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May 2019



In This Issue

Articles

[Labour Relations Update](#)

[MSC VP Events](#)

[NAIT Board of Governors](#)

Peeking Over the Fence

[MHCFA](#)

[MUFA](#)

[SAFAgram](#)

[UWOFA](#)

Links

[2019 Corporate Discounts](#)

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Time for Thanks and Review

To the members that volunteer for NASA committees, a very big THANK YOU. To all the people that I have used as sounding boards, I thank you. This is also the time for review on what we as instructors ... [Read more from Garry Wilson, NASA President](#)



Class Sizes

An opinion piece on class size ... [Read more from Gordon Cutting, VP Communications](#)



Bike and Barge

One of the best ways to see Europe... [Read more from John Reeves, Retired NASA member](#)



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NAIT Academic Staff Association

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Garry Wilson

The academic year is ending soon and this becomes a time of reflection for staff. I reflect on the past year and think of the many people that have been a large help to me in my role as president.

Thanks to staff who have helped keep the NASA office running smoothly: Adele, Lana and Jarret. They have put in many a long day to make sure that member's needs and concerns are addressed, that the social events like the Welcome Back Lunches and committee initiatives such as the Share the Warmth campaign run smoothly, that your EPDA requests are processed in a timely manner, and Executive meetings stay on track. These three people have been a tremendous help – keeping me grounded, focused and, on occasion, locked in my office until my *Intercom* articles are wrote. (Sorry Lana, I promise to try to have them in on time next year.)

I would like to also thank the VP's of NASA: Gordon Cutting, Terry Sulyma, and Glenn Tkachuk. You have allowed me to use your insights and wisdom to help make some very difficult decisions. I have enjoyed the discussions and debates regarding the business of NASA, of NAIT leadership and overall, to help guide the direction of the Association.

To the members that volunteer for NASA committees, a very big THANK YOU. It is the time that members, like you, put into make our committees that make NASA's events a success.

To all the people that I have used as sounding boards, I thank you for lending your ears to allow me to discuss and reflect on my direction.

This is also the time for review on what we as instructors, may need to help us make our classes run smoother.

I have had meetings with Natasja, from Learning and Teaching Commons, and I would like to share some points from them on what they will be undertaking in the next while to help instructors.

- Regular reviews of educational technology is part of good practice in post-secondary institutions. These reviews allow the Ed Tech team on campus to ensure that the technologies are meeting the current and impending future needs of students and instructors. Regular reviews are an expectation of our overall quality assurance processes and assist us in continuous improvement of delivering quality education at NAIT.
- Coming soon – the Ed Tech team in Teaching Services is going to gather instructor feedback through surveys on different educational technologies including on our current learning management system – Moodle.
- We welcome all feedback and ideas for educational technology adoption at teachingservices@nait.ca

Please contact Natasja and her group if you have any concerns or questions.

I want to close by thanking all NASA members for their hard work, long hours and dedication to their student's success. Your efforts truly make NASA and NAIT great. Enjoy the time off to reflect, rejuvenate and relax.



THE PERPETUAL WAR REGARDING CLASS SIZE

An Opinion Piece on Class Size

By Gordon Cutting, VP Communications



I'm not qualified to make a definitive statement on this issue – I haven't got any unique research beyond my own personal experiences or anecdotal evidence. And besides, you can find mountains of info on the topic which, depending on your politics, supports whichever side you wish to take. A sample of each side is as follows:

http://files.nlta.nl.ca/wp-content/uploads/public/documents/ptf_docs/doesclasssizematter.pdf

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/smaller-classes-dont-necessarily-make-a-difference/article535799/>

The issue of class size recently blew up again in the media due to the Ontario government's education minister announcing that the Ford government would be increasing class size targets from 22 to 28 students per class (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-education-minister-lisa-thompson-increases-class-sizes-high-school-benefits-1.5064285>), with the majority of the large class sizes being in the high school (secondary education) classes. What really started the firestorm of criticism was the disingenuous claim that the increase in class sizes would make secondary students more resilient and benefit them as they went on to university and other post-secondary studies in which even larger class sizes are normal – you're welcome.

From the above CBC article, posted March 20, 2019:

"When students are currently preparing to go off to post-secondary education, we're hearing from professors and employers alike that they're lacking coping skills and they're lacking resiliency," [Ontario Education Minister Lisa] Thompson told CBC Radio's *Metro Morning* on Wednesday.

