

# carnets 43

SPRING 2023

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Hello!  
How can I help you  
... or hurt you ?

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Over the last few decades, Hollywood has shaped our view of artificial intelligence. From Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey to Steven Spielberg's A.I. Artificial Intelligence, not to mention the countless iterations of Terminator and The Matrix, sci-fi films have featured a host of often formidable and unhinged cyborgs, robots and computers in post-apocalyptic settings. On the big screen, technology is always a double-edged sword, at once life-saving and destructive; and the moral of the story is that the future of humanity ultimately depends on how the "machine" will be used.

Some people see the launch of the new chatbot ChatGPT by the U.S. company Open AI this past November as the first sign that the end of the world is nigh. Admittedly, the fact that Elon Musk co-founded Open AI in 2015 is unsettling (he left the research group three years later, reportedly after a failed bid to take control of the company). Now Musk is accusing ChatGPT of being "woke" and has recruited a research team to create a rival "uncensored" conversational bot to be called TruthGPT. It's worth noting that the famed billionaire was one of 1,300 signatories of the petition launched in March calling for a moratorium on the development of artificial intelligence.

In any event, ChatGPT is enjoying phenomenal popularity: five days after its launch online, one million people had signed up, and just three months later the AI text generator already boasted more than 100 million users. Clearly, its vast research and writing capabilities are opening up new horizons in the fields of education and higher education. Should we be celebrating or mourning? For some, abuses loom large: plagiarism, loss of copyright, and the reproduction of ideological and cultural biases. But others believe intelligent adoption of the technology can have benefits for teaching and the development of critical thinking.

One thing is certain: artificial intelligence no longer resides in the realm of fiction. It is already entrenched in our schools, colleges and universities, as this issue of Carnets attests. At the time of writing, all eyes are on the Ministry of Higher Education, which is organizing a day of reflection on AI on May 15, in cooperation with Ivado, which defines its vision thus: "to accelerate Québec's digital transformation by being a catalyst for progress in research into the harnessing of big data for decision-making." That bodes well.

*Caroline Quesnel*

**Caroline Quesnel**  
PRÉSIDENT

# What should we say to teachers who want to ban the use of conversational robots by students?



When considering the use of conversational robots in the classroom, it is important to weigh the potential benefits and drawbacks of these technologies. While some teachers may be hesitant to allow students to use conversational robots, there are several reasons why they may be beneficial for language learning.



Conversational robots provide students with a safe and non-judgmental environment to practice their language skills. This can be especially helpful for students who are shy or self-conscious about speaking in front of others. The robots can also provide immediate feedback on pronunciation and grammar, which can help students improve their skills more quickly.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that conversational robots can be a distraction if not used appropriately. Students may be tempted to use them for non-educational purposes, such as chatting with friends or playing games. Additionally, some conversational robots can be quite expensive, which may be a concern for schools or teachers working with limited budgets.

Unedited excerpt from a conversation with ChatGPT

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## Slave to a chatbot? No thanks!

Marianne Di Croce  
PHILOSOPHY TEACHER AT CÉGEP DE SAINT-JÉRÔME

BY MARTIN ROBERT

**Doubt and concern. Those were Marianne Di Croce's reactions after testing ChatGPT. Di Croce has been teaching philosophy at Cégep de Saint-Jérôme for over 15 years. When she asked ChatGPT whether Epicurus believed that philosophy leads to happiness, the chatbot took just a few seconds to generate a paragraph for which she would have given at least a passing grade.**

Every day, Di Croce sees the pandemic's after-effects on her students. They are less engaged and motivated, and more are dropping out at the slightest obstacle. Under these circumstances, instead of trying harder, some students inevitably succumb to the temptation to use chatbots.

"To be able to think for yourself, you must know and understand ideas other than your own," says Di Croce. She doesn't want students to memorize philosophers' ideas but they should at least acquire some basic concepts, read their works and engage with them. Once students have that intellectual background, they can develop their own critical faculties. But Di Croce wonders whether chatbots may so degrade these abilities that we become their slaves and depend on them to develop our thinking.

