

CAUT FORUM FOR ABORIGINAL ACADEMIC STAFF
November 11-13, 2011

REPORT TO LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATION

The main questions discussed at this forum were:

- recognizing and naturalizing Indigenous knowledge in the Academy
- the role of Elders in colleges and universities;
- managing work-life balance;
- negotiating racial diversity in the classroom; and
- working conditions for indigenous academics.

A major subtopic of the last agenda item was promotion and tenure. The last session, held on Sunday morning, focused mainly on how CAUT might better facilitate movement on the issues identified in the discussions of the preceding two days.

It is apparent from the presentations and discussions during the plenary sessions, as well as from the discussion circles that followed the plenary sessions, that Aboriginal academic staff continue to be faced with greater demands for participation in governance and administrative activities and in service to their communities than do non-Aboriginal academic staff while also having the same expectations imposed on them with respect to publications. Also apparent are: the reason this situation persists, which is administrators in most institutions being unwilling to recognize the particular set of responsibilities that Aboriginal academics have; and the consequences. Making this situation more exploitative are the benefits universities accrue from the positive PR associated with a focus on Aboriginal student recruitment. (A participant in one of the discussion circles remarked how several universities have proclaimed a goal of being the “university of choice” for Aboriginal students, the demographic expected to grow the most in the next few decades.)

Inevitably, a number of participants in discussion circles expressed their frustrations with the situation, one that some characterize as a form of violence. A comment from one of the young faculty members in attendance may be indicative of the potential impact. This young woman remarked that, given the apparent climate in which Aboriginal academic staff work, she was wondering if she should stay in academia at all. However, the situation did not seem entirely hopeless. The Aboriginal equity initiative championed by LUFA, for example, demonstrates what can be done. A few administrators participated in the forum and seemed to appreciate the analysis offered by the Aboriginal academics. But another person remarked that faculty association executives should also participate in these forums since the concerns of Aboriginal academic staff especially in bigger universities are not always heard at that level either.

About a hundred attended the forum. For perhaps a third of the participants, this was their first time attending the forum. These first-timers were given the bargaining advisory that CAUT had prepared and distributed following the previous gathering. All in all, the forum was invaluable in bringing academics from across the country together to get a sense of the struggles common to all and to identify possible strategies.

M. Corbiere
December 7, 2011