



U URFA Update

**Volume 1, Issue 2
September, 2018**

Equity on Campus

**U of R Academic Staff
Bargaining Update**

**Why Are U of R
BOG Meetings Closed?**



UNIVERSITY OF REGINA
FACULTY ASSOCIATION

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URFA President's Message

When I was running for the position of URFA's President back in April 2018, I suggested that I would visit all URFA members. When dealing with an organization that has over 1400 members, it's quite an ambitious endeavour. I waited until everybody was back on campus and I started knocking on doors. On September 10th, accompanied by Eric Bell, URFA's Communications Officer, we visited APT and Academic members from the First Nations University of Canada. We had the chance to chat with six FNUniv APT members and one FNUniv Academic. I did not really have a plan to start with, I would simply knock on doors, introduce myself, and just listen to what members had to say. I heard sad stories and good stories and I don't know yet what will come out of these conversations. I think the most important thing is to start a dialog with all the members, one at a time, and make sure the dialog is kept alive.

URFA will also be embarking on a strategic planning exercise in the coming months. I now these words sound awfully "corporate" and I wish there could be something more "union". But the point is that URFA should have the capacity to change, and we need a process to do so. We need to know from the members how URFA should be working and take into account every voice. It is a long process, but it is an important one. I will keep you updated on this.

Collegial governance is like a good pair of glasses; it is a frail thing. When used properly, it helps to see things clearly,



but it can be misplaced, forgotten, lost or even broken. We have to take good care of our collegial governance, just like we take good care of our glasses (for those of us who wear them). Please, get involved in all levels of governance and always make sure administration is done in a transparent way and that members are consulted. Discuss these things with colleagues from your unit and if need be, ask URFA for advice or help.

The UofR Academic bargaining team is currently hard at work representing the interest of members from that particular bargaining unit. You can show your support by wearing a button, discussing bargaining issues with your colleagues and attending bargaining update meetings. Don't let pessimism set in, we are all members of an association and there is strength in numbers.

In solidarity,

Sylvain Rheault
URFA President

Executive Director's Message

Welcome back to the 2018 - 2019 academic year. Where did the summer go?

Hopefully you had a safe and enjoyable summer and are re-energized. The start of a new academic year is exciting and the heightened energy level is easily noticeable with the start of the fall semester. However, the academic year goes beyond this initial time, and energy management can be a key to health and well-being. Remember, there are only so many hours in a day and you are in control of your energy level. Step back periodically and assess what can realistically be done within a day versus the demands and pressures. Health and well-being must come first, and of course are protected in multiple ways under your collective agreement.

I look forward to this academic year and URFA's continued support of its members. Our first priority this academic year will be the continued negotiations on the University of Regina Academic agreement, followed by academic bargaining with First Nations University of Canada, Campion College and Luther College. Please be engaged in these negotiations as doing so provides feedback and support to our hardworking bargaining teams.

Remember, if you have a question regarding your collective agreement, an accommodation, a return-to-work, your benefits, your workload, etc. please contact the URFA office to speak with one of the Member Services Officers.



These amazing people are here to help you.

As your Executive Director, I am extremely proud to be part of this Association and look forward to continuing to serve its members. Again, welcome back and have a great year!

Kevin Siebert, URFA Executive Director

NOTICE

New Email for URFA President

Please note that the email address for URFA President Sylvain Rheault has changed. All inquiries and email correspondence with the URFA President should be sent to:

URFA.president@uregina.ca

URFA says goodbye to longtime staff member

After a 30-year career, Professional Officer Debbie Sagel retired from her position at URFA at the end of July.

Starting at URFA in 1988, Debbie assumed the role of Professional Officer in 1995, and also spent time in recent years as acting Executive Director. Dedicated to the URFA membership until her last day at the office, a final of Debbie's many accomplishments was working to negotiate a new collective agreement for First Nations University APT members.

We thank Debbie for her years of dedicated service to URFA and its membership, and send our best wishes to her as she embarks on a new adventure!



URFA Professional Officer Debbie Sagel, who started her career at URFA in 1988, retired at the end of July.

