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Institu dPolitik di Nor

Briefing Note No.19 | March 2021

## A University “By and For” Francophones

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NPI would like to acknowledge the First Peoples on whose traditional territories we live and work. NPI is grateful for the opportunity to have our offices located on these lands and thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land.

### Our main offices:

- Thunder Bay on Robinson-Superior Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg and Fort William First Nation.
- Sudbury is on the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnaabeg as well as Wahnapiatae First Nation.
- Both are home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

We recognize and appreciate the historic connection that Indigenous people have to these territories. We recognize the contributions that they have made in shaping and strengthening these communities, the province and the country as a whole.

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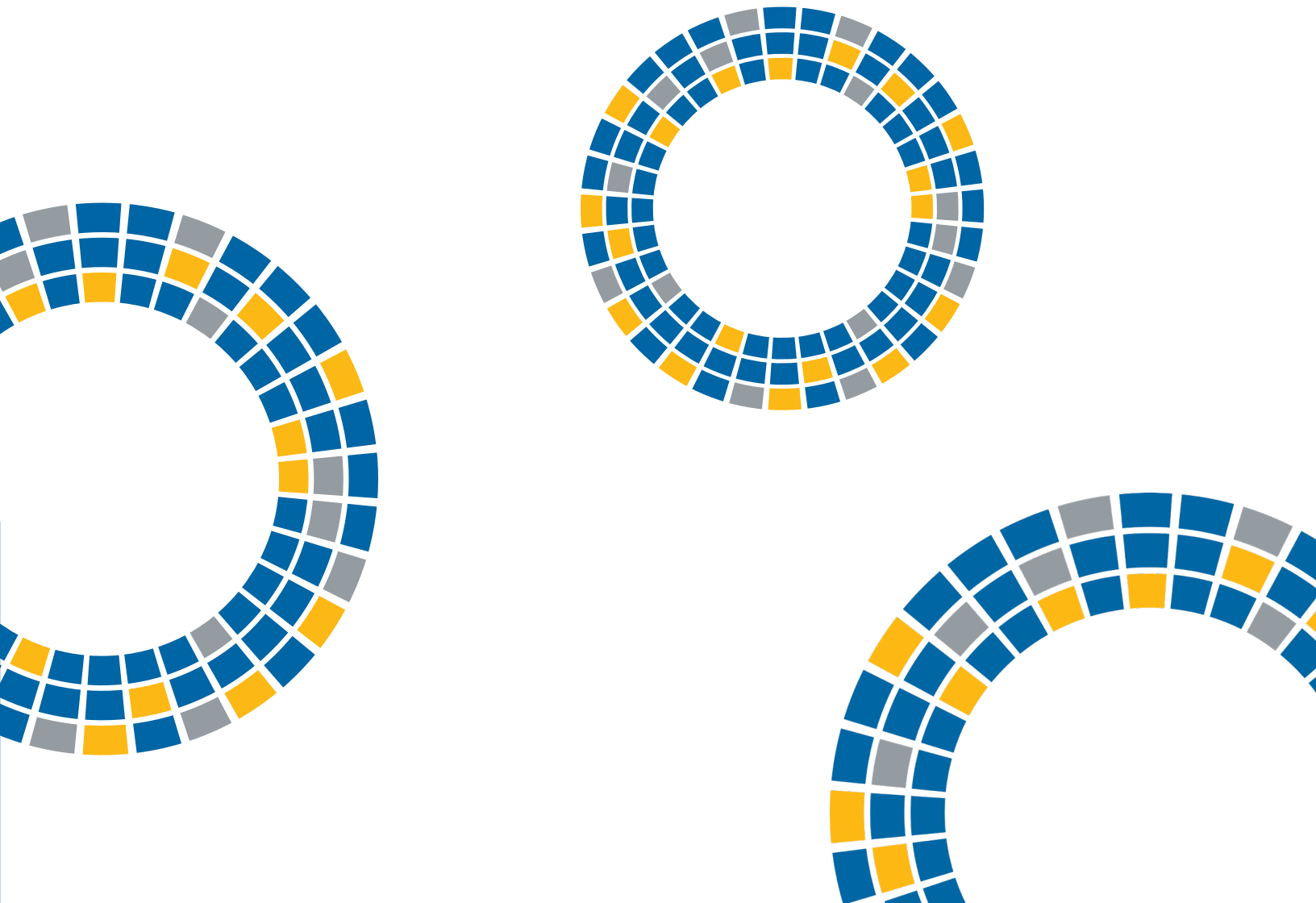
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## About the Author

