

2012-2013 ACTION PLAN

Occupy Post-Secondary Education:

Strategies and Activism to Engage
Our Members,
Our Communities and
Our Students



Federation of
Post-Secondary Educators
of BC

Occupy Post-Secondary Education: Strategies and Activism to Engage Our Members, Our Communities and Our Students

The Occupy Movement first emerged in the fall of 2011 as a grassroots protest that was taking aim at growing economic and social inequalities that have become hallmarks of most developed economies. The initial focus of the protest was Wall Street, the iconic epicenter of both global finance and market excesses that threatened to bring the global economy to the brink of collapse in 2008-09. The immediate consequence of that crisis were the billions in corporate bailouts, followed quickly by skyrocketing unemployment in many countries, and more recently, the ravages of government austerity measures. All have taken their toll and raised broader questions about how this crisis happened and what steps need to be taken to guard against it happening again.

BC has never been immune to the impacts of global events, and the labour movement in our province has long been a strong dissenting voice to the excesses of unregulated markets and the acquiescence of governments that are unwilling to take on the issue of defending the public interest. For our province, the Occupy Movement simply amplified labour's call for public policy changes that would lead to a strengthening of valuable public services, a reduction in the economic and social inequalities that would improve social cohesion and a fundamental acknowledgement that the right to free collective bargaining had to be part of building a modern, democratic economy.

Post-secondary educators have a direct interest in those changes to public policy. Our institutions are epicenters of a different kind. They are the place where teaching and learning occur, but only if governments are prepared to invest in those institutions and ensure that affordable access is not denied to students. Our institutions are also a gathering place for our communities, a place where adult learners can re-engage in a life of learning, where local employers can connect to the development of relevant skills for their workplaces and where faculty and

students can engage in dialogue and debate that builds on the diversity of their community.

None of those laudable goals are achievable, however, if our institutions and our members feel the restraints of government policy and funding that impose barriers, limit our participation or undermine our collective interests as post-secondary educators. The unfortunate fact of the last decade in BC is that all three of those restraints have become well-entrenched conditions within all our institutions. Like the Occupy Movement, post-secondary educators need to mobilize to change those conditions. We need to develop strategies and activism within our ranks to ensure that our voices are not just heard in the broader public debate about the need for change, but become a focal point for achieving positive change.

Over the next twelve months FPSE is proposing an action plan that will mobilize its members, staff, resources, organizational capacity, bargaining authority and alliances with the labour movement and among progressive community partners to advance our interests in five major areas. Those areas include:

1. Building an effective system of coordinated bargaining for the 2012 round provincial bargaining. To achieve this FPSE will:

- Work with the BC Federation of Labour's Public Sector Committee to ensure that our bargaining strategies and tactics are reflective of the plans developed by other unions involved in the 2012 round of provincial public sector bargaining.
- Resource the Bargaining Coordination Committee to ensure that it has the research and communication support to advance our bargaining objectives in the 2012 round of bargaining.
- Strengthen our on-going relationship with the Canadian Federation of Students to ensure that the CFS understands our bargaining agenda and supports our bargaining objectives.
- Ensure that BC's Labour Council network is aware of our bargaining issues and is regularly briefed on our bargaining status.
- Provide support to our locals to ensure that they are meeting with their local MLAs and MPs to brief them on key issues at their institution and the importance of securing fair contract settlements in 2012.
- Convene a Bargaining Conference to begin mapping out the elements of a coordinated bargaining strategy for the 2012 round.

2. Strengthening our capacity to protect existing provisions in our current collective agreements. To achieve this FPSE will:

- Increase the access to FPSE's Labour Relations and Public Policy Advocacy Certificate Program by providing more local steward and bargaining training and working with our locals to better identify needs within their associations for new training and capacity building.
- Work with our national partners at the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), the National Union of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (NUCAUT) and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) to ensure that our members connect with the resources of these organizations and participate in the work and campaigns that these organizations develop on our behalf.
- Ensure that the Labour Relations services provided by FPSE are addressing the critical and emerging issues within our workplaces by properly resourcing the grievance and arbitration process and ensuring that, through the Grievance and Arbitration Review Committee (GARC) and the Contract Administration Review Committee (CARC), we continue to maintain strong and effective oversight on labour relations issues.

3. Broadening the network of activism within our membership to ensure they have the skills, confidence and experience to advocate for our institutions and our members. To achieve this FPSE will:

- Provide training opportunities for members of Presidents' Council and Chairs of Standing Committees to attend conferences and workshops organized by our provincial and national labour organizations.
- Enhance the work of our Standing Committees by ensuring that they have the Staff support necessary to fulfill their assignments and the resources necessary to convene workshops and targeted events that will, in turn, augment the work of Presidents' Council and the Action Plan.
- Work with locals to expand the range of steward training options available to them by collaborating with other unions whose systems of activist training complement the work that we do with our locals.
- Provide locals with briefing material and support services that will allow them to follow through with efforts to lobby their local municipal, provincial and federal elected representatives on the key issues at their local institution.

- Use the Governance Manual developed by Presidents' Council as part of a broader training and education effort that builds awareness and support for a progressive approach to post-secondary governance at every local and encourages our activists to participate in their local governance structures.

4. Making post-secondary education a critical, vote-determining issue in the next provincial election. To achieve this, FPSE will:

- Engage our members to become more active politically in their communities by organizing events and forums that highlight the importance of post-secondary education and the need for better funding and policy choices by governments to improve that critical public service.
- Work with locals, union allies and community partners to mobilize a broadly based public campaign that makes effective use of polling, targeted advertising and social media along with community and public events all designed to make post-secondary education a key vote determining issue in the May 2013 provincial election.
- Ensure that our lobbying of government stresses the opportunities that improved access can provide in creating the economic and social conditions that British Columbia needs to sustain growth and prosperity for every citizen.
- Support the efforts of locals that want to become more active in the 2013 provincial election by developing a local member-to-member political action strategy at those locals.
- Advocate for a substantial revision to the funding formula for public post-secondary institutions to address disparities in the operating costs that the system faces and close the funding gap that exists between small rural institutions and those that operate in larger urban centres.
- Coordinate a provincial political action strategy that not only raises awareness within the ranks of post-secondary educators but also galvanizes public support for our issues.
- Ensure that any public campaign on post-secondary education issues emphasizes the importance of post-secondary institutions in the delivery of trades training and the problems that exist in the funding of those institutions by the Industry Training Authority (ITA).

- Support the efforts of newly organized faculty at private institutions in their campaign for better working conditions and better oversight of private institutions in the delivery of education and training for international students.

5. Creating alliances with other unions, the student movement and community partners to ensure that the value of public services, especially post-secondary education, is recognized, accepted and supported by a plurality of citizens in our province. To achieve this FPSE will:

- Support the work of the Coalition for Public Education and the BC Federation of Labour's Public Sector Committee to ensure that allies and affiliates throughout the labour movement are working with us to improve funding of public post-secondary education in our province.
- Target our work on access issues to ensure that it reflects the growing diversity of our communities as well as the specific challenges of under-represented groups within those communities.
- Work with the Canadian Federation of Students to document the impacts that de-regulated tuition fees and chronic underfunding have had on participation rates and develop new research that shows the benefits that accrue to governments, citizens and the broader public when access to post-secondary education is improved.