

BUFA Forum

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Suspicious Minds and What to Do With a 3 Million Dollar Surplus

President's Message

Hans Skott-Myhre
BUFA President

In a recent Senate meeting, I am given to understand that Dr. Lightstone invoked what he called the hermeneutics of suspicion. The context for this was a rather rigorous set of questions by a senator and BUFA officer regarding the administration's proposed new strategic planning process. Before I explore the phrase hermeneutics of suspicion in a more complete way, let's assume that Dr. Lightstone, at the simplest level, intended to decry the union's suspicious attitude towards his administration.

In that regard, let me propose a remedy. I, for one, would prefer to feel trust in Brock's administrators. I would like to abandon the perceived necessity to look behind the surface of their proposals for ulterior motives, hidden meanings, and obscured information. I would like to be able to take at face value the things I am told about the budget, the strategic plan and the claims of transparency. Unfortunately, we have not had a good couple of years in these areas. The administration town halls on our budgetary crisis appear, under examination, not to have been an accurate representation of the fiscal situation at Brock. The presentation of the strategic plan was fraught with misrepresentations and inaccuracies. The ongoing claims of transparency proved to be far more opaque than we had hoped. However, I am willing to set aside these unfortunate suspicion generating events if we can kind of start over.

By starting over, I am referring to returning to the first town hall. In that meeting Dr. Lightstone said, in front of many witnesses, that he would create a table that showed all the effects of the rescission exercise across the university. He stated

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(President's Message cont'd)

that he would make that table available for all of us to see. Further, that as soon as money became available, he would systematically use it to reverse the effects of the rescissions as indicated on the table.

As it so happens, in the same senate meeting that produced the hermeneutics of suspicion remarks, the provost announced that there is a 3 million dollar surplus as a result of increased student retention. This is very exciting news and I would call on Dr. Lightstone to now deliver on his promise to:

- 1) Publish the table
- 2) Apply the 3 million dollars to alleviating the most egregious effects of the rescission process.

This would go a long way towards putting to rest my own suspicious mind and perhaps it might also build a new hermeneutics of trust and collegiality among the university community. I will admit that my discipline Cultural Studies skews my personal reading of political landscapes toward what Dr. Lightstone referred to as a hermeneutics of suspicion. I am trained to look at society from the perspective of Marx, Freud, Foucault and Nietzsche and they were a suspicious bunch—more on that shortly. However, let's take a look at this suspicious framework a bit more closely.

In his remarks, we can assume that Dr. Lightstone is referring to Paul Ricoeur's origination of the phrase in his book *Freud and Philosophy*. There, Ricoeur explores the relation of a hermeneutics of suspicion and what he terms a restorative hermeneutics. Without going into the fine points of the argument, let's note that hermeneutics refers to the way in which meaning is constructed and interpreted. In Ricoeur, it is about the literal function of certain forms of meaning making. In relation to the hermeneutics of suspicion, Ruel F. Pepa notes that Ricoeur identifies, "the masters of the hermeneutics of suspicion" as being Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. Pepa goes on to say that, "the hermeneutics of suspicion is a method of interpretation which assumes that the literal or surface-level meaning of a text is an effort to conceal the political interests which are served by the text. The purpose of interpretation is to strip off the concealment, unmasking those interests. It unmask and unveils untenable claims. It suspects the credibility of the superficial text and explores what is underneath the surface to reveal a more authentic dimension of meaning."

If this is accurate, then Dr. Lightstone has identified BUFA's hermeneutic intentions correctly. We are in fact, interested in investigating the administration's construction of meaning. In particular, we are interested in the ways in which it conceals or reveals the political interests of

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(President's Message cont'd)

the administration. We think the interest of the administration should be, as claimed, made transparent to the university community. We would think an administration that has claimed transparency, as a hallmark, would welcome our questions and concerns. We would think that a dialogue could emerge that would foster as Ricoeur stated, "a more authentic dimension of meaning." Unfortunately, this has not been our experience. In fact the opposite often seems true. For example, our repeated questions about the budget from two years ago remain unanswered.

