

BUFA Forum

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Questioning the Status of Women in a Bold New Brock

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1
-
2

• [Michelle McGinn](#)

Graduate Student Funding Cuts Constructive and Creative Solutions

3

• [Cathy Mondloch](#)

Letter to the Editor

4
-
5

• [Murray Miles](#)

Radiofrequency and Other Electromagnetic Emissions at Brock

6
-
8

• [David Fancy](#)

2009-2010 BUFA Executive Committee Contact List

8

This year, our university has launched its aggressive Brock 2014 academic plan and the corresponding Campaign for a Bold New Brock. There is much excitement and hoopla. At the same time, there is also considerable trepidation, especially as each unit has also been asked to prepare for budget cuts. How can this all be accomplished? How will the future unfold? How will this affect our working conditions? These are the questions that circulate through hallway corridors. The BUFA Status of Women annual breakfast on March 11 provided a congenial space to ponder these questions and the ways that these initiatives may affect women and other equity seeking groups at Brock.

We couldn't help but ask who will be the leaders of the bold new Brock? As part of Brock's identity transformation, many vacancies in senior administration have been (or will be) filled with external candidates. What can we expect from these new members of the Brock community? The vision may involve a bold new Brock, but the senior administration at this institution continues to be overly white and overly male. Liette Vasseur began her appointment as Vice-President, Research in January, but who else will join her on the Senior Administrative Council? Is it really true that there were no qualified women to present as candidates for Provost and Vice-President, Academic or Dean of Graduate Studies? Will the same argument be made when the Faculties of Business and Applied Health replace their Interim Deans (currently women)? When can we expect Aboriginals, members of other visible minorities, and persons with disabilities to be appointed to senior positions? These are not idle questions. It is absolutely imperative that Brock enact its equity policy and take serious steps to expand the applicant pool for all positions. We learned at the breakfast that the Senior Women Administrators at Brock have been talking about creating mentoring opportunities for women who might consider administrative positions. This is a terrific way to ensure that credible candidates

Questioning the Status of Women in a Bold New Brock

Continued. . .

with the right profile will be available for the next round of hiring. What other steps can be taken?

Not surprisingly, budget cuts also occupied considerable attention in our breakfast conversations. Where will cuts be made? Women and other equity seeking groups are more likely to occupy limited-term appointments; how many of these positions will face the chopping block? Will budget cuts mean higher workloads for those who remain? For faculty members, how will possible new workload expectations fit with the recently created Normal Department Workload Standards? Will the additional workload be distributed equitably or will women pick up the slack, as has so often been the case (e.g., Bankier, 2002)? How will we monitor these issues and ensure that budget concerns don't trump equity concerns?

One final important thread wove through our breakfast conversations. To fulfill its mandate, the BUFA Status of Women committee must be attentive to equity issues throughout the Brock community: issues that affect women also affect other designated groups, and issues that affect BUFA members also affect others at Brock (students, staff, and administration). We need to tackle equity issues in collaboration. As the bold new Brock takes shape, the BUFA Status of Women committee will be connecting with other groups and organizations on campus to see how we can move forward together. We look forward to your suggestions, commitment, and action for a better Brock.

Michelle McGinn
Faculty of Education
Chair, BUFA Status of Women Committee

Reference

Bankier, J. (2002). Paying the inequity tax. In E. Hannah, L. Paul, & S. Vethamany-Globus (Eds.), *Women in the Canadian academic tundra: Challenging the chill* (pp. 17-21). Montreal, QU & Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press.

BUFA Annual General Meeting

Tuesday, May 12, 2009

10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Sankey Chamber - MCC

Graduate Student Funding Cuts Constructive and Creative Solutions

I am writing this article in order to raise awareness about the implications of current cuts to graduate student funding in the hopes that we can develop constructive and creative solutions. I sent a version of the following article to members of the administration of Brock University and was asked by Carol Merriam if I would be willing to write a version of it to share with the BUFA membership.

To put this article in context, let me be clear that I am sympathetic with the need to cut costs in response to the economic crisis. In contrast with thousands of people who are losing their jobs each week, I am grateful that my own employment is relatively secure. I have worked hard within my department to sort out what cuts can be made with least impact on faculty workload and student experience. However, until I did the math, I had not realized what a big impact the current cuts would have on my research program. Most of the cuts that will directly impact my research program concern graduate student funding. Effective September 2009, students will no longer receive a DGS (worth \$1000), the stipend for new MA students will be reduced (by \$2500), and international student funding *even for current students* is being cut (by \$1800). A second cut that will directly impact my research program concerns support for faculty travel; in the social sciences this is being cut by \$600. My research currently is funded by NSERC at the rate of \$23,000 per year. When I thought about these changes in funding individually, no one cut seemed too difficult to overcome. Giving a current MA student \$1000 from my grant did not feel too onerous, nor did putting an addition \$600 from my grant towards travel. My concern spiked only when I added up the total reduction in funding. Assuming that I make up the difference in funding (so that my students can eat and spend time in the lab) I will incur \$6100 in *new* expenses in 2009-10; this is 26.5% of my current grant. (These costs will increase in subsequent years, as each new MA student will be at the reduced funding rate.) This will reduce money available for necessary equipment and other costs.

