

The Value of OPSEU Members' Work - Revisited!

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Well, here we are in another contract negotiation, and again, we have a fight on our hands. And this time it's not only with Trent administration, but also with the Ontario Government, who is asking us to accept a net compensation increase of zero (via the "Public Sector Compensation Restraint To Protect Public Services Act"). Can we be made to feel any smaller, any less appreciated? Well, I'm writing to remind you of what you already know:

The work OPSEU Local 365 members contribute to Trent is valuable and essential!

Our OPSEU Local 365 is 250+ members strong. That's over 2,000 person-hours contributing to the running of this university EVERY DAY. We complete about 40% of the work done at Trent. Our Local's job composition varies widely, from secretaries to caretakers to technicians and more. As a group we contribute work to just about every functioning area of Trent.

This diversity carries with it some challenges, but it is also a strength. Consider what would happen if OPSEU Local 365 members were to go on strike. Some OPSEU members may be aware of possible impacts of a staff strike on their own work area, but may not fully realize the impact all OPSEU workers have as a group on the whole university. Let's look at the hypothetical impact...

- **Classes:** Without all the OPSEU-performed teaching, demonstrating, marking, curriculum development, and student contact work, classes would quickly fall into disorganization. Some classes would be cancelled because there would be no available people to run them. Those that ran would not run well, because there would not be enough people to do the work. Aspects that give Trent a quality edge over many other universities- like personal one-on-one student help - would be unavailable.
- **Computer Support:** Computers are ingrained in almost every process performed at Trent. Without OPSEU members working in IT, how long would it be before a serious computer problem interferes with email service, or web site functioning, or accounting or registration or student records management? Classroom computer failures would not be repaired in a timely manner and it would be unlikely students with computer problems would get assistance- there just would not be the people to do the work.
- **Registration and Timetable:** Can you imagine the chaos if OPSEU staff were not available to help schedule courses, register students into courses, and resolve timetable conflicts and issues? Course conflicts, courses scheduled in the same room or in too small a room, future timetable development would be halted. Registration, now a year-round process, would be difficult for any students with exceptions or unusual circumstances.
- **Caretaking:** We will be approaching the seasons of rain, mud, and (eventually) snow. Students and faculty would walk amidst uncleaned Trent hallways, offices, and classrooms. And washrooms... could health issues arise? OPSEU cleaners perform an essential service that would not be completed in a staff strike.
- **Secretarial, financial and administrative work:** Without OPSEU workers, would inquiries from prospective students be answered- how would this impact on future applications? Would non-OPSEU workers know how and have the time to process tuition fees, purchasing requests, room booking and admissions requests? All the little detail jobs and processes we

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perform as part of our daily routine may seem trivial alone, but together they add up to a lot of work and are the foundation of the education and research work done at Trent.

- **Library:** Would students be able to check out books or get help with on line research? Would a lack of resources impede their ability to complete their research in time to submit those assignments by due dates? How about the library-administered first year research assignment that almost every first year student completes... would it run?
- **Maintenance:** Trent is a big place with old equipment and structures: electrical systems, plumbing, heating, air cycling systems. How many maintenance requests such as toilets not working, heating malfunctioning, roof leaks, etc. would not be addressed? How well would walking paths be maintained, de-iced and snow cleared?

This is only a small sampling of the kind of problems that would be encountered without the work of OPSEU members like you. In a strike, all these impacts would happen at once. Bottom line: as a group OPSEU members have tremendous impacts on Trent University.

I still occasionally hear people say that OPSEU Local 365 members are not valuable to the university, that we are replaceable. And the attitude that the administration has taken towards OPSEU when bargaining... giving administration and faculty salary increases almost double that of OPSEU members since 2002... is clear evidence that they believe we're not worth much.

I submit that Trent Administration underestimates us. As a group, and as individuals, we provide vital work in almost every functioning area of Trent University. Without our contribution, Trent University could not function as an institution. OPSEU members replaceable? Not a chance. We are as valuable as every other work group on campus.

Every OPSEU Local 365 worker should realize and understand this. We should be proud that we contribute to a vital societal function: the education of our future workers, researchers, and society leaders. We should also know that other campus groups, including Faculty and Trent students, recognize the importance of our contribution and support us.

With these realizations, we have strength and influence, and can tell Trent administration that our contribution deserves the same respect and benefit increases as the other campus worker groups, and tell the Ontario Government that we, the public sector, should not be unfairly singled out as the only work group having to compromise on our income in order to fix Ontario's debt, which is every Ontario resident's problem. Instead we should be compensated fairly in salary and benefits for our work. Our demands are more than reasonable by any current economic measure.

Things you can do:

- Support your union's negotiation efforts. Go to rallies. On August 12th, when the strike mandate is called, vote yes. Remember, a strong strike mandate doesn't guarantee a strike, but does show that we are united, and are prepared to strike if our reasonable demands are not met. A strong strike mandate actually reduces the likelihood of a strike by showing Trent we are serious.
- Read about and write your Ontario politicians about the unfairness of the Public Sector Compensation Restraint To Protect Public Services Act:
 - o Peterborough MPP is **Jeff Leal**: jleal.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org
 - o Ontario Premier is **Dalton McGuinty**: dmcguinty.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org

Thank you.