permanent faculty are shouldering the increasing burden of university and department responsibilities with a shrinking number of colleagues. Recognizing that CF are not academic infill—and addressing the inequities that arise from the pretence that they are—is a compelling basis on which to build solidarity between WLUFAs two bargaining units.

After all, without solidarity, the ground upon which Laurier stands is only weakened.

OCUFA conference on contract faculty, a precariously employed majority

By Anne-Marie Allison, Mathematics and member of the CAS Negotiating Team

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) hosted a conference in Toronto on February 11-12. Confronting Precarious Academic Work brought together students, tenure-track and contract faculty, journalists, policymakers and union representatives. As a member of the 2016 CAS Negotiating Team and as a contract faculty member, I was thrilled to be immersed in an atmosphere that recognized and respected my contributions as—take your pick!—a “sessional,” a “part-timer,” a “gypsy lecturer,” “adjunct faculty,” “contingent faculty” or an “invisible majority.” I was also somehow reassured that contract faculty are not alone—we are a fast growing sector of the workforce not just in Ontario universities, not just in Canada, but around the world.

That is definitely not a new statement. (See “[Contract faculty: An international challenge](#)” and “[Precarious employment is becoming a way of life & academia is no exception](#).”) But it is most certainly an abysmal and frustrating truth. Speakers and attendees came from across Canada and around the world—the US, the UK and Australia—to address the employment precarity of contract academics. The exploitation of the contract faculty workforce and the ever-growing challenges thrust upon universities to the potential detriment of student education is a worldwide epidemic. Dr. Guy Standing, Professor of Development Studies at the University of London, describes an emerging class of people, the “precariat,” who face lives of insecurity as they cope with jobs that are far from guaranteed, temporary, low-waged, and/or part-time. In her introduction for Dr. Standing's talk, the moderator, Grace K. Stephenson, PhD candidate from OISE, University of Toronto and University World News contributor, joked that she was a “sessional in training,” and said Dr. Standing believes that contract faculty are part of the most educated underclass in the history of humanity. He gave an impactful and eloquent keynote address titled, “Global trends in precarious labour and international responses.”

Dr. André Turcotte, Associate Professor, School of Journalism and Communication, Carleton University, discussed results of an OCUFA public opinion poll that charted Ontarians' perceptions of precarious academic work. The survey reveals that Ontarians gave nearly full support to modifying current university practices to convert part-time positions to full-time positions.

Also, Ontarians think that universities should be model employers and support good jobs in their communities. There is near universal support among the respondents to the survey for fairness in hiring, equal pay for equal work, provision of health and pension benefits, assurance of adequate course preparation time and the first option to teach familiar courses. Results of the poll can be found on the [OCUFA website](#).

In a panel discussion asking, “What do we know about the impact of precarious academic labour on contract faculty and our university communities,” Dr. Jamie Brownlee, Department of Law and Legal Studies, Carleton University, recounted his struggle to obtain data on contract faculty from various universities. Even after exercising the Freedom of Information Act, he was still stonewalled by Administrators. Dr. Brownlee likened the veiled threats and questions about how he intended to use the data to the sorts of techniques used by mafia bosses.

In the UK, many contract faculty are hired under “zero-hour contracts.” These contracts offer no fixed hours or income. See the article by Jonathan White, “[Zero-hour contract and precarious academic work in the UK](#).” White, who is the Bargaining and Negotiations official from University and College Union in the UK,



<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/most-university-undergrads-now-taught-by-poorly-paid-part-timers-1.2756024>

highlights the prevalence of faculty on fixed-term contracts, many of them hourly-paid.

