

MAFA NEWSLETTER

Mount Allison Faculty Association
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

With this newsletter the 2013-2014 MAFA Executive wraps up its term and the new 2014-2015 MAFA Executive comes on line. We thank all of those who served this past year and we give our warmest welcome to those who are returning as well as those who are joining us for the first time. Because it is the last newsletter of an eventful year, I must beg the indulgence of a longer than usual President's message.

In concluding this year we face an unusual and challenging situation. The strike that began on January 27th ended but we returned to work without a new collective agreement, having deferred the resolution of our dispute with the Employer to binding arbitration. It is not just the terms and conditions of our employment that remain unresolved, however. The conditions that we faced during the strike as well as the conditions under which the strike ended have made a return to the life of the institution that we left on January 27th more difficult to manage.

The difficulty that stands in the way of resolving the strike begins with the very different accounts given by MAFA and the Employer over the reasons behind the strike.

MAFA's communications cast the strike as the result of a collision over different visions of the institution, between, on the one hand, an idea of the institution as a university community devoted to teaching and research, and, on the other, an idea of the institution as an edu-corp aimed at enhancing consumer satisfaction and maximizing product sales. Teaching and research are necessary to the edu-corp but not as ends in themselves, only as means to serve the requirements of the institution, and they need to be controlled for this purpose.

The Employer's communications denied that any significant difference of institutional vision was at issue in the negotiations. MAFA's claims that the Employer's proposals increased administrative control over academic work were met with professions of confusion and consternation. The denial that any difference of institutional vision was at issue became central to the Employer's media strategy: scenes of high minded outrage at the bargaining table over MAFA's claims which the MAFA Team regarded as a time wasting diversion turned out to be staging for the next day's media release.

These denials gave a peculiar air of unreality to the strike that the Employer presented to the public. If there was nothing important at stake, if, as was often asserted, the Employer proposals intended no substantial changes and raised no matters of controversy, then the strike appeared to have no reason for its existence. The faculty imagined that the strike was necessary but, the Employer insisted, there was no need for it. MAFA must have conjured the strike. The slim difference of a few percentage points in salary had been spun into an

unbridgeable gulf. The faculty and librarians on the picket lines, caught in the MAFA spell, must have lost their senses.

There can be no denying that MAFA members decided to go on strike. We held a strike vote in which members authorized the Executive to call a strike if necessary. The Executive voted to set a deadline for the strike, and the strike was called when the Negotiating Team gave notice to the Executive that negotiations had failed to reach an agreement by the deadline. Each of these moments of decision was public, and the reasons behind them were publicly discussed in some detail. But the Employer, by its own account, appears to have decided nothing at all bearing on the strike. By the Employer's account MAFA alone had the agency to begin the strike; MAFA alone had the agency to determine its duration and the timing and terms of its conclusion. The strike figured in the Employer's communications as an inexplicable mystery, a natural catastrophe over which it could not be expected to have any control.



The picket lines are down now and the institution has been busy with the most pressing work of getting the students through the term. But the air of unreality in the Employer's relation to the strike persists. It is as if by evading the matter of its own agency in having made the strike the Employer might manage to effect its unmaking, so that it would be for them as well as for everyone else as if the strike had never occurred at all.

The same fantastical denial of reality surfaced again in recent weeks, when the faculty's contestation of budget priorities and collegial governance culminating in the non-confidence vote at Faculty Council were met with the by now familiar denial that there was any significant difference of views over the direction of the institution, and the familiar cloying assurances of harmony. This time the denial of reality was even more ambitious than the denial of the strike: there never was any meeting of Faculty Council, and there never was any vote.

MAFA members have not taken leave of our senses. We remember the reasons why we decided to join our colleagues on the picket lines on January 27th, and we stand by our original understanding of the different institutional visions underlying our proposals and the Employer's proposals. Although the strike has concluded these proposals remain before us, still disputed, still to be settled through binding arbitration. It remains to be seen whether or not the Employer will have the courage to acknowledge its own agency in this next phase, whether, indeed, the Employer will have the courage to take responsibility for the kind of institution that it is aiming to create even over the objections of faculty and librarians. If we find more of the same, the same evasions of agency and responsibility, the same denials of reality, in those evasions and denials we will find once again the truth of the Employer's institutional vision. And, once again not unmindful of the irony with which the truth of things is often revealed, we will mark the distance between that vision and our own.

Loralea Michaelis
President

**OUTSTANDING STUDENT VOLUNTEER
AWARDED
GEORGE J. DE BENEDETTI BOOK PRIZE**

Congratulations to Alex Whynot, the 2013-14 winner of the George J. De Benedetti Book Prize. The prize is awarded to the student who, following George's example, is engaged in social activism, advocacy work, and student, university-wide, and /or broader community issues.

Alex won the award as the result of his tireless volunteering and leadership in the Global Brigades Movement, the Terry Fox Foundation, and the Brain Tumor Community in Halifax.

