

SMUFU Colleagues,

Twice a year, our national Canadian Association of University Teachers convenes in the spring and the fall for our bi-annual council meetings. Hundreds of delegates come together to learn about issues of national interest, brainstorm and network and vote on matters related to the operations of the association through to positions on issues that concern us as academics.

I have been attending these meetings for several years now, and always come away with new insights and ideas, and it has occurred to me that some of you may have an interest in hearing some of my main take-aways from these events.

A highlight of this year's meeting was a presentation by Brad Levigne, of Counsel Public Affairs on the *Public attitudes of post-secondary education in Canada*. This is primarily intended to inform the CAUT's advocacy for post-secondary education for the next federal Canadian election, but it occurred to me that this can also support our next round of bargaining. 2521 Canadians were surveyed in May, 2024 with regards to societal attitudes towards post-secondary education institutions and those who teach at them. After a discussion of the political landscape in Canada, the presenter addressed the critical issue of ensuring that our post-secondary advocacy work is grounded in understanding the average Canadian's perceptions of our sector, understanding where people are largely leaning politically, and focusing our actions in response to these perceptions.

The results from the analysis and intelligence that informs action concluded that the perceived value of Universities and colleges in Canada has been diminishing (as a function of value for money), however post-secondary education remains a core value for the majority of Canadians. Mr. Levigne cautioned against a negative political discourse as this would not be constructive in light of the findings. The analysis also concluded that the Canadian public has a high level of confidence in academics, that there are concerns related to freedom of speech, that governments (federal and provincial) should not interfere in the academic operations of Universities and colleges, and that a University/College degree is essential and not a luxury and should therefore benefit from funding to enable accessible education for all Canadians.

The main message? Post-secondary education provides a net benefit to the country and to our communities. Leaning into this message, the Executive Director of CAUT, David Robinson, and other staff from CAUT presented the official CAUT lobbying campaign *Unlock Education* (<https://education2025.ca/>). In his presentation to council, Robinson also noted the reluctance by governments to fund and support Universities and Colleges. While costs of services and declining International students have impacted institutions across the country, there was still a \$1.5B surplus across the sector in 2022-23, while provincial funding has declined 1.9%. Good news included the fact that the demographic outlook for domestic students will mean eventual increases in enrolments of between 15 -35% depending on the province (lower end for NS).

Robinson also spoke about concerns related to academic freedom in Canada and urged members to review their Collective Agreements for language specific to *extramural* academic freedom to ensure that protections are robust.

Council also heard from the *Scholars at Risk* program, urging members to remain engaged and to support where and whenever possible.

Many motions and engaged discussions took place, and I am happy to answer questions or discuss these in detail with any interested members. Of note: a motion that was one motion and had to become two in relation to opposing the IHRA limitations on academic freedom and support and endorsement for BDS across Canadian faculty unions both passed. IJV has a summary: <https://www.ijvcanada.org/canadian-association-of-university-teachers-says-no-to-academic-censorship-on-palestine/>.

For those who ever wonder, our CAUT dues provide a great return on our expenses. We receive extraordinary support, solidarity and education from our national association.

Solidarity Forever!

Cathy Conrad,
SMUFU President,
December, 2024