Maria Maisto, an activist and organizer for contingent faculty and for the integrity of higher education is the president of the [New Faculty Majority](#), a non-profit

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How the modern university may go the way of the monasteries

Dr. Jason Sager, former CAS, Department of History

The other evening, I met up with a good friend and former colleague from Laurier at one of my favourite haunts in Waterloo. It was a thoroughly enjoyable evening as it had been some time since we had last seen each other. Surrounded by exposed brick and artificially distressed wood, I was reminded of why I loved academic life in spite of being underpaid and underemployed as a contact faculty member. Our conversation was sparkling and intellectually engaging. As the evening wore on, the conversation



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/47042618@N06/6737902495/in/photolist-bgpdqg-bgpvEF-bgpd6-9zZTkS-4opTqW/>

turned to the subject of the fate of the institutional university. Much of what we discussed has been explored in minute detail in different forums (although Stefan Collini's articles in the *London Review of Books* on the conditions universities in the UK face are harrowing and worth the read). However, my friend made a point that I found to be quite insightful.

Years ago during a conversation with his former PhD advisor, he had mentioned some of the growing realities of the modern university. After listening, the PhD advisor responded by comparing the modern university to medieval monasteries on the eve of their collapse during the Reformation of the 16th century.

As a historian of early modern Europe who slummed in the medieval era, I think that such a comparison makes considerable sense. Even at the dawn of the Reformation—which helped see off a millennia of old culture throughout northern Europe—there was little sense that the monastic enterprise would come to an end. Of course, complaints and social trends had begun

to undermine the privileged position that the monastic movement enjoyed throughout medieval Europe. While there had always been complaints about monastic laxity or abbatial abuses, the orders were too powerful and too protected to be really concerned that they would truly ever be displaced. Furthermore, after an existence of nearly 1,000 years, it is difficult to conceive that things would change so drastically. And yet change came, and the monasteries were displaced. In England, when Henry VIII turned his cannons on the religious orders during the Dissolution of the Monasteries—

leaving little more than the haunting ruins that now dot the Yorkshire landscape—he demolished more than the Gothic religious heritage of England; he tore down the religious and intellectual structures that had supported the monasteries and convents, forever altering England's religious landscape. However, the initial stages were less dramatic than that. In 1535, Thomas Cromwell led a commission to determine the spiritual state of England's monas-

teries. There was no question as to the outcome of the investigation. Reporting their findings in 1536, Cromwell and his agents presented a picture of a monastic world dominated by loose morals, gluttonous monks, illiterate abbots and centres of blasphemy—an image mostly of Cromwell's imagination. No matter. Within a few years, England's monastic heritage crumbled under Henry's onslaught.

In Germany, where the Lutheran Reformation took hold, monasteries were closed down and many of their inhabitants were married off or left to their own devices, events that anticipated developments in Revolutionary France nearly 300 years later. Even the regions of Europe where Catholicism maintained its primacy, the popularity of cloistered monasticism also waned in popularity.

So what does this have to do with the modern state of the university? Quite a bit, I think. First of all, today's university can trace its origins to the monastic and cathedral schools of the late 11th and early 12th

centuries. Hence, Universities and monasteries share a long-standing common tradition even as the university evolved over time. Throughout this evolution, universities for the most part maintained their basic structure and function for nearly 800 years. And like the monks did in 1500, we have assumed that the university would continue forever. Yet, as with the monasteries then, so too the universities are now under threat of disappearing.

To be fair, universities are not being bombarded with cannonade, but something more insidious is at play. For the past 30 to 40 years, the *raison d'être* of the university has come under attack in the guise of criticism of the value of the liberal arts and humanities. Disciplines such as History, English, Literary Studies and Art History are considered irrelevant to labour market demands of the 21st century. As a result, colleges of Arts throughout the Anglo-Saxon world have been on the defensive, attempting to mount a defense of our existence by emphasizing “skills” such subjects provide. The relevance of the humanities has been further eroded by the emphasis put on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects, again with the claim that graduates need to be ready for the jobs of the future. There is nothing wrong with the idea in principle and the more money available for the sciences should be welcomed. But that funding has come at the expense of the humanities. For example, at Laurier, a multimillion-dollar state-of-the-art building has been built to house the School of Business and Economics and the Department of Mathematics while the Faculty of Arts will end up being housed in the outdated and worn out hand-me-downs.

