



## Teaching Assessment

Some months ago the Administration struck a task force on teaching, the “Working Group on Assessment of Teaching.” CUFA was asked to name a representative, as were the two part-time unions and each of the four Faculties.

We understood that the first priority for the Working Group would be to deal with the low and declining response rates to the on-line course evaluations. Not far behind as a priority would be studying and making recommendations on how course evaluation questionnaires could be improved. In addition to these issues, there were in the mandate other teaching-related questions that we feel must be resolved by direct negotiations between CUFA and the administration, not in a broad-based task force such as this Working Group. Still, progress on the first two issues would facilitate agreement on questions that are covered by our collective agreement such as finding four questions common to all student evaluation questionnaires (as required by Art 14.01 f), and agreeing on a comprehensive model of teaching evaluation.

Unfortunately, things have evolved in an unexpected manner. In the view of CUFA’s Executive, the Working Group has chosen to move in an entirely inappropriate direction, which is to pursue the ways and means of

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## Benefits Review

*by Charles Draimin*

This fall a major focus of attention for the Executive has been the Employee Benefits package. The Employee Benefits package includes health, dental, vision, long-term disability, basic life insurance, and the various optional plans. Health, dental and vision are financed 50-50 by the employees and the employer; the other compulsory components (long-term disability and basic life insurance) are paid entirely by the employer; the optional plans are entirely employee-paid. (The pension plan is also an employee benefit but it is not part of this benefits review; sick leave is also outside the review as far as CUFA is concerned as it is governed by our collective agreement.) Discussions were instituted last year by the University’s Employee Benefits Committee with representation from CUFA, other employees and

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making course evaluation results available to students. Primarily as a consequence of this initiative, the CUFA Executive has instructed its representative, Professor Vered Amit (Sociology and Anthropology), to resign from the Working Group, which she has done. It is our view that progress on teaching-related issues will be much more likely to occur in direct discussions between CUFA and the administration. Following our withdrawal from the Working Group, CUFA and the Provost's Office have agreed to begin such meetings.

## ***Upcoming General Meeting***

*When: Wednesday, December 9,  
2009*

*Where: SGW Campus  
Room H765-767*

*Time: 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm*

*A buffet lunch will be served  
starting at noon*

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retirees on the one side, and the employer on the other. It has been many years since a thorough review has been done and it is clear to all that such a review is long overdue.

**Problem in finding a consensus.** Although the review process began more than a year ago with the establishment of the benefits review sub-committee, there has been little progress. Very soon after the process began, it was evident that the employer has a very different set of objectives for this review than do the members (CUFA, other employee and retiree representatives). In particular, the administration's heavy emphasis on "sustainability of future costs" and "cost containment" – neither term clearly defined and both code (we believe) for an eventual *reduction* of the Employer's contribution and our benefits – made the member representatives on the committee increasingly uncomfortable. We all had ideas for improvements to the benefits plan, the health plan in particular, but everything we were hearing from the consultant with the support of the employer was pointing towards a more complex plan. This "modern" plan will seem attractive on the surface for its range of choices and potential to reduce the premiums for some participants, but when investigated more closely and critically, it clearly stands to leave our members at a great risk of inadequate coverage that may require them to pay for services out of their own pockets. And while it was never directly articulated, language (often repeated) about the exceedingly generous subsidization of retirees by the university – more than that received by other university retirees in Quebec – suggests that a much less generous retiree health benefits plan is in the cards. This is in fact an issue for all members, because regardless of the current stage of their career, most CUFA members will retire from Concordia.

**A turning point in the benefits review process.** By early July of this year, unease amongst employee and retiree representatives on the sub-committee increased to the point that they found it necessary to write to the Acting Chair of the sub-committee, Me Bram Freedman, VP External Affairs and Secretary General, to express their concern that the consultant was not giving due consideration to the views of the

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## *Benefits Review continued from page 2*

employee and retiree representatives, and that, in general, the procedures followed in the committee tended to marginalize us. At about the same time, the presidents of the other unions at Concordia wrote Me Freedman demanding representation in the benefits review process. They also expressed serious reservations about the purpose and usefulness of the benefits survey circulated the previous month. The upshot of all this is that the benefits review process was suspended by Me Freedman in the summer. At a meeting of all the union presidents in early October (myself as CUFA's President included), he offered us a choice to resolve the representation question in the benefits review. One option would be to allow the benefits review subcommittee to finish its work and make recommendations to the Benefits Committee and the Board of Governors (this would involve each union renouncing its right to grieve or legally challenge the outcome in any way). The other would be to take the review out of the hands of the Benefits Committee and make it a negotiations issue. This would mean that the benefits plans would be negotiated "as part of total compensation at each bargaining table or a common table starting immediately." A response is to be made to Me Freedman by the unions, CUFA included, in early December.

