OCADFA BULLETIN

Monday, 16 November 2026

An Open Letter

Defending Decolonization, Collegial Governance and the Future of Public Art and Design Education

Dear VPAP Gabriele and President Serrano,

c.c. Chair, Senate, Jules Goss
c.c. Chair, Board of Governors, Lanita Layton
c.c. President, Canadian Association of University Teachers, Robin Whitaker
c.c. President, OPSEU, J.P Hornick

We, the undersigned faculty and academic staff of OCAD University, are deeply concerned about the academic restructuring proposals currently being advanced by the Office of the Vice-President, Academic and Provost.

We recognize that OCAD U faces significant financial and institutional challenges. We also recognize that universities must evolve to meet changing educational and social needs.

But restructuring is not simply a matter of reorganizing reporting relationships and consolidating service. It is a decision about what kind of university we want to be and whose knowledge and labour we value.

The VPAP has advanced three proposed prototypes and each raises fundamental questions about collegial governance, job cuts, working conditions, faculty workload, disciplinary integrity and the future of academic administrative support. All three include a centralized back office, despite the absence of a completed assessment of staffing needs, academic responsibilities or the consequences for curriculum delivery.

We are particularly troubled that the University proposes to select a new academic structure before completing the detailed evaluation of the work, resources and staffing required to sustain it. Additionally, we are told restructuring is necessary because of fiscal pressures but have been given no evidence that these plans have been costed or whether any actual savings will be realized.

As presented, the prototypes are not ready for decision. Yet

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faculty, staff and students are being asked to respond under pressure and on a compressed timeline. It is irresponsible to approve a major reorganization on this basis. This process has We believe that any process of academic restructuring must be guided by the following non-negotiable principles.

1. Decolonization must guide the entire process.

Decolonization must be the foundational principle informing how OCAD U governs itself, distributes resources, values knowledge and people. A restructuring process that concentrates authority or treats education primarily as an economic activity cannot claim to advance decolonization.

2. Academic decisions must be made through collegial governance.

The future of our academic programs cannot be determined through a top-down managerial process. Faculty, academic staff and students must have meaningful decision-making power over the structures that shape teaching, learning, research and academic life.

Senate must be able to exercise their academic governance responsibilities fully, with access to the information and time necessary for informed deliberation.

3. Protect and respect the people and relationships that make education possible.

Faculty-based administrative staff hold specialized program knowledge, institutional memory and relationships that are essential to curriculum planning, scheduling, teaching assignments and student support. These functions cannot simply be standardized or centralized without consequences.

No centralization or reduction of academic support without a demonstrated educational benefit, a full assessment of its consequences and meaningful participation by the workers affected.

4. No restructuring at the expense of workers' rights or employment security.

Academic restructuring must respect collective agreements, bargaining-unit protections and the rights of all university workers. Any proposed changes to duties, classifications, reporting relationships or employment conditions must be addressed through the appropriate collective bargaining and labour-relations processes.

5. Protect Studio-Based Education.

OCAD U's strength lies in its studio-based education practices. Academic restructuring must protect our core delivery models rather than subordinate them to standardized administrative models. Our students do not come to OCAD to attend online asynchronous or big-box classes. Studio-Based Education is a strength to be sustained, not an inefficiency to be eliminated.

6. Financial transparency and academic accountability are essential.

The VPAP must provide a credible and transparent financial rationale for restructuring. This includes comparative costs, projected savings, transition expenses, staffing implications and the consideration of alternatives.

Financial sustainability is a legitimate management responsibility, but fiscal austerity alone cannot justify changes that weaken teaching, learning, research or academic governance.

7. No decision before the evidence, meaningful deliberation and accountability.

The University must not finalize a restructuring model before completing and sharing comprehensive assessments of its academic, financial, staffing, workload, equity and governance implications. The University cannot decide the structure first and determine its consequences later.

8. The proposed timeline must allow faculty, staff, students and Senate to examine the evidence, propose alternatives and meaningfully influence the outcome.

Instead of choosing among the three provided prototypes, there should be an opportunity to propose alternatives that reflect the lived experiences of those affected by the changes.

9. Equity must be central to any restructuring process.

The process must ensure that changes do not deepen existing inequalities in workload, employment security, access to resources or decision-making power, particularly for historically marginalized and precariously employed members of our university community.

10. Student learning must be at the heart of every institutional decision.

We must prioritize the people, resources and relationships that sustain high-quality, accessible and transformative education. Our working conditions are our students' learning conditions.

Our Collective Demand

We call on the President and the University's senior leadership to halt the current decision-making timeline and commit to a genuinely collegial, transparent and decolonial process of academic planning.

Before any restructuring model is advanced for approval, the University must:

- Complete and disclose the necessary academic, staffing, workload, financial, equity and governance assessments.
- Reconsider the predetermined centralization of academic administrative support.

- Protect collective agreement rights, employment security and academic decision-making authority.
- Ensure that faculty, staff, students and Senate have meaningful opportunities to shape the outcome.
- Demonstrate that any proposed changes will strengthen OCAD U's educational mission.

We believe in an OCAD University that honours its commitments to decolonization, values the people whose labour sustains it, protects academic freedom and collegial governance, and places teaching, learning and creative inquiry at the centre of its decisions.

OCAD University's Academic and Strategic Plan, 2022–2028, approved by both Senate and the Board of Governors, commits our institution to decolonization, equity, innovative teaching and learning, student-centred education and responsible financial stewardship. These are not optional aspirations to be set aside during a period of financial difficulty. They are the principles the University has collectively adopted to guide its future.

