

The University of Western Ontario Faculty Association (UWOFA) has compiled the following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to help members of the campus community understand the implications of a potential partnership between Western University and the for-profit company Navitas. This FAQ is a living document and reflects our best understanding of the situation as drawn from conversations with and presentations by the Western administration, insights from the faculty associations at other Canadian institutions who have experience with Navitas, review of the literature on educational policy and international pathway colleges and review of other relevant secondary information.

### 1. What is Navitas?

Navitas is an Australian for-profit education provider owned by private equity firm BGH Capital. It recruits international students through an alternative entry “pathway program,” which operates as a privatized, revenue-driven model embedded within public institutions. These programs often charge very high fees while offering limited academic support, raising concerns about the outsourcing of education to corporations that prioritize profit over student success. By relying on private companies like Navitas, universities risk eroding the accessibility, transparency, and academic standards of public education.

### 2. Is a partnership with Navitas a new idea for Western?

No. In 2020 Western’s administration pushed for a partnership with Navitas. They provided much of the same rationale that we are hearing today. Following campus town hall sessions and special meetings of Faculty Councils and within Units targeted for adoption, including meetings which included representatives from Navitas, six Faculty Councils (Arts and Humanities, Education, FIMS, Music, Science, and Social Science) passed the following motion:

*The Faculty of XXX does not support the outsourcing of the crucial work of teaching first-year international undergraduates at Western to a private, for profit international ‘pathway’ college such as Navitas.*

Following this resounding rejection, the Navitas proposal was abandoned.

### 3. Does Navitas operate at other universities?

Yes. In Canada, Navitas has developed partnerships with Simon Fraser University (SFU) (2006), University of Manitoba (2007), Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) (2020), Wilfred Laurier University (WLU) (2021), and the University of Lethbridge (2023). Navitas also operates in other countries around the world. However, the reports are not glowing.

In 2020, faculty at SFU and the University of Manitoba told us about the exploitation of students through high fees, a lack of diversity in the country of origin of recruited students, and broken promises of success; many students did not successfully transfer to the mainstream university programs. The instructors in the Navitas pathway at SFU and the University of Manitoba are also non-unionized contract labour.

SFU Professor Enda Brophy included a critique in his paper: [“From Utopian Institutions to Global University: Simon Fraser University and Crisis of Canadian Public Education”](#)

UManitoba Professor Brenda Austin-Smith also wrote negatively about the Navitas experience in the [CAUT Bulletin](#).

Now at a five year review point, representatives from the TMU Faculty Association say that the success has been mixed; a few departments have invested considerable energy into the program and say that in 2nd year the pathway students are virtually indistinguishable from regular students. Others say that the academic standards are not being met.

Also half-way through the 10-year agreement, the international college at WLU, which is located on the Brantford campus, is in jeopardy. According to the WLU Faculty Association, Navitas has not been able to recruit sufficient numbers and has threatened to pull the plug on the deal unless WLU moves them to the main campus in Waterloo. There are serious space concerns associated with this demand and the course model has reportedly been shifted to allow content to be offered online. This raises questions about pedagogical quality and the socialization opportunities for the international students.

#### **4. What does a proposed partnership with Navitas entail?**

The details of the partnership are not yet clear. The administration has presented the idea as 'in the early phases' and has not provided a detailed overview to the campus community. Senators have called for a written report which includes financial information and a business case.

UWOFA has been provided with a two-page document which summarizes some elements.

- Navitas would use space on campus to run a pathway program. At other universities this has often been branded as an "international college" using the University's name. For example, [Wilfrid Laurier International College](#) and [Toronto Metropolitan University International College](#).
- Students in the pathway program would take first-year courses separately from any other first-year Western students. It is likely that the college would use space on the Brescia campus.
- After first year students will transition into regular Western courses.
- The Western administration is also proposing, as an innovation, a new element to the Navitas partnership which is a pathway into professional Masters programs.

