

Name: Maija Duncan

Position: Communications Officer

2015-16 Executive Term Report

The past year has been incredibly challenging but ultimately productive. In order to give a full an account of the duties I have completed, I have separated this report into different sections, and noted difficulties and recommendations (if applicable) throughout, as well as at the end.

Website

Website maintenance has been a large part of my duties throughout this term. Beyond these day-to-day updates, I have initiated several projects that would improve our website — and I think we could all agree there is a lot of room for improvement.

Accessibility

The accessibility of our website has been a long-standing issue. In cooperation with the Accessibility Committee, who selected a web developer, I supervised the completion of this work. The site is up to AA AODA accessibility standards now. You may be wondering why it doesn't look any different. The work that was done by the web developers affected the code so that individuals accessing our website with assistive technology will find it more accessible. I'm happy to share the report of their work with whomever is interested.

Reorganizing Content

Accessibility is not only technical, however. In order to make our website easier to navigate, I had planned to reorganize its contents with the aid of a static front page. At the time of writing this, I have developed a sitemap and creating the new front page is on my to-do list before the end of the month. If this project turns out to be more labour-intensive than planned, it is one that I suggest should be continued by the incoming Communications Committee.

Members-Only Area

A members-only area for the website would be a password-protected section where the local could store meeting minutes and other documents which do not leave the office, placing undue difficulties on members who may want to consult them. I have initiated discussions with the IT services at CUPE National. While I was not able to secure a projected completion date, they are willing to build this for us.

French Materials

After consultation, it was decided that it would be best to create a Bilingualism Committee who would be responsible for identifying content that should be translated, supervising that work, and working to build relationships between campuses. Notice of motion for such a committee was given at the February GMM. I strongly recommend that it be approved when the motion is brought to a vote. I would happily sit on this committee and am willing to do translations myself if it will see this project come to fruition.

Newsletter

Collecting information, drafting the newsletter, double-checking the code, and finally sending the newsletter has been a huge part of every week for the past year. I've been drafting the newsletter in html and checking it against an online html editor ever since gmail destroyed my formatting one time too many. While this has worked well enough, there has to be a better way. Looking into newsletter formatting options for the future would be worthwhile.

Social Media

Nowhere in our bylaws does it say that the CO is responsible for our social media presence. It may seem like common sense, but doing all the work of the CO and sitting on the executive committee are already very time-consuming. I have been updating our Facebook page as much as possible, but I was not able to keep up with Twitter. Gizem Çakmak (CSU1) was a lifesaver in taking over the local's Twitter account. The only way to be successful on social media is to post often. It would make sense for the Communications Committee to have one or two people dedicated to social media. In any event, it makes no sense for the CO to be the only person responsible for social media: it's simply too much to expect of a single person.

Tuition Indexation

The fight for tuition indexation began anew almost as soon as the current exec took office. In that time, I have always been involved in this fight in different ways. Over the summer, it was producing materials to explain the issue, as well as leafletting. In the Fall, as we ramped up toward arbitration in December, I was part of a team that produced posters and a social media campaign. In the last couple months, I have been part of an exec team (with CSU1 and the Chair) helping our arbitration lead (Sonja Killoran-McKibbin) with the arbitration case itself, going over the employer productions, creating spreadsheets, reviewing arguments, meeting with our lawyer, and helping to draft alternative settlement language. These tasks were especially onerous since our Grievance Officer showed no interest in any of it. Throughout the entire year, I have helped organize and participated actively in events and protests, including the BBQ-turned-rally and the delivery of the grievance in May, crashing the Board of Governors meeting in December, and the rally in January. I do believe that collective actions, communications, and hard work on our arbitration case are all part of why we now have a settlement to consider. It was a tremendous group effort, including some great work from the rank-and-file, and everyone deserves credit for their part in it.

Unit 4 Bargaining

I have been attending as many of the U4 bargaining meetings as my schedule will allow, and updating the U4 bargaining information on the website in as timely a fashion as possible. I have been in communication with the bargaining team on the subject of their communications needs, but they are content, for now, to see how bargaining goes. Should that change, I have prepared a communications plan that I will happily share with my successor.

Difficulties and recommendations

The Communications Committee is simply inadequate in assisting with the communications of our local. I have spent more time dealing with the unreasonable demands of committee members than I would have doing the small amount of work that came out of the committee. This problem is structural, to a point: the role of the committee needs to be spelled out more clearly. In my opinion, its job is to do communications, not supervise while others do that work (whether the CO or paid contractors). It also would be beneficial to increase the number of people on the committee. The committee's composition has not been updated in years, and as our communications shift more towards the internet in general and social media in particular, the burden of that work increases.

Another reason why I think increasing the number of people on the committee is a good idea is quite simple: the CO's workload is truly unreasonable. Doing this job properly requires that one dedicate large swaths of time every week, and there are no breaks. You can't just decide to not do communications for a few days if something comes up. Other people's unreasonable expectations (that everything be done perfectly and immediately while I balance a full courseload) has also played a role in the fact that I have burnt out. If elected to the Communications Committee, I fully intend to take on some of that load so that my successor won't face the same fate. I would entreat whoever is on the committee to take their jobs seriously. Our local's communications are too important to fall on the shoulders of a single person.