**Thinking about our options.** We will know shortly in what decision-making context the review of benefits will unfold. Whether this will be in the Benefits Committee as in the past, or at the negotiating table, at some point soon there will be a comprehensive review of all components of the benefits plan that will most certainly lead to changes. In either case CUFA will be directly involved, and we will do our best to ensure that these changes are advantageous for our members. Moreover, we should be aware that proposals for change will not just be in the details of health, dental and vision coverage, but may also include changes in the other components of the benefits package such as disability. In addition to changes in the benefits themselves, the ways in which the plan is financed and managed will be under consideration, and it is important that we think about our options in these areas as well. For example, the employer has already spoken about having all components of the benefits managed by a single insurance carrier to be able to negotiate better rates and get better adminis-

trative support. Another option that can be explored is for the benefits plans to be run independently of the employer, through an independent legal structure called a benefits trust. Although it has a different governance structure, pension plans, including the Concordia Pension Plan, have the same independent trust structure. If we have an agreement with the employer, rather than being involved in managing the benefits plan itself, the employer would agree to pay a benefits trust a negotiated amount (based on its current benefits costs). The trust then negotiates with the insurance companies. Such an arrangement can see a reduction in costs or an improvement in benefits. The benefits plan would still be managed by insurance companies (though not necessarily the same insurance companies as now), but such an arrangement provides employees – through their union – with much more control over benefits.

**The CAUT Benefits Trust.** There are many examples of benefits trusts in Canada though they have only just begun to be seen in the university sector. The first one is at St. Mary's University in Halifax. There the faculty association and employer agreed to a benefits trust. The trust has been able to negotiate better rates with its carriers for the same benefits enjoyed previously and so faculty members now have, in addition to their regular benefits, a health spending account. Using the benefits trust at St. Mary's as a model, the CAUT has created the CAUT Benefits Trust to provide a legal structure for other faculty association in Canada to manage their own benefits plans. This is an option the Executive believes that CUFA should investigate. We have asked Neil Tudiver, Assistant Executive Director of CAUT and Secretary of the CAUT Benefits Trust Board of Trustees to explain the nature of a Benefits Trust at the Council/General Meeting on December 9th. Please do your best to attend this meeting as it is important that every member understand what is at stake. Whatever we decide to do, we should be cognizant of the advantages, costs and risks of the various options we have. (Members should be aware that I have been named to the five-person Board of Trustees of the CAUT Benefits Trust by the CAUT Council. My position as a trustee of the CAUT Benefits is independent of my role as CUFA President and in no way obligates CUFA to join the CAUT Benefits Trust.)

## News at a Glance

**Faculty Travel Grants.** As many of you are aware, earlier this term there was a move by the administration to eliminate faculty travel grants. CUFA began an investigating and we have been assured that the initial decision is now under review.

**Bill 38.** The provincial government's Bill 38 would reduce faculty representation on the Concordia Board of Governors and would impose much more of a for-profit governance framework on our and other universities in Quebec. The Fédération québécois des professeurs et professeures de l'université (FQPPU) has mounted protests against these changes which CUFA supports. Petitions against the bill have been circulated in departments among faculty, students and staff. Please contact the office (3999) if you would like to sign.

**Retired Members.** Discussions with our retired members' association have led to a proposal to offer retirees an associate membership status in CUFA. This is being considered by the Executive and, if passed will be presented to Council shortly.

**Collective Agreement.** As you are undoubtedly aware, the new *Collective Agreement* was agreed upon this past June. The English version of the Agreement is now being copied edited and a French translation is being prepared. When these are ready, hard copies will be made available for all members. Until then, the English version is available online at: [http://www.cufa.net/collective\\_agreement/collective\\_agreement.html](http://www.cufa.net/collective_agreement/collective_agreement.html)

**CUFA dues.** The issue of increasing CUFA dues was discussed at the October Council meeting. The justification for such a change would be to strengthen the Association and, in particular, to provide us additional resources in the event of future labour action. The Executive will seek guidance from the Council and from the membership in the near future.

**CUFA General Meeting.** The Christmas CUFA General Meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 9th at noon in H-767. There will be a buffet lunch for the first hour and the meeting itself will begin at 1:00. The agenda will be circulated

about a week before the meeting. There will be issues of importance to all members including benefits (see the article in this issue) and our relations with retired members.

**CUFA Council.** Following our usual practice, the next Council meeting will be held jointly with the General Meeting on December 9. Council is CUFA's policy-making body and every member should have a representative. Unfortunately not all do because some constituencies still remain without a Regular or an Alternate Councillor. You can contact Chantal Bohbot, the Executive assistant at the CUFA Office, to confirm the status of your constituency's representation. If there is a vacancy, you can ensure that your constituency is fully represented before the December meeting by filling out the appropriate nomination form. For more information, Chantal can be reached at extension 3999.

**Social Events.** In September and early October, CUFA hosted welcoming lunches for new faculty at the Cafe des Beaux Arts for new members. CUFA's fall cocktail took place in mid-November. There will be a winter term cocktail on Thursday February 11 – details will be announced in the New Year.

*Mark your calendar!*

*CUFA Winter Cocktail*

*February 11, 2010*

*Details coming up*

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