I would encourage all BUFA members to do this math. Two solutions are obvious. We can accept weaker students who will be less concerned with funding because they aren't getting offers from other schools, or we can accept fewer students to keep our own costs down. Neither of these options will help Brock become a comprehensive university and both will hurt faculty members' productivity. My own success in obtaining external funding and publishing in high-quality journals has only been possible because I have been able to recruit excellent graduate students. I do understand that many other schools expect a larger contribution towards graduate student stipends from grant funds, and that funding travel is not a common practice, but these cuts are coming at us so quickly that those of us locked within a granting period of 5 years can't do much to increase funding. Thus, while I don't categorically oppose budget cuts per se, I am wondering if a more creative method can be found, such that quality research and graduate student support can be maintained at least at current levels.

Cathy Mondloch
Department of Psychology

Letter to the Editor

The most recent Collective Agreement no longer contains the Respectful Workplace and Learning Environment Policy (RWLEP) as part of the labour contract of Brock University faculty and librarians, although article 8 still recognizes the policy, introducing a few minor changes and giving BUFA a word to say in its future implementation and amendment. The whole policy is to undergo a (belated) periodic review this Winter term 2009.

According to the December 2008 issue of the CAUT Bulletin (Vol. 55, No. 10), the University of Alberta recently closed down its Human Rights Office, much to the displeasure of campus stakeholder groups, who were not even consulted. This was no doubt a cost-cutting measure: staffing and operating these offices diverts scarce education dollars into salaries, operating budgets, and legal costs. (I requested and got the figures for the Brock operation. The annual total for Salaries/Benefits and Operating Funds is over \$200,000. For that money, Brock could hire three assistant professors for the departments that need them most.) Moreover, the loss in productivity may be significant as employees book off work for training and to serve on quasi-judicial investigating teams and to write lengthy reports. Still, it's hard to believe that the U of A operation would have been closed down so abruptly if there hadn't been serious problems with the policy and way it was being administered. With a full-scale review of the RWLEP getting underway at Brock, there are lessons to be learned from the U of A controversy and from the flawed process by which the RWLEP was implemented here at Brock.

Officially, the policy is the work of the Special Harassment Prevention Policy Task Force struck in February 2005 by then-President David Atkinson, who hand-picked a senior female faculty member (now an administrator) to chair it, inviting various stakeholder groups to send representatives (the undergraduate and graduate students' unions, the two CUPE locals, the OSSTF, which represents administrative assistants in various academic and non-academic departments, and BUFA). The HR Director, the Associate VP, Student Services, and a representative of administrative and professional staff were all seconded to the committee. No one knows exactly what precipitated the decision to create such a task force. No minutes of its deliberations were kept. No one was troubled by the fact that the only academics taking part were the chair and the BUFA representative. Nor was anyone worried about the fact that the entire voting membership of nine was female, as was one of the two non-voting members, the future Manager of the Office of Human Rights and Equity Services (OHRES), who played a lead role despite her non-voting status. "I really just coordinated efforts," wrote the task force chair in an email to me, "she took on the real work of writing the policy." Since article 15 makes the administration and interpretation of the Brock policy the sole prerogative of the non-academic staff of the OHRES, one of whom was largely responsible for writing it, the same person who effectively wrote the policy has sole authority to interpret and apply it. The *modus operandi* of the task force was apparently to cherry-pick clauses from various models—five from Canada and four from the UK—all pre-selected by the future OHRES Manager. Since (as the task force chair put it to me) "she was the expert," no one did any independent research to determine what other model clauses might be available. Thus, the comparatively sensible harassment policies of the University of Regina and University of Guelph left no trace whatever

