

## Rebellious Responses to the Walmartization of Canadian Higher Education

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**ABSTRACT:** Canadian higher education has been heading in a general neoliberal direction for quite sometime with most universities employing similar strategies. The example of Wilfrid Laurier University is used to first illustrate some of those strategies and then later on to show a relatively new one. WLU's Integrated Planning and Resource Management (IPRM) process is very much like similar processes being undertaken at a number of Canadian Universities. It is a management strategy to more easily enable unpopular cuts to staff and programs and legitimate the process through enlisting faculty "cooperation". The APRM is the faculty union's commissioned alternative report and will be a focal point of resistance with its very different set of recommendations. However, an argument is also made that, though while worthwhile, such-like actions will not nearly be enough to prompt a significant change in institutional direction. It is argued that though there are many prongs to the neo-liberal attack upon higher education, the most significant one is the casualization of its teaching labour force. It is argued that strong action by tenured and tenure track faculty is required to not only eradicate the injustices inherent in the situations of our contract academic colleagues but that this is actually the key to preserving quality education.

**KEYWORDS:** Neoliberalism, Education, Casual Labour, Resource Management, Austerity

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## INTRODUCTION

*Walmart: The High Cost of Low Price* was a documentary film showing the uglier side of the corporation. If cost cutting and cheap products are two of Walmart's prominent characteristics, and if a hidden but nonetheless extremely high cost, is also part of the neoliberal management of the higher education sector, then Walmartization is indeed an apt metaphor to apply to Canadian higher education.<sup>2</sup> Some would even assert that with the Walton Family Foundation becoming the major source of private funding support for the development of charter-school alternatives to public schools Walmartization is more than a metaphor (Martinkich, 2014).

But there are more similarities between higher education and Walmart as well. There is an ever increasing reliance upon cheap casual labour. There is a constant aggressive expansion of universities, both in a physical sense, a never ending building program, and in terms of student numbers. Understandably universities are leaders in technological innovation but they are also at the forefront of the battle to manage and control it. There is also a constant review of its various "systems": systems of knowledge delivery, systems of administration, systems of resource allocation. This last review, the review of resource allocation, will be the particular focus of this article, as a focal point of this Walmartization process and as a site of resistance to it. The hidden, high cost of this Walmartization of higher education is the destruction of quality education. The hidden, high cost is the end of the university as an institution in any presently recognizable form.

First, I provide an overview of the strategies and policies commonly implemented by Canadian universities in the last few decades. I then discuss faculty involvement in a certain kind of resource allocation exercise as one of the more recent processes imposed upon them. This has been attempted in a number of Canadian institutions but I will focus upon my own university – Wilfrid Laurier – as an example to illustrate most of my points. Next, again using my own university and my own union, I discuss two different sorts of "rebellious responses". The first of these is already being done; while the second may never be, but is instead being presented as an analysis, an argument and a call to action. It is an intervention in those ongoing Marxist questions: Who will educate the educators? And what is to be done?

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<sup>2</sup> For further utilizations of Walmartization in relation to higher education see, for example: Bios, 2013; Hoeller, 2014.

## STRATEGIES OF THE CANADIAN NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

Government regulation and financing of education in Canada is a mixture of federal and provincial responsibility, with the latter having the greatest responsibility, effects and control over direction. The kind of governance they provide varies by province from year to year dependent upon the vagaries of electoral politics. However, there is nonetheless a country-wide common trend. This has been in accord with an even broader trend internationally in the English speaking countries of New Zealand, Australia, the UK and the US. The trend is to move toward neoliberal ideals of educational service, to acting upon short term economic interests, to privatizations, and most crucially, to a cost-benefit analysis being the guiding principle of resource allocation. This broad ideological context internationally has framed the more particular policy direction and strategies that will be outlined below.<sup>3</sup>

The first thing to note is that there has been an enormous expansion of student enrollment in the last decades or so. But this expansion in numbers has been without a corresponding increase in the government financing of universities. The trend can be clearly seen for Ontario in Table 1. Wilfrid Laurier has doubled its enrollment in the last five years (Wilfrid Laurier, 2014).

**Table 1: Summary of Fall Term Full-time Enrollments in Ontario Universities, 2003-04 - 2012-13**

2003-04	312,987	2008-09	367,150
2004-05	330,772	2009-10	383,805
2005-06	346,673	2010-11	397,653
2006-07	355,763	2011-12	409,569
2007-08	359,250	2012-13	419,963

Source: Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2014.

