



university of saskatchewan
faculty association

Collectively Speaking

January 2021

Message from the Chair

As we embark on the first term of 2021, I wish you the very best for the new year. I hope you were able to get some relaxation in over the holidays. And, I hope that the outlook for this year is improved, although I realize that might not be possible given the challenging conditions of working remotely. I want to express my gratitude to the USFA staff for their incredible commitment and dedication to advocate on our behalf and help ensure that our voices are heard.

And, to our faculty members and to clinical faculty attending to hospital care, it is impossible to express our profound gratitude.

The past two terms since the pandemic began may have been the most formidable you have encountered in your career. While workload has been manageable for some, I know the volume of work for many others has been problematic, if not downright crushing. You deserve praise and gratitude for the work you have done to deliver courses and labs. You deserve praise and gratitude, too, for care you have shown at the same time for students and colleagues who are themselves struggling in this remote, challenging, and oftentimes lonely environment.

Even before the pandemic began certain units were struggling with the ways in which the university's budgeting process has resulted in increased teaching assignments and

reduced research support infrastructure. While we recognize that the university is in a difficult financial situation, we are deeply disappointed that a number of challenges faculty face in terms of workload as a result of this model continue unresolved, especially during a pandemic. Some have seen their teaching loads increase. We recognize too that senior administration has never dealt with such a crisis before, but it is disappointing during a time of crisis to see that the TABBS/RCM models continue to impose expectations for a few categories of productivity, which in turn result in debilitating deficits for certain units.

In terms of support for IT and office-related purchases to help you do your work, we continued to learn through December that faculty requests for reimbursements or approval for work-related purchases from APEFs or research accounts that once went unquestioned after approval by the unit head were still being denied. The Executive Committee has asked the Association Grievance Committee to consider pursuing grievances on these denials, as well as on the Employer's choice to change the usage of our professional expense allowances without negotiation. We will need information from you to move these grievances forward. Please respond to our e-Letter requesting this information, or by emailing us at usfa@usaskfaculty.ca.

Lastly, speaking of negotiation, our Col-

lective Agreement expires in 18 months. This issue of Collectively Speaking contains a summary of collective bargaining from universities across Canada to provide a sense of the current national bargaining landscape. Additionally, as we start to prepare for the next round of bargaining, we will be scheduling opportunities for Indigenous USFA members to meet with myself and USFA Vice-Chair, Doug Chivers. We are very interested in hearing from these members about bargaining issues as well as other matters they want to raise with the Association.

Workload is likely to be an issue in our next round. Please consider reaching out to the Association if your teaching load has increased in the past couple of years, and if changes to your workload have made your work untenable whether due to TABBS/RCM or to COVID-related or other pressures. To help us address these issues, we need you to bring your questions and concerns to our attention. You can do that by email to usfa@usaskfaculty.ca or by contacting any member of the USFA staff. When you contact the Association, your connection is confidential. Remember that you always have a right to communicate with your union.

Allison Muri, USFA Chair

Bargaining Trends Across Canada

Following is a summary of bargaining trends as reported at the CAUT Council meeting in November.

Like the USFA, many academic staff associations negