



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

Program Cuts Playbook

In the wake of the federal government cap on international student visas and insufficient provincial and federal funding, colleges and universities across the country are closing programs, suspending enrolments and laying off staff.

These measures are often being taken without consultation with the academic staff association or approval from the Senate or equivalent academic governance body.

If your institution has announced program cuts, here are some things you can do to preserve programs, protect jobs and defend collegial governance.

1. Review the terms of your collective agreement.
 - a. If the association has a right to see the institution's financial information, make sure the information is provided.
 - i. Consider asking an accountant or financial analyst to review the information and identify areas of financial mismanagement and/or high administrative spending.
 - b. Review the terms of joint association-administration committees and ensure they are meeting and operating as they should.
 - c. If there is language in your collective agreement governing how budget concerns are to be shared before the declaration of financial exigency, ensure it is respected.
 - d. Verify if lay-offs are only possible with a declaration of financial exigency.
 - e. Consider whether proposed cuts affect other areas of the collective agreement, such as equity initiatives and hiring.
2. Ensure language mandating collegial processes is enforced.
 - a. Most legislation establishes bicameral systems of governance for universities.
 - i. In most cases, the Senate (or equivalent academic body) has power over all academic decisions. If Senate's power is not being respected, then the Senate (via a Senator) can file for judicial review with the courts.
 - ii. In some cases, the Senate or equivalent academic body may have only consultative authority. If this consultation about program cuts or enrolment suspensions has not occurred, then a judicial review may be filed.
 - iii. Consider meeting with Senators to discuss ongoing issues of concern and brainstorm potential motions in advance of meetings.

- b. Colleges may lack a bicameral structure. In this case, associations should review any existing institutional policies that outline processes for program renewals, suspensions, pauses or cuts.
 - i. Are there academic councils or committees that need to approve these changes? If so, organize members of these groups to put forward a motion and vote against these cuts.
- c. Call on departments to send letters to the President and Vice-President Academic expressing the academic unit's opposition to the program cuts.
 - i. Encourage members to utilize their faculty and departmental councils for this purpose by providing a motion template.
- 3. Organize to raise awareness and build pressure.
 - a. Build an organizing committee of interested members to bring people together, share ideas and empower new organizers.
 - b. Focus on internal communications first. Be transparent with your membership about any updates or concerns. Offer ways to get involved.
 - c. Work in coordination with the students' union(s) and other campus unions and coalition partners. If you don't have one already, establish an inter-union coalition.
 - d. Develop an escalating campaign calendar of tactics building up to a rally or a day of action.
 - i. Collect and share stories of academic staff, students and alumni from the impacted programs.
 - ii. Develop a letter-to-target for campus community members to sign to bring to leadership and show support. Here is an example from [the University of Calgary](#)
 - iii. Plan a town hall to raise awareness of the impact of these cuts and to hear from members of the campus community.
 - iv. Organize a series of pressure tactics that target key decision-makers. Actions might include postering, teach-ins, media stunts and preparing an alternative institutional budget.
 - e. Draft a message box and contact the media to raise the visibility of the proposed cuts, identifying key spokespeople from each affected department or faculty who can speak to the direct impact.

These are just some ideas to get you started as your association begins to organize to protect your members' jobs, academic programs and collegial processes. CAUT is here to help you develop and implement a strong organizing plan. Please consult your CAUT Senior Labour Relations Officer and Organizing Officer. If you are unsure who to contact, please reach out to Christina Wallace, CAUT's Senior Education and Organizing Officer, at wallace@caut.ca.