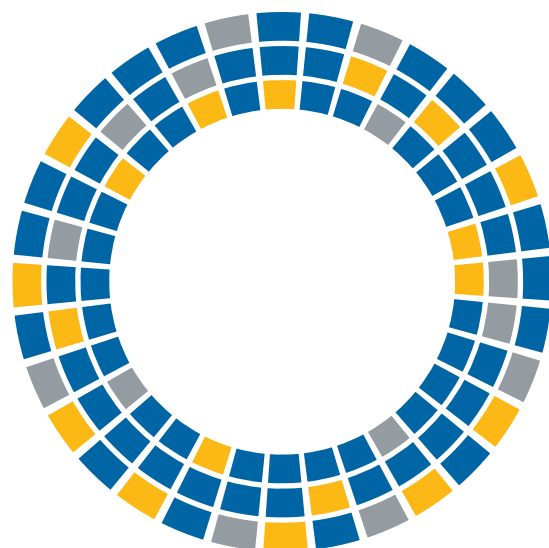
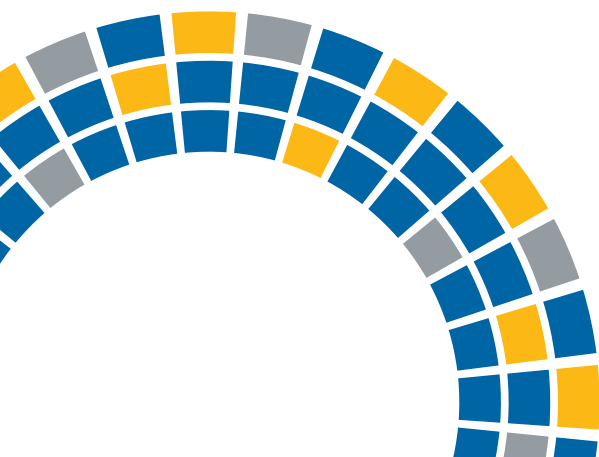
### Dr. Donald Dennie

A native of the Sudbury region, Donald Dennie worked at Le Droit from 1964 to 1973 before joining the faculty ranks of Laurentian University in 1974. In these two professions, he has written extensively on the Sudbury region. He has also published *La parish Sainte-Anne de Sudbury: 1885-1940* (Société historique du Nouvel-Ontario, 1986), *In the shadow of INCO* (PUO, 2001) and co-wrote, with Simon Laflamme, *L'ambition disproportionnée. A survey of the aspirations and representations of students in Northeastern Ontario* (IFO / Prize de parole, 1990). Retired since 2010, he is dedicated to his passion for Sudbury history.



# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	5
Introduction .....	6
Programs of Study .....	7
Faculty .....	8
Students.....	9
Governance .....	10
Conclusion .....	10



# Executive Summary

"You never want a serious crisis to go to waste." President Obama's Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel gave new life to this phrase when he uttered it during Obama's first term. What is routinely left out though, is the second sentence in the quote, "...what I mean by that is an opportunity to do things that you think you could not do before."

Is the current financial crisis at Laurentian University, and the simultaneous enrolment crisis at Université de l'Ontario Français, such an opportunity? An opportunity to do something that we "could not do before"? This is the question Northern Policy Institute asked three leading thinkers to answer.

This piece answers the question by diving into two scenarios that would encourage greater autonomy for French post-secondary education in Northern Ontario: a Université de l'Ontario français campus at Laurentian, or an autonomous structure at Laurentian. Out of both scenarios, the latter was concluded as more realistic.

The first scenario is unlikely given multiple disparities between the two institutions along the lines of programs, faculty, students and governance. For example, UOF's programs are interdisciplinary (e.g. Urban Environment Studies) while Laurentian has a more traditional disciplinary focus (e.g. Chemistry, Political Science). Not only would combining be difficult, but students from Laurentian would not be able to take courses in their focus area, thus discouraging any moves to transfer to UOF.

The second scenario is a worthwhile alternative, particularly if the institute was the University of Sudbury. Not only does U of S have interinstitutional agreements with Laurentian, but that it has had a university charter with full powers since 1914. If this option were to move ahead, a transition structure could consider factors such as the ability of students to choose from a variety of French-language university courses administered by U of S and, with agreements in place, from other programs administered by Laurentian. Furthermore, professors could teach U of S courses and, with agreements in place, could be involved in bilingual and graduate courses. They would retain their tenure and have union protection through the Laurentian University Faculty Association (LUFA), which already represents U of S faculty.