A single sentence from the Report of the Advisory Panel on Future Directions for Postsecondary Education to the Ministry of Training,

<sup>3</sup> There is a large and growing scholarly literature upon various aspects of neoliberal reforms and its philosophical framing of issues affecting higher education management. See for example: Tores and Schugurensky, 2002; Sears, 2003; Lipman, 2011.

Colleges and Universities (MTCU) in 1996 sums up the Ontario policy direction for the past decade: “Historically, colleges and universities have demonstrated their ability to accommodate increased enrollment demand in an environment of constraint.”

Professors, both full-time and sessionals, have often acceded to the constant administrative pressure to “do more with less”. This certainly includes more marking and administrative responsibilities, but it is questionable whether this includes more educationally.

I support the democratization of education, including higher education. But I do not believe that an increased percentage of the population attending university simply achieves this. While the underfunded expansionary policies of government and university administrations has resulted in a number of things, a better educated populace is not one of them. The first thing to result from the “do more, with less policies”, were larger class sizes, often much larger. This point was made in dramatic fashion in a joint Senate and Board of Governors (BoG) meeting at Laurier. One of my colleagues, Thomas Hueglin, had taught the then Chair of the BoG twenty-five years earlier. He asked the Chair if he remembered the class and received a complimentary reply. He then followed with a question as whether he remembered the size of the class. Twelve or fifteen was the reply. “Well” said Thomas, “I’m glad you liked the class. I still teach it. Only this term the class size is one hundred and seventy-five!”.

Small seminar classes still exist of course, though now usually only in the students’ final year. The large introductory classes are now largely devoid of written work because the marking load would simply be too onerous. Written assignments have been shifting more and more to machine marked multiple choice assessment. This educational choice was certainly not thought desirable by any professor. Rather it was and is a pragmatic response to increased class sizes. In order to enable a higher percentage of Ontario high school students to attend university required a lowering of entrance requirements. This manifested itself particularly at Laurier in the Faculty of Arts. These lower entrance requirements went along with a simultaneous general grade inflation in high school. In an interview with journalist Michael Woods, James Côté, a sociology professor at the University of Western Ontario, notes:

“When the Ontario Scholar program was introduced in the 1960s, average performers were C-students and A-students were considered exceptional...Now, 90 per cent of Ontario students have a B average

or above, and 60 percent of students applying to university have an A average.”

Grade inflation is also occurring at the university level because we were not only supposed to admit these “lower achievers” but to retain and hopefully graduate them. The lowered entrance requirements for Laurier’s Arts Faculty produced a crisis in the Fall term of 2010 (The Cord, 2011): After closely monitoring their fall-term data for the first time in recent years, the faculty of arts has discovered an alarming statistic – out of five first-year arts students, approximately two are at a high risk of landing on academic probation or not being able to declare their major in second year. Thus, an ever increasing amount of time and resources was needed to address this crisis in order to retain these students. Thus, more and more time is needed to be spent upon remedial instruction. While many students are ‘getting through’, this strategy overall is resulting not in a better educated public but rather a public with a higher proportion of academic credentials. Both the politicians and the university administrators seem content with this.

## **AUSTERITY BUDGETING AND SURPLUS TRANSFERS**

As Naomi Klein (2007) argued in *The Shock Doctrine*, a crisis is a way of achieving otherwise unpopular changes. The crisis need not be real. As CAUT Director Jim Turk (in Kershaw, 2009) asserted: “What is publicly perceived as a crisis can be a convenient opportunity to push through changes that administrators may want even when the circumstances at a particular university don’t justify them.” Senior administrators, particularly the Finance Vice-Presidents, are perpetually telling their university communities that we are in very bad shape financially. They scare us about our pensions. And they insist on austerity budgets. So, we never get the budgetary increases necessary to deal with the burdens of the increased student numbers. And we often get cuts. We get cuts to course stipends available, cutbacks to program offerings and demands for penny pinching savings to be made to normal office or teaching practices.

An example of this last sort of cut at Laurier was the decree that we could no longer afford to pay for the printing of course outlines. So instead of the usual practice of instructors at the beginning of courses to pass out course outlines to students and go over them, we now simply tell them to download them and print them themselves from the website. Well, some students do this, some students do not. Some students prefer

to individually email their instructors to ask them for the relevant pieces of information, as and when it occurs to them. This “money saving” policy, in terms of the additional time spent by instructors emailing, seems like a false economy.