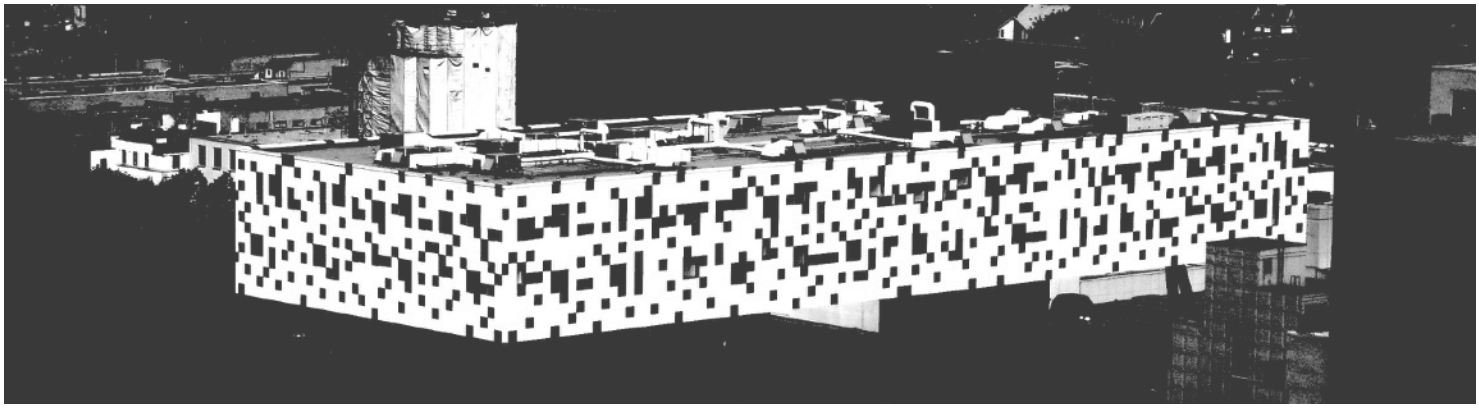
We are not opposed to change. We insist that change be guided by our collective values, supported by evidence and accountable to the university community.

Signed,

Members of the OCAD University community and allies
Faculty and Academic Staff

Add your name to the petition: https://c.org/vY8M4dmjQG





These Restructuring Plans Are Not a Made-for-OCAD Solution

Conversations with our national affiliate, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), and other allied faculty associations quickly revealed that the VPAP's unveiling of three prototypes for a planned restructuring of the university follows a model designed elsewhere to erode collegial governance and corporatize decision-making structures at OCAD. What is going on here closely resembles a playbook being enacted at several universities across the country.

Acadia University, for example, is slated to restructure to two faculties (from three) on July 1, 2027. Initially, the university's Provost and Vice-President Academic announced three potential restructuring proposals, before eventually deciding on a fourth. One model was to eliminate faculties altogether and instead divide programs between two colleges. That model was met with fierce criticism in consultations with the university community, so another model was unveiled to concentrate all programs within one faculty, with traditional department heads drawn from the faculty replaced with administrative directors managing program clusters. This model also met fierce criticism, so a third model was introduced with two faculties, that maintained the elimination of faculty heads as program leaders. Yet again there was fierce criticism against this model, but eventually a fourth model that closely resembled it was passed by the Senate. A total of 15 academic leadership positions are slated to be eliminated, with nine new Assistant Director positions created.

The restructuring at Acadia University is said to be primarily motivated by financial constraints, and is claimed to garner $1.34 million annually in operation cost savings according to an article from the CBC. **The President of the Acadia University Faculty Association (AUFA) is not convinced, and emphasizes that any savings are external to components of the plan that will erode democratic control over academic decisions.**

Indeed, OCADFA is not alone in questioning whether the real aim of restructuring is to concentrate power. **In her 2024 article, "**Uncollegial governance and the restructuring of the University of Alberta**," Carolyn Sale argues that collegial governance is being supplanted by the corporatization of the academy through university restructuring.** The article documents restructuring at the University of Alberta (U of A), that consisted of three main

aspects:

1) a significant reduction in support staff to achieve operational savings;
2) the elimination or reduction of the role faculty play in academic leadership in the management of these new colleges or merged faculties.
3) the elimination or reduction of the role faculty play in academic leadership in the management of these new colleges or merged faculties.

Sale cautioned that shirking collegial decision-making at U of A was legitimized as freeing faculty to focus on teaching and research.

The restructuring at UofA was likewise fueled by consultant reports and data concerning the need to reduce costs, which the University refused to fully disclose. This meant members of the university community had no way of adequately meaningfully assessing the plans, or developing their own. Nonetheless, **the lesson we need to learn from the U of A experience, Sale tells us, is that faculty need to assert a commitment to the practice of collegial governance by participating in consensus-based decision-making, and by exercising their academic freedom rights of intramural critique, as protected by the collective agreements negotiated by faculty associations.**

What we are seeing at OCAD is emblematic of the stories CAUT has shared about what is happening at universities across the country. Aided by consultant reports and financial data they refuse to release; senior university leaders are proposing restructuring plans to merge programs and faculties while getting rid of faculty leadership and shifting key decision-making authorities to managers outside of the bargaining unit. Painting it as something innovative that will relieve faculty members of certain administrative responsibilities, what these restructuring plans really are is a clear erosion of collegial decision-making in the academy.

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Carolyn Sale, “Uncollegial governance and the restructuring of the University of Alberta” (2024) 46:2 *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 295

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www.ocadfa.ca/blog/2026/11/03/ocadu-restructuring-2026

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