



**PRIVATIZATION & U:
CHANGING THE FACE OF
OUR UNIVERSITIES**

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Privatization of our university public services has a great ripple effect far beyond those who are the immediate casualties. The impact of tuition user fees and corporate infiltration on the university community spills over to everyone. But so does the direct privatization of the work of support employees such as maintenance, trades, administrative, library, and child care, along with the privatization issues directly impacting academic staff such as sessionals and TA's. Privatization is eroding our network of public services and our sense of community. Under privatization, corporations reap profit and power, while employees see eroding wages and working conditions and students see diminished quality and access. Fighting privatization forges a common cause for support and academic workers.

There has been a dramatic increase of privatization at Canada's universities. The most apparent is the growing reliance on individuals rather than the government to finance university operations. University tuition and other fees have been skyrocketing in recent years with students are paying a far larger share of the costs of postsecondary education. In 1974, student tuition fees comprised 16.1% of university operating revenues, rising to 19.9% in 1994. By 2004, this had ballooned to 30.3%. At the same time, government funding as a percentage of operating revenues had been steadily shrinking: In 1974, government revenues represented 79.9% of total university operating revenues, in 1994 they were 74%, and government funding had dipped to 57.2% by 2004.ⁱ

Corporate research has grown almost every year, with the 2004 fiscal year showing a 9.9% increase in corporate sponsored research that accounted for 13% of total university research income or \$650 million. The combination of corporate, endowment/investment, and non-corporate income represented 30% of university research spending.ⁱⁱ Although governments still fund the largest share of university research, the private influence on research has been steered by the private sector. Researchers in the sciences find their work scrutinized by biotech companies, 'corporate partner' before it is published. Rather than setting their own research agendas in response to a variety of social needs and interests, academics are doing more and more research with partners from the business community. Private interests increasingly control the benefits of universities.

Corporate Campus

Private-public partnerships are seen as the way to expand the university campus. Most new academic buildings are for sciences and business programs. The push for private and corporate sponsorships has also resulted in most corporate support going to science and business programs. Arts have become the poor cousin, creating have and have-not faculties. Privatization of universities threatens to leave our communities without an independent source of expertise to which we can turn for consideration or advice on important social, economic, and other policy questions.

Campuses are ever more looking like an amalgam of corporate sponsorship rather than communities and public spaces. Buildings are now named after corporations-- buildings that used to be named after public figures that had done a lot for the community and the country-- their names are no longer on campus. People work and study in rooms and buildings named for Casino Niagara, ScotiaBank, CIBC, Nestle, Hollinger and Campbell Soup. They may be able to purchase only drinks from Coca-Cola or Pepsi on campus. University are selling themselves to the highest bidder. It seems that every part of the university is available for ad space. They're setting up entire university fundraising wings in order to attract potential students or corporations.

Here is a close-up of what UBC administration looks like today.

The restructured External Affairs Department now includes a “University Town” office that provides project coordination on neighbourhood proposals, manages all related campus consultation and communications including media inquiries.

Campus and Community Planning provides planning, infrastructure and regulatory-related services; and UBC Properties Trust, which was initially incorporated in 1988, now oversees the construction and major renovations of buildings, produces land use studies, and manages a large investment mortgage portfolio.ⁱⁱⁱ

Instead of university or student-run food services, we have commercial fast-food chains. Many university bookstores have been taken over by Chapters Campus Bookstores. All this has lead to the commercial feel of the campus and the elimination of a sense of community and public service. Many decent university jobs have been traded in for low-wage 'Mcjobs' with poor working conditions. Many of these privatized jobs were ones where students could work at the university with decent wages and working conditions while they studied. Privatizing jobs has meant no access to tuition fee-breaks for full-time workers as well as other important benefits negotiated in the collective agreements. The cost is typically the same or more for the university as the money taken out of wages and benefits just goes into the profits of the corporation.

University-run child care centres are at risk. Despite all the studies that make the link between wages and quality of care, publicly operated early learning and care centres in municipalities, school boards, colleges and universities are at jeopardy because of the temptation to bring wages down through privatization instead of developing and funding a national early learning and care program. These centres are a model of quality, yet they are treated as a target for privatization. Camosun College in B.C. recently won a campaign to keep its child care centre from being privatized.

Deteriorating Infrastructure Under Privatization

There are new buildings on every campus and, in most cases, not enough workers to staff them. Many universities are off-shifting support staff; starting to look at off-site areas where they cooperate with corporations and have a dual model. By shifting title to a corporation, they don't have to hire the support staff at the off-site.

The lack of funding for operation and maintenance threatens existing programs and maintenance, and doesn't bode well for working conditions in any new facility. With no additional money for more staff, institutions will beg, borrow and steal from existing programs. Deferred maintenance is a serious issue that has consequences today. At many institutions, structures are literally patched together.

Public campuses are deteriorating at an alarming rate. A 1999 report from the Canadian Association of University Business Officers estimated Canadian universities need a bare minimum of \$3.6 billion to undertake the most basic repairs to crumbling infrastructure. Of that, an immediate infusion of \$1 billion was needed to stop the growing cost of deferred maintenance and prevent further deterioration of facilities. Left unaddressed, this problem has only worsened.

Contracting out often results in work being done in unsafe ways such as not following any health and safety and putting those on campus in jeopardy. The work that contractors are doing is often not quality work because they have to make a profit and come in under budget. Major flaws in contracted-out work create huge maintenance issues for our workers who are often left behind to patch up mistakes from the contractor.