Oftentimes there are surpluses at the end of the budgetary year. These surpluses, however, seldom go back into operational budgets, which includes staff and faculty wages, heating and light and materials, etc. Rather they are transferred into the capital fund. This is reserved for real estate acquisitions and construction costs. Laurier, it seems (and this may certainly apply to other universities), is increasingly a real estate and holding company, as much as an educational institution. We are buying and selling; we are renters and rentees; we are constantly tearing down and building.

Apparently we do this well. Laurier has got a good deal renting prime space in a downtown Toronto building. Our recent sixty million dollar apartment purchases alongside the Waterloo campus are set to bring in rental profits for years to come. This is why the BoG, with their preponderance of a business people membership, cannot see any problem. Yes, we are buying and selling and building. But we are also profiting on this. This is precisely the neoliberal vision, the bottom line as they say. But while we are making millions in the real estate game, we still cannot afford to give our students course outlines, or an Anthropology Department (Laurier’s was recently abolished). This is because the transfers of surplus from operations to capital are never transferred back because the profits made in real estate never come back to pay for actual education, only buildings.

The University of Western Ontario has had a similar situation to Laurier’s in this regard (as have had most other Ontario universities). The University of Western Ontario Faculty Association (AWOFA) recently commissioned some financial analysts to prepare a report on the issue, entitled *Every Budget is a Choice* (University of Western Ontario, 2014, p.3). It is worth quoting from this document at length:

“When we hear that our employer doesn’t have funds available to hire the normal contingent of contract academic staff, or to give pay increases that match those at other universities, it is because they have funds tied up in assets – investments, buildings and equipment – and are unwilling to liquidate any of their investments or finance buildings and equipment through debt in order to allow them more cash to meet operational needs. What they are saying is that when

money is used to fund capital projects, or is invested, that is where it stays. This creates a one-way street: money doesn't ever flow back to the operating fund to help with operating deficits or rising costs, or to maintain an appropriate staffing level, no matter how flush the capital or reserve funds are. It would only require a change in policy for the board of governors to transfer money back into the operating fund. *At this university, at this time, any shortfall of operating funds is an artificial problem of the board's own making.*"

## **CASUAL LABOUR: THE KEYSTONE OF THE WALMARTIZATION PROCESS**

It is a simple strategy that worked for Walmart and seems to be working for higher education as well. Universities are replacing tenure-track and tenured full-time professors with a casual labour force to do the teaching. This is what contract academic labour essentially is: casual labour. Adjuncts, as they are called in the US, sessionals as they are called in Canada, are very low paid, have extremely tenuous job security and few, if any, benefits. Fortunately, Canada has public health coverage, which, of course makes Canadian sessionals immediately much better off than their American colleagues. But they still lack such things as dental coverage or supplements to health insurance for prescription drug purchases, for example, and quite crucially they lack a pension plan.

Sessionals have historically been called part-timers. This is not only a very misleading term, it is positively insulting. As a tenured professor my full-time teaching load is four course units – two courses each term. Many of the contract academic faculty at WLU teach three courses a term here and sometimes another three in the Spring and Summer terms. Many, of course, do not do all their teaching at Laurier's main campus but have their teaching split between campuses (an hour apart by car and impossible to reach by public transit). Many do not do all their teaching at Laurier at all as they teach for multiple universities. A character in a recent novel – *Fight for Your Long Day* by Alex Kundera (2010) – taught at four different universities in Philadelphia. This novel might be fiction but it was grounded in the realities of the Canadian, as well as the American, adjunct/sessional experience.

Most American adjuncts are much worse off than their Canadian colleagues in matters of pay as well. Few of them are unionized, which contributes to a situation where the pay scale of the Canadian underpayment of teaching would seem like a positively utopian dream to them.

But it is no utopia. Were a sessional at Laurier to teach twice as many courses as I do (and many, of course, do) their pay would still be (literally) less than half of mine. Expanding class sizes is not sufficient alone to make the “do more with less” strategy work. An ever increasing casualization of the academic workforce is in fact absolutely key to the whole process of the transformation of universities into big box stores of educational credentials.