Ricoeur, however, felt that the hermeneutics of suspicion had serious limitations. He felt that there needed to be something more than simply an interrogation of a text. There needs to be, he argued, an opposition to suspicion and that he said was faith. Faith was the restorative hermeneutic. However, not blind faith. Ricoeur stated, "The contrary of suspicion, I will say bluntly is faith... faith that has undergone criticism... postcritical faith." We would suggest that this can be a starting place for a dialogue with the administration; a postcritical faith.

For that to happen, we believe that there needs to be an affirmation of intention and action that would recognize and respond to the critiques we have made. One step in this direction would be to follow through on the promise of the rescission table and the deployment of 3 million dollars to alleviate the suffering caused to the university community by the administration's fiscal decision making. This step would open the dialogue to a restorative hermeneutic. Unfortunately if it doesn't happen I, for one, will have to wonder why . . . and that would make me suspicious.

Hans Skott-Myhre, President
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RUMOUR MILL

Anything to the rumour that *some* staff in ITS are on notice for heavy duty hours during the month of March... just in case some (ahem) "back up" work needs to be done??

Know Your Rights

What happens if another employee group at Brock goes on strike?

In January, members of OSSTF District 35, representing office, clerical, administrative, and library support employees at the University, voted 85% in favour of taking strike action if necessary in order to achieve a fair collective agreement.

Members of CUPE Local 4207, representing Teaching Assistants, Lab Demonstrators, Course Co-ordinators, and Marker/Graders, followed suit, authorizing a strike mandate of with 80% voting in favour.

Just a few weeks later, members of CUPE 1295, representing Maintenance, Trades, and Custodial, voted 100% in favour of authorizing a strike mandate. These three employee groups join members of CUPE 220, representing workers at Rodman Hall, who voted to authorize a strike mandate late last year.

Hopefully, these strong strike mandates will send the University administration a wake-up call and provide OSSTF and CUPE with the leverage they need to avoid a labour dispute and achieve fair collective agreements. However, if the University administration forces a strike or lockout, BUFA members need to be aware of their rights and responsibilities.

The BUFA collective agreement contains the following provisions:

42.02 Members have the right to decline to perform the duties of other University employees during any legal strike by, or lockout of, those employees.

42.03 No member shall be disciplined on the basis of his/her decision not to cross a legal picket line, or on the basis of any consequences of that decision.

In other words, you are not obligated to cross picket lines and you cannot be disciplined for exercising that choice, even if that means cancelling classes or not fulfilling service responsibilities. BUFA encourages its members not to undermine strikes by other unions on campus by crossing picket lines. Only through displaying solidarity with other union members on campus can we expect the same in return.

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Anticipation, Consultation, Representation

Report of the Chief Negotiator

Question: What is better than attending a department meeting?

Answer: Attending the meetings of 35 departments!!

I knew before accepting the position of chief negotiator for BUFA that part of my job in the fall of 2010 would, along with the President of BUFA, the Deputy Chief Negotiator, and other colleagues from the BUFA bargaining team, involve attending the meetings, of all departments inviting us. There are 34 academic departments plus a number of units in the library. We met the professional librarians in the BUFA bargaining unit in one specially scheduled meeting, for a total of 35 possible meetings. We received invitations from 33 of these 35 departments (94%).

I know that department meetings are cornerstones of academic governance and that participating in these meetings is an important right and responsibility of faculty members and professional librarians. However, I must admit that, as collegial and professional as my colleagues in the OBHREE Department in the Faculty of Business are and always have been, I have not always looked forward to meetings of my own department as peak experiences of my academic life, and the prospect of multiplying one of those meetings times 34 in one term was not something to which I was especially looking forward.

I have not personally been able to attend all of these department meetings but, over a three-month period in the fall, I attended most of them. I have met face-to-face with almost everyone in the bargaining unit during these meetings. My response to attending these meetings has been just the opposite of what I was expecting.

These meetings have confirmed in practice what I knew in theory before, namely, that BUFA represents a very diverse group of academics: faculty members in departments in Applied Health Sciences, Business, Education, Humanities, Mathematics and Science, and Social Sciences, and professional librarians in several units in the Library.

