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Student-Faculty-Staff Alliance Calls on University Administration to Keep Contracts for Part-Time Instructors

HALIFAX - An alliance of students, staff and faculty at Nova Scotia's universities and community colleges is calling on Mount Saint Vincent University administration to rethink their recent decision to cancel part-time contracts this year, a move that would result in the loss of approximately 100 part-time contracts.

"The decision to cut part-time faculty will diminish the quality of education at Mount Saint Vincent University this fall by offering students fewer options and an increase in class size," says Scott Stewart, president of the Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers (ANSUT) and Chair of the Students, Faculty and Staff Alliance. The alliance represents 19 unions and associations that serve over 18,000 staff, students and faculty at colleges and/or universities from Sydney to Yarmouth.

Karen Harper, president of the CUPE 3912 local to which the part-time instructors belong, agrees. "Cuts to part-time positions affect not only our instructors but also the quality of education for students. If these cuts go ahead, fewer courses would be offered and class sizes would increase. These cuts would greatly damage the quality of education for students, cause job losses for part-time instructors, and negatively affect working conditions for both full and part-time faculty. This is unacceptable at a time when we need to strive to maintain high-quality working conditions for instructors and therefore learning conditions for students."

Stewart says the cuts seem counter-productive at a time when students will already be presented with a mode of teaching delivery of which they are not necessarily fond. "MSVU has not sustained a substantial loss in enrollment this spring and summer. The vast majority of university revenue is tied to student enrollment, and they have not demonstrated any substantial revenue decline. Their decision to reduce staff is built upon projections, but, as with so much else regarding the pandemic, projections have been off the mark, sometimes radically so."

The alliance has called on university administrations, and the provincial and federal governments, to reduce student tuition and increase student bursaries, prevent layoffs and accept the necessity of deficits this year as they work to return to normalcy from the current pandemic.

Stewart says the proposed cuts at the Mount are one of the first visible signs of the erosion of universities that are already on shaky ground due to years of chronic underfunding. "It is a sad irony that while universities have come to rely on underpaid, precarious work from part-time faculty, they are the first to be cut when even a hint of an economic difficulty is foreseen.

Surely, this pandemic has taught us the inherent injustice of continuing with an insecure, underpaid segment of our workforce. We call on Mount Saint Vincent University, as an institution built on social justice and equity, to rescind their decision.”

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Background:

Formed after the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Students, Faculty and Staff Alliance includes higher-education unions and associations in Nova Scotia. The Alliance represents college and university employees across the province, both staff, students and academics, who are all essential to the work of higher education in the province. Represented unions include:

- Acadia University Faculty Association (AUFA)
- Acadia University Professional and Technical Staff (AUPAT)
- Association des professeurs, professeures et bibliothécaires de l'Université Sainte-Anne (APPBUSA)
- Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers (ANSUT)
- Atlantic School of Theology Faculty Association (ASTFA)
- Cape Breton University Faculty Association (CBUFA)
- Canadian Federation of Students-Nova Scotia (CFS-NS)
- CUPE3912
- Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA)
- Faculty Union of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (FUNSCAD)
- International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE)
- Mount Saint Vincent University Faculty Association (MSVUFA)
- Nova Scotia Community College Academic Union (NSCCSAU)
- Nova Scotia Government Employees Union (NSGEU)
- Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)
- Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
- St Francis Xavier Association of University Teachers (StFXAUT)
- Saint Mary's University Faculty Union (SMUFU)
- UNIFOR