## THE NEXT STEP IN THE NEOLIBERAL ONSLAUGHT

So far the replacement of tenure-track and tenured full-time professors with a casual labour force has mainly been done by not replacing tenured retirees with tenure track positions and by ensuring that the new teaching requirements of the university (because of the enormous expansion in student numbers) has mainly been filled by contract academics. But this is not sufficient. A new strategy is required for the further cuts to staff and programs required to achieve the neoliberal multi-campus, mega-university ideal.

Senior administrators are aware that these coming cuts will be very unpopular among faculty. Thus, with the help of some American consultants, they have devised a way to head off such resistance as may be generated in advance through enlisting the faculty’s aid, through giving them an emotional and intellectual investment in making the cuts, and by also causing the faculty to fight among themselves.<sup>4</sup> The Integrated Planning and Resource Management (IPRM) process was thus initiated at Laurier. The IPRM is simply the Laurier variant of a larger process called ‘program prioritization’ developed by U.S.-based consultant Robert Dickeson and implemented at a variety of universities in that country. This American process is now being exported to Canada where a small number of universities – including the University of Saskatchewan, Brock, York, Guelph and Laurier – are implementing this method (Salatka and Kristofferson, 2014).

The university’s web page (WLU, 2014) describes it thus: “A resource-allocation process will be developed that will then be utilized to direct resources to the major academic and administrative priorities of the university”. In other words: the process will decide where cuts to staff and academic programs are to be made. It should be emphasized that implementing cuts is something that was being planned anyway. Although this would be vigorously and directly denied by the

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<sup>4</sup> See Dickeson, 2010. And for a specific critique of Dickeson’s thinking see Heron, 2013.



administration as being the purpose of the IPRM exercise. Rather they would say things like ‘the process is to discover our strengths and weaknesses and to channel resources toward areas of excellence’. (I am paraphrasing here things repeated many, many times in the Senate debates about whether or not to implement the process). However, they are quite correct to assert that the process is not all about making cuts. This was going to be done anyway. Rather the process is very significantly about ideologically legitimating such cuts. It states on the Laurier website (WLU, 2014): “The Planning Task Force is strongly represented by faculty and will approve the prioritization criteria for both academic and administrative areas”. Translation: we want you to make the cuts for us!

The recommendations the IPRM makes will still have to be approved by Senate, as the legally constituted academic decision making body of the university and by the BoG as the financial decision making body. A good deal of time and energy was spent in Senate discussing and debating this and its ultimate decision making powers were affirmed. However, I believe many missed the ideological point with respect to the initiative. When the IPRM issues its report and recommendations in the Fall of 2014, the process will have involved a huge number of person-hours. Estimates were for three hours a week, from something like sixty faculty on the IPRM’s various committees, for two years. This is not to mention that all the university’s faculty and staff have had to have meetings and fill out forms and templates as well. All of this effort thus meant for some, a tremendous investiture of emotion, as well as time. People working so hard and so long in a process quite naturally become emotionally invested in it. When it comes time to implement the recommendations to discontinue programs or layoff staff members, it will be much harder to argue against such after this long lead up involving so many faculty and staff. Further many faculty in departments and programs that are feeling very secure in terms of possible cuts, have short-sightedly concluded that the process may be advantageous to them. So, staff and faculty are also divided among themselves. From the point of view of a neoliberal political strategist, it is a brilliant initiative.

## **RESISTANCE TO THE IPRM**

There were probably some faculty members in many departments that thought the IPRM was a good idea. There were also quite certainly a great many that did not. But resistance and support for the process was not distributed evenly throughout the university. Unsurprisingly, the greatest support for the, at time of writing still ongoing process, is to be found among

the Business and Economics faculty (SBE). First, many SBE faculty members share the same neoliberal viewpoint that the administration does. Second, those in SBE who believe that the IPRM process may possibly benefit their particular department or faculty or that at least it won't disadvantage it, are likely correct. Very definitely, all faculties are not equal in terms of, well, anything. There is a growing disparity between the Faculty of Arts and SBE. It is evident in terms of average faculty salaries and in the buildings in which their respective offices and classrooms are located. A new, very expensive Business faculty building is now under construction.