Letter to the Editor (cont'd)

on the Brock policy. The same is not true of three particularly Orwellian UK policies (Bath, Kent, and Bradford). Significant passages of the Brock policy are lifted straight out of them, notably the definition of “academic bullying,” defined as “asserting a position of intellectual superiority in an aggressive, abusive or offensive manner,” to which the Brock policy adds “making threats of academic failure, or public sarcasm and humiliation.” Nothing even remotely like this is found anywhere in any Canadian source that I’ve been able to identify. Apart from the dangerously subjective elements in the wording, the fact is that there is nothing corresponding to ‘case law’ that would allow one to identify exactly what sorts of behaviour constitute “academic bullying.” According to an email from the OHRES Manager, the “‘final version’ was vetted by each union executive for approval, and each signed a letter of understanding that they would acknowledge the policy until it could be formally included in their collective agreements via the bargaining process.” In fact, the policy was incorporated into the last BUFA *Collective Agreement* not in article-by-article negotiations, as one might have expected, but *en bloc*, with a couple of clauses added, ostensibly to safeguard academic freedom, although, in my opinion, they’re woefully inadequate for the purpose. My reasons for thinking so are set out in a previous issue of this newsletter (“Respect: Get It ... Out of the Collective Agreement,” BUFA Forum, January 2008), now available on the BUFA website. BUFA members may also want to have a look at this *National Post* article on the Brock RWLEP by Prof. em. Ian Hunter in the November 27th issue (<http://www.nationalpost.com/opinion/story.html?id=998001>).

The lessons to be learned from past Brock and recent U of A practice are these. First, it’s worth bearing in mind that this is a university. In order to safeguard academic freedom, faculty should form a majority on the committee that conducts the review. Second, a committee dominated by women, or by women and minority-group members, cannot be assumed to be impartial. Third, do not appoint anyone close to the administration to chair the committee; and do not ‘stack’ it with those whose jobs or advancement may depend on pleasing senior administrators. Fourth, recognize that the OHRES Manager is not a disinterested party. She should not be privy to the committee’s deliberations, nor the sole source of its information. Fifth, hold public hearings, not secret meetings. Issue a call for submissions and invite personal appearances before the committee by those who have first-hand experience of the RWLEP in action. Sixth, make sure that accurate minutes are kept of all deliberations (except those that are of a properly confidential nature), and that the minutes are publicly accessible after the committee disbands. And, finally, if deliberations lead to the same conclusion drawn unilaterally by the U of A administration, recommend comprehensive professional training for deans, managers, and directors of student life whose job it will then become to prevent harassment and discrimination on this campus.

Murray Miles
Philosophy

Radiofrequency and Other Electromagnetic Emissions at Brock

At the February meeting of the Joint Health and Safety Committee (a group with management and worker representation that advises the administration on health and safety issues), a report from a subcommittee tasked with investigating the issue of electromagnetic emissions on health at Brock was unanimously supported by the committee of the whole. The authors of the report (Gerry Boily, CUPE representative; David Fancy, BUFA representative; Greg Finn, Vice Provost and Associate Vice-President) advised that, in view of the lack of international scientific consensus about the safety of levels of radiofrequency to which Brock faculty and staff (as well as students) are exposed over the course of their regular working day, that the administration pursue the minimum amount of precautionary activity by notifying faculty and staff that the JHSC has been investigating this matter on their behalf, and that Faculty and Staff should inform themselves further on the matter if they are interested/concerned.

While the consensus reached at the JHSC on this issue represents, in my view, an important step, more precautionary action may eventually be warranted. In 2004, I began providing the Office of Environment, Health and Safety with research that suggested that the levels of radiofrequency and microwave emissions on campus may be not be as harmless as Health Canada's regulatory current framework — last revised in 1999 — suggests they are.¹ There are over 50 radiofrequency and microwave signals broadcast from the antenna on the Schmon Tower. Brock hosts some of these as a public service (ambulance, police) while other antennas are revenue generating for the administration (Telus, Rogers).

Various constituencies internationally are pushing for significant changes to their regulatory frameworks for levels of radiofrequency and other electromagnetic emissions. On September 4, 2008, the European Parliament voted 522 to 16 to encourage Member States “to take into account the Member States' best practices and thus to set stricter exposure limits for all equipment which emits electromagnetic fields in the frequencies between 0.1 MHz and 300 GHz.”² On the March 4 2009, the European Parliament Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted, with a vote of 43-1, a resolution urging the European Commission to recognize growing public and scientific concern over health risks from electromagnetic emissions. Integral to this call is to revisit cell tower siting policy near domestic, workplace, and educational settings. On November 3, 2008 Dennis Kucinich, the Chairman of the Congressional Domestic Policy Subcommittee requested that the Federal Communications Commission, who regulate safety levels for electromagnetic emissions in the United States, reconsider their regulatory frameworks since “current data are insufficient to draw definitive conclusions concerning the adequacy of [existing] guideline to be protective against non-thermal effects of chronic exposures” such as those engendered by living or working in proximity to cell towers, radio broadcast antenna and overlapping wireless networks.³

Kucinich's reference to 'non-thermal effects' points towards the crux of the scientific debates on the issue of the safety of current guidelines, guidelines that have been developed to protect people from **short term** exposures of a strength that might heat flesh (protecting individuals such as workers who might be installing broadcast antenna). However, a variety of non-thermal effects, including genotoxicity, cognitive and neurological effects, and cancer induction, have been demonstrated repeatedly in peer-reviewed studies.⁴ According to Norbert Hankin, Chief EMF Scientist, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: “The U.S. Federal Communications Commission, (FCC's) exposure guidelines are considered protective of effects arising from a thermal mechanism but **not** from all possible mechanisms. Therefore, the generalization by