It turns out that the lack of coping skills in today's youth isn't due to the effect of helicopter parenting (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helicopter_parent), or even worse snowplow parenting (my new favorite term for over-involved parenting) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/16/style/snowplow-parenting-scandal.html>), but rather these darn small class sizes that we've had in K-12 all these years!

One of the things that really bothers me about the defense offered up by the Ontario education minister is the implication that all post-secondary programs will have large class sizes thus the K-12 students are just going to have to learn to cope. This feels like the kind of argument for the status quo that was popular in the past (and is rising in popularity again), for example: sexism exists in business but we can't do anything about it so get used to it.

Are large class sizes in post-secondary inevitable? Does class size matter once students become "adult learners?" If class size is not an issue then why don't we record the "best instructor" of any particular content and push a bunch of classes online? Perhaps not coincidentally, this is another approach that the Ontario education minister is advancing – requiring four of the 30 credits that high school student need to graduate to be taken through online courses.

But in the current environment in which we have our management reviewing class sizes in programs across NAIT and a new provincial government that is likely to follow in the footsteps of the Ontario PC's (although I suspect that Jason Kenney will argue that the ideas were his in the first place), I'd like to make a few of my own observations.

Class Size At Post-Secondary Institutes

So, why do large class sizes at universities "work" and should they be the norm (for which we must engender resiliency in our youth)? I'll argue it doesn't work but rather it's something that they've been getting by with. But, to be a little more fair, I'll also point out that the university model is focused on feeding research (PhD's) and that requires a large pool of (undergraduate) students – the undergrads are not the focus, the graduate students are. The model was developed in an era where the majority of initial entrants were not expected to finish a program but to find themselves unsuited to academic

pursuits – in harsher words, fail out – and, as with any elite training program, this requires a broad base to draw from (similar to Canadian hockey). This reality is changing – more employers are looking for people who have completed an undergraduate degree – but the internal model remains much the same.

Second, the expectation is on self-driven learning. The collaborative, peer-supported side of the experience is left to the student to find if they need it. This means that lectures are often presented as guidance to important ideas (those ideas that the instructor feel are important, at least), not as the learning growth experience that tends to be more prevalent in K-12.

Further, I believe that one of the founding principles of a university education was the idea that the “best mind” or the “top expert” in the field should be teaching the class (as a case in point, consider the Richard Feynman lectures on physics from MIT). I’m sure most people would be fine with large class sizes if they got a premium instructor, but these days it seems that first year courses – with enormous class sizes pushing upwards of 500 students – are “shopped out” to the lowest bidder.

As far as a polytechnic is concerned, I think we have a different base of students and a different mandate. Please don’t read any negativity into my last sentence with regards to the quality of NAIT students – I think we attract many top minds – but our students often expect a different experience: a training-for-the-working-world experience. Hands On, Essential to Alberta kind of stuff...

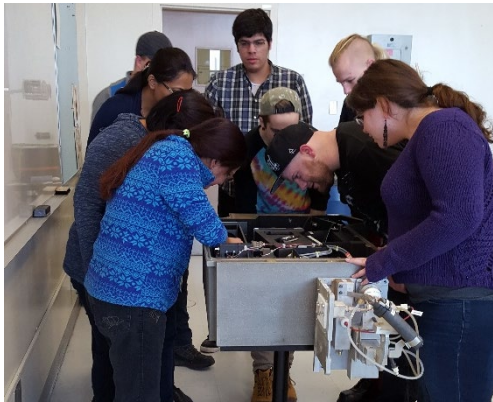


Photo by Paula Hawrysz, NAIT Instructor

To begin with, students come to NAIT to learn directly from experts in the field of study. This could be argued to be true of universities as well, but at the polytechnic there is no undergraduate mountain to climb (a four year degree that shows your commitment to the field) before you can access the sage at the top of the mountain. At NAIT this connection needs to be early (we’ve only got two years with each student) and in a more conducive social setting (smaller group sizes) so that the student can internalize the training with support from their instructors and peers and have the opportunity to hear from experts why any of this matters – helping to build their personal narrative.

If NAIT students don’t get a chance to connect with a local sage in their two years then when might they hope to connect with them? Maybe, if they’re lucky, they’ll get an opportunity to work for one out in industry, or maybe they will become disillusioned and walk away from their chosen field with the sense that they’ve wasted their time and money.

Our students also rely on us and their peers to help make concepts applicable and contextual. Face-to-Face teaching to smaller groups lets me know, through the student’s body language, facial expression and overall engagement, when I’m succeeding or failing in explaining the necessary concepts and transferring learning to the students.