But the inequality between these faculties most relevant in terms of this article's argument, concerns student admissions. What was earlier alleged concerning the general dumbing-down of the neoliberal university is a very unevenly applied situation. Thus, the grade admission average for a Business Administration honours BBA degree program for 2013 was 87.5 Percent. The average entrance to the Bachelor of Arts honours BA program was only 75 percent (WLU, 2014). This difference also accords well with the neoliberal vision of the university being primarily about directly servicing the economy. The greatest opposition to the IPRM has not only come from the Faculty of Arts, however, but from the two faculties – The Faculty of Human and Social Sciences and The Faculty of Liberal Arts – at the Brantford campus. There is a definite political disjuncture in terms of radicalism and resistance between the Waterloo and Brantford campuses. It has a simple political-material basis. In the preceding fifteen years of Laurier's general expansion, Brantford went from near nothing to begin with in 1999 (five administrators and only two part-time faculty) to today's figure of 2700 students. The new tenure-track, but then still untenured faculty, during this period at the Waterloo campus, sometimes had onerous service demands placed upon them. But nearly all of the Brantford faculty members had this experience. For a time nearly the entire Brantford faculty was untenured. They were untenured but forced to head programs and perform other time consuming administrative tasks at the very same time in their career as they faced the greatest demands of time for research and publication to ensure they received their tenure. Management was not very sympathetic to this. These early years created lasting resentments and a greater politicization of the workforce.

At any rate, the Brantford campus has led the IPRM opposition thus far. At the beginning not a single faculty member volunteered to be a part of it. And more recently the two Brantford faculties passed motions expressing a lack of confidence in the methodology of the process. The Waterloo campus Faculty of Arts quickly followed them and passed a

similar motion. Below is the original Brantford Faculty of Liberal Arts (Council Minutes, February 3, 2014) motion:

Be it resolved that the concept, method, data collection and analysis of the Integrated Planning and Resource Management process is so fundamentally flawed that this body has no confidence that it will provide reliable information upon which sound academic decisions can be made. As such, this body calls for the immediate cessation of the activities of the IPRM and the return of academic decision-making to the Senate, its rightful place as established by the WLU act.

Regardless of these calls for cessation, the process continues. However, there is another equally significant piece of resistance underway. The Alternative Planning and Resource Management (APRM) report is being researched and written. This is an intended shadow process to the IPRM commissioned by the faculty union (WLUFA) and I am the chair of the committee entrusted with this.

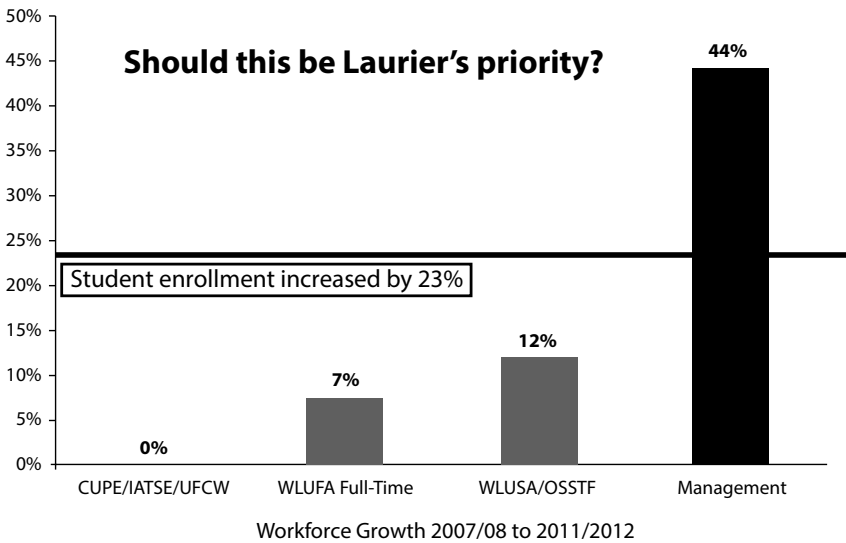
It is interesting to note with regard to faculty involvement in this process the degree of fear connected to it. The researching and writing of this report is a collaborative effort involving staff and contract academic faculty. However, it is only the full-time faculty members' names which will appear on the report. Contract faculty and staff members fear identification and management reprisals and so (perhaps wisely) have chosen to remain anonymous.