1 <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/radiation/99ehd-dhm237/index-eng.php>

2 <http://www.emfacts.com/weblog/?p=1056>

3 <http://www.emfacts.com/weblog/?p=1045>

4 See www.bioinitiative.com for a summary of 2000 of these.

Radiofrequency and Other Electromagnetic Emissions at Brock (cont'd)

many that the guidelines protect human beings from harm by any or all mechanisms is **not justified**" (Hankin's emphasis).⁵ Despite various international initiatives as well as and evidence pointing towards significant and recurring non-thermal effects, and despite the fact that an Expert Panel Report prepared at the request of the Royal Society of Canada for Health Canada 1999 states that a variety of "biological effects brought about by non-thermal exposure levels of RF could potentially be associated with adverse health effects",⁶ Health Canada has not responded to this growing evidence except to reiterate the position that there is not yet sufficient proof to warrant a change in regulations.

However, many of the existing studies are quite compelling. For example, an epidemiological study published in the journal *Neurotoxicology* finds that people who live around cell phone towers are at risk for developing neuropsychiatric problems and changes in neurobehavioral function. The prevalence of such neuropsychiatric complaints as headache (23.5%), memory changes (28.2%), dizziness (18.8%), tremors (9.4%), depressive symptoms (21.7%), and sleep disturbance (23.5%) were significantly higher among exposed inhabitants than controls: (10%), (5%), (5%), (0%), (8.8%) and (10%), respectively ($P < 0.05$). Exposed inhabitants exhibited a significantly lower performance than controls in one of the tests of attention and short-term auditory memory and the authors say revision of standard guidelines for public exposure to radiofrequency emissions from cell phone towers and antennae is recommended.⁷ Santini found similar results, concluding that people living within 300m of a cell tower were more liable to experience nausea, loss of appetite, headache, sleep disruption, hypertension, depression⁸ while Navarro et al discovered similar results in another comparable study.⁹ A special issue of *Pathophysiology* (available through Brock's databases) will soon be released. Research professor and Editor Martin Blank, PhD (Associate Professor, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons) says, "This special issue of *Pathophysiology* is about the human body's sensitivity to EMF signals in the environment, e.g., EMF effects on DNA, effects on the brain from cell phone radiation, and how EMFs in the environment may lead to Alzheimers disease, dementia and breast cancer. The scientific evidence tells us that our safety standards are inadequate, and that we must protect ourselves from exposure to EMF due to power lines, cell phones and the like."¹⁰

For some of the membership, to assume that there is necessarily a problem with, for example, radiofrequency exposure for human health before such a position has been established beyond any doubt by the scientific community would be a hasty step. Indeed, the EMF subcommittee of the JHSC was informed by a member of the bargaining unit that there were "no risks for current levels of radiofrequency exposure for anyone, anywhere, and at any time." Clearly this is an issue that currently remains very much unresolved. However, we might ask ourselves, considering the studies that do currently exist and the amount of activity on a political level on this front internationally if there is perhaps more we should do in our community than simply wait for more studies to be performed?

Also, how important is it to the conversation, for example, that meta-analyses demonstrate that industry-sponsored studies are more liable to show no effects from electromagnetic emissions? As a learning institution we might ask ourselves if, even with the lack of international consensus on the issue, we can afford to ignore the potential hazards of long term involuntary exposures of radiofrequency, especially when one considers that 10 out of 13 peer-reviewed studies on cell phone towers that conform to World Health

5 <http://www.protectschools.org/epa%20letter.pdf>

6 Expert Panel Report, p 2)

7 Abdel-Rassoul et al. O. Neurobehavioral effects among inhabitants around mobile phone base stations. *NeuroToxicology* 28 (2007) 434-440.

8 Santini et al. Study of health of people living in the vicinity of mobile phone base stations. *Pathologie Biologique* 50 (2002) 369-73.

9 Navarro et al. The microwave syndrome: a preliminary study in Spain. *Electromagnetic Biology and Medicine*. 22 (2003).

10 Press release.

Radiofrequency and Other Electromagnetic Emissions at Brock (cont'd)

Organization standards of scientific quality (including assessment criteria of consistency and replication) found significant increase in negative symptoms. Should we not be engaged in a broad-based discussion about what level of precautionary activity needs to be taken here to protect ourselves and to protect our students?

Please contact me if you think this is an important issue, regardless of your position on the science.

Dr. David Fancy
Dramatic Arts

2009-2010 BUFA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CONTACT LIST

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