

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?

As explained by Senior Administration in the March 14th Senate meeting, Navitas would handle recruitment and offer a first-year pathway program for undergraduate students and a preparatory program for professional master's students who do not meet Western's direct admission requirements. These students would pay Western's international tuition rates, and Navitas would pay Western a royalty for each enrolled student. The University claims that instructors in the International College would be Western faculty under the UWOFCA Collective Agreement, but the details remain unclear.

This partnership raises major red flags:

- **Privatization of Academic Functions:** Despite assurances of oversight, this partnership effectively outsources a core university function—teaching—to a private corporation driven by profit, not public education values.
- **Threats to Academic Standards:** Navitas students would enter Western after a separate first-year program, raising concerns about whether admission and progression standards will be compromised.
- **Labour Concerns:** While the University states that instructors would be Western faculty, there is no clarity on job security, hiring conditions, or protections for existing faculty. Without clear commitments, this could lead to precarious academic work.
- **Student Experience:** International students should be fully integrated into Western from the start, rather than placed in a separate college operated by a private company.

While framed as a way to increase international enrolment and revenue, this model raises serious concerns about academic integrity, faculty working conditions, and the creeping privatization of university education. You can review the Senate discussion document [here](#).

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. We have heard from Navitas partner institutions that there are significant issues for students when updating their DLI for their student visas. If Navitas has its own DLI, students would be required to transfer to Western’s DLI when moving from the International College to the University, creating additional challenges for the students.

6. Who will teach in the Navitas program and what are the implications?

Western has stated that it will have academic oversight of all course programming in the Navitas pathway. While this is certainly better than outsourcing degree-credit courses to Navitas, it does not resolve concerns about who will be hired to teach these courses. The administration has suggested that instructors will either be “UWOFA Members” or that their employment contracts will be “compliant with the UWOFA collective agreement.” These are two very different things—most critically, they hinge on whether Western or Navitas is the employer.

What is clear is that instructors in the Navitas program will be hired on part-time contracts. This means 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, will lack research support (e.g., part-time members cannot be PIs on research ethics proposals or grants), and will have limited job security.

Creating and staffing these courses will require significant work from appointments committees, curriculum committees, undergraduate and graduate chairs, and department chairs and directors—many of whom are already managing heavy workloads in understaffed units. High turnover and short contracts in part-time positions create additional administrative burden. Teaching-only positions do nothing to alleviate service demands within units, address student supervision needs, or contribute to research capacity.

In the long run, this model erodes secure academic jobs, weakens the university’s research mission, and further fragments our 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! While Western claims to offer additional support for International College students, including an extra hour of instruction per week, English-language training, and access to campus services, this approach still risks creating a segregated, second-tier system for these students. By partnering with a private, for-profit provider like Navitas, the university is prioritizing a profit-driven model over a truly integrated and supportive academic experience for these students.

The additional services may sound comprehensive on paper, but they do little to address the underlying issue of these students being separated from the broader university community. The real question is: will this pathway model foster genuine success, or will it only deepen the divide between students on private pathways and those in the main university program?

Similar programs at other universities have shown mixed results. At TMU, students entering through Navitas have been described as experiencing a “tri-modal” outcome: some successfully transition, some drop out, and others are allowed to remain in Canada despite failing to meet academic standards. This raises serious concerns about the long-term success of this model. There are also unverified reports that Navitas, in collaboration with TMU, may have arrangements with Algonquin College to absorb students who do not meet the transition standards. This adds another layer of complexity, pointing to a lack of transparency about the real impact of the pathway program.

The core issue here is the role of a private, for-profit company in shaping students’ academic experiences. While Western may be offering certain supports, the involvement of Navitas raises concerns about accountability, academic standards, and long-term student success. If the university truly wants to ensure the success of international students, it must look beyond profit-driven partnerships and focus on creating equitable, transparent, and integrated support systems within the university itself. The pathway program, when managed directly by Western, could offer the necessary academic and cultural support without the complications introduced by privatization.