Alongside the above, and often overlooked by decision-makers when it comes to funding education (and this is hard for me, a genuine introvert in an extroverted world, to admit), there’s a strong social element to learning, particularly at polytechnics. So often we look at the dollars and cents and forget that education is a shared experience that can be enhanced, or undone, by the quality of the interpersonal contact. A lucky few people that I know can recall one or more people who helped support them in times of need, academically or otherwise, and enabled them to soldier on in their schooling, while most people that I know can trace the end of some part (or the whole) of their academic ambitions to one or more individuals along the way. It’s important that we facilitate the constructive social connections so that they can hopefully compensate for the inevitable negative influencers that we run into along the way – that’s what truly builds resiliency, not hordes of students assigned to one instructor, no matter how good that instructor may be.

Long story short – my personal opinion on class sizes is as follows: 25 if I’m lecturing, 12 to 16 in the lab if they are all doing the same thing, and 12 or less if anyone is doing something dangerous or if they are all doing something different (due to limitations in the number of sets of equipment that are available).

There is some content that I might be willing to deliver to larger classes or push to online content, but my experience with this content is if it’s not delivered as part of a reasonably sized face-to-face experience then the students aren’t likely to read it or to internalize it – thus we return to the reality that one of the most important things that face-to-face learning can achieve is group engagement.

Bike and Barge through Belgium and The Netherlands

Retirement column 2019

By John Reeves- Past VP Communications & Past President -NASA
Retired and living in Canmore



One of the best ways to see Europe is on a “Bike and Barge” vacation. Last fall we took a Bike and Barge vacation through Belgium and The Netherlands. There were six of us from Canmore/Calgary along with people from Argentina, New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain and the USA.

The thing you get on this type of vacation is to be able to see the people and the way they live in the small villages and in the larger cities. You see everyday life on the farms and towns not just the tourist areas. All this at a moderate pace.

The other thing is it is an active holiday where you are riding 40-50 km per day with a guide and 15-20 other people. It is not head down riding hard it is heads up and watching the community of people as you ride past.

How does a Bike and Barge work? In our case we started in Bruges Belgium where we met our barge and our fellow passengers. The barge is a medium to large canal boat with rooms below and a main deck with dining facilities and an upper deck where you can watch the scenery go by and enjoy a beer after your day of riding and site seeing.

In the morning you have breakfast on the barge and the guide tells you the route and what you will be seeing that day. You leave the barge with your bike and are guided through the many bike trails of Belgium and The Netherlands. You always stop for a coffee in the mid-morning and then lunch, which you have packed on board the barge in the morning. In the mid afternoon you usually have another stop and enjoy a great Belgium beer in a small village. While you are riding the barge makes its way to the next stop in your journey. You have another beer on board after your shower and then enjoy a great supper with your fellow passengers. There is usually a walking trip in the evening because you usually dock near a larger centre.

The biking is not hard but at a medium pace. If you are not a great rider then you can enjoy an electric bike which gives you an assist on the uphill.

The rooms on the barge are a little small but you don't spend a lot of time in the rooms except to shower and sleep. The meals are first class with wine and beer if you desire.

Belgium and the Netherlands are quite flat, so the riding is easy. All the towns, cities and villages are all linked with bike trails as biking is there preferred mode of transportation especially in The Netherlands.

This part of Europe is very clean and friendly and has an historical story that we in Canada can't even come close to. The cities are not that crowded like Paris or London but are still busy even in the fall. There is lots to see and the food and chocolate are outstanding.

Amsterdam was the finish of our trip and it was a sight to behold. The first thing you notice is that there are bikes everywhere. They have bike jams not traffic jams because the right of way goes to the bike not the cars or pedestrians. The museums, art works and the docks are spectacular.





Linda and I and our friends from Canmore/Calgary really enjoyed this trip because it was quite different from many of the trips we had been on and was an active trip at the same time. The company we choose to use was CycleTours, if you are interested.

This is a great way to see the country side at as pace where you can look around and admire the countryside. You may want to consider it in your summer plans.

Access my previous articles on retirement by visiting the NASA website and looking them up in the past *Intercom* issues.

Don't wait until you retire to start a regular exercise program, start NOW. It will pay back later in the quantity and quality of your life as you age.

If you have any questions e-mail me at jreeves1@telus.net.