Di Croce also wonders about the validity of grading work that students do at home with the help of a handy chatbot. "But if we have students do all graded work in the classroom, as many are suggesting, that would create problems of inclusion. For example, it would penalize students who have performance anxiety, or who have children and need some flexibility in their schedules." Instead of grading her students in class, Di Croce has changed her evaluation criteria. She now

requires students to cite excerpts from required readings and references to the course notes in their essays. This will work for a while.

### The real solution: Better teaching conditions

The development of increasingly powerful chatbots is inevitable. To counterbalance them, says Di Croce, the real solution is to lower student-to-teacher ratios. Teaching in smaller groups allows for discussion, feedback, oral and individual evaluations and help with difficult assignments. But she fears that if the past is any indication, the government will invest in digital tools for detecting plagiarism instead of improving teaching conditions. Such tools are always one step behind and never completely effective: "Technology won't save us from technology."

Marianne Di Croce knows whereof she speaks. Her Master's thesis was plagiarized by a Ph.D. student, and reporting it turned out to be a complex and painstaking process. As a teacher, she faces the same challenge when she suspects students of plagiarism. Assembling the evidence, catching the cheaters, and proving plagiarism is such a daunting task that some teachers just look the other way. Valuable time that could be devoted to teaching is spent on red tape. To make matters worse, some administrators are reluctant to go after plagiarism for fear that will tarnish their institution's reputation and make it harder for them to attract and retain students as satisfied, paying "customers."

"Our system wants students to succeed. I want to teach. From that standpoint, I don't think ChatGPT is my ally."





## The upsides and downsides of AI

**Dave Ancil**

TEACHER AT COLLÈGE JEAN-DE-BRÉBEUF AND RESEARCHER AFFILIATED WITH THE INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATORY ON THE SOCIETAL IMPACTS OF AI AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY (OBVIA)

BY MARTIN ROBERT

**Dave Ancil has been watching artificial intelligence (AI) since its earliest days. When asked if, on balance, the AI revolution will bring more advantages than disadvantages, he unhesitatingly answers in the affirmative:**

« **T**here isn't enough human intelligence in the world to find solutions to all of the complex problems facing humanity." He cites as examples climate change, the collapse of biodiversity, and the emergence of new technologies to cure diseases and staunch future pandemics. According to Ancil, augmented intelligence is an unparalleled tool for making major discoveries in all fields.

But his enthusiasm wanes as he lists the risks associated with AI, especially when it comes to the immediate future of education in schools, colleges and universities. He notes just how ill-prepared our education systems are to cope with the revolution that is unfolding at breakneck speed before our eyes, destabilizing teachers and undermining any "academic meritocracy." When students can get chatbots to help them write their exams and papers, the validity of evaluations, in terms of fairness and intellectual integrity, becomes dubious. In other words, project-based teaching, which is so popular and so strongly encouraged in our institutions, should no longer be used for important evaluations. "In the short term," says Ancil, "we have to go back to in-class written and oral evaluations. That's what I've been doing for the most important evaluations since last fall." Close physical supervision can keep the value of diplomas from dropping like a stone.

Looking further ahead, "The government must immediately fund groups of experts who understand the current upheavals, which will only accelerate," says Ancil. "We need effective recommendations on how to adapt our systems."

Ancil also worries about the negative impact of AI on young people's cognitive development. Just as Google Maps impaired people's sense of direction, an application like ChatGPT, which can write better than many students with the click of a mouse, may well affect their ability to think critically.

### No choice but to adapt

At the same time, we should not reject AI out of hand because of the dangers. As a researcher on the societal impacts of AI, Ancil suggests that AI be incorporated into teaching as a tool and even as a useful resource, provided it is done in a transparent way. Why not develop experimental approaches in the classroom to learn how to exploit the advantages that AI can provide?

