

Loyalist staff return from strike

By Sarah Sobanski

Loyalist College students are back at school this week thanks to the province.

Ontario passed legislation sending more than 12,000 faculty members from 24 of its colleges back to work Nov. 19.

Professors, instructors, counsellors and librarians took to picket lines after the Ontario Public Service Employees Union and the College Employer Council failed to negotiate a renewal of their collective agreement. It expired at the end of September.

According to the announcement of the province's resolution act, "all outstanding issues are to be referred to binding mediation-arbitration." It gave the union and council five days to choose a mediator-arbitrator "otherwise the Ministry of Labour would appoint one."

The strike began in mid-October. Loyalist College students returned to school Nov. 21 "they've lost more than a month of school. The college also announced semesters would be reorganized to give students the opportunity to save their semesters. A letter to students from senior vice-president of academic and chief learning officer for Loyalist Ann Drennan said fall semesters would be extended to Jan. 19, 2018. The winter semester will be delayed until Jan. 29 and run to April 27. The college also plans to make room for a study week in March.

"We will work with our faculty to adjust the curriculum over the course of all programs to ensure that students will achieve all program learning outcomes," Drennan said in the letter.

To "support students who have experienced financial hardships as a result of the strike" the province's announcement stated colleges would pool savings from the strike for students following consultation with them.

"Many students have asked about changes to refund and withdrawal policies as a result of the strike. You may have also heard about the announcement of a fund established to address student financial hardships. Decisions on the policies and the fund are made on a province-wide basis by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development," said Drennan. "Final details regarding the relief fund are not yet known, but we expect to learn more in the coming week and will provide that information to you as soon as it is available."

Her letter also said an information centre would be set up in the career centre for student guidance. For more information or to view the letter, visit www.loyalistcollege.com/labour-negotiation-updates/loyalist-strike-updates/.