# Introduction

On February 1, 2021, Laurentian University's president Robert Haché, Ph.D., announced that the institution was insolvent and had to seek protection under the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, reviving the issue of autonomy around French post-secondary education in Northern Ontario. This is an issue that has been debated and discussed for at least 60 years in the north, from the time Laurentian University was established in 1960.

The purpose of this report is to review two possible scenarios for delivering this coveted autonomy: first, the Université de l'Ontario français and second, a federated university such as the University of Sudbury.

I think it would be helpful at this point to summarize the proliferation of reactions over the past two weeks following Laurentian's announcement.

- Francophone Laurentian alumni are proposing a French-language university with campuses in Sudbury, Hearst and Toronto, but are not saying whether it would be the UOF;<sup>1</sup>
- A Northern Ontario coalition has been formed to study creation of a French-language university in Northeastern Ontario;<sup>2</sup>
- A poll conducted by Laurentian's Regroupement des professeurs francophones (Francophone Professors Alliance) revealed that 75.8% of its members are in favour (strongly and somewhat) "of creating a French-language entity (college or federated university faculty) that would enable programs in French to be administered "by and for" Francophones, with financial autonomy";
- University of Sudbury (U of S) announces plan for a university "by and for" Francophones;
- In response to this announcement, two UOF spokespersons (Edith Dumont, vice-president, and Dyane Adam, chair of the board of governors) stated that the UOF needs to focus first and foremost on its opening in September 2021. "There may possibly be some partnerships after that," said Edith Dumont;<sup>3</sup>
- In a statement on Tuesday, March 16, Laurentian's president Robert Haché said that "the commitment to Ontario's Francophone community is a primary goal of Laurentian University and will continue to be a leading part of our mission as a restructured Laurentian goes forward into the future".
- At the March 19 meeting of the Regroupement des professeurs francophones, 60 members voted unanimously in favour of the following resolution: "Be it resolved that the Regroupement des professeurs francophones demands that governance of Mid-North French-language university programs, along with the related services and finances, be allocated to a board of governors from New Ontario's French-language community under the "by and for" principle, as the community has been advocating for decades."<sup>4</sup>

## A. Université de l'Ontario français at Laurentian

I elected to focus my research into this hypothesis on four components:

- Programs of Study
- Faculty
- Students
- Governance

<sup>1</sup> "LU restructuring may be an opportunity for post-secondary French education, alumni say.", Sudbury.com.

<sup>2</sup> "Les francophones du Nord de l'Ontario forment une coalition pour imaginer leur université" (Northern Ontario Francophones form coalition to envision their university), radio-canada.ca. March 16, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> "Le projet francophone de l'Université de Sudbury continue de faire réagir" (University of Sudbury's French-language plan continues to draw reactions), radio-canada.ca, March 16, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Regroupement des professeurs francophones, "Université Laurentienne : les professeurs veulent la gestion par et pour" (Laurentian University: Professors want "by and for" administration), Statement issued on Tuesday, March 23, 2021.

## Programs of Study

Established on April 9, 2018, the UOF's special mission is to offer a range of university degrees and education in French to promote the linguistic, cultural, economic and social well-being of its students and of Ontario's French-speaking community.<sup>5</sup>

One of its objectives is to provide French-language undergraduate and graduate university programs that are innovative and respond to the needs of students, the community and employers, as well as to advance the values of pluralism and inclusiveness and support governance by and for the French-speaking community by conducting its affairs in French.<sup>6</sup> The UOF may confer degrees and honorary degrees and award certificates and diplomas in any and all branches of learning.<sup>7</sup>

Its focus is to offer collaborative and interdisciplinary programs "that integrate knowledge and methods from a number of disciplines (e.g., geography, psychology, law, management, sociology, history, arts, economics or information technology)."<sup>8</sup>

The UOF decided on a Toronto location in order to reach the student population in Southern, Western and Central Ontario for the most part. Four bachelor's programs are currently being offered:

- Human Plurality Studies
- Digital Culture Studies
- Economics and Social Innovation Studies
- Urban Environment Studies

Established in 1960, Laurentian University currently offers over 100 programs, i.e., approximately 80 undergraduate and 34 graduate (27 master's and 7 doctoral). It also features 14 research centres or institutes as well as 13 research chairs. Its three federated universities (University of Sudbury, Huntington University and Thorneloe University) offer a total of 14 bachelor's programs.