Teachers could also use AI to create exercises. When it comes to the sometimes problematic accuracy of the information retrieved by AI robots, teachers have the knowledge needed to separate the wheat from the chaff. What is more, teachers who learn how to use AI effectively can save precious time. For example, AI might prove a valuable cost-free assistant for correcting assignments, freeing up time for teachers to devote to their primary mission—teaching and nurturing individual relationships with their students.

In any case, there's no putting the toothpaste back into the tube. AI is here for good. We might as well adapt and make the most of it

[observatoire-ia.ulaval.ca](https://observatoire-ia.ulaval.ca)

# Artificial intelligence in education: Friend or foe?

By Benoît Lacoursière

GENERAL SECRETARY OF FNEEQ-CSN, POLITICAL MEMBER OF THE SCHOOL AND SOCIETY COMMITTEE

**What does it mean for the future of education, for students and for the teaching profession? The committee is attempting to answer these questions with some critical distance, while also drawing connections with the associated social and economic issues.**

**T**he School and Society Committee began its work in early 2023, in the aftermath of the furor caused by OpenAI's public launch of ChatGPT3 at the end of the Fall 2022 school term. Teachers' reactions to ChatGPT exploded across social media and mass media. Their views were varied and conflicting. Some teachers saw it as a promising innovation while others raised concerns, particularly that ChatGPT3 would make it easier for students to plagiarize or cheat.

ChatGPT is far from the only IA application in education. Many institutions have been using AI systems for various functions for years. This development has occurred in parallel with the development of distance education and the application of numerous "digital solutions" at all levels of education. More generally, these fast-paced technological developments are happening in lockstep with the development of cybernetic capitalism, with the Big 5 tech firms at its centre, and with no

collective reflection on the usefulness and, more fundamentally, the justification for and impacts of this massive recourse to technology. What does it mean for the future of education, for students and for the teaching profession? The committee is attempting to answer these questions with some critical distance, while also drawing connections with the associated social and economic issues. As always, the School and Society Committee's mandate is to stimulate discussion within the Federation to inform the formulation of recommendations and demands.

In its most recent report, the School and Society Committee discussed the work it has done to carry out the following mandates from FNEEQ federal bodies concerning the development of artificial intelligence (AI) systems:

- ▷ That the FNEEQ, its regroupements and its affiliated unions call for a public debate on the issues surrounding digital technologies and artificial intelligence (33rd FNEEQ Convention, June 2021 );
- ▷ That the FNEEQ condemn certain practices that are being presented as miracle solutions, such as universal design for learning and the misuse of distance learning and artificial intelligence, as well as their impacts on teaching workloads and even on the inclusion of students with disabilities (Federal Council, May 2022);
- ▷ That the School and Society Committee be tasked with documenting and developing a critical analysis of the use of artificial intelligence in primary, secondary and higher education (Federal Council, May 2022).

The committee's report is divided into six sections. The first deals with general definitions of artificial intelligence and with its development.

The second takes a closer look at the assumptions underlying AI systems, particularly those that contain biases.

Section 3 focuses on applications of AI systems in education—to teaching and learning, selection and advising, supporting student success, individualized assistance, and research.



Section 4 explores the implications of AI in education for students' physical and social development, for learning, for the teacher-student relationship, and for the teaching profession.

The fifth section deals with the ethical and philosophical issues that arise from the findings about AI in education and other fields. In an effort to move beyond the false debate between technophilia and technophobia, the committee instead adopts a technosceptic stance, arguing that technology is not neutral and is heavily influenced by the socioeconomic and ideological context in which it is produced. Thus, when we think about introducing AI into education, it is important not to regard it simply as a tool and consider each of its applications in isolation. Instead, we must always ask whether its use will enhance the student-teacher relationship, whether this "tool" is really necessary, and whether it is the only or best available option, while always keeping in mind the many issues that AI raises and the economic system in which it is embedded and across which it is spreading.