The APRM will have a radical set of recommendations. The first and foremost of these will counter directly the IPRM. We will recommend that there need be no cuts to programs and staff. Further, this recommendation will include the clarification that "no cuts to programs" also includes the kind of cuts disguised as mere amalgamations of programs and departments. In preparing this report we have had the benefit of the University of Saskatchewan experience. Their IPRM equivalent process, labeled "TransformUS", while still not complete, is further along than our own. In the College of Arts and Science, TransformUS will likely merge women's and gender studies, philosophy, modern languages and religion and culture programs into a new department. Those departments feature popular classes, but few people graduate with degrees from the departments, said Peter Stoicheff Dean of Arts and Science. He said he doesn't see the changes as cutting programs, but rather building a new department that retains popular classes from the shuttered departments (Warren, 2014). "Shuttered departments", of course,

referring to departments that were cut. To imply otherwise is simply deceptive administrative-speak.

While our report will clearly state that we neither accept the need for austerity budgets nor the neoliberal reductive bottom-line ideology that reduces all to simply financial cost-benefit analyses, we do hope to hoist them by their own petard, so to speak. We will be looking at the proliferation of senior administrative positions from a cost-benefit point of view. As Table 2 illustrates, while staff and faculty increases have lagged well behind student enrollment increases, senior administrative positions have greatly exceeded them.

**Table 2: WLU Workforce Growth**



\*WLU HR Annual Report of 2011-2012

Source: Human Resources Annual Report, 2011-12

Neither Laurier, nor indeed Canada, is unique in their senior administrative proliferation, as the US experience equally indicates (Ginsberg, 2011). But it does call into question the honesty of then Council of Universities (COU) President, Paul Genest, when he asserted: "You could get rid of the entire senior level of an administration and you would still be seeing a number of our universities trying to wrestle a deficit to the ground." (Kershaw, 2009).

In countering such proposals, we will be recommending a comprehensive, fully transparent review of Laurier's senior administration, including hiring practices, compensation, bonuses, travel funds and so on. We will also recommend that the review seriously consider the need for any of these positions in the first place, bearing in mind that from a cost-benefit perspective none of them are revenue generating. To put this in perspective, the yearly cost of all the teaching of the Cultural Analysis and Social Theory Master of Arts (MA) Program and the Sociology MA Program together with all the teaching of the Archaeology Department (at least as considered in terms of the value of contract faculty stipends) is actually considerably less than the salary for the Vice-President Student Services. These executives are paid large sums in order to allegedly make important decisions that will effect the WLU student community. And yet, the biggest decision made by the position's current occupant was to privatize food services.

Finally, we shall recommend a reversal of the budget transfers from operations to capital projects. We are making profits out of real estate and have accumulated enormous assets. Laurier's total assets over the course of May 2011 to May 2013 was \$128,000,000 (WLU Budget, 2013). We propose, putting some of that one hundred and twenty-eight million back into education, perhaps even by reducing class sizes. This report will also be made fully public; in addition to sending it to the union membership and the student union newspaper, we will send it to relevant ministers, and members of both provincial and federal parliament. It will also, of course, be sent to the Senate and the BoG. But we are under no illusions about its recommendations being followed. It will be a consciously political document, intended to provoke thought and discussion, to fire a shot, so to speak, across the bows of both the Laurier administration and the politicians who so poorly govern education in the province and country. We hope it shall have some resonance with public discussions about the future of higher education. But we know this will not be nearly enough to fundamentally change the neoliberal directions higher education is heading in. To have a chance of affecting that something much bigger is required to be done.

## **WHAT IS TO BE DONE?**

The most obvious aspect of the Canadian (and certainly Wilfrid Laurier's) neoliberal university not yet mentioned in this article is the increased corporate involvement with universities. WLU came very close to receiving academic censure from the Canadian Association of

University Teachers (CAUT) for its, and the University of Waterloo's, official governance regulations for their Basillie School of International Affairs because it gave a hitherto unprecedented degree of corporate power over academic decision making. But universities are becoming increasingly dependent upon corporate funding. And corporations, unsurprisingly, are wanting increased control as their price for donations. This process has been written about extensively elsewhere (Bradshaw, 2012; Polster, 2008). However, it is not, I believe, the most serious challenge presented by the Walmartization of higher education in Canada. It could well become so, but we have not yet reached that stage. In my view, the key issue is the situation of contract academic faculty. It is central to both the overall problem and to its solution, if there is ever to be one.