URFA Fall General Meeting

**Tuesday, October 30
2:30 PM LI 215**



Follow URFA on Social Media!

URFA has now joined both Facebook and Twitter in order to keep members more informed of the activities and events at URFA, as well as what's going on with URFA affiliates such as CAUT and the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour as well as other Faculty Associations across the country.

We just launched our Facebook and Twitter accounts a few weeks ago, and we'd love to have more followers and engagement on our posts!

Like URFA on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) to stay up to date with the latest news and events from your Faculty Association.



FOLLOW US!

And keep up-to-date with the latest news, events and updates from URFA

 facebook.com/UofRFA

 [@UofRFA](https://twitter.com/UofRFA)



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Important Dates- Fall Semester

September

Sept. 18- Executive Committee Meeting

Sept. 25- Council of Reps. Meeting

October

Oct. 23- Executive Committee Meeting

Oct. 9- Grievance Committee Meeting

Oct. 30- URFA Fall General Meeting

November

Nov. 7-12- Fall Semester Break

Nov. 13- Grievance Committee Meeting

Nov. 20- Executive Committee Meeting

Nov. 27- Council of Reps. Meeting



Collective Bargaining Updates

University of Regina Academic

Negotiations for the U of R Academic Staff Collective Agreement are underway, and after several bargaining sessions with the employer throughout the summer months, there are key issues that still remain unresolved.

Although agreement has been reached on a number of housekeeping items, there are many proposals still unresolved that signal a concerning shift in the employer's priorities away from research. The employer's proposal also continues to ignore key issues such as job security for sessional members, and their position on compensation does not keep pace with inflation.

A letter and a postcard outlining a brief overview of the priorities identified by the membership was mailed out to all U of R Academic staff members in August. More postcards, as well as buttons to show your support, are available at the URFA Office.

A meeting of the U of R Academic Staff membership was held on September 12, where the Bargaining Committee discussed the status of negotiations in more detail. A copy of the power point presentation delivered at the meeting is [available online](#) for those who were unable to attend.

Members of the Bargaining Committee will also be tabling regularly on campus

as negotiations continue to answer any questions you may have. If you see URFA tabling on campus, please stop by to say hello, grab a postcard or a button, and show solidarity with your fellow URFA colleagues.

More bargaining dates have been set with the employer and URFA Academic staff members will continue to receive regular email updates as negotiations continue.

First Nations University APT

Following several days of bargaining with the employer throughout the spring, the First Nations University APT Bargaining Committee was able to reach an agreement with the employer on June 12 on a four-year collective agreement effective July 1, 2017.

A meeting of the First Nations University APT membership outlining the proposed new agreement was held on June 20, followed by a ratification vote. Members voted in favour of the proposed new agreement and it was ratified in July. A copy of the new 2017-2021 First Nations University APT Collective Agreement is [available online](#) on the URFA website.

Thank you to the First Nations University APT Bargaining Committee for all of their hard work, as well as all First Nations University APT members for their guidance and support throughout the negotiation process.

URFA Emergency Fund available to members

The Faculty Association has a Member Emergency Fund to support members with emergency circumstances due to the sudden loss or decline in remuneration from the University or affiliated college. Applications are made through the URFA Executive Director and are kept strictly confidential.

Expenditures from this fund are consid-

ered loans, normally to be repaid within one calendar year, however, the term of repayment is flexible.

If you would like to make an application to the fund, please contact URFA Executive director Kevin Siebert at 306-337-2968 or at kevin.siebert@uregina.ca. More information on the URFA emergency fund is available online at www.urfa.ca.

U of R Sexual Violence Response Coordinator able to assist URFA members

Recently, the URFA Equity Committee met with the University of Regina's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Coordinator to discuss their work in developing the University's sexual assault prevention and response policies.

During the meeting, the Coordinator noted that they are able to assist everyone on campus, including all University employees. They are also able to assist those who have had reports of sexual assault disclosed to them by others on campus, including

from students. Support is available without having to make a formal report. URFA is available to assist, advise and support you through this process.

The Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Coordinator can be reached at 306-337-3149, or by email at sexual.violence.response@uregina.ca. The Office is located in Riddell Centre 251 and hours are 8:30-4:40, Monday-Friday.

More information is available online at www.uregina.ca/sexual-violence.

Deadline for Fall GM motions is Sept. 25

The URFA Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 30 at 2:30 p.m. in LI 215.

The deadline to submit motions to the URFA Bylaw and Resolution Committee is 4:30 P.M. on Tuesday, September 25. Motions submitted in writing must be

signed by the mover and the seconder.

For motions submitted by e-mail the mover and the seconder should each submit the motion indicating they are either the mover or seconder. The Bylaw and Resolution Committee shall be responsible for ensuring that resolutions and motions

submitted comply with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Association.

Motions can be mailed to the Bylaw and Resolution Committee c/o URFA Office (Room 122 Campion College), e-mail to urfa@uregina.ca; or e-mail to the URFA President, URFA.President@uregina.ca

The Annual General Meeting is open to University of Regina and FNUniv APT members, and Faculty/Academics at University of Regina, Campion College, Luther College, and First Nations University.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact URFA at urfa@uregina.ca; 306-585-4378



URFA Equity Committee Update

The URFA Equity Committee met over the summer and last met at the end of August, where we discussed the committee's priorities for the upcoming year, including potential opportunities for member education and engagement.

The committee is also actively involved in reviewing and giving feedback on the development of the University's sexual assault policy. Equity Committee members will be attending the "Campus Conversations" to pose questions about the University's policy and strategies when it comes to sexual assault prevention and response. URFA members are encouraged to attend the sessions and give their own feedback as well as pose questions.

The dates and times for the Campus Conversations are:

Policy

September 19, 2:00-4:00 pm in CW 113

Prevention

September 27, 10:00 am-12:00pm in AH 527

As always, if you have any equity-related concerns, ideas, or would like to get involved with the committee, please contact URFA Equity Committee Chair Bridget Klest at bridget.klest@uregina.ca

URFA Sessional Advocacy Committee Update

After a summer break, the URFA Sessional Advocacy Committee is back and making plans for events and activities to bring awareness of issues faced by sessional instructors. Stay tuned for more information on SAC activities throughout the coming year, including activities in recognition of mental health week during the first week of October.

In August, URFA SAC Chair Marianne Jacobsen and URFA Member Services Officer Colin Tether attended the Coalition of Contingent Academic Labour (COCAL) Conference in San Jose, California. The conference started off with an excellent talk on the effects that “trickle-down economics” has had on creating neo liberal higher education institutions.

At the conference, Chandra Pasma of CUPE presented a report of the research they have been conducting on Sessional workers across Canada. This report is due to come out later in the year. Through the freedom of information act, CUPE was able to obtain data on the numbers of sessionals vs. faculty in higher education institutions over the past 10 years. We look forward to the release of the report.

The conference also discussed the subcontracting of online courses to private companies from afar that are charging far less than what a sessional instructor would get paid, and have far worse working conditions than our local instructors. This sets a dangerous precedent, and

rules and regulations of the universities need to be re-written in order to prevent this from happening.

Local responses and solutions to precarious working conditions were also discussed. As always, mobilization is important, and having a grassroots program for mobilizing the faculty was suggested as a way to build momentum on campus. However, it was noted that it is also important to get support for sessionals from students, faculty and the public. Engaging the public and the provincial government was highlighted as key in addressing issues.

This conference came at a perfect time to get motivated as the new academic year has started and U of R Academic is bargaining. We have discussed how we can bring some of the ideas shared at the conference to URFA and look forward to the coming months and the activities we will be doing to connect with our members.

If you would like more information about the SAC Committee or you would like to get involved, please contact URFA at urfa@uregina.ca.

Remembering former URFA Chair Oscar Seawell

Dr. Oscar Seawell, Professor Emeritus of Engineering and former URFA Chair, passed away on September 2 at the age of 95.

Dr. Seawell began his career at the University in 1971 as a Professor of Mechanical Engineering, following a career as a nuclear engineer in California. He later developed a Systems Engineering Program at the University and became a Professor of Systems Engineering. Dr. Seawell retired from the University in 1989, but continued to teach Engineering part time until 1993.