And just like the monasteries, universities have become complacent and failed to recognize our dependency on the goodwill of the society in which they operate. While there were many defenders of the old monastic world, the fact is, for a greater number of people, the monasteries had outlasted their value. Anyone who doesn't think that that is happening now only needs to read the comment section of any local paper to see how unsupported universities are by the general public.

* * *

With massive increases in university enrollment in the 1950s and 1960s, we assumed that our work was done. This was something the late Jane Jacobs understood.

The overturning of progressive victories achieved during the post-war period happened largely because we assumed the value and social benefits of those accomplishments—whether publically funded roads or the strengthening of the social safety net—would be self-evident to all, and require little effort on our part to constantly remind the public of their value.

Instead, we need to consistently fight these battles. Barry Goldwater's 1964 US presidential campaign was the first warning that progressive policies—often informed by the liberal arts—would be seen as frivolous luxuries, or even worse, dangerous. The Reagan-Thatcher decade was the warm-up act for what was to come in the subsequent 25 years.

Of course, other challenges to the existence of the university come from the same developments that have disrupted other sectors of the economy. The rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and advances in technology bring with them many exciting opportunities. (Imagine the possibility of inexpensive virtual reality technology to recreate a historical event that students could experience.) They also bring dangers. MOOCs have provided more people more opportunities to engage in continual learning, but they have exerted downward pressure on wages of university instructors as well, for example.

This is no *cri de coeur*, but rather a sobering acknowl-



gment that we might be witnessing the end of the university as we know it. Knowing the profound challenges facing the universities might mean that we can avoid the fate of the monasteries. By facing up to those challenges, we can still preserve the mission of the university while adapting to cultural, technological and political forces that will always be with us.

OCUFA conference on contract faculty (cont'd from p 3)

national organization in the US that advocates for contingent faculty. Maisto spoke about the formation of the organization and the growth of “so-called part-time faculty” who have little to no union support. “Faculty,” she argued, “are actually subsidizing very wealthy institutions that are making questionable decisions about resource allocation.” She said that her “group has addressed the health implications and the costs that are associated with the stress of contingent faculty work and the costs that that imposes on the state.” Although her group has had some success building solidarity with tenure-track faculty and gaining the backing of some Administrators, it has been challenged in reaching out to parents of students. The group’s findings about the delusions of higher education held by parents seems to echo other results of the OCUFA survey mentioned above.

Dr. Robyn May from the University of Melbourne reported on the casualization of labour in the academic profession in Australia. Her description is eerily similar to the situation in Canada: a decline in government funding, devolved budget models within universities, and the rise of managerialism. She quoted a university manager who said: “It’s a curious way to run a university that the teaching—the core business—is done by the most marginalised members of the community, and this impacts on both the casuals and the ongoing staff.”

In a panel session on why university governance is important to addressing precarious academic work, Erin Black, Vice Chair, CUPE 3902, University of Toronto, provided some insight in the words of her local’s members: “It is difficult to imagine what being valued and respected might mean in a system that systematically marginalizes an entire segment of its workforce. The fact that marginalization does not necessarily translate into hostility is commendable, but even so it is hard to feel valued and respected when one is on the outside looking in.” Contract faculty need to get other faculty and Administrators to “Involve us in key decisions as they affect us and the well-being of our students.” Laurier professor, Dr. Jim Gerlach, Chemistry and Biochemistry and CAS Chief Negotiator, rounded out the first day of panel discussions by summarizing the lack of representation at governance levels at WLU, citing an example that contract faculty cannot partake in the search for a university president.

