

**2019 OCUFA
Award for Outstanding
Contribution to
Grievance/Arbitration**

Citation for Christal Côté

OCUFA

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des associations des professeurs des universités de l'Ontario



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Read by Rahul Sapra, OCUFA President

The OCUFA Award for Outstanding Contribution to Grievance/Arbitration was established in 2018 to recognize that, alongside Collective Bargaining, Grievance and Arbitration work is one of the twin pillars that shape the working conditions of faculty, academic librarians, and other academic professionals. It is in the nature of counselling and representing members that much of the effort undertaken by faculty association members and staff occurs outside of the public eye. This award pays tribute to the exemplary dedication and resourcefulness that Grievance Officers bring to defending collective agreements, advancing the position of the academic professions, and protecting members' rights and dignity.

In the inaugural year for this award, we honour Christal Côté for dedicated service as Senior Grievance and Arbitration Officer for the Carleton University Academic Staff Association (CUASA), and for her significant contributions to the OCUFA Grievance Committee. She is a member of the Law Society of Ontario, and she is a Law Society-licensed paralegal who teaches paralegal students employment, human rights, and labour law. Christal brings these skills and experiences together to provide in-house legal services for CUASA, training for CUASA's representatives, and representation of members and the faculty association through the grievance process and at arbitrations.

Among the numerous cases Christal has handled since joining CUASA, her meticulous preparation and persuasive arguments have yielded notable successes, including her advocacy for a member seeking accommodation of a mental health condition which required an unyielding defence against the employer's intrusive demands for medical information. In this case, Christal secured arbitrator-mandated protocols for the limited release and significantly curtailed sharing of strictly defined information. Being an effective grievance officer is more than legal argumentation however. In an environment in which the number and complexity of members' complaints against the employer were increasing at a previously unheard of rate, Christal developed a new system for reporting and tracking members' cases and, importantly, for monitoring the implementation of their resolution.

One of the things that most clearly speaks to Christal's outstanding contribution, beyond her immediate work for CUASA, is the commitment to information sharing, legal education, and capacity-building that she has offered for other faculty associations and their representatives. Since joining CUASA, Christal has become a true stalwart of the OCUFA Grievance Committee. Like others, she readily shares insights gleaned from specific cases but she has consistently risen to the challenge when called upon to give presentations and lead discussions on specific topics at the quarterly Grievance meetings and especially at the annual Grievance Officer Orientation Workshop. Her unique contribution is to have helped transform the Orientation Workshop by bringing her background in legal education along with her commitment to practical skill building to the afternoon session. Led by her expert



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facilitation, participants learn to apply some of the essential skills for eliciting relevant information from members in a sensitive and purposeful fashion. It is a crucial first step for the success of any case and vital training for new grievance officers.

Christal is also CUASA's Director. In her dual role, she connects the two pillars shaping faculty association members' working conditions and professional life. She brings her grievance/arbitration knowledge and experience to bear in supporting equity initiatives at the bargaining table. CUASA, with Christal's expert support, achieved a mediated agreement to conduct a gender pay equity study and two Memoranda of Understanding – one establishing a commitment and process for hiring Indigenous scholars, and another creating a Joint Committee on Employment Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Amidst all this, Christal is acclaimed for her commitment to equity, her capacity to empathise with members, her ability to explain provisions of the CUASA collective agreement and legal issues clearly to faculty association representatives and members, and for doing so fairly for all members. These attributes and achievements make Christal a worthy recipient of the inaugural OCUFA Award for Outstanding Contribution to Grievance/Arbitration.