



Canadian Association of University Teachers
Association canadienne des professeurs et professeurs d'université

Political Action Report

Date: November 2020
To: CAUT Executive Committee
CAUT Council
From: Pamela Foster, Director of Policy and Communications

COVID-19 and the impact on the academic job

When the public health emergency was declared in March, academic staff moved overnight to ensure education continuity for over 2 million students, many while juggling additional family responsibilities. CAUT [surveyed academic staff](#) in May-June to better understand the impact of the pandemic on the academic job. 4300 responded. Of these, the vast majority showed increased workload from remote teaching and higher stress and anxiety. Research had slowed or stalled all together for 2 out of 3. 1 in 10 of the respondents were working less or not at all since the pandemic began. Only 1 in 4 felt they had been consulted before decisions that affect them were made. These survey findings help inform and support advocacy locally and nationally.

CAUT also [surveyed students](#) about their fall plans, together with the Canadian Federation of Students. This poll of 1000 new or returning students showed that a significant number were considering postponing their education in the fall. It also showed deep concerns about affordability. This poll garnered significant interest in the media and in Ottawa. CAUT briefed staff in the Prime Minister's Office as well as the Office of the Minister of Employment and Social Development Canada.

To facilitate awareness and actions to address the impacts of the pandemic on the academic job, we held a [series of townhalls](#) on various issues, such as remote teaching, research, intellectual property, contract academic jobs and more.

COVID-19 and the global uprising against racism that occurred after the murder of George Floyd in the USA shone spotlights on long-standing inequities. To examine the role of post-secondary institutions in perpetuating and addressing racism and other forms of discrimination, we held a townhall on [systemic racism in the academy](#) and released guidance on [steps that associations can take to address equity](#).

We tracked and continue to track university and college [re-opening plans](#). We developed [a checklist](#) to assess health and safety plans. We also track enrolment numbers, finances, labour force changes, international student policies, student financial assistance and tuition to bring the best evidence to inform policy and negotiations.

Federal advocacy

CAUT called on the federal government to include academic staff and students at public post-secondary institutions in emergency support programs. We did so in [submissions](#) to parliamentary committees, in [letters](#), in our [2021 pre-budget submission](#) and in outreach to government officials.

In response to lobbying efforts, the federal government extended [emergency supports to students](#), increased flexibility to shore up international student enrolment and invested in [temporary support for research](#).

We also continued to press for greater federal investment in core operating funding, basic research, and student financial assistance. We laid out our vision in a report, [The Federal Opportunity: Strengthening Canada's Knowledge Advantage for 2020 and Beyond](#), which was shared with MPs through our Parliament Hill Days, November 16-20. We met with over 60 MPs and key political staff. A snapshot of our messages can be read [here](#).

CAUT participated in a government consultation on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, and in discussions with the federal Anti-Racism Secretariat and Statistics Canada on the [Survey of Post-Secondary Researchers and Faculty](#).

To help push post-secondary education higher on the federal agenda, CAUT worked to raise awareness of the issues through the media. Below are recent stories related to CAUT's federal advocacy work.

- President Brenda Austin-Smith explains the challenges on [CBC Radio's Sunday Edition](#).
- [New workloads causing anxiety and despair for Montreal's university students](#) (multiple outlets)
- [International students worry about the pandemic as decisions loom on travel to Canada](#) (Toronto Star)
- [Some Canadian universities say fall classes will be offered primarily online as pandemic uncertainty persists](#) (Toronto Star)
- [The changing face of post-secondary education](#) (multiple outlets)
- [The verge of burn-out, COVID-19 a factor for universities, colleges in contract talks](#) (CBC)
- [Laurentian faculty battle over suspended programs](#) (multiple outlets)
- [Switch to online learning not universally welcomed by students](#) (multiple outlets)
- [COVID-19: Students face a precarious future](#) (multiple outlets)
- [Post-secondary students deserve reduced tuition](#) (multiple outlets)
- [Plus de travail et plus de stress pour les professeurs d'université](#) (multiple outlets)

National advocacy

This summer, we held a webinar on the [attack on labour](#) underway in several provinces and its implications for academic workplaces. CAUT also joined a coalition [fighting Bill 32](#) in Alberta, which is the first "right to work" type legislation to be passed in Canada. We made a submission, upon invitation, to the Alberta opposition's consultation on post-secondary education.

CAUT is also supporting the Manitoba campaign to [defend and not de-fund](#) its universities and the Laurentian campaign on governance.

We continue to speak out against [performance-based funding](#), calling for it to be permanently-shelved.

With members across the country, CAUT amplifies national actions of members and member associations that advance shared goals. This fall, CAUT called for support of the [Scholars Strike](#) to mobilize for racial justice and a petition calling on university presidents to declare [a climate emergency](#).

Fair Employment Week 2020

Fair Employment Week took place virtually this year, with a full week of events, including a professional development webinar [on intellectual property](#), a panel on [organizing wins for contract academic staff](#) and a keynote by UK academic and activist, [Liz Morrish](#).

International solidarity

Academic staff in Canada are united with teachers' associations and unions around the world through its affiliation with Education International. CAUT President Brenda Austin-Smith participated in Education International's World Teachers Day event, discussing issues of mental health and well-being. ([Tune in at hour 4](#) of North American and Caribbean Teachers Take the Lead video).

We spoke out against violations of civil liberties and academic freedom around the world:

- The delivery of death threats in the form of obituary notices and a funeral wreath naming the executive committee members of a [teachers' union in Colombia](#).
- The arrest of Mr. Eslami, a dual national Iranian-Canadian citizen and member of the scientific board of Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran where he teaches human rights and environmental law.
- The [murder of French professor](#), Samuel Paty.
- The detention of Carleton student [Cihan Erdal](#) in Turkey.
- The firing of professor [Xu Zhangrun](#) in China for human rights activity.
- The dismissal of [pro-democracy activist professor Benny Tai](#) from his tenured position as an Associate Professor of Law at the University of Hong Kong and the passage of the National Security Law for Hong Kong.

CAUT also seeks to influence the OECD's work on tertiary education. This fall, CAUT participated in consultations on precarity in the research community and on education technology.

A look ahead

The fall Speech from the Throne set out an ambitious agenda for the government. Getting new commitments in either the Fall Economic Update or Budget 2021 will take collective effort. CAUT is developing a campaign with the Canadian Federation of Students, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Public Service Alliance of Canada and others to help propel post-secondary education on to the federal agenda, in what may well be an election year.