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 will mean a considerable workload increase given that they will all be short-term contracts and likely have high turnover. It is not clear who will represent the Employer for faculty in the Navitas program.

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?

Western claims the International College will generate significant revenue at no direct cost. Navitas would pay a royalty for first-year students, while Western collects full international tuition for years two, three, and four. They estimate 200 additional students could bring in \$10 million. Some revenue would be shared with faculties, reinvested in faculty and staff positions, and fund international student scholarships.

But key questions remain unanswered. Similar deals elsewhere, like at the University of Manitoba, lacked financial transparency (Austin-Smith, 2019). Faculty have raised concerns that revenue may not adequately flow back to the departments doing the work. If Western is responsible for hiring and oversight, how are these costs accounted for?

Western claims some revenue will support faculty hires, staff positions, and research infrastructure, but there is no clarity on how funds will be allocated or whether the departments responsible for teaching and oversight will see direct benefits. Many units are already under-resourced, struggling with high workloads and limited job security for part-time instructors.

Without a clear, equitable funding plan, this partnership risks adding strain without providing the necessary support to sustain quality education and research.

Without transparency, this deal looks less like a financial win for Western and more like a risk that shifts costs onto already stretched departments while prioritizing short-term financial gain.

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. In the Navitas presentation, a model shows growth from 80-800 in a six year span. Is there evidence that they have these levels of growth at other universities?

The ambition to grow from 80 to 800 students within six years, as presented in Senate on March 14th, raises serious concerns about the realities of such a rapid expansion. While this may sound appealing, there is a significant lack of evidence showing that similar levels of growth have been achieved at other universities through partnerships with Navitas. Without concrete data from institutions that have scaled their programs in a similar manner, it is unrealistic to assume that this growth is both achievable and sustainable for Western.

Equally concerning is the lack of analysis regarding the federal caps on international students and the Provincial Attestation Letters (PALS), which are critical factors in understanding the regulatory environment surrounding such a partnership. These caps and PALS could significantly restrict the number of international students eligible to enroll, undermining the projected growth targets. It is troubling that senior administration has not thoroughly considered or addressed these constraints in the proposal, especially given the rapid growth they are envisioning.

In essence, it seems that senior administration is attempting to sell this partnership without fully accounting for the realities and risks involved. A more comprehensive analysis, including an understanding of regulatory constraints like federal caps and PALS, is essential before moving forward with such an ambitious proposal. Without addressing these fundamental issues, the proposal presented on March 14th appears to be more of a speculative push than a well-thought-out plan for the university's future.

16. 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
- 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.

17. 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.

18. 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.

19. 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.

20. 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: two CUPE locals, 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 is the uncertainty surrounding the future of staff and instructors in the existing Western English Language Centre (WELC) and related Western International programs. Although these discussions about Navitas are still in the early stages, the Academic English Program at WELC has already been closed to new admissions. Despite this, Senior Administration insists that the English Language Centre will continue to be responsible for EAP instruction

21. What is the Senate Ad-Hoc Committee's role in the Navitas proposal, and what is its timeline?

The Senate Ad-Hoc Committee's role is to review the 2020 and 2025 Navitas proposals, identify risks and benefits, assess Western's requirements, explore alternatives to the partnership, and provide a final recommendation to Senate on whether or not to proceed. The committee will also support ongoing consultations, propose additional questions, and consider feedback from the university community. We welcome the changes to the committee's mandate to include a review of alternatives, as this will ensure a thorough evaluation of all options.

We encourage members to raise any questions or concerns with their senators so that they can be addressed during the committee's review. A report is expected to be submitted to Senate at the May meeting.

22. 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.
- Take action on social media: Record a video with your perspective on the Navitas Partnership and use the hashtag #NoToNavitasUWO
- Sign and share the [No to Navitas petition](#), started by colleagues in FIMS
- Plan to attend Senate on April 25th and May 16th
- 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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