In 1975, Dr. Seawell was elected Vice Chair of the URFA Executive Committee, and was elected Chair of the URFA Executive Committee in 1976. It was at this time during Dr. Seawell's term as Chair that the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board named URFA the certified bargaining agent for the academic staff, librarians, lab instructors, and sessionals employed at the University of Regina and Campion and Luther Colleges, and URFA officially became a union.

A longtime colleague in the Faculty of Engineering, Art Opseth, reflected on Dr. Seawell's career:

“He had a great relationship with all the students and was a great professor. It was unfortunate that when he retired we had a mandatory retirement age of 65 and the faculty did not have the resources to keep him on staff since he could have continued to make a great contribution to the university for many more years. We were so fortunate to have had him as a member of



Professor Emeritus of Engineering Dr. Oscar Seawell was URFA Chair from 1976-77. (U of R Library)

the Engineering Faculty. Oscar was a truly great Professor.”

It is because of the work of early members like Dr. Seawell that URFA members are able to enjoy strong collective agreements and better working conditions today. URFA continues to build on the legacy of our early members, negotiating collective agreements that make gains in compensation, while protecting and improving language and benefits in our collective agreements that members like Dr. Seawell first fought hard for over 40 years ago.

Dr. Seawell is survived by his wife, Bonnie, and three children.

Equity on Campus: A Discussion with Bridget Klest

Dr. Bridget Klest is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and the Chair of URFA's Equity Committee. URFA Communications Officer Eric Bell recently sat down with Dr. Klest to discuss equity, what it means, and how we can address equity issues on campus. This interview has been edited and condensed.

To start off, could you give a brief explanation of equity as a concept, for someone who might not know?

Equity is recognizing that not everyone is treated equally or has equal opportunity, and recognizing the barriers that get in the way for some people, for people who are members of equity seeking-groups, like women, visible minorities, aboriginal people and people with disabilities.

Equity can also extend to include things like gender identity, sexual orientation, parental status, lots of things that contribute to a person's day to day experience that may have implications for how they experience their working environment. Equity then, is about recognizing the barriers that people face, and trying to address those barriers.

People don't often see the issues that many people might face at work on a daily basis. How can people be more conscious and aware of the equity issues that exist in their workplace?



Associate Professor of Psychology and URFA Equity Committee Chair Dr. Bridget Klest.

“ Equity is realizing that not everyone is treated equally or has equal opportunity ”

One of the big issues that we deal with is the fact that people are generally unaware of the barriers other people face because, when people face barriers, they don't necessarily want to announce it to the world. That could have negative implications for them at work, it could affect them socially, and it's also very tiring to have to tell everybody and educate everybody about

the specific barriers they might face. So one of the really important things is education about the kinds of issues that people might face when they are part of equity seeking groups. Understanding things like how our own language and assumptions are biased in many cases against people from different groups. And we might not recognize our own biases, but it contributes to the day to day experiences of other people.

“ One of the big issues that we deal with is the fact that people are generally unaware of the barriers other people face ”

If we all are aware of the implicit biases we have, we can all take action when these biases come into play, and we think about whether we're making decisions based on implicit biases or on actual information.

What are some of the equity challenges faced by members in our workplaces on campus?

One of the things I've noticed here is a perception of a scarcity of resources, and a perception that addressing equity is going to take a lot of resources away from budgets that are already tight. So I think that there is an attitude at this university that if it does take money to

do, it should be avoided at all costs. And that's not a great attitude to have, because one, it's not consistent with law, and two, it shows that we don't value certain members of our community equally. I think that's part of what equity is about, realizing that different members of our community have differences, and those differences are valuable and not a threat.

So what can people do to make things more equitable for everyone on campus?

That's complicated, because for a lot of people it seems like an impossible battle since so many of these biases are so ingrained and a part of our culture that it's very hard to think about things in a different way.

At the same time, there have been cultural changes and shifts that have gained momentum over time and eventually, they reach a tipping point where they create a change in society.