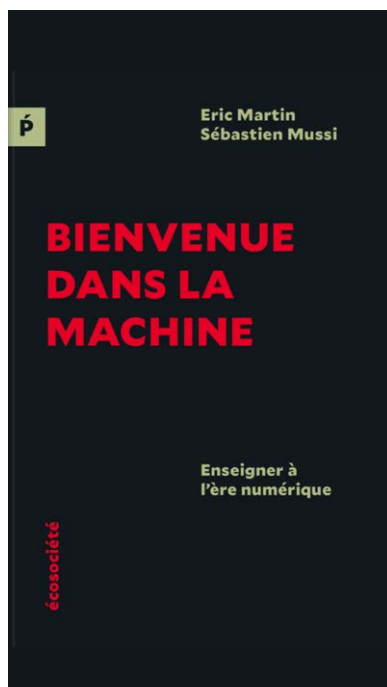
Section 6, the conclusion, argues that to properly understand the applications of AI in education, we must return to certain fundamental pedagogical principles. Many of the questions raised about these applications come down to two fundamental issues: why do we teach, and why do we go to school? In this regard, the committee offers an interesting case study of cheating and plagiarism in a highly competitive school and social environment.

The committee ends its report by reiterating its call for vibrant schools that serve the common good, rather than the factory-school model, to which teachers are confined against their will by chronic underfunding followed by ideologically driven reinvestment.

The recommendations presented to the FNEEQ Federal Council will be designed to support reflection about a comprehensive framework for the development of artificial intelligence that ensures it is preceded by genuine ethical deliberation and that covers issues such as the protection of personal information and copyright,

the transparency of the technology, collective, democratic control, and how to prevent the technology from undermining helping relationships in the school environment. In addition, the report suggests possible demands both in the policy sphere and at the bargaining table.

**To read the School and Society Committee's [full report](#).**



# Resisting the machine in school and society

By Eric Martin and Sébastien Mussi

CEGEP PHILOSOPHY TEACHERS AND CO-AUTHORS OF BIENVENUE DANS LA MACHINE. ENSEIGNER À L'ÈRE NUMÉRIQUE, A BOOK ABOUT TEACHING IN THE DIGITAL AGE (ÉCOSOCIÉTÉ, 2023.)

**We initially decided to write our book because our forced experiment in online teaching during the pandemic was, frankly, disastrous. We were told repeatedly that a lesson on screen was “the equivalent” of a lesson in the classroom but our experience showed just the opposite.**

**O**ur own sense that we had lost an important dimension of the delicate relationship between teachers and students, our sense of dehumanization, was soon confirmed by numerous studies on the harm that overexposure to screens does to young people—not only to their command of the content being taught but also to their mental health and socio-cognitive development. But none of this stopped the ardent advocates of online teaching and unfettered technology-based learning. The Big Five tech giants of platform capitalism had been dreaming of taking over the classroom long before COVID, but the pandemic gave them the opportunity to implement their agenda. Now that the pandemic is over, the dark side of the computerization of education is being ignored, and it is even claimed that online courses are “greener,” despite the pollution that computer systems and networks generate. There are calls to push this trend even further, although the overwhelming majority of teachers and students (94%, according to one recent survey) are against it. How can we explain such stubbornness, such willful disregard for reality? The answer, we believe, is

a combination of ideology, technology fetishism and, obviously, economic interest. We must always ask: who benefits from the crime?

But the tech giants’ dreams go beyond generalizing online education and computerizing the classroom. They envision an entire society—in Google’s words, a tele-everything world—in which all tasks are performed remotely under the “benign” governance of algorithms and artificial intelligence.

Just before our book went to press, ChatGPT was released to the public and became a media obsession. This technology obviously poses serious risks for education, plagiarism being one example. But it is only the latest manifestation of a logic that we describe in our book, drawing on the writings of philosophers such as Günther Anders, Hannah Arendt and Michel Freitag.

Today’s societies tend to shirk responsibility for examining and making decisions about what they are doing, leaving these tasks to cybersystems and machines. Hence the role of education is no longer to develop autonomy and

good judgment, but rather to train individuals to adapt, as Eric Sadin puts it, to the signals sent to them by the automated systems (economic systems, IT systems, etc.) that now control the world.

