

April 9, 2014

Open letter to the University community:

Many members have asked us to provide information about a series of apparently sudden and unexplained job terminations of non-union Brock employees over the last few weeks, if not months. In all cases these individuals have worked alongside BUFA, CUPE or OSSTF members for many years and have contributed valuable support to the University's success. The Executives of all the Unions on campus share the sense of loss expressed by our members, as well as their frustration at the lack of information, consultation, and transition support that have accompanied these termination decisions.

The details that have been reported to us by our members have led us to be deeply concerned about the manner in which these terminations apparently have taken place and their subsequent impact on our members. In many cases the lack of a departmentally based plan for the transfer of the former staff member's responsibilities has created, and continues to create, a significant problem for the operation of department's programs. The reported process by which individuals were terminated has raised several serious concerns among our members. One such concern is the apparent disregard of collegial self-governance, which requires that affected members be meaningfully consulted in decisions that affect their working conditions, programs, and the structure and functioning of their departments.

We also note current decisions to cut staff have been made before both the President's Special Task Force (focusing on administrative programs) and the Senate's Ad Hoc Committee for Program Review and Prioritization (focusing on academic programs) have completed their work. The reports of these committees were to provide a framework for restructuring, program change, and the direction of budget cuts for 2014-2015, which is when the current job losses will first have any budgetary impact. Why, then, has the University implemented these job cuts without the benefit of the recommendations of the committees that were created to guide this process?

Another concern expressed by our members was the manner in which they observed these terminations to be implemented. The process apparently involved a sudden notification

and removal from the University, under the escort of a Human Resources or Security staff member. It appears that the process could have been carried out in a more sensitive way that afforded the affected employees greater dignity and control and reduced the emotional impact on the “survivors” of the terminations. Some ways in which a termination process can be made more sensitive is to give the targeted staff members an opportunity to take time to complete key projects, transition their responsibilities, and say goodbye to co-workers.

The University Administration has provided us with little information about the goals, decision-making strategy, and timeframe for the job terminations. Misinformation, rumours, and stress are an almost inevitable result of a lack of information in times of threat, as potentially affected individuals try to make sense of what is happening. The stress level among staff is palpable and reportedly affecting their ability to function at their usually high levels of performance and effectiveness. **Morale at Brock is noticeably deteriorating, along with a growing sense of a lack of understanding and appreciation for the vital role we all play at the University.** Certainly, the loss of a colleague’s job is a sad event in any circumstances, but anxiety and depression in remaining employees have been heightened by a lack of communication from the Administration about the goals, decision-making principles, and timeline associated with the job terminations. Anxiety is further exacerbated by the lack of support for employees left behind, who are worrying about their own jobs, facing increased workload, and contemplating an uncertain future.

The current atmosphere on campus, coupled with the Administration’s approach in recent months to job terminations, flies directly in the face of a core value and strategic priority as expressed in the University’s Strategic Mandate Agreement.

“As a public, service-oriented institution, our employees are essential and foundational to productivity, innovation, and efficiency. In creating our Integrated Strategic Plan, we have identified being “a preferred place to work and study” as both a core value and a strategic priority. We understand the nested relationship between student and employee engagement, productivity, and innovation. We know that a fully engaged workforce outperforms (e.g., profit margins in the private sector, cost reductions and efficiencies in the public sector) organizations whose workforces are not engaged. To enable employees to be productive, we must provide the tools and a work environment that support their wellbeing. We are committed at Brock to implementing an Organizational Development Program and a Strategic Human Resources Plan. Additionally, we are building partnerships with local employers and community partners such as Niagara College and the Niagara Region to find efficiencies in the areas of organizational development and staff training.”

We oppose any further cuts to staff at the University as we feel it will inevitably harm the core functions of the University, continue to lower morale, and ultimately negatively impact our students' learning environment.

In Solidarity,

Linda Rose-Krasnor, BUFA President

Norm Westbury, President, OSSTF D35

Dan Crow, President, CUPE 4207

Shane Jenkins, President, CUPE 1295