The BUFA representatives took notes at each of these meetings and these minutes are being analyzed now as part of the information-gathering phase of BUFA's mandate setting process. Although that process has not been completed, I am writing now to report on my experiences and observations in attending those meetings.

As a result of attending those meetings, I have concluded that we are, indeed, a very large and diverse group of dedicated, thoughtful, collegial, experienced professionals who, as a group, care deeply about the quality of teaching, learning,

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Report of the Chief Negotiator

research and governance at Brock University. As a group, we experience barriers and problems in the course of doing our work, but we are committed to confronting those barriers and solving those problems in a very constructive and productive way to ensure that we are participants in a high quality educational experience for everyone at Brock.

The department meetings we attended ranged from small informal gatherings in offices or studio spaces to large, more formally run events in boardrooms and chambers. The diversity we observed in departmental cultures during these meetings was truly surprising. We also observed displays of deep emotion, passionate debates, and the exercise of hard cold logic in these meetings. We observed that faculty members and professional librarians in the BUFA bargaining unit as a group care deeply about the quality of education, teaching, learning, research, and governance at Brock.

Despite having been at Brock since 1987, last term I managed to get totally lost in every part of the University -- from the back halls of the Walker Complex, in the hallways of the Education building, through the basement of Thistle Complex (a detailed map provided in advance by the department chair was the only thing that saved me here), along the passageways in blocks of the Mackenzie Chown Complex I had not visited before and in 573 Glenridge Avenue, to the top floor of the International Centre, and everywhere else in between. Lost, standing in the middle of the parking lot between the International Centre and 573 Glenridge Avenue, I used my cell phone to call a department chair who was expecting me for help and was told to wait there where I was and to look for someone waving her arms at the main door at the back of 573 Glenridge Avenue who would meet me and escort me to the meeting room!!

Why have all of these department meetings and discussions of problems and possible solutions been taking place now? The members of the BUFA bargaining unit and their representatives are preparing for the collective bargaining that will take place very soon under the provisions of the Ontario *Labour Relations Act*. The BUFA Executive, the BUFA Bargaining Team, the members of all of the committees that support the Bargaining Team's work, and the members of the bargaining unit generally are all reviewing the provisions of the collective agreement between BUFA and the Administration of Brock University that will expire on June 30, 2011, and they are identifying problems we have experienced in its administration. The statutory framework of the Ontario *Labour Relations Act* encourages and supports collective

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bargaining between the parties and provides mechanisms for ensuring that problems are addressed and get resolved, that sometimes difficult decisions get made, and that agreements are reached on the terms and conditions of work by the people here at Brock who have to live and work with them.

In the weeks and months ahead, the BUFA Bargaining Team will be continuing its preparations for collective bargaining which is expected to begin in mid April by, among other things, considering the results of the web-based survey of BUFA bargaining unit members (very special thanks to all who responded!), conducting additional research on selected topics of interest, assisting the BUFA Executive in the formation of a BUFA bargaining support team, and assisting the BUFA Executive in its task of deciding what BUFA Bargaining Team mandate for collective bargaining is to be presented to the BUFA membership at a special general membership meeting in early spring for approval.

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TRIOLET: BUDGET EXERCISE

GOOFY



POETICS

Paradox
tales of woe
empty box
paradox.
Wounded fox
Silent crow
Paradox
Tales of woe.

Stumbling blocks
Who's to know?
Keys, no locks,
Stumbling blocks
Scattered flocks
Bleeding snow
Stumbling blocks
Who's to know?

SYNERGIES OF SERVICE

Deep learning is distinguished from surface or “additive” learning by virtue of the quality and sophistication of the thinking, discernment and analysis and the integration and consolidation of perspectives, theory and related sources (Entwistle, 2009). In far too many instances, “more” content, “more” source material, “more” pages substitute in a horizontally additive fashion for engagement with an idea or topic that forces interrogation of premises, recursive comparison of perspectives, deconstruction and analysis of taken for granted assumptions and deliberate attention to the expressive repertoire. Deep and surface, interactive and additive are concepts that can also be applied to service in our university community in terms of engagement, functionality, and appreciation.