At one time faculty were the senior administrators of the university. They would undertake these tiresome but necessary chores for short durations, a few years perhaps, and then go back to the much more important business of teaching and doing research. But that is certainly no longer true. If a university president once taught and researched, it is something long abandoned and never to be returned to (if they had such an academic background at all). Today, university administrators are professional managers. Thus, faculty lost all control over the university long ago. And to save higher education they need to get it back. The governance of most Canadian universities is bicameral, consisting of a BoG and a Senate, with the former having responsibility for financial decision making and the latter for academic matters. In practice, there is no clear separation between academic issues and financial ones. Academic decisions frequently have financial consequences and more crucially the financial decisions of the BoG completely determine the boundaries of possibility for academic activities. There is staff, faculty and student representation on the BoG but such is largely token. The majority of the Board membership is drawn from the business community, and thus have little problem with the neoliberalization process.

In one of the Senate meetings at Laurier when we were still fighting the initiation of the IPRM process, a faculty supporter of the administration admonished Senators with a lecture to us asserting that we must be "financially responsible". A couple of weeks later I referenced this speech and quoted this phrase while addressing the BoG. But I added that if that is so for Senators, the other side of bicameral governance was that Board members must demonstrate academic responsibility in their decision making. I concluded my little speech with a polemical

flourish: “This isn’t no burger chain we’re running here people”. Blank faces greeted this remark. It appears that the distinction between corporations and universities was lost upon many of them. If the university is making money then any decisions that facilitate that process are wise ones, seemed to be the general opinion.

The composition of a university’s Senate is legally inscribed in its founding act and thus is very hard to change. WLU has a “plus one” clause in its -- that is to say, faculty, student and staff representation at Senate need have one more member than the administration. However, given that this grouping would have to have complete unanimity (and total attendance) in practice to ever defeat an always united administration, it means that the Senate is a largely impotent body. The fact that unanimity is rarely achieved even amongst Senators from other faculties other than SBE and that SBE has strong sympathies with a neoliberal vision, means that the Senate can achieve little in terms of putting a brake upon the present direction in which we are headed. So what can be done to halt or reverse the bad direction in which higher education is heading? There is little hope to be had from our existing university governance institutions. There is also little hope to be had from government policies. And there is little hope to be had that either students or the general public will insist upon progressive changes. Students seem to live with a perception of an eternal present of massive class sizes (“hasn’t it always been like this?”). This leaves only the faculty, as the most directly knowledgeable and invested party, to do something about the situation.

But the faculty is divided in many ways and their sole organ of institutional representation and self-defence – the faculty association union - is an imperfect one. A great many sessionals are well aware of not only the injustice inherent in their own personal situation but have a sophisticated political generalization of it. Many are ready to fight. However, sessionals at any university are a very divided group. Many of them, still early in their career, are living with the delusion that a past reality still exists. In other words, once upon a time, sessional teaching could be regarded as simply a stage in their career, a final apprenticeship stage before the tenure-track position. This still is the reality for a few, but statistically this reality belongs to the past. Many sessionals are well aware of this fact but nonetheless still live in a personalized state of denial; no matter how long the odds are of them getting a tenure-track position, they cling to the belief it will happen. They don’t have time for politics with the teaching load they carry and research agenda

they set for themselves. Then, of course, there are the long-time sessional faculty, who have so many different employers and workplaces that to be politically involved in all of them would be impossible. In essence, what I am arguing here is that the contract faculty themselves have structural weaknesses built into their collective situation, so as to make strong coordinated resistance near impossible. Evidence of this is the persistence of their dire situation over years and years.

Full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty have no such deep structural weakness that would prevent coordinated action. Yet, the situation for them is far more ironic. This group, at the top of the heap of salaried knowledge workers, whose occupations are much more of a calling than merely a job, who have a direct vested interest in a good education system, are themselves the ones in most need of political education. Who indeed, will educate the educators?

While tenured faculty do not have direct structural impediments to coordinated political action there are, nonetheless, structural impediments to transcending the neoliberal ideologies that impede the development of political consciousness. In a way, privilege not only begets privilege but it also clouds awareness of privilege. For example, as a group, full-time faculty do less of the teaching of the very large lower level service classes and instead teach more of the higher year seminars and graduate courses. There is thus a polarized collective experience of teaching realities. In a nutshell, the situation for full-timers just doesn't seem so bad at the moment so as to demand political consciousness and struggle. Collectively they have been insulated from many of the harsher changes that have come in recent years.