**REPORT FROM THE CAUT ABORIGINAL
STAFF FORUM**

In late 2011 I had the privilege of attending the CAUT Aboriginal Staff Forum, and it was such a positive experience, I found it easy to decide to go again on behalf of MAFA members in November 2013. In 2011 there were about 66,000 CAUT members in Canada, and about 400 elders, staff and aboriginal faculty at Canadian institutions. The current best guess is that these numbers did not change much in 2 years. Part of the problem is the primary means of gaining this information was lost when the Canadian Government altered the way it conducts the census. There have been some apparent increases in representation across the country, mainly in Western Canada, but Atlantic Canada continues to dramatically lag behind other regions in Aboriginal representation throughout academia.

The Aboriginal Staff Forum features traditional ceremonies, songs, and talking circles led by distinguished elders. No matter the subject, deep levels of catharsis occur, and it is an emotionally tiring but highly worthwhile, inspiring experience. A haunting memory from a sharing circle was from a dear friend, a residential school survivor, who, having made it through undergraduate and advanced degrees, went to her first academic job interview. Upon being brought to the building for her interview, she stared in horror as she realized it was a decommissioned building from the government,

annexed by the university, that was the standard plan of all residential schools built in Ontario. She was able to get through the interview, but things fell apart when they tried to give her a tour of the building. She was unable to go to the fifth floor, a floor where very personal demons still lurked. It made me realize how lucky I was when I interviewed in the non-threatening halls of Avard Dixon. Unfortunately, stories of cultural insensitivity and misconceptions, whether inadvertent or seemingly otherwise, are all too common among aboriginal faculty in Canada.

The most important message I returned with was the poor way that most universities are trying to capture the Aboriginal "tuition dollar." Some universities, especially those with programs that offer a bridging year for students to get into a mainstream university, are doing better than most. But by and large, administration teams from across the country seem to have bought into the idea that all First Nations people get a "free education" from the government, and so there is a rush to try to capture this easy tuition money. The problem is that the students are the least of their worries, and when the students fail, band councils often withdraw the tuition dollars and use them elsewhere. With this in mind, I'm hopeful that the newly formed Association of Atlantic Universities' Aboriginal Working Party, supported by Mount Allison, will be a step in the right direction first for Aboriginal students and ultimately for Aboriginal faculty.

Colin Laroque
(Formerly) Geography and Environment

**MAFA MEMBERSHIP TAKES A STAND AT
RECENT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

At the MAFA Annual General Meeting on April 14th, the MAFA membership passed the following two motions unanimously:

With Michael Fox in the chair, President Lorelea Michaelis moved, seconded by David Thomas, that in recognition of the work of the Student Strike Head Quarters during the 2014 MAFA strike--and the particular contributions of Alex Thomas, Laura Gallivan and Erik Sin to this exemplary

universities from other places of work. This professional right is more than just the freedom of expression and extends to freedom in teaching, freedom in research and scholarship, intramural as well as extramural academic freedom. However, this understanding of academic freedom has been contested over the years in different forms and shapes. One of the group discussions of this workshop was devoted to how subjective interpretation and selective enforcement of respectful workplace policies impact academic freedom.

Outsourcing email communications by some universities in connection to safeguarding the privacy of emails was another topic of discussion at this workshop. It was pointed out that moving to a Canadian provider as opposed to a U.S. based one like Google has the advantage that Canadian law can be invoked when needed, and there is no protection under American law for non-residents (such as under the US Patriot Act). Also, one can argue that the research funding from the Tri-council agencies come with privacy stipulations which are not compatible with outsourcing email communications to non-Canadian providers.

Member-on-member disputes were the topic of discussion in the last session of the workshop. It was important for faculty associations to encourage members to press the employer for assistance in resolving these

disputes, and to try to put the necessary language in the collective agreement to require the employer to notify the association if such cases arise. For example, if the conflict is a workplace harassment case, the faculty association can frame it as a grievance about the employer's obligation to provide a harassment-free workplace. This is in contrast to the employer's handling of the case through the respectful workplace policy for which disciplinary measures may be warranted.

Mohammed Ahmady
Collective Bargaining Officer



On April 14, 2014, MAFA was pleased to present pottery by Rachel Morouney to Danise Ferguson and Robert Hawkes, two long-time MAFA members who will retire on June 30th. Above, Danise is pictured with two members of her Tenure and Promotion Committee.
Source: Ron Boorne

MAFA 2013-2014 EXECUTIVE

Loralea Michaelis, President
Michael Fox, Vice-President
Zoe Finkel, Past President
Mohammed Ahmady, Collective Bargaining
Mark Fedyk, Grievance Officer
Lori Ann Roness, Part-time/Unit 2
Robert Rosebrugh, Treasurer
Renata Schellenberg, Membership

Helen Pridmore, Chief Negotiator

MAFA 2014-2015 EXECUTIVE

Loralea Michaelis, President
Dave Thomas, Vice-President
Zoe Finkel, Past President
Jane Dryden, Collective Bargaining
Rick Hudson, Grievance Officer
Lori Ann Roness, Part-time/Unit 2
Robert Rosebrugh, Treasurer
Mike Fox, Membership

Helen Pridmore, Chief Negotiator

Note to members: Mark Fedyk will be continuing to serve as Grievance Officer until June 30th, 2014, when Rick Hudson's 2013-2014 sabbatical concludes.