We believe, on the contrary, that the challenges of the 21st century, such as building a green and democratic society, will demand cultivated individuals who can think critically and steer the economy and technology toward carefully considered goals. Stated more bluntly, education must produce independent citizens, not drones or slaves, no matter what the Big Five and their standard-bearers say. They must be resisted.



# Public-sector bargaining: Disappointing offers

By Yves de Repentigny

VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT CEGEP



**I**n December 2022, Treasury Board presented its offers to the Common Front, of which the FNEEQ is a member through the CSN, at the central table, where issues common to all employee groups, such as wages and pensions, are negotiated. Then, at the sectoral table, which deals

with matters specific to a single personnel class, the CEGEPs' bargaining committee (CPNC) presented its offers to the Alliance des syndicats de professeures et professeurs de cégep (ASPPC), an alliance that includes the FNEEQ and the Fédération de l'enseignement collégial (FEC-CSQ).

None of the offers met our expectations. Treasury Board is offering a 9% raise over five years, which is less than inflation. To retain teaching staff, they want to make retirement more complicated. The government is simply ignoring the CEGEPs, since primary education and the health and mental health system are its declared priorities, and the only solutions the CPNC is interested in are distance learning (including in asynchronous mode), splitting up teaching schedules in the regular sector, recognition of acquired competencies, and to solve the staff shortage, making it harder to get certain types of leave and disability benefits.

At both the central and the sectoral tables, the talks got off to a slow start. The parties met for only one day every two weeks, and the only mandate the employer's negotiators seemed to have was to listen to the union presentations, then ask a few questions, without ever making any commitments regarding our demands.

Treasury Board and the CPNC did table new offers on March 27 and April 6 respectively, but in the view of the Common Front and the ASPPC, they are only adding details to the offers they tabled in December. The employer's negotiators say they are prioritizing their demands in order to speed up the talks.

## Other issues

Another hot topic is the work arising from the 2021-2026 Action Plan for Success in Higher Education. The FNEEQ plans to send the Ministry a response to the report on CEGEP students' command of French, which was released more than a year after it was submitted to Minister Danielle McCann in January 2022. Its recommendations include explicit grammar instruction not only by French teachers but also by teachers of other subjects, as well as a major shift to digital writing. The Federation is also preparing an opinion on the "challenge" courses (first courses in philosophy and in French language and literature). The departments concerned were invited to complete a questionnaire on the practices most likely to improve student success. But this way of surveying faculty did not allow for a broader examination of the factors that contribute to student success. The committee working on this issue is to submit its report by June 30, 2023.

The Regroupement is also closely monitoring the review of the Inhalation Therapy and Nursing programs. In both cases, the professional orders would like to make a Bachelor's degree the minimum requirement for entering the profession.

# The power of coordinated bargaining

By Christine Gauthier  
VICE-PRESIDENT FOR THE REGROUPEMENT UNIVERSITÉ



The past few months have been a busy time for the unions in the Regroupement Université, most of which have been at the bargaining table. They have been ramping up pressure tactics, holding strike votes, issuing media releases to condemn the deadlock in the bargaining talks, and coming out to support the SCCC-UQO-CSN. The tools of coordinated bargaining have been leveraged to force the employers to find satisfactory solutions to the lecturers’ demands.

The unions representing lecturers at UQO and UQAR reached settlements that improved their members’ working conditions in several important areas, including job stability and security, access to research, and collegiality.

The provincial mobilizing committee for coordinated bargaining (CNMNC) has also been very active in recent months. First it produced two videos about two of the most harmful situations facing university lecturers: the precarious job status of contract teachers at universities, and the lack of recognition, despite the important contributions they make.

Next, the CNMNC piloted a coordinated mobilization action at multiple campuses across Québec. From Abitibi to Montréal and Québec City to Rimouski, union activists sent a clear collective message that they are committed to continuing the Québec-wide struggle in support of contract teachers: Together/ensemble in coordinated bargaining for better working conditions.

Solidarity!