It takes but a moment of reflection for full-time faculty to realize that regardless of the situation of higher education getting worse and worse, their own personal situation is one of privilege. They are impacted by increasing administrative burdens placed upon them, by increased numbers of students requiring remedial instruction, by growing class sizes (though it is much more frequently the contract faculty that teach the lower level mega-classes). But still they are paid well and have benefits; they have time for research; and are privileged. Most faculty are aware of their privilege. However, many of them have also been disciplined by the experience of precariousness and fear that led to finally reaching the promised land of tenure. Few put it to themselves in terms of a choice with respect to collective action. Few put it to themselves with respect to deciding to protect the future of higher education, or even their own situation, if they are to remain part of it long enough.



The choice is a simple one. The first alternative is to continue not to look beyond the end of your own nose and be ready to fight for two things only. The two things I refer to are simply reactive to the (so far) relatively minor administrative assault upon faculty privilege: pay and pensions. If the university administration pushes too hard upon these issues full-time faculty will likely be willing to strike. My argument here is that there is another choice possible. There is a different set of things entirely that full-time faculty ought to be willing to strike for. And make no mistake, powerful, determined and coordinated action by the faculty is the only thing that will even possibly slow or reverse the Walmartization process. Of course, we will also need to involve the students. We will need to make them much more aware of hierarchies and the practical ways that “our teaching conditions, are their learning conditions” (LaFrance and Sears, 2012,). The fight I am proposing, that could be and should be undertaken, could be done much more easily than actual Walmart workers effecting political change. They are as yet un-unionized. Canadian higher education -- of both tenure track and sessionals -- is largely unionized. But, as discussed earlier, there is weakness structurally built into the sessionals’ collective position. This could be addressed by the full-timers. And this is exactly what I am proposing here. Full-timers could demand change to the contract faculty situation!

Full-timers could demand change to the hierarchical employment structure of Canadian higher education. By doing so – and by showing they were serious about it – they could not only work toward the achievement of justice for a grossly exploited group of colleagues but actually toward the preservation of quality higher education, as these two things are intimately related. My argument here could easily be misunderstood. It could be read as simply a call for full-time faculty to be more altruistic. Rather than altruism, however, what I am calling for could be more aptly described as enlightened self-interest.

There is a widespread impression that full-time faculty benefit from the exploitation of sessionals. This is a common belief among both full-time and contract faculty, rather more bitterly among the latter group. Each can easily perceive the glaring inequalities between their situations. Nonetheless, it is a mistake to believe that the exploitation by the institution of the one creates the privileges of the other. When sessional teaching was a rarity, the notion of it being an apprenticeship was to quite some degree a reality. Universities did not always depend upon a large casual labour force to fulfill their educational missions. The full-timers of the past were always in a pretty good

situation vis-à-vis working conditions, perks, security and salary. If anything their collective situation now has significantly deteriorated relative to other professions such as lawyers and medical doctors. The casualization of such a large percentage of the academic labour force has not actually benefited the full-timers; they gained no new benefits or privileges. In fact, sessional labour has been used in part to keep wages for full-timers down. Recognizing that fact, however, is only part of what I would consider necessary for full-timers to recognize their “enlightened self-interest”.

My argument is that the casualization of the labour force is the flagship policy, as it were, of the neoliberalization of higher education and that this process overall is destroying all the good qualities of the university. Full-time professors have both a vested interest and powerful emotive linkage with the maintenance of educational quality. At the same time as maintaining decent salaries, benefits and pensions they have felt the burden of increased class sizes and ever more onerous administrative duties. They have been witnessing the gradual decline of educational quality, and it has pained many of them to witness this. They are experientially aware of many of the negative aspects of the neoliberal university. What they need to put together in their minds (in their hearts and minds!) is the fact that these things come in a package. They need to grasp the fact that the miserable salaries and working conditions of the contract faculty are indirectly but nonetheless powerfully affecting their own working conditions and at some point in the near future are very likely going to profoundly affect their salaries as well!

Lest I be accused of being an idealistic dreamer, whether what I’m suggesting is seen as “enlightened self-interest,” or simply an altruistic concern for social justice, let me assert quickly that I do not believe what I am calling for is even remotely on the horizon. Management has succeeded very thoroughly in dividing us ideologically. A first step toward the kinds of action I am advocating though, would be for the union to engage in an educational campaign to convince tenured and tenure track faculty of the proposition that justice for our seriously exploited colleagues is essential to the preservation of quality higher education. To preserve the university, we must educate the educators!

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