The final keynote address was given by Dr. Karen Foster, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, and Canada Research Chair in Sustainable Rural Futures for Atlantic Canada, Dalhousie University. Foster polled the

contract academic staff at Nova Scotia universities about the stresses and insecurities of precarious academic work. Her findings are similar to those in WLUFA’s CAS Negotiating Team [survey](#). Key challenges (ranked in order of importance) are: (1) job insecurity, (2) time (notice of contracts) and (3) compensation. A majority of contract faculty find the precarity of their work stressful (mostly because they do not know whether they have steady employment). The majority do not think they are paid fairly: when they do the math, they realize they are paid below minimum wage.

The conference concluded with a panel on the way forward. It was both evocative and empowering. Dr. Frances Cachon, Department of Sociology, University of Windsor and OCUFA Contract Faculty/Faculty Complement Committee, gave a motivational speech about her experience as a contract faculty member. She urged tenure-track faculty to use their tenure to help the cause of the precariously employed contract academic. Precarious labor is not just affecting contract academics. Pam Frache, an organizer with the [Fight for \\$15 and Fairness](#) campaign, gave an energized speech about the unfortunate replacement of decent jobs with low-wage and precarious work.



The overall message of the conference is clear: universities need to be more accountable to their employees, students (*and* the folks who pay tuition, parents), and to the public; more and more post-secondary education is being delivered by contract faculty who have little to no job security and are paid very little for their industrious efforts; and building solidarity among faculty, students, university Administration and the broader community is vital to changing the working situation for the precariously employed at our universities.

I have only touched on the scope of the conference. I urge you to peruse the conference materials (agenda, slides, audio) available on the [OCUFA website](#).

You can listen to Dr. Standing’s speech (as well as those of other presenters) by clicking on the relevant Sound Cloud on the [conference website](#).

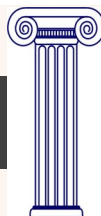
Student evaluations (cont'd from p 1)

from offending or discomforting statements. Untenured permanent faculty face similar pressures, but do not have to apply for a teaching position every term. Meanwhile, the threat of negative evaluations places contract faculty members in a constant state of surveillance; departmental expectations about evaluation results effectively polices the design of their syllabus and teaching methods.

So how do we evaluate teaching capabilities of university professors? The Centre for Teaching Innovation and Excellence here at Laurier will visit classes and provide feedback to faculty who request it. And some graduate programs incorporate courses on teacher training. Maybe this should become standard practice, and faculty should be encouraged and trained in following the methods endorsed by teacher training programs. Such supportive forms of evaluation are clearly preferable, and should in fact replace the current system in which hiring and promotion decisions are made by taking student evaluations into consideration. This would solve the problem of constant surveillance of teaching over the course of a faculty member's career. It is also possible to have expert and award-winning teachers, possibly from the Faculty of Education, to run periodic evaluations of faculty teaching as part of the process to improve teaching at the university level. Only then would university professors be in line with all other professions and their methods of evaluation in making career decisions.

Further reading:

- C. Havergal, "Course evaluation forms 'not read properly by students,'" in the March 2016 edition of *Times Higher Education*.
- A. Boring, K. Ottoboni and P.B. Stark, [Student Evaluations of Teaching \(mostly\) Do Not Measure Teaching Effectiveness](#), Science Open Research, 2016, (DOI: 10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-EDU.AETBZC.v1).



WLUF

Wilfrid Laurier University
Faculty Association

WLUF's changing of the guards ...

By Michele Kramer, WLUF President

After a very successful trial run with a new online voting system, WLUF is pleased to announce the members of your incoming Association Executive for 2016-2017. They are:

Anne-Marie Allison	Judy Bates
Kari Brozowski	Timothy Donais
Kimberly Ellis-Hale	Azim Essaji
Jim Gerlach	Angele Hamel
Michele Kramer	Rob Kristofferson
Adam Metzler	

While many of the members of the incoming Executive are familiar faces, we are especially excited that we'll be getting an injection of some "new blood" with the additions of Anne-Marie, Timothy and Adam. Their service, of course, means that we're also saying good-bye to other members whose valuable input will be greatly missed. Joanne Oud, Glenda Wall and Stephen Wenn are all taking some time away from Association duties this year in order to gain some much-needed research time.