# Québec culture and citizenship course postponed: A big win for the unions!

By Léandre Lapointe

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE REGROUPEMENT PRIVÉ



PHOTO: DOMINIC MORISSETTE

**O**n March 21, 2023, when the provincial budget was tabled, the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ) quietly announced that mandatory introduction of the new course on Québec culture and citizenship would be postponed. Minister Drainville finally yielded to the

arguments marshalled by all the stakeholders in Québec's education system and accepted the Regroupement Privé's proposal to make the program optional for the 2023-2024 school year.

With the program's original September 2023 implementation date fast approaching, the Regroupement Privé brought the alarming facts to the attention of the media and called on the Ministry to take action. The program has yet to be finalized and officially approved by the MEQ, only the most fragmentary teacher training has been provided, and the first teacher's manuals will not be published until 2024.

The postponement of mandatory implementation of this program is a major victory for the Regroupement Privé. Armed with a mandate from the private-sector unions since November 2022, the Regroupement successfully argued for the program to be implemented appropriately, in a way that respects teachers and supports student success.

## Agreements in principle ratified

The past few months have been busy for the Regroupement Privé. Many of its unions are currently at the bargaining table. The general assemblies of four unions ratified agreements in principle and hence new collective agreements: the Syndicat des enseignantes et enseignants de l'Institut du tourisme et de l'hôtellerie du Québec (ITHQ), the Syndicat des enseignantes et enseignants du Collège André-Grasset, the Syndicat des enseignantes et enseignants du Collège de Montréal, and the Syndicat des enseignant-e-s de l'Atelier de musique de Jonquière. All of these unions significantly improved their working conditions. The ITHQ union's new FNEEQ collective

agreement means its members will finally be fully recognized as teachers and will be paid on the same scale as teachers in the public sector. Congratulations to all the members of the bargaining committees, and a big thank you to all of the union advisors involved!

## First wave of coordinated bargaining

Since the start of the current term, we have been working on creating a coordinated-bargaining mechanism within the Regroupement Privé. The disparities among the collective agreements in the private sector and with working conditions in the public sector were the main concerns that led the Regroupement's unions to join forces.

We can now tell you that five of our unions have decided unanimously at their general assemblies to join the historic first wave of coordinated bargaining by the Regroupement Privé: the Syndicat des enseignantes et des enseignants du Collège Regina Assumpta, the Syndicat des travailleuses et des travailleurs de Villa Maria, the Kells Academy Teachers' Union, the Syndicat du personnel du collège Mont-Saint-Louis and the Syndicat des professeurs du Collège de Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière.

Over the past few weeks, these unions have begun bargaining in solidarity for improvements in working conditions for all of their members. Issues such as management of IEPs, technological change, distance education and parental rights are being addressed so that together we can achieve a satisfactory settlement.

Here's to a positive outcome!





## To reduce the carbon footprint of Québec's schools: Promote public transit

By Nova Doyon

FRENCH TEACHER AT CÉGEP DE SAINT-LAURENT, MEMBER OF OF THE FNEEQ ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

**If the employer reimbursed some or all of its employees' public transit expenses, they would be killing two birds with one stone.**

**T**o meet the targets that governments and experts have set for reducing greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions, we must be able to quantify the emissions generated by our activities. So it is logical that the environmental policies of Québec educational institutions should include methods for calculating their GHG emissions.

As teachers, we produce knowledge and educate citizens—activities that do not cause much pollution in and of themselves. But according to Québec's official inventory of its GHG emissions, transportation generates more of these emissions than any other sector, ahead

of industry; residential, commercial and institutional heating; agriculture; and waste treatment). In order to achieve carbon neutrality, Québec's schools, colleges and universities must include in their GHG calculations not only the emissions they produce directly (Scope 1 GHG emissions) and those they generate indirectly through the use of purchased energy (Scope 2 GHG emissions), but also their Scope 3 GHG emissions, the greenhouse gases produced indirectly by activities upstream and downstream of their own—mainly the transportation of people to and from the places where they work and study.

Offsetting GHG emissions is not a silver bullet in the fight against global warming. We must also reduce GHG emissions at source. That means changing institutional practices and individual behaviours. And there is no better way to do that than offering people attractive incentives to adopt alternative modes of transportation. For example, why couldn't educational institutions pay all or part of their employees' commuting costs if they use public transit instead of driving their own cars (even electric ones)?

**The case for universal programs to support public transit**

Young people are generally considered to have a natural tendency to use collective or active modes of transportation. That’s probably why most programs to promote mass transit at Québec CEGEPs and universities are targeted at their student populations (examples include Trois-Rivières, Québec City and Sherbrooke). With only a few exceptions, such as Université de Sherbrooke, which has an employee mobility program, Québec’s educational institutions offer little or no financial support to faculty members who use other modes of transportation instead of driving to work.

If the employer reimbursed some or all of its employees’ public transit expenses, they would be killing two birds with one stone. Public-transit corporations in Québec—and particularly in Montréal—are running deficits

and considering cutting back their services. But they must do the opposite if we want to change people’s daily travel habits to achieve Québec’s GHG reduction targets. The best way to do it is to improve public-transit service while reducing the cost, or even making it free. Obviously, accessibility has a cost. Educational institutions and public-transit corporations could enter into agreements that go beyond simply reducing the cost of an annual subscription, as the STM’s OPUS & Cie corporate partnership program does. The goal should be to make public transit accessible and even attractive. If it costs people less time and money to take mass transit than to drive their own car, chances are good that many will become regular new users of public transit.

Once these new individual and collective practices have been adopted, they should lead to the next step: limiting parking to meet real needs (rather than needs induced by ease of access

or lack of attractive alternatives) and ecologically transforming parking lots to reduce heat islands, facilitate absorption of stormwater runoff and increase biodiversity on campus.

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# First CSN Feminist School rises to the challenge!

**In 2023, do we still need to fight for women's rights in Québec? Has the issue of pay equity been settled for good? Is abortion now an established right that will remain so forever? Do women have the same career prospects and retirement income as men? What about prostitution and the exploitation of women? How should the CSN movement address this issue, and the issue of domestic violence?**

By Caroline Leblond, Christine Gauthier,  
Élisabeth Cyr and Sophie Bouliane  
FNEEQ DELEGATES TO THE CSN FEMINIST SCHOOL

**T**o explore questions like these, the CSN decided to bring together committed women activists from various spheres of activity and regions of Québec to participate in the first-ever CSN Feminist School.

It was no small challenge, but one that was most definitely met. This success can be attributed to the School's wide-ranging program, focused on key issues for feminist struggles, the very high quality of the guest speakers' presentations, and the valuable contributions of the women who came to attend and build our feminist union action together.

The session was opened by none other than Claudette Carboneau, the CSN's first woman president, who recounted the feminist struggles that have marked the Confederation's 100-year history. It would have been hard to find a person better qualified to talk about the hard road women have had to travel, including their efforts to claim their rightful place in the life of the CSN. She named the important but often little known women who led the fight within our movement while supporting the struggle for women's rights in society at large. Thank you, Ms. Carboneau!

This event also included a very interesting panel discussion on the role of women in public life that looked at the situations,



perspectives and obstacles faced by women in various fields. The speakers included Pascale St-Onge (on women in politics), Caroline Senneville (unions), Geneviève Fortier (business) and Camille Chai (sports and broadcasting). Undeniably, women still come up against unfair barriers and challenges, and engaged women still encounter more than their fair share of negative feedback and scepticism. Bumping into a glass ceiling that you don't see until you your head makes contact with it is still an all-too-common experience for women.

Special thanks to the members of the CSN's Status of Women Committee and to Nathalie Arguin, General Secretary of the CSN, who hosted the CSN Feminist School. We came away stronger, more militant, more unified and more determined, and with a new store of knowledge that we will bring to our work for feminist causes.

The fight goes on!

