

President's Annual Report to CAFA

Council May 22 2025

I am pleased to report on the Federation's work in 2024-25 in three areas: Advocacy, Bargaining, Governance

Overview: A Year of Consolidation

Let me start with thanks to Past President Dan O'Donnell, who firmly set us on the path becoming a member-directed federation, or Dan might say, a community of practice focused on Alberta postsecondary education. Working with Dan is inspiring and we have been well-served by his strategic thinking and communications prowess.

Reviewing the year, there have been unexpected developments both at the federal and provincial level. On the federal side, the government cut the quotas for international students now including graduate students while also changing the rules for post-graduate work permits. We have seen the impact of this policy in the college-sector where program cuts and faculty layoffs have rippled through ACIFA's membership. Olds College, Red Deer Polytechnic, Lethbridge Polytechnic have all reduced programs and faculty while last week NAIT cancelled 16 programs. In solidarity with ACIFA, CAFA issued a statement opposing the FLAP funding cuts which have also affected college faculty and students. In March, the Liberals were re-elected with a strong minority government averting the possibility of a Conservative government who planned to attack academic freedom with its goal to root out federally "woke research" projects. That crisis is averted for now but the impact of the tariff wars and other trading issues will have impacts on PSE across Canada and in Alberta. Provincially, the Smith government created many issues for postsecondary education with these initiatives.

- Bill 18 and its regulations
- A suite of anti-trans youth legislation including Bill 29 which will affect intramural sports in both the university and college sector. No regulations have been proposed and the legislation remains in limbo.
- Appointment of the Expert Panel to Recommend a Funding Model in December 2024

- Operating grants remain unchanged in the coming year—a decrease by any other name.

With all these challenges, CAFA has responded with advocacy on a number of fronts.

Advocacy

The Federation has been active on a number of advocacy initiatives. We have contributed to Public Interest Alberta's *Reinvest in Postsecondary Education* campaign, which be rolling out lawn signs over the next month. We expect more actions will be forthcoming as the campaign unfolds. We have also issued statements of support for First Nations leaders who have objected the province's referendum bill changes (Bill 54). We have opposing the province's *Safety and Transparency in Sport Act* (Bill 29).

Provincial Priorities Act Update

After a busy summer of consultations, the Ministry released the regulations around federally funded research grants. As reported at our previous Council meeting on Bill 18 CAFA worked with CAUT to organize a letter-writing campaign and supported the MRFA's rally to oppose Bill 18 and interference with collective bargaining. We met with the Deputy Minister who noted that CAFA's expert panel had been quite helpful to the Ministry. While CAFA continues to hold that PSIs should be removed from this act, the Ministerial exemptions will ensure that faculty research can continue without government interference.



On the government relations front, CAFA pressed for and received an invitation to meet with the Mintz Panel on May 7, an invitation not extended to individual faculty associations. We presented to the Panelist including Chair Jack Mintz and have made a written

submission to the panel to reinforce our recommendations. Finally, CAFA now meets with the Deputy Minister regularly and we are looking to meet with the new Minister as soon as possible.

ACIFA and CAFA Collaboration

Over the past year, CAFA and ACIFA have continued our collaboration. ACIFA LRO Brian McCulloch has joined CAFA's Grievance Committee. It was a pleasure to support ACIFA President Shauna Macdonald's initiative to bring together faculty representatives on Boards of Governors to enhance communication and understanding of their roles in Board governance. CAUT Governance Committee co-chair Marc Schroeder spoke to those reps and pointed out CAUT's governance resources. Finally, CAFA joined ACIFA to make a FOIP request to access a letter from then Minister Nicolaides to Boards about the role of faculty on Board Committees. Most importantly, CAFA and ACIFA commissioned a research report to make a submission to the Mintz Panel. Lucille Gnanasihmany of LG Consultants was selected to complete that report.

Reaching Out "Beyond the Lecture Hall"

In March, CAFA launched a regular podcast focused on PSE issues and on our members' work in organizing faculty. The third episode will be uploaded next week and the fourth will be available in mid-June. We have budgeted for the podcast to continue next year and we will report to Council on it both in September and January. I will be working with Lucille on how to better integrate this podcast into our communications as part of our strategic planning. *Suggestions for topics, improvements or additions are welcome!*

Focus on Communications

CAFA Executive conducted a national search for a Communications Coordinator to enhance CAFA's advocacy efforts, outreach, support member communications, and build our public presence on line and with allies. Lucille Gnanasihmany has joined CAFA as the Communication Coordinator. Lucille brings a wealth of experience in postsecondary education in Alberta (MRU) and in BC (TRU). As a consultant, Lucille has been working closely with Indigenous communities and with PSIs in Saskatchewan and prepared the CAFA/ACIFA presentation to the Mintz panel and the follow-up report. Lucille will be

attending CAFA Council and I look forward to introducing her to Council.