LABOUR RELATIONS

Updates

Jarret Serediak, NASA LRD

Feedback from Chairs

The Bargaining Committee invited all Chairs to attend meetings scheduled in early April to gain their feedback and perspectives from their respective Schools. We listened as many Chairs expressed common issues regarding their workloads in reference to scheduling duties being passed down and the discrepancies around inconsistent downloads applied to them.

The feedback suggested Chairs across the Institute receive a download anywhere from 20% to 50% for administrative duties which includes scheduling. Chairs communicated their job duties and level of responsibility are increasing and it appears to be due to additional administrative and managerial tasks, technological changes, more time in a classroom and providing OH&S orientation for new bargaining unit members. Other expectations include course coordination, peer surveys (NSSI) and curriculum updates such as CRR. As more responsibilities are being passed to Chairs, it appears they are not provided appropriate credit for those duties. More and more duties are being hived off to Chairs and thresholds being upward of 90% to 99% loaded. This doesn't provide enough time during the academic year to plan, prepare and ensure the curriculum is up to date, conduct scholarly activity because they are scheduled to instruct classes for so many hours a week.

Other topics discussed included NAIT's hiring of contractors. This looks to be the case in most Schools and the concerns are that contract employment is eroding the hiring of full time instructors. Contractors are cheaper to employ for the institute and this seems to be the number one reason why permanent instructors are being replaced by contractors.

The discussion also brought to light other issues with contractor class of employment, such as, they do not experience the same benefits of being part of NAIT, nor do they have access to the same amount of professional development – particularly for training related to curriculum and instructor excellence (BMI, Leadership, Resolving Conflict, Panopto, etc...). They cannot access the staff course catalogue, nor are they compensated for their time to attend these even if they did. From a Chair perspective – this is hard – as contractors assume the role of instructor, they need a lot of extra mentoring, coaching and support directly from the Chair. Other feedback received was low contractor engagement, commitment and sustainability, and discrepancies in the contract fees which is all having an impact on Chair and instructor workloads.

Confirmed Arbitration and Labour Board Matters. Additionally, there are three arbitration matters NASA is currently working on securing dates for and an arbitrator:

- June 2019 – ESL Designation
- August 2019 – Instructor from the JR Shaw School of Business
- October 2019 – Instructor from the School of Applied Science and Technology
- December 2019 – Instructor from the JR Shaw School of Business
- December 2019 – Instructor from the School of Skilled Trades
- January 2020 – Instructor from the School of Skilled Trades
- March 2020 – CCP School of Skilled Trades

NASA had two arbitrations scheduled for February and April of 2019. Both arbitrations did not proceed. The matter scheduled for February was resolved by the parties and the April arbitration was withdrawn by NASA.

On-going Matters: **Grievance (C&I):** Resolved. A Letter of Understanding was agreed to by the Parties.

New Grievances: **Grievance (Termination):** On April 10, 2019, NASA filed a grievance at Step III on behalf of a staff member. A Step III grievance hearing was held on May 6, 2019 and we are waiting for the decision.

Collective Bargaining: Your bargaining committee will commence negotiations with NAIT on May 15, 2019. Please stay tuned for updates from the bargaining committee.

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES COMMITTEE

By Glenn Tkachuk, VP MSC

Another school year is almost over and summer is starting to look really good. We have been busy at Membership Services working to provide information and entertainment to the membership. In March we had Joe Gadbois (Greenland Garden Center) talked about getting your yard ready for spring, and Richard Heetun (Richard & Sons Grafting) gave a quick lesson on tree grafting.

On April 13, 2019 we held our first Member's Family Event at the Shaw Theater. Two movies, Spiderman- Into the Spider Verse, and Green Book were viewed by those who attended, munching on popcorn and washing it all down with the pop that was also provided free of charge. We hope that this will be a yearly event held earlier next year. If you were unable to attend the screening of the Spiderman movie, it is available to be signed out from our NASA library. Our library also has many other books and educational videos for use by our members.

Sgt. Lance Parker of the Edmonton City Police was scheduled to give a talk on street drugs on April 10, 2019 but this has been re-scheduled to a later date TBA.

May 13, 2019 is our NASA Annual General Meeting at the Shaw Theater with a reception to be held afterwards at the NEST. Please plan to attend the AGM and join us after for some refreshments and good food.

Philip Mak from LAPP is making a return to NAIT on May 29th, to provide our membership with information on LAPP and retirement and the various options that are available.

In June, we hope to bring in Derek Cox to present a session on Strongman Training for those who want to get in shape and look good in that bathing suit.

