

College Employment Stability Committee (CESC) Report – Pures College Agreement

As usual, there was very little action on the CESC front this year. On the one hand this is good news, since the only reason the College deems a CESC meeting necessary is when there are plans to lay off faculty. On the other hand, it has always been our position that the CESC is not just about dealing with layoffs (Article 27), but also about taking a proactive approach to employment stability as described in Article 28: “*the making of recommendations with respect to long-term strategies to enhance employment stability*” (28.04). The college consistently declines our request for CESC meetings to discuss such issues.

The one meeting we did have this year stemmed from the Freedom of Information request in relation to the contract with Pures College. Management was very reluctant to share this contract with the union and decided to allow us a look at a heavily redacted version during a special CESC meeting. We will respect the confidentiality of that meeting and not discuss any specifics about the contract.

Most faculty first heard about Pures College at the last Town Hall meeting at the end of March. Management proudly announced that not only did we now have a budget surplus, but that we also have met the “2020 by 2020” enrolment objective...all thanks to the success of our programs running at Pures. Faculty were a little confused by the announcement and had many questions about this arrangement. Here are a few important points to consider:

- Pures is a private career college, specializing in international students.
- Pures is not part of the Ontario College system. No faculty at Pures are part of the OPSEU bargaining unit
- Northern College has a special arrangement with Pures whereby it can offer 5 of our 2-year diploma programs. Pures pays a fee to Northern for every student enrolled in one of these programs. These students are registered in Northern’s system and processed by our support staff.
- Students graduate from Pures with a Northern College diploma, having never set foot at one of our campuses, and never having been taught by Northern faculty.

While it would be nice to think that Pures sees something special in our programs that they cannot develop on their own, the reality is that this is *all about the diploma*. Private Career Colleges simply do not have the same reputation as Ontario Colleges, and it is the ability to grant an Ontario College diploma that Pures is paying for. There are currently 6 other colleges in the system that have similar arrangements with other private colleges.

The union is troubled by this on many levels. The first is that this is an obvious attempt to circumvent the bargaining unit. We already have an ever-growing number of non-unionized part-time faculty in the system, and now, entire programs will be run without the involvement of any full-time, bargaining unit faculty.

The other issue has to do with quality. Management has assured us that quality assurance is a top priority and that they make regular visits to Pures to ensure the program delivery meets Northern’s standards. It is our belief that a big part of why Ontario College diplomas are sought after by students and employers alike is that they are the result of a system where faculty have a stable job, fair

compensation, and adequate time to prepare and deliver their courses. Private colleges have none of these things. You cannot simply take a program from Northern, hand it to a private college, check a few “quality assurance” boxes on a checklist and say that the program will be as good. The contribution of full-time faculty plays a huge role in the success of our programs, and this is not considered at all under the quality assurance model for these arrangements.

These types of arrangements undermine the Ontario College system and will slowly erode the difference between private and publicly funded colleges. While it is great that Northern is now running a modest surplus, we disagree completely with the method in which the revenue was generated. The funding model in the College system is broken. Certain large colleges in the south have surpluses as large as our operating budget, while smaller colleges are struggling to keep their heads above water. By seeking other sources of revenue we are enabling the government’s flawed funding model and hurting the system in the long run.

These types of discussions are what should be taking place between the college and the local at regular CESC meetings. Perhaps together we could come up with a strategy to challenge the government to improve its funding model and restore balance to the college system. The current approach is frankly short sighted and misguided.

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