

May 14, 2021

The King's University College Faculty Association (KUCFA) stands in solidarity with our colleagues from the Laurentian University Faculty Association / Association des professeures et professeurs de l'Université Laurentienne (LUFA/APPUL), who are facing existential threats to their working conditions, collegial governance, and collective bargaining. In a surprising move, on February 1, 2021, Laurentian University filed for court protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA) due to financial challenges it is facing as a result of reckless administrative decisions and the erosion of public university funding.

On April 2, Laurentian University unilaterally terminated its federation agreements with Huntington University, Thorneloe University, and the University of Sudbury. Over the past two months, Laurentian University has cut more than 60 academic programs and – following an in-camera Senate vote – terminated over 100 faculty positions and issued 83 termination notices for academic staff without severance as a result of insolvency proceedings. Since King's is an affiliate university of a larger institution, we at KUCFA are keenly aware of the dangerous precedent set by Laurentian administration via its unilateral and secretive termination of federation agreements, program cuts, and disrespect of students, faculty, and staff, and firmly believe this presents a serious challenge to the security of academic workers in higher education across Ontario.

The Laurentian University Faculty Association repeatedly raised concerns about the increasingly non-consultative approach that university administration has taken to making important financial decisions at the University. At Laurentian and at other universities across Ontario, more and more decisions are being made in secret and in clear violation of collective agreements and university constitutions. We are seeing more and more examples of universities circumventing existing collegial governance structures that include faculty, staff, and students. Importantly, financial crises like the one at Laurentian University are likely to happen again across the sector so long as the provincial government continues to systematically under-fund universities, rely on over-priced international tuition rates, and erode the collegial model of university governance in favour of a corporate managerial model.

While this is not the first time a public university in Canada has experienced financial distress, it is to the best of our knowledge the first time one has sought creditor protection under the CCAA in this way. We stand in solidarity with LUFA and maintain that the appropriate way forward is not creditor protection for a public institution, but it is to receive increase support from the Ontario and federal governments to sustain Laurentian University and, if required, support Laurentian in their handling of financial exigency in ways already built into LUFA/APPUL's agreement with Laurentian's administration. We also stand in solidarity with LUFA/APPUL in calls for the federal and provincial governments to protect universities from entering into corporate insolvency proceedings like the CCAA.

Laurentian University faculty and staff at Laurentian have been doing incredibly wonderful work under extraordinarily difficult conditions since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and should therefore not be suffering as a result of administrative mismanagement. KUCFA therefore unequivocally supports our colleagues at LUFA/APPUL in their attempts to get the Ontario government to the table.

We at KUCFA:

1. Maintain that Laurentian is a public institution, not a private sector corporation;
2. Condemn the systematic erosion of collegial governance by administration at Laurentian University;
3. Ask the Provincial and Federal governments to:
 - a) Challenge the CCAA process immediately and fully fund Laurentian University in support of its multi-lingual mandate that service Indigenous students and Northern communities;
 - b) Protect all universities from private insolvency proceedings like the CCAA;
 - c) Protect collective bargaining rights and collective agreements at all Ontario universities;
4. Ask LU to:
 - a) Ensure that research funding for graduate programs and their faculty members are restored;
 - b) Immediately stop the layoffs to faculty and staff and secure their employment through the proper bargaining processes;
 - c) Ensure that collegial governance and collective bargaining rights for faculty and staff are respected.