There is obviously a significant disparity in programs of study between the two institutions, which is completely normal given their respective ages, but I feel this disparity is a fundamental one. The UOF offers only interdisciplinary undergraduate programs while Laurentian University has a variety of mostly disciplinary undergraduate and graduate programs focusing on traditional branches of learning, like most Ontario and Canadian universities. I feel this dissimilarity would make it impossible to combine the two institutions' programs.

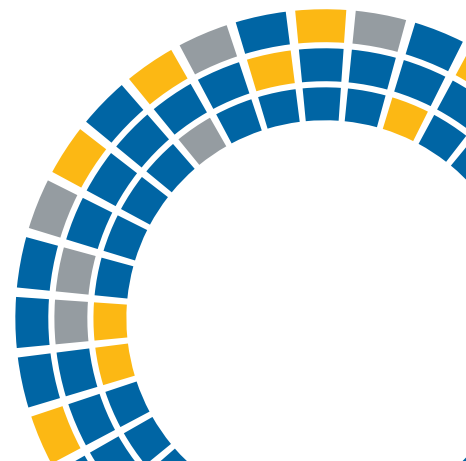
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<sup>5</sup> Université de l'Ontario français Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 34, Sched. 43, section 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, section 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, section 7.

<sup>8</sup> "Expérience UOF", <https://UOntario.ca>, p.6.



## Faculty

The UOF does not have a regular faculty at this time. "In the absence of a regular faculty in 2019, the Board of Governors adopted a policy concerning associate professors. The aim of this policy was to deepen the university's academic component (continued implementation of study and research programs at the UOF), as well as to update its interinstitutional projects."<sup>9</sup>

The university has thirty associate professors from universities in Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick, from Ontario colleges and institutes, as well as from public and private businesses. These professors provide instruction in the four programs indicated above. None of these associate professors are from Laurentian University.

Laurentian University has more than 300 tenured professors - 111 of whom teach in French - in addition to master lecturers and part-time professors, meaning there is a considerable disparity between the two institutions in this regard.

I contacted a few UL professors to find out whether they would agree to transfer to the UOF if it were located on the Laurentian campus or in the region. Most said they would not (admitting they were not very familiar with the UOF), citing their tenure, union protection and participation in graduate programs.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>9</sup> "Professeures et professeurs associés" (associate professors), <https://uontario.ca>, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> This was clearly not in any way a scientific poll.



# Students

As of mid-February the UOF had received 66 applications for admission for the 2021-2022 academic year.<sup>11</sup>

At the start of the academic year in September 2020, Laurentian University had 1,901 Francophone students enrolled as follows among the various faculties:

**Table 1: Francophone student enrollment by faculty, 2020**

Arts	Health	Science	Management	Education	Graduate Studies
395	995	142	121	152	84

The Laurentian student body grew by 400 between 2016 and 2020, explained in large part by the increased number of students in online courses.

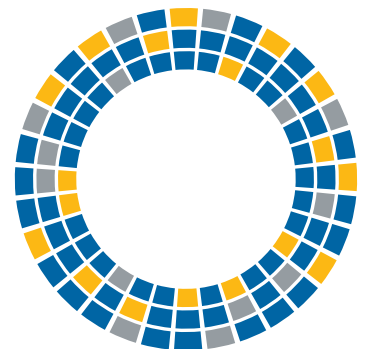
**Table 2: Total Francophone student population, 2016-2020**

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1,480	1,545	1,661	1,783	1,901

Source : *Reliable and anonymous*<sup>12</sup>

The vast majority of Laurentian students could not take courses in their focus area, so they would not be much inclined to transfer to the UOF.

Francophone students have their own association, i.e., the Association des étudiantes et des étudiants francophones (AEF), but not all of them are members. Some have elected to join the Students' General Association (SGA) instead.



<sup>11</sup> <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1764606/universite-ontario-francais-admission-rentree-2021>.

<sup>12</sup> The source of these statistics asked not to be identified, which is a fairly clear indicator of the current climate of mistrust at Laurentian with respect to the administration.

## Governance

What type of governance structure could the UOF put in place that would be mindful of the fact that the majority of its professors and students would be concentrated in Sudbury, while central administration would be concentrated in Toronto? Just asking.