# FNEEQ highlights job insecurity at Acfas

**At the 90th Acfas conference in May 2023, the FNEEQ drew attention to the important issue of job insecurity for college and university teachers.**

## **Job insecurity at CEGEPs**

**A**bout 40% of the teaching staff at Québec colleges have insecure employment status, which can continue for years on end. In addition to the practical problems that precariousness entails, such as financial insecurity, it has a number of other consequences for teachers' professional and personal lives. In a presentation at the 90th Acfas conference, Véronique Lépine, from the FNEEQ's National Meeting Committee and the Parity Placement Committee outlined the forms that job insecurity takes in both regular programs and continuing-education programs at CEGEPs.

She discussed how precarious status is sometimes established and maintained systemically, especially in continuing-education programs and in some regular programs and disciplines, particularly at institutions located in some remote regions. Programs with low enrolment require a minimal number of teachers; there are not enough groups and students to support full-time teaching loads, much less create tenure-track positions, in all disciplines. In addition to all the inherent problems of job insecurity, CEGEP teachers with insecure status do not meet the minimum requirements to qualify for certain rights that permanent teachers enjoy under the collective agreement.

## **Job insecurity at universities**

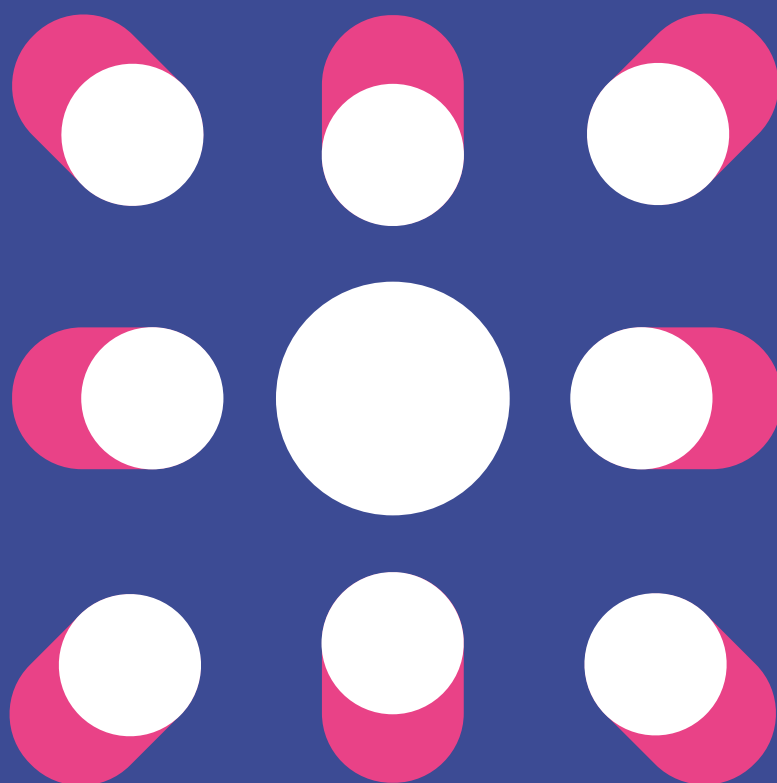
Far from being a marginal phenomenon, the use of contract teachers at Québec universities is on the rise. In fact, recent data show that contract appointments now account for the majority of teaching appointments at universities in both Québec and Canada as a whole (Shaker and Pasma, 2018). This growing, persistent insecurity for an entire employment group is especially troubling.

In her presentation at the Acfas conference, FNEEQ Vice-President Christine Gauthier drew on Paugam's (2007) model, which distinguishes between job insecurity and poor job quality, to describe the situation experienced by university



lecturers, using various economic and psychosocial indicators. Her analysis showed that lecturers' uncertain prospects for stable employment at universities may lead to a deterioration in their professional situation, in terms of both employment conditions and the nature and organization of their work, depending on how teaching models evolve.

Analyses done by the FNEEQ's School and Society Committee provide a detailed picture of the logic at work in the neoliberal university and at the intersection of various zones of power (department, institution, government). On the basis of these analyses, a number of approaches to fighting job insecurity for university teaching staff were presented.



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