Collective Bargaining

The Federation aims to facilitate collaboration and communication among faculty associations especially with respect to collective bargaining. Working with CAUT, CAFA has organized monthly bargaining updates that include CAFA members and representatives from AASUA, ACIFA and TUCFA. Both St Mary's University and Concordia University of Edmonton have joined the bargaining meetings as has the Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA) at the University of Alberta and AUPE. Many thanks to ACIFA's LRO Brian and Concordia's Glynis Price for facilitating these important meetings. We continue to bring together the Job Action Committee.

Governance

One success this year has been the formation of various working groups/committees to focus on specific issues. As I mentioned earlier, Chris Burton ably chaired the Collective Bargaining Committee and the Job Action Committee. We also formed a Grievance Committee which met several times and has created a set of resources for grievance officers including a spreadsheet to track experience with mediators/arbitrators and some best practices around dealing with member-to-member conflicts. We were unable to form an EDI Committee and it became clear that this year much of the advocacy work fell to either the Government Relations Committee (thank you Bob and Dan!) or to the President. That said, it's clear that the portfolio approach has been effective and the Governance Committee has recommended a series of changes to the CAFA By-laws to enshrine this approach.

CAFA Awards 2024 and 2025

We successfully hosted the CAFA Awards which recognizing faculty excellence in research and teaching. Held in Edmonton, CAFA welcomed over 75 guests including representatives from government the Ministry of Advanced Education , Rural Municipalities of

Alberta and of course, the award winners pictured here.



This year the 2025 CAFA Awards will be held September 25 at a gala in Edmonton. Council will review recommendations for the 2025 Awards at its AGM May 23. Do encourage your members to consider nominating colleagues for the 2026 CAFA Awards!

The Year Ahead

Many challenges lie ahead this. On the government front, we have a new Minister of Advanced Education Lyle McDougall, who has a range of experience with Alberta PSE. McDougall is known for being detailed oriented and knowing his files well. This attention to detail will be important when the Mintz Panel issue its recommendations for a new PSE funding model. While CAFA and ACIFA have advocated for stakeholder consultations on any proposed model, realistically, the government will likely move to implement the model in the next budget cycle. CAFA must prepare our response to the recommendations so we are ready when the Panel reports.

Collective bargaining will continue to be a focus in the fall if agreements are not reached soon. CAFA will continue to support information sharing among PSE stakeholders and the Job Action Committee will continue its work. After collective bargaining ends, we will need to debrief on this round and begin planning for the next round.

The AASUA bad faith bargaining complaint will require close attention since the constitutional issues at play may not be resolved. CAFA and others will want to continue to work those who also wish to challenge to use of mandates in collective bargaining. Both the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators (FPSE) in BC and the Saskatchewan Organization of Faculty Associations (SOFA) have expressed interested in

challenging government interference in free collective bargaining.

Finally, we remain open to working with the faculty associations at both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta. CAFA believes that our interests are well-served when all the faculty associations in the university sector work together.

As part of strengthening our own federation, we need to continue build out our policy structures. I look forward to welcoming the new Officers from MacEwan, Lethbridge and Athabasca as we head into the new year. All of this report, sets the stage for Friday May 23, when we create a strategic plan that focuses on CAFA's mission and vision and will guide our work in 2025-26 and beyond,

Thanks to....

Let me finish then with heartfelt thanks to the retiring CAFA Officers including: Treasurer Bob Graves (MacEwan) for keeping CAFA books in order and for serving on the Governance Committee; Vice-President Chris Burton (ULFA) who chaired our Job Action Committee and the Collective Bargaining Committee; and Secretary Kate Finegan (AUFA) whose also worked on the Governance Committee and represented CAFA at Edmonton events. Thank you to CAUT representatives Claudia Stienke and Marc Schroeder for attending our Officer meetings and offering your insights.

Let me also thank Member at Large Brenda Lang (MRFA) and Past President Dan O'Donnell for their contributions over the year. I look forward to our work together in coming year.

Finally, no thanks would be complete if I did not end with extending immense thanks and gratitude to Lori Morinville for her dedicated service to CAFA. Lori's deep knowledge of CAFA and the provincial PSE sector, her strategic thinking and knowledge about board governance was key to the work CAFA undertook this year. THANK YOU.

Respectfully submitted
Lee Easton (he/him)
CAFA President