So what can people do? People can start to recognize their biases, they can recognize the challenges that are faced by themselves and other people. By starting to think about that, and recognizing where you may be benefiting, where you may be facing challenges, where others may be facing challenges. Just that awareness is a first piece.

Continued on page 17...

Photos: URFA out and about



URFA was pleased to once again have the opportunity to march in Queen City Pride along with the UR Pride Centre. A small but mighty contingent of URFA members and their family and friends were able to join in the parade that drew thousands of Regina to celebrate Pride and continue the fight for LGBTQ equality.

during the summer months



TOP: URFA Executive Director Kevin Siebert chats with members during the annual Gathering on the Green Barbecue. BOTTOM LEFT: U of R Academic Bargaining Committee member Kate Cushon discusses bargaining priorities with URFA members while tabling on campus in August. BOTTOM RIGHT: URFA President Sylvain Rheault welcomes new members on behalf of URFA during the University's orientation day for new faculty.

Why are U of R BOG meetings closed?

By Dennis Fitzpatrick



The above graphic from the Canadian Association of University Teachers shows the U of R at the bottom of the least transparent boards of governors at Canadian Universities. (CAUT)

Dr. David Robinson, CAUT's Executive Director, spoke to the conflict between fiduciary duty and collegial governance at CAUT's Western meeting last year. He used *Harelkin v. University of Regina (1979)* as the foundation for his presentation. The Supreme Court of Canada found "The Act incorporates a university and does not alter the traditional nature of such an institution as a community of scholars and students enjoying substantial internal autonomy... [I]ts immediate and direct responsibility extends primarily to its present members." The faculty, the current community of scholars, has management rights and responsibilities. The Board of Governors,

meetings should be open and Faculty should be represented in a meaningful manner. CAUT's Legal Advisory has been posted on its [website](#).

CAUT's recent report *Board of Governors Structures at Thirty-One Canadian Universities (May 2018 - Posted on the URFA web site)* summarizes their study and identifies local governance issues. They ranked Canadian University concluding that Carleton, Regina, Saskatchewan and Memorial University were in a class of their own - the worst class.

CAUT's note on Saskatchewan states "Together, the two major Universities of Saskatchewan are notable for the limited faculty presence on their boards. Their boards are smaller than most universities' boards, and their members receive monetary payment in the form of honorariums and access to university facilities at no cost. In every other province, university board members are strictly volunteers. Both of these facts are worth mentioning because they make the boards more like corporate boards rather than the boards of public bodies. Typically, corporate boards are smaller closed groups whose members receive payment. Public boards and non-profits usually have more open boards of community, professional, and organizational volunteers."

I encourage you to take the time to learn the facts of University governance. Start with CAUT LegalAdvisory A Corporation

and a Community: Fiduciary Duties of University Board Members available on the URFA web site. This advisory concludes, “the reliance of corporate law concept of fiduciary duty to deny or inhibit representations by board members as academic staff representatives is a misapplication of the concept within the collegial governance system.” Next, read their recent report on governance.

The University of Regina is a public institution. Board of Governors meetings should be open, minutes transparent and Faculty should be represented in a meaningful manner.

Dennis Fitzpatrick is a Professor of Biochemistry and served as URFA President from 2015-2018.

Have something to share?

URFA welcomes opinion pieces, news articles, and profiles submitted to the newsletter from our membership. Maybe it’s a colleague who is doing something interesting that other members should know about, or perhaps it’s an issue on campus that you’d like brought to other people’s attention. Whatever it is, we’re happy to have it!

Articles should be between 250-300 words and all submissions will be considered for publication at URFA’s discretion. Submissions will be published in the quarterly URFA Update newsletter, sent to approximately 1,400 URFA members.

Please send submissions and story ideas to Eric Bell, URFA Communications Officer at eric.bell@uregina.ca

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And then, taking actions, even small actions like thinking about the language you use, and changing how you talk to other people. Little changes build and build and get to a tipping point and big change happens. I think if we think about it that way, it seems less hopeless.

How can people get involved with the URFA Equity Committee?

