



**Sault College Media Release
For Immediate Release**

Labour Disruption at Sault College

(Sault Ste. Marie, ON October 16, 2017) – Unfortunately, the union representing our faculty and counsellors has elected to commence strike action against Ontario’s 24 public colleges.

“OPSEU submitted a counter-offer Saturday that did far too little to close the gap between the Colleges and the union,” said Dr. Ron Common, Sault College President.

There are three components at the heart of this labour dispute.

- 1. The union’s demands are unaffordable.** The Colleges offered faculty a 7.75 per cent salary increase over 4 years but OPSEU has asked for 9 per cent over 3 years.
- 2. The union’s demand for a staffing quota is unrealistic and does not take into account student needs and program and operational requirements. Generalized quotas don’t work.** OPSEU has demanded a staffing ratio guarantee. At Sault College we currently have 76 percent of our teaching hours delivered by unionized faculty and of that number most are full-time.

The remaining academic numbers are made up of non-unionized faculty who are working short contracts called sessionals, who often replace full-time faculty on leaves for things like illness, professional development, maternity leave etc. We also have part-time faculty who primarily teach our weekends and night courses.

While some of these contract faculty undoubtedly want to work for the College full-time, the group is by no means homogenous. We have many professionals and trades specialists who work full-time in the community or who have recently retired who work for us part-time. We have police officers, nurses and other experts who add to our programming mix and have no intentions of working for the College full-time.

- 3. The union is demanding unmitigated control of a teaching, curriculum and classroom activities with no oversight and calling it “academic freedom”.** Our faculty currently have a high degree of professional autonomy in regards to curriculum design, development and classroom delivery. Faculty are critical to academic decision making but they are not the exclusive voice. The language they have presented effectively cuts out any other stakeholders, including our industry partners who currently have a say in the content of our programs. In addition, it neglects provincial and industry standards which must be met to ensure accreditation of programs and external certifications.

“The Colleges offer adds \$70 million in costs over four years, and the union’s new counter-proposal would cost colleges \$250 million over three years. One has to question how OPSEU believes we could pay for these proposals. We would have to cancel programs, raise tuition fees, get more government funding or a combination of all three. This is simply not realistic and out of line with what has happened across the rest of the broader public sector. As an example, The Ontario Hospitals Association just settled with OPSEU at 5.25 percent over three years, so our academic union needs to be more realistic.” said Common.

This strike is totally unnecessary and frankly hard to understand. Just a short time ago, OPSEU central was whole heartedly endorsing a deal with our support staff which is patently similar to the current college’s offer.

We will do our very best to ensure students complete their academic year and we will keep support services open during a strike. We are disappointed to be having this strike but we simply do not have the resources to meet these demands. The long term sustainability of Colleges is important and the threat of job action and the action of striking itself does not give us more resources.

We encourage everyone to look at our FAQ’s document on our webpage, www.saultcollege.ca. We will update our FAQs on a regular basis as circumstances warrant it.

“We look forward to our colleagues returning to work soon and to completing our academic year,” said Common.

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About Sault College

The vision of Sault College is to provide a transformative life experience through empowering those who study with us to think and learn in progressive, innovative ways, including those we have not yet imagined. Sault College grants Ontario College certificates, diplomas, advanced diplomas, graduate certificates, and degrees to its graduates. The College is the largest deliverer of apprenticeship training in all of Northern Ontario. Sault College has a significant economic impact on the community, with spin-offs in excess of \$158 million. Over \$1.8 million dollars in scholarships, bursaries and awards are distributed annually to students at the College. Located on the border to the United States and situated in the middle of three of the largest Great Lakes on the planet, Sault College is one of 24 publicly-funded colleges in the province of Ontario.