While service is designated its token 20% in faculty workload, this 20% is too often relegated to lip service only. Faculty members regularly miss opportunities to participate in and learn from the complexities and interconnectedness of departmental, Faculty, Faculty Association, Senate, Board, and campus-wide committees. These missed opportunities are frequently based in the perceived low currency of service in general and in the lack of understanding of how service can function both strategically and synergistically. In effect, service is experienced at a surface level and is approached in an additive fashion, when a deeper engagement and analysis would allow for more interactive functionality and more efficient and effectively linked collaboration and shared information and planning. Many committees are not even aware of redundant or helpful partnerships and this contributes to duplication on the one hand and lost time on the other.

Our Brock community is at an intriguing threshold. We can continue to avoid and disparage committee service and allow more and more university work and decision-making to be done at more and more senior levels. Alternatively, we can stop being our own worst enemies and grant service the status it deserves in P&T and workload allocation so that being involved in service is not only appreciated and supported, but is also seen as important professional development and political engagement. In this case, the choices –and their consequences—are in our hands.

Entwistle, N. (2009). *Teaching for Understanding at University: Deep Approaches and Distinctive Ways of Thinking*. Palgrave and Macmillan, Basingstoke and NY.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS



BUFA Status of Women Committee Annual Breakfast

Tuesday, March 8, 2011

8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Sankey Chamber

Please RSVP to ndufour@brocku.ca if you plan to attend this breakfast and mention any special dietary restrictions that should be taken into consideration.

BUFA Elections Schedule

On Monday, February 14th, the call for nominations to the 2011-2012 BUFA Executive Committee will be open for the following positions.

President
Vice President
Communications Officer
***Grievance Officer (2-year term)**
***Health and Safety Officer (2-year term)**
Non-tenured Faculty Representative
***OCUFA Director (2-year term)**
Professional Librarian Representative
Secretary
Treasurer
Members-at-large (2 positions)

All positions, except where noted, will serve for a one-year term from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012.

A list of nominees to date will be sent to the membership on Thursday, March 3, 2011. Nominations close on Thursday, March 10, at 4:00 p.m. A slate of candidates will be presented to the membership by Monday, March 21, 2011 and an election held on Thursday, March 31, 2011.

*** The positions of Grievance Officer, Health and Safety Officer and OCUFA Director serve a two-year term.**

2010-2011 BUFA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
and
STAFF CONTACT LIST

President	Hans Skott-Myhre Child & Youth Studies	Extension 4323 hans.skott-myhre@brocku.ca
Vice President	Kathy Belicki Psychology	Extension 3873 kathy.belicki@brocku.ca
Past President	Dawn Good Psychology	Extension 3869 dawn.good@brocku.ca
Secretary	Nancy DeCourville Psychology	Extension 4084 nancy.decourville@brocku.ca
Treasurer	Jonah Butovsky Sociology/Labour Studies	Extension 4371 jbutovsky@brocku.ca
Grievance Officer	Larry Savage Labour Studies/Political Science	Extension 5007 lsavage@brocku.ca
Health and Safety Officer	Jonathan Neufeld Graduate & Undergraduate	Extension 3771 jonathan.neufeld@brocku.ca
OCUFA Director	Michelle Webber Sociology	Extension 4411 mwebber@brocku.ca
Communications Officer	Maureen Connolly Physical Education & Kinesiology	Extension 3381 mconnoll@brocku.ca
Non-tenured Faculty Representative	Nancy Taber Graduate & Undergraduate	Extension 4218 nancy.taber@brocku.ca
Professional Librarian Representative	Laurie Morrison Liaison Services	Extension 5281 lmorrison@brocku.ca
Member-at-large	Paul Hamilton Political Science	Extension 4646 paul.hamilton@brocku.ca
Member-at-large	Jeannette Sloniowski Communications, Popular Culture & Film	Extension 4065 jeannette@brocku.ca
BUFA Executive Assistant	Leslie Dick BUFA, MCC-D402	Extension 3268 bufa@brocku.ca / ldick@brocku.ca
BUFA Administrative Assistant	Shannon Lever BUFA, MCC-D402	Extension 4643 slever@brocku.ca
BUFA Office Assistant	Nadia Dufour BUFA, MCC-C409	Extension 5378 ndufour@brocku.ca