As you can see we have been busy and are also starting to plan for next year's events. The Membership Services Committee would like to thank everyone for attending the events and if you have any ideas that you would like to see happen, drop us a note and if we can make it happen, we will!

Have a safe and enjoyable summer.

WHAT IS IT LIKE ON NAIT'S BOARD OF GOVERNORS?

By Annemarieke Hoekstra



Alberta's Post-Secondary Learning Act specifies that two academic staff members serve on NAIT's Board of Governors (BOG). Traditionally, these board members are nominated and elected by NASA members. A fellow instructor and I were elected in the 2017 spring NASA elections and we joined the board together.

So what is it like to be on the NAIT Board?

My first year on the board was absolutely overwhelming. First, I received a letter from the minister of Advanced Education, approving my appointment to the board. Then I attended an orientation provided by NAIT president Dr. Glenn Feltham. During the orientation we received a binder with the Post-Secondary Learning Act, the board bylaws and the terms of reference of all sub-committees of the board.

Before I knew it, I received an invitation for a board meeting, along with an agenda and 400 pages worth of documents to go through, including financial statements, reports from each member of the NAIT executive (president and vice-presidents) and the minutes of all the meetings of the sub-committees, including Academic Council. And then there were the documents about new business. I tell you, the amount of work and change accomplished at NAIT and reported to the board every three months is simply astounding. And that is only the work that is new or noteworthy, that does not even include our regular work!

Since then I've spent about 4 hours a week on my board duties, including preparing for and attending board meetings, meetings of the Campus Development Committee (one of the sub-committees of the board), and meetings of the NASA executive. Some of the board duties are absolutely dreadful (to me), like reviewing a list of NAIT's lease agreements for buildings, or trying to understand the details of quarterly financial reports. Others are quite interesting, like attending a luncheon put on by the Chamber of Commerce, where Premier Rachel Notley came to speak. It was just delightful to observe the audience respond to what she said. Sometimes the room was divided and only half the people clapped, while the other half made sure we could see they were not clapping.

In the past 1.5 years on the board I've learned lots and real fast. It's fascinating to see how NAIT is navigating the changing climate, from political change, to societal and economic change.

So, that's all good, you say, but are you actually doing anything useful?

Trust me, I ask myself this question regularly. It's a lot of work, and for what? Thus far, I can think of the following answer.

First, the board provides checks and balances for important decisions. NAIT is a publicly funded institute and should steward its resources responsibly and according to the mandate provided by the Alberta government. As an academic staff member, I can raise questions from the perspective of a post-secondary educator, thinking about the impact of decisions on the quality of education and the student experience. While the decisions are discussed in the sub-committees, they still come before the board, and board members vote on these decisions. Board members have the opportunity to flag issues in advance of a board meeting. In a number of instances, this results in decisions being postponed, as NAIT might need to figure out more details. Board members can also request more information, if they feel that the information is not sufficient to make informed decisions.

Finally, board members have an opportunity to provide input on NAIT's strategic direction. Last year, for instance, I was engaged in a discussion about a new initiative at NAIT around enabling skills. These are the skills that any post-secondary graduate needs, including communication skills, collaboration skills, etcetera. Some board members raised issues with the term 'enabling', as it can have negative connotations. The skills have now been renamed as "Career-Essential Skills", and are included in NAIT Vision 2021+.

To conclude, it is an honor to be appointed by the honourable Marlin Schmidt, Minister of Advanced Education, to serve on NAIT's Board of Governors. It is an honor to discuss the strategy of NAIT with NAIT executive and the members of the board, who are all well-respected leaders in their sector of industry. It is a very special experience. I hope that the perspective I bring to the board discussions will help further the quality of teaching and learning at NAIT.

Here is the most recent board picture from NAIT's website. I am standing in the back, third from the left.



(Photo courtesy of NAIT Digital Media Services, Leigh Kovesy)

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\$129/night plus taxes (double/queen)

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220 – 4th Avenue SW, Calgary

Jan-Mar 31 - \$186, (Sun-Thurs)

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DISCOUNTS

All Expire: December 31/19

(Unless otherwise noted)

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Quote NAIT when making reservations.

All businesses are in Edmonton

(Unless noted otherwise)

All will accept NAIT ID

(unless otherwise noted that a membership card, coupon or corporate account number/code is required.)

NASA gratefully acknowledges the donations of our Door Prize Sponsors at our annual Mid-Winter Frolic Event.

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