

BUFA

BROCK UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATION
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BUFA's Response to President Jack Lightstone's October Town Hall

Many BUFA members who attended President Lightstone's Town Hall meeting in October were there to gather information on the state of the University's finances and academic mission, but left with more questions than answers. During the very short Q&A session, President Lightstone dismissed some important questions and was ill-prepared to answer others. He theatrically used straw polls of the audience to deflect criticism, and sent out mixed messages concerning the future of the seminar system and the inevitability of cuts.

1. When is \$4 million dollars not \$4 million dollars? The President of the University is inconsistent with his presentation of monetary figures. President Lightstone says the seminar system costs \$4 million in total, therefore not worth eliminating given its centrality to our mission. Please note that the President said that the seminar system is not worth "eliminating" in total, but that he might support cancelling seminars in some courses and increasing seminar size in those that remain. Four million dollars is also the total cost associated with staffing and maintaining all the new buildings in Brock's 2014 plan (BUFA would love to see how this figure was generated). However \$4 million becomes a lot of money when Brock's senior management and Board of Trustees refuse to invest the necessary funds to maintain the quality of our academic programs. The President is spendthrift in one breath and frugal in the next. BUFA cannot take seriously the University's claim of poverty when we see full page colour ads in the weekend *Globe and Mail*. Since the beginning of 2009 there has been a flurry of hiring in the University's marketing and fundraising divisions. There were exactly 3 new faculty positions in 2009. Budgets are about choices and BUFA feels that, in many ways, senior management is making the wrong choices.

2. Outsourcing teaching and learning. When President Lightstone says we should be creative in terms of increasing revenue, he is really asking us to cut costs. This can only be done by watering down our courses or outsourcing teaching and learning. Senior management wants us to consider the following:

- providing more courses on-line
- delivering our courses on weekend, in the summer, or in intensive week-long blocks
- giving our students credit for volunteering or other activities in the community
- having Niagara College provide more classes to more of our students
- opening up campuses in other countries on for-profit basis.

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BUFA believes that altering the presentation of our courses should be done for pedagogical rather than financial reasons. However, even if these changes make sense pedagogically, the senior administration has no concrete plan for turning revenue generating ideas into reality. For example, initiatives like on-line learning take an initial investment to integrate the technology in pedagogically effective ways. Where is the plan? Asking faculty members to be creative without giving them the tools or time to implement their creative solutions is tantamount to setting us up for failure.

3. Development and progress are not the same. Brock has been a laggard among universities in terms of rapid capital expansion. This is good. Queen's University and Lakehead University, among others, are experiencing the results of unanticipated construction overruns. These additional costs need to be covered by operating budgets that are already strained. Brock faculty and staff will be around to see the results of these judgments long after university executives have sailed off into the sunset. Buildings without resources are not going to help us become a comprehensive university.

4. The cuts to date have already hurt. The University had committed to tracking the effects of the budget cuts made last year with the stated intention of restoring them in the future. We are unaware of the existence of any of this documentation. BUFA does have anecdotal evidence about the effects of the cuts to date. Departments have not been able to replace colleagues who resigned. Departments have cut seminars (or increased seminar size) and associated marking hours from courses. Departments have replaced LTAs, who are BUFA members earning a reasonable salary, with more stipend positions. In some cases the same people are rehired with pay cut of about two thirds. Are these the types of jobs that are going to drive the local economy?

5. Chairs and Directors should not make any cuts that they feel will damage their program. According to the BUFA Collective Agreement (27.01) Chairs and Directors are responsible for submitting an estimate for the Department's budgetary requirements for the ensuing year. BUFA reminds Chairs and Directors that their first priority is to uphold Brock's academic mission. **If cuts will damage the academic integrity of your program, you are not required to make them.**

In sum: BUFA recognizes that adjustments to Brock's budget need to be made in order to move towards a balanced budget. This should be done by vigorous lobbying to ensure that the provincial government honours its commitment to invest in higher education, on the one hand, and fortifying our existing programs and infrastructure on the other. In any case, changes to academic programs should involve a serious collaborative discussion with faculty, those who actually teach the courses and deliver the programs, rather than the current scattershot approach of individuals sending proposals to VP Academic Knuttila, who will then discuss them and prioritize them with the Deans. BUFA members are ready and willing to use our expertise and creativity to sensibly explore a range of ways to deliver our programs in ways that maintain our academic integrity and enhance Brock University's reputation as an institution that values both its graduate and undergraduate students.