And, we'd like to thank the four Members who offered themselves as nominees this year but were not voted in: Chris Klassen, Chad Lebold, Houman Mortazavi and Stephen Svenson. Significantly, all four are CAS colleagues and this means that—in this election—we had more new contract faculty offer themselves for election than new full-time members. Hopefully, we'll see their names on a ballot again in the future!

WLUF Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, April 20, 1:00 p.m.
Turret • Waterloo Campus

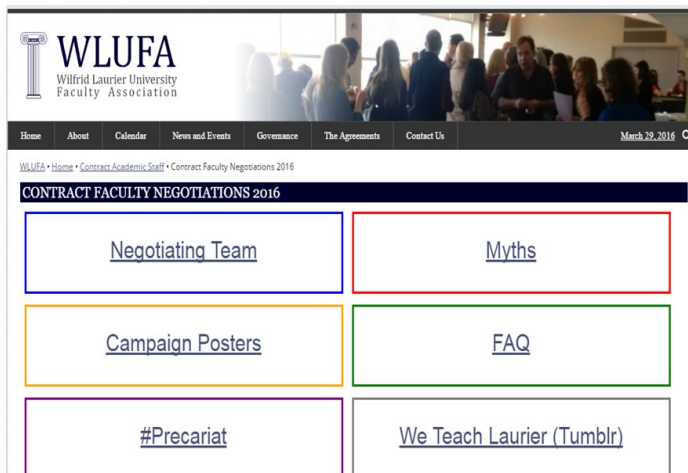


WLUF Annual Spring Wine & Cheese Social

Wednesday, April 20, 4:00 p.m.
Hawk's Nest • Waterloo Campus

Visit our Contract Faculty Negotiations 2016 webpage

As WLUFAs heads into Negotiations with the Administration for a new Part-time Contract Academic Staff and Part-time Librarians Collective Agreement, we want to keep you informed of all the issues. Take some time to wander through the site, where you'll find news and background about what's going on at the bargaining table, and the issues Contract Faculty are facing at Laurier and beyond. We encourage you to send in any questions to wluфа@wlu.ca you may want answered, and **to download posters and other materials related to campaigns we're supporting**. Let us know what else you'd like to see there!



Did you know that the WLUFAs Advocate also hosts a blog?

We do! We use it to publish articles and announcements that we want to get to you as soon as possible, and the occasional article that's too long to include in the regular issues of the *Advocate*. If you've not yet visited the blog, or forgotten it exists, [please check it out](#).

This year's blog posts include:

- Two letters to President Blouw—one by an alumnus, the other by a labour studies expert—asking him to withdraw his plans to outsource custodial services in the new buildings on the Waterloo campus.
- A Canadian University Teachers Association (CAUT) job posting for a Professional Office position.
- A summary of the Divestment campaign letter that urges President Blouw's Administration to take steps to protect Laurier's investment "portfolio against a carbon-constrained future and to remove the social license of fossil fuel companies to damage the climate any more than they have already done."
 - Past issues of the *Advocate*
 - Contract Faculty Bargaining Survey results
 - The results of our "Whaddya Say, John A?" contest

You can find the blog by visiting the [WLUFAs web page](#) and clicking on the WLUFAs *Advocate* blog icon in our list of social media sites at the bottom right-hand side of your screen. Or click on the larger WLUFAs Newsletter icon on the left-hand side of the screen, and follow the links.

Thank You!

Thank you and congratulations to all the students, staff, faculty and other community members who worked so hard to stop the statue project from going ahead.



Many thanks also to this year's members of the Communications Committee—Sue Ferguson (Director), Kimberly Ellis-Hale (Officer), Anne-Marie Allison, Kari Brozowski, Azim Essaji and Matthew Thomas—for helping WLUFAs Members stay in touch with workplace issues and politics. The committee's annual report will be available at the WLUFAs AGM on April 20.