#### **5. How does Navitas operate within the federal caps on international students?**

We are still seeking clarification on this question. After all, if Western has to transfer its international student spaces (PALS) to Navitas, then the gains being contemplated are small.

We are coming to understand that when Navitas sets up its international college at universities, that college can be granted as a '[designated learning institution](#)' and therefore be eligible for its own international student quota. It is unclear how this is possible if Western is supposed to retain oversight over the programming, hire the faculty and staff and provide the facilities; it seems like just the kind of international student scam that the federal government's caps were trying to rein in.

## **6. Who will teach in the Navitas program?**

These details are not yet clear. In the 2020 proposal, Navitas was going to hire non-unionized contract labour to deliver their programs. In this resurrected proposal, the Western administration has variously suggested that faculty who teach in the Navitas pathway would be “UWOFA Members” or that the employment contracts would be “compliant with the UWOFA collective agreement”. These are two very different things - namely hinging on whether Western or Navitas is the Employer.

What is clear is that the instructors in the Navitas program will be hired on part-time contracts. This means that they will not have space in their workloads to conduct research or participate in service to the university or their academic community, they will not be included in the extended health and benefits program, they will not be supported in their research (e.g., part-time members cannot be PIs on research ethics proposals or grants) and they will have limited job security.

Such an action fuels the erosion of secure academic jobs, reduces the research capacity of the university and polarizes us as an academic community.

## **7. If Navitas students do not meet the entrance standards of Western and may have language and cultural barriers, how will they succeed?**

Good question! The senior administration has said that Navitas offers extensive ‘wrap-around services’ including language and cultural support. Faculty at other universities have described a system where Navitas students receive four hours of instruction per week instead of the regular three. The 4th hour seems to consist of additional language training. Navitas promotes an 89% rate of student progression to their university partners.

Faculty at other universities report that many students struggle to bridge the gap. The situation at TMU was described to us as ‘tri-modal’. Some students successfully transition to the second year, some drop out altogether and some do not meet the threshold to transition, but still wish to study in Canada. We have been told, but have not yet fully verified, that Navitas and perhaps TMU have entered into an arrangement with Algonquin College to absorb this third group. We do know that Algonquin College has a Toronto ‘presence’ through a partnership with CDI College, a private career college located in the GTA. Once private partners are involved, the transparency of educational provision is lost.

## **8. How might this partnership affect academic standards at Western?**

Outsourcing first-year instruction to a private entity firm for financial gains could compromise academic standards. The admitted students will be below Western’s usual entrance requirements and many will also face language and cultural adjustment challenges. However, the Western administration is counting on these students to transition in order to reap their international tuition fees for three more years (for undergrads). Western does not capitalize on its partnership with Navitas if students do not transition. Navitas is also very motivated to keep up its ‘stats’ and, as we are seeing at WLU (see above - “Does Navitas operate at other universities”), will hold the university accountable if they are not meeting their profit targets.

This will place incredible pressure on everyone in the system to ensure progression. In such an environment, academic standards will inevitably be in jeopardy. As precarious workers, instructors teaching in the Navitas program will bear the brunt of this pressure and have the least security in resisting it.

#### **9. What are the implications for faculty employment and working conditions?**

Navitas-run programs employ instructors on a contract basis without the protections and benefits afforded to full-time unionized faculty. They will be second class citizens with respect to job security, fair compensation, and academic freedom. They will not be given opportunities to engage in research - a central pillar of academic work and will not receive any support from Western if they do engage in research. When UWOFA tried to negotiate the right for Part-Time Members to be PIs on research grants and ethics applications, we were told by the administration that this is not work that they were hired to do.

The proposal is particularly insensitive and, frankly, offensive given that Units across the university have been told to cut part-time jobs to the detriment of program integrity, pedagogy and the student experience.