The Equity Committee has a number of big projects that we’re working on, and anyone who is interested in these issues can get involved with the

Equity Committee, or even just a specific project with the committee. We’re still solidifying what we’re working on this year, but there will be a lot of member education pieces, we are involved in learning about the university’s sexual assault policy and how that might impact our members, holding workshops in conjunction with Equity Week and dealing with issues of family friendly spaces on campus.

If there are things we aren’t talking about that are important to members, then we want to hear about it, and think about how we can address them.

Teaching is too important to our mission to let fall by the wayside

By Marc Spooner and Alec Couros

When it comes to valuing and supporting teaching at the University of Regina, have we been drifting astray?

In a time of massive reinvestment into teaching centres on campuses across Canada, and given the importance of teaching to the university's overall mission, it may come as a surprise to see just how little administrative support actually exists for this primary pillar here at the University of Regina. Teaching, Research, and Service are all vital to our proper functioning and to our ability to serve our students, our community, our province, and, ultimately, our society. Each must be supported accordingly.

A Timeline of Neglect

Truth be told, support for the University's Centre for Teaching and Learning (formerly the Teaching Development Centre) has been on the decline for years.

Prior to 2011, the Centre for Teaching and Learning was helmed by a fully-fledged director who reported to the VP-Academic and was charged with leading a team of skilled designers and developers with administrative support; however, coinciding with the director's retirement in 2011, this position was eliminated. By 2012, the Centre's team was disbanded and reshuffled.

The Centre would now be administered on a part-time basis by a series of faculty associates reporting at various times to the now defunct AVP (Research and Teaching), as well as, curiously, to the University Librarian.

In other words, over the course of a year, the Centre underwent a profound organizational restructuring, going from a full-time director leading an entire complement of teaching support staff to a two-course-release "side of the desk" faculty associate.

Directorless, adrift, and essentially hobbling along on life-support, by 2017 the Centre had been placed on hiatus for review and potential retooling. Knowledgeable faculty associates/coordinators (we've had three since 2012), no matter how passionate and committed, simply could not overcome the attrition and the Centre's low organizational priority and status. In 2017-2018, still on hiatus, the University offered a smattering of isolated programs, delivered on an ad hoc basis under the banner of the shuttered CTL.

At present, the Centre remains the same empty shell in academic palliative care, though it continues to have a presence by offering the rudimentary Teaching Certificate and U of R Graduate Teaching Certificate programs. As of September 11th, 2018, with its newly announced coordinator, a faculty associate in all but name, it

may once again offer an additional smattering of isolated programs, but starved of resources and status it will once again not be able to provide the comprehensive support and leadership we require and that teaching merits.

Let's not let this crucial teaching support flat line with an agonal whimper, some hand wringing, and perhaps a modicum of regret. Let's not allow the Centre for Teaching and Learning to once again be rendered irrelevant by organizational orphaning and financial atrophy.

The Reviews are In, Opportunity is Now

At September's Executive of Council, an important review will be presented. I invite you all to have a look:

<https://www.uregina.ca/president/assets/docs/council-minutes/2018/Attachment%20A%20-%20CTL%20Review.pdf>

For those who find themselves disillusioned by what the Centre has become, let's imagine and discuss what it could be. Let's build towards a re-imagined, fully-functional, fully-supported, and organizationally respected Centre for Teaching and Learning, one that is "...recognized as a place that supports teaching and learning of many kinds and in many settings," (p.15) as stated in the report.

Let's aim for nothing less than a director position (or better still an Associate Vice-President of Teaching and Learning) answering to the Vice-President Academic (or even the President); one that oversees

a fully-staffed, high profile centralised unit akin to the Office of Research Services and in parallel to our research pillar.

Let's envision a centre that not only supports, develops, and nurtures, but also one that leads and fosters the conditions for improvement, exploration, and research into teaching and learning.

Our individual visions may differ and our goals may not perfectly align, but for the sake of our institution, our students, and our own professional growth, let's argue, debate, show some passion, and not allow this important cornerstone of our University's mission to crumble, fall into disrepair, and fade into an afterthought.

Let it not remain the victim of empty rhetoric and platitudes; let it not become higher education's equivalent of a pedagogical Potemkin village.