CUPE locals report a lowering of standards for cleaning. There are no preventative maintenance programs. Lower cleaning standards affect everyone working and studying on campus. Infectious diseases are running through residences and administrative buildings because they're not being cleaned to a proper standard. Custodians are being made to decide what is the priority work.

Space is at a premium for teachings assistants, for support workers and for students, both in classrooms and residences. Students have difficulty meeting with sessional faculty and teaching assistants who may not have offices or telephones or who simply have too many students to see.

Using Technology to Privatize

Technology can be a vehicle to outsource functions and jobs at the university. University library books come pre-catalogued. Outsourcing functions like document digitization and can lead to jobs leaving the university and the community. Often the introduction of new computer hardware leads to the outsourcing of the work because service packages form part of the contract.

Outsourced information technology work could even leave the country, threatening the privacy of students and staff. Companies are springing up to automate management and administrative decision-making, often trapping staff and students in bizarre outcomes with no redress. Privatization will also have a significant impact on service delivery. Contrary to claims that automation allows more focus on the front-line delivery, experience tells a different story in other public services where technology has led to the re-design of work processes that increase workloads yet services deteriorate. Britain and Australia have been leader in these types of automation and 'business transformation'. There are countless reports from government auditors condemning the runaway cost of these projects and the failed models of service delivery.

The Turnin program, run by an American company provides a computer program that students are forced to submit papers to see if they have violated a copyright. The program is being designed to actually assign a grade to that paper. Instead of adding teachers, it's a mandatory program. If you don't submit your paper, you automatically fail. It's another way of contracting out work of CUPE members, teaching assistants. We're losing jobs and treating students as a product.

Pearson Education, an international corporation, advertises in Canada that it:

'means so much more than textbooks in a digital world. While books are still central to what we do, we're creating reusable learning objects, online testing, Companion Websites and e-books to enhance learning and make it interactive – where and when you want it'^{iv} -

Through these firms, students contact a teaching assistant in a commercial call centre in order to get help with course material. All this is privatizing and commercializing important work for TAs and important learning for students.

Contingent Work

A just-in-time workforce, part of the corporate model, proliferates the academic workforce. Contingent worker translates into low-pay, fewer benefits, less predictability and security of income, and dismal working conditions. CUPE locals had fought hard to halt the stampede of contingent work to protect existing members and future members. One of the glaring examples of contingent work is found with sessional faculty.

A recent presentation on the subject of contingent academic labour shows that, in Canada outside Quebec, approximately 40.4% of faculty were part-time non-tenure track and 9.5% were full-time, non-tenure track. Quebec has 100% union coverage for contingent faculty. The individual impacts of contingent academic work are low wages, low status, and very little security or other rights and benefits. Contingent work pits academic workers against each other. It leads to an erosion of academic freedom, increased workload, and decreased quality.^v

Contract instructors, some of whom teach at several universities to make ends meet, are a source of cheap labour. At some universities, including the University of Ottawa, they teach half of all undergraduate courses.

Stressed-out, overworked, underpaid "roads scholars" (as they are known within academia) have become familiar figures on campuses across the country -- as familiar as the tweedy tenured professor in his ivory tower. The data are hard to collect -- part-time academic staff are a diverse group with a high turnover rate. Statistics Canada discontinued its survey of university and college part-time staff for lack of funding, and the agency won't resume collecting part-time data until at least next year.^{vi}

Private Interests Reap the Benefit—the Community Loses

Universities are adopting values and practices that are employed in the private sector. This shift is reflected in the new language being used in our universities in which university presidents are "CEOs" and students are 'clients'. This business model means producing products at the lowest price and maximizing profits, to the detriment of students and all people working on the campus.

There are many ways in which we are harmed by the privatization of our universities and where the benefit of university resources are more and more controlled by private interests. The university acting as a corporation means that the focus is on the needs of business, not the needs of communities. Research is directed to the needs of the corporate world while 'non-lucrative' research on issues benefiting social justice groups and disadvantaged groups isn't valued. The whole business model means the university will put priority of profit over public and community service.

This summary on an on-line forum working on issues of privatization and public domain says it well --*There are many things that we assume to be 'ours' - from to parks and pensions, hospitals and highways, and the land we may have long inhabited - until one day we find that they are no longer 'ours' but the 'property' of someone else: they have been privatized. Privatization takes many forms, from claiming 'property rights' over genetic material isolated from a human and the patenting of seeds. Privatization also describes the 'ascendancy of corporate control over and benefit from university research and intellectual endeavours. A healthy society, however, requires a healthy public domain with a diversity of structures, spaces and management to nurture common interests and provide for the public good. These may take the form of public libraries, open source software, farm-saved seed, community gardens, public schools, roads, parks, and socialized health care.*^{vii}

ⁱ source: CAUT Almanac of Postsecondary Education in Canada 2006.

ⁱⁱ source: Canada's Top 50 Research Universities List 2005 Analysis, ReSearch Infosource Inc.

ⁱⁱⁱ opinion piece CUPE 116 President, Colleen Garbe March 2006 <http://www.cupe.bc.ca/3174>

^{iv} source: <http://vig.pearsoned.ca:8081/home>

^v presentation at the American Sociological Association Meeting August 2006, Ian Robinson Co-Director, Labor and Global Change Program, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of Michigan

^{vi} source: The Ottawa Citizen November 7 2005

^{vii} source <http://www.forumonpublicdomain.ca/about>

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