#### **10. Could this partnership impact existing faculty and staff workloads?**

Yes. Many faculty associations have expressed concerns that integrating students from Navitas programs increases workloads, especially if these students are underprepared for second-year courses. This situation will necessitate additional support and resources from existing faculty and staff. Given the current austerity at Western this is unlikely to receive corresponding compensation or recognition.

The reports from TMU suggest that the only places where the pathway is working are in departments which have invested considerable resources (i.e., time and effort of full-time faculty and staff).

If the plan involves Western as the employer, the hiring of faculty for the Navitas program will fall on existing Appointments Committees. This is a considerable workload given that they will all be short-term contracts and likely have considerable turnover.

#### **11. How does this partnership align with Western's commitment to public education?**

This partnership is extractionist and fundamentally undermines Western's commitment to public education. The senior administration has brushed off this issue by reporting that Western already engages with the private sector in the use of student recruitment agencies. We do not accept this slippery slope argument and cannot compromise our educational values by prioritizing profit for the shareholders of private equity firms.

As articulated by our colleagues in FIMS in their call for a special meeting of their Faculty Council, "this model constitutes a "pay for play" system for university admissions, reserving access to Canadian higher education for only the most economically privileged international students."

#### **12. What are the potential financial implications of this partnership?**

The Western administration has not provided any financial details or rationale behind the proposed partnership. While partnerships with private providers are often pursued to enhance revenue, the financial benefits are not always transparent. At the University of Manitoba, there was extreme

secrecy. “Details of the contract were not shared with the Senate ... and it took a FIPPA application, as well as a subsequent appeal to the provincial ombudsman, to have a redacted version of the contract released for public discussion.” ([Austin-Smith, 2019](#))

We understand from arrangements at other universities that there is revenue to be gleaned from space rental and a proportion of the fees students pay to Navitas for the first year. However, it is not clear how those are off-set by any costs to staff and support the program which presumably are born by Western (if they are the employer). In this, Navitas seems to be outsourcing the work to Western, making us accountable in a pay for service model. The Western administration then also seeks to benefit from the international student tuition that will flow directly once students transfer over.

At the town hall meeting on February 24 and 26, 2025, faculty members expressed concern that revenues would not adequately flow back to the Units expending the work and resources to deliver Navitas programming. These questions were not adequately answered.

### **13. How might this affect the university’s control over curriculum and admissions?**

Outsourcing first-year programs to Navitas could shift control over critical aspects of the academic mission, such as curriculum design and admissions criteria, from the university to a profit-driven company. Any transfer of authority or oversight will compromise the university’s ability to maintain its academic standards and values.

Though the Western administration says that Western will maintain oversight, this is compromised by the contractual and financial pressures to ensure that the students progress.

### **14. Why can’t Western invest in its own Western English Language Centre to create a foundation year?**

Investing in Western’s own English Language Centre to create a foundation year would be a more transparent and student-focused approach, aligning with the university’s core mission of providing high-quality, public education. This suggestion was made to the administration in 2020.

In the current program, students focus primarily on upskilling their English language proficiency before beginning their undergraduate degrees. However, Western’s program stands out as one of the only programs in Canada that does not offer any version of academic credit for that work. This has made recruitment notoriously difficult over the past five years, but is a very easy thing to fix.

The idea of a foundation year was previously developed between WELC and the Faculty of Science, and the King’s Enhanced Year (KEY, a joint program between WELC/King’s) has already gone through the Senate approval process. While KEY does not place students directly into second year, it allows them to take university credit while still receiving the academic English support they need.

This model offers a significant value proposition by integrating students into the academic community and providing support without segregating them, unlike the for-profit pathway programs. By creating this in-house program, Western can directly control the student experience, ensuring it is both academically rigorous and inclusive, while also keeping financial benefits within the university rather than outsourcing to private companies.