Note: Alec Couros was tasked with carrying out the Centre for Teaching and Learning review and writing the report.

Dr. Marc Spooner and Dr. Alec Couros are Professors in the Faculty of Education.

News from CAUT

On the Wisdom of Chasing Excellence

By James Compton

Excellence. It's one of today's favourite academic words. You won't find a university president who doesn't claim that their institution pursues and embodies excellence in teaching and research. And why not? Canadian universities have quality scholars teaching in all disciplines. And besides, it's their job to promote their institution. Sadly, however, the phrase teaching excellence has become tightly wedded to the branding strategies of university administrations caught up in the competitive pursuit of students, now routinely treated as consumers.

Nowhere is this truer than in the use of student opinion surveys, often referred to as student evaluations of teaching (SET). These anonymous surveys are routinely conducted near the end of all university courses and used as a measure — among others — of a professor's teaching and course delivery. Here's the problem, though. SETs do not measure teaching effectiveness. This is the conclusion of a growing body of peer-reviewed research challenging the use of these instruments in hiring and promotion and tenure evaluations.

"SETs seem scientifically sound: the objective correlation of numerical data." Wrote William Kaplan in his recent arbitration ruling involving Ryerson University and the Ryerson Faculty Association, "But upon careful examination, serious and

inherent limitations in SETs become apparent.... The expert evidence ... persuasively demonstrates that the most meaningful aspects of teaching performance and effectiveness cannot be assessed by SETs. Insofar as assessing teaching effectiveness is concerned — especially in the context of tenure and promotion — SETs are imperfect at best and downright biased and unreliable at worst."

What SETs do measure, according to a recent study by Anne Boring, Kellie Ottoboni and Philip B. Stark, is a student's gender bias. "SET are more strongly related to instructor's perceived gender and to students' grade expectations than they are to learning, as measured by performance on anonymously graded, uniform final exams," they conclude.

If the evidence against using SETs as a measure of teaching effectiveness is overwhelming, why continue using them? The University of Southern California posed this very question and decided to stop their use in promotion and tenure decisions. Instead, after reviewing the research, they have adopted a peer-review model. Students will continue to be asked their opinions about their courses, but those responses will not be used in promotion and tenure deliberations.

A similar move was made at the University of Oregon this past spring. "Those scores

have nothing to [do] with how much a student learns in a class,” said senate vice-president Bill Harbaugh. Speaking with the university’s student newspaper the Daily Emerald, Harbaugh said “that’s really problematic because our intent as [a] university is to try to get better at teaching.” These evidence-based decisions deserve to be applauded. This is how one should pursue teaching excellence — with genuine concern for student learning, as opposed to an anxiety with consumer satisfaction.

But what does excellence mean in the context of post-secondary education? It’s a highly fungible term and open to abuse. One suggestion comes from Peter Starr, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at American University, who suggests we pursue something he calls “cognitive humility.” Starr recommends

we strive to develop our students’ capacity to be wise. “In all of its manifestations, wisdom is not an end state so much as a process — not a body of knowledge but an approach to its acquisition; not a fixed corpus of moral and ethical answers but a deep-seated (and ever-renewed) engagement in ethical questioning.”

That’s the kind of excellence I can sign up for — a learning outcome that can’t be measured and represented numerically but which can help students and society cope with the social, cultural and political complexities facing us.

James Compton is the President of the Canadian Association of University Teachers. This has been reprinted from the September, 2018 edition of the CAUT Bulletin.

Read more from CAUT

[Shattering Myths about Contract Academic Staff](#)
(CAUT Bulletin, September, 2018)

[By the Numbers: CAUT Survey of Contract Academic Staff in Canada](#)
(CAUT website, September, 2018)

[Ontario Government’s “free speech” requirements for Universities and Colleges cause for concern](#) (CAUT Website, September, 2018)

[CAUT Submission to the 2019 Federal Budget Consultations](#)
(CAUT website, August, 2018)

[Responding to the Academic Sector’s use of Temporary Foreign Workers](#)
(CAUT website, August, 2018)