How could the Academic Senate be structured without giving a deciding vote to the professors, students and administrators located in Sudbury? Without a Senate majority they would be reluctant to accept - or would even reject - that program decisions be dictated from Toronto.

## Conclusion

For these reasons, the hypothesis of a UOF campus in Sudbury does not seem realistic to me at all.

## Alternative: Autonomous French-language structure at Laurentian University

In my opinion the only possible, realistic alternative is an autonomous structure within Laurentian University. I will try to describe the type of structure this might be.

The actions and statements by many Sudbury-region groups detailed on page one of this report indicate clear support for French-language university education in Sudbury and Northern Ontario. Most are saying it needs to be delivered at an autonomous institution administered "by and for" Francophones, but no one is specifying the nature and structure of such an institution.

I feel a federated university such as the University of Sudbury, with interinstitutional agreements, is the most realistic alternative and the one that could be achieved in the shortest time, in large part because U of S has had a university charter with full powers since 1914. "...in 1914 the Ontario Legislature bestows an impressive charter on the college (Sacré-Coeur); that document gives the college the power "to establish and maintain Faculties, University Colleges, Universities, Observatories and other equivalent institutions, in addition to degree- and certificate-granting powers."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Gaétan Gervais, "L'enseignement supérieur en Ontario français (1848-1965)" (Higher Education in French Ontario (1848-1965)", *Revue du Nouvel-Ontario*, #7, p.39. Au cours des années 1940, la nature exacte de cette charte a fait l'objet de différends. Une décennie plus tard, cependant, les avocats du gouvernement avaient accepté l'idée que la charte de 1914 contenait tous les pouvoirs nécessaires pour donner des diplômes universitaires. (During the 1940s the exact nature of this charter was the subject of controversy. A decade later, however, government lawyers had accepted the view that the 1914 charter contained all necessary powers for granting university degrees.) p. 41.

However, I feel that in order for this federated university to become fully autonomous and administered "by and for" Francophones, a period of transition involving negotiations and agreements, mainly with Laurentian, will be required. U of S will need to abandon its religious affiliation and also find a fair way to divest itself of its three English-language programs with its English students and professors.

This is how I envision a transition structure:

1. The University of Sudbury, with its residence and main building, has been a fixture at Laurentian for close to 60 years. Its central building features offices for professors, a library, classrooms, administrative offices and two large student spaces. It would be beneficial for U of S to renovate the former Jesuit Fathers' area into modern classrooms, and it could also purchase or lease the Alphonse Raymond Building where French-language programs are already being delivered.
2. The university already has a basic administrative structure (president and registrar) that could easily be bolstered by other administrative positions such as vice-presidents and deans if necessary.
3. The administration would be largely autonomous in terms of courses, but would need to negotiate agreements with Laurentian for graduate and bilingual undergraduate programs. It would have a degree of financial autonomy and could, with its university charter, negotiate directly with the federal and provincial governments.
4. Students could choose from a variety of French-language university courses administered by U of S and, with agreements in place, from other programs administered by Laurentian.
5. Professors would teach the University of Sudbury courses and, with agreements in place, could be involved in bilingual and graduate courses. They would retain their tenure and have union protection through the Laurentian University Faculty Association (LUFA), which already represents U of S faculty. Additionally, an agreement with Laurentian would enable them to continue contributing to their pension plan. If such an agreement were not possible, U of S could join other Ontario universities that have started merging their pension plans.<sup>14</sup>
6. Program administration would be handled by a bicameral Senate where the French chamber would administer the French-language programs autonomously. Bilingual and graduate programs would be administered by a Senate in plenary session.

This is my broad vision for a university - in this case the University of Sudbury - "by and for" Francophones during a transition period possibly leading to full autonomy.



<sup>14</sup> See the <https://universitypension.ca> site.

# About Northern Policy Institute

*Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent think tank. We perform research, collect and disseminate evidence, and identify policy opportunities to support the growth of sustainable Northern Communities. Our operations are located in Thunder Bay and Sudbury. We seek to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts Northern Ontario, Ontario, and Canada as a whole.*

## Related Research

### **A University for Timmins? Possibilities and Realities**

Dr. Ken Coates

### **French Speaking Migrants to Greater Sudbury: 2017-2026**

Fenfang Li & Alex Ross

### **French-language postsecondary education in Ontario: crisis or opportunity?**

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