### **15. Are there concerns regarding transparency and governance?**

The ongoing concerns around transparency and governance at Western University, particularly in relation to the partnership with Navitas, mirror broader issues of accountability and open communication. Faculty at institutions that have entertained a partnership with Navitas have consistently reported a lack of transparency in the discussions, negotiations, and ultimate agreements with Navitas ([Tamtik, 2024](#)). This has clearly been the case at Western, where:

- Deans were notified about the plan before it was announced at Senate and were set up to speak to its merits.
- The announcement at Senate was not accompanied by a written report, and none has yet been produced, further limiting transparency around the proposal.
- The Provost failed to provide direct answers at town halls, openly dismissing the views and questions of some attendees, signaling a lack of engagement with the concerns of the community.
- The rushed timelines appear to prevent proper deliberation and consultation, hindering the opportunity for meaningful input and reflection from all stakeholders.

These actions highlight ongoing challenges regarding governance at Western, undermining trust and fostering skepticism around how decisions are being made.

### **16. What has been the response of faculty unions at other universities?**

Faculty unions across Canada have actively opposed partnerships with Navitas and similar private pathway providers. This opposition has come from institutions including Saint Mary's University, Memorial University, the University of Guelph, Carleton University, Dalhousie University, the University of Windsor, Toronto Metropolitan University, Wilfrid Laurier University, and the University of Lethbridge. Faculty associations at these institutions have issued strong statements raising concerns about privatization, threats to academic integrity, and the erosion of universities' public missions.

### **17. How might this partnership impact international students?**

There are many negative effects. Here are a few. First, integration into the campus community and the transition from first to second year is already notoriously difficult. Segregating a group of international students into their own cohort in a different area of campus will exacerbate isolation and could lead to discrimination and difficulties in working within future peer groups. Second, any for-profit model is likely to prioritize revenue over student welfare. Students are likely to face high tuition fees and we have heard that Navitas may employ aggressive recruitment strategies. Third, students in the pathway programs are promised small classes and comprehensive wrap-around services. This introduces equity issues with international students and even domestic students who enter by the usual way. Fourth, if admission and academic requirements are lowered or compromised to accommodate a for-profit model and maximize progression, this could ultimately devalue a Western degree, affecting all students and alumni.

### **18. What are the potential long-term consequences of this partnership?**

Engaging in such partnerships could set a precedent for further privatization within the university, potentially leading to more outsourced programs and services. This shift may erode the university's autonomy and commitment to public education. Once these agreements are in place, it becomes difficult to reverse course, as reliance on private partners like Navitas grows. Wilfrid Laurier University's experience demonstrates how such arrangements can make institutions beholden to corporate interests, as they now face threats from Navitas about revoking their partnership if they are not given space at the Waterloo campus.

### **19. What about other campus employee groups? How will this affect them?**

The senior administration has not provided any information about how the Navitas proposal will involve or affect staff and students in other campus employee groups: CUPE, PMA, PSAC, and UWOSA. It is not known whether any administrative staff working in the Navitas pathway or trades and custodial services required for the support of the Navitas spaces will be unionized. It is not clear whether there will be investment in the required complement of UWOSA and CUPE staff to support these programs, students and spaces. It is not clear if there will be teaching assistant support nor whether that work will be unionized with PSAC.

Perhaps most distressing, it is not clear what will happen to staff in the existing Western Educational Learning Centre and related Western International programs. Though this is supposed to be the early stages of discussion about Navitas, the Academic English Program at WELC has just been closed to new admissions.

### **20. What can I do?**

- Engage in open discussions with your colleagues, your Senators, and with your UWOFA representatives like your Board member or Steward.
- Work with your colleagues to bring a motion opposing the Navitas partnership to your Faculty Council or Librarian and Archivist Forum. Call for a special meeting if there is not one scheduled. Make sure that you have enough people attending the meeting to win the vote.
- Ask your Senator BEFORE March 14 to oppose any motions to partner with Navitas. They must represent their constituency - you.
- Write to your Dean/Chief Librarian to express your views and concerns.
- Volunteer with UWOFA to help with important tasks like updating this FAQ and creating other resources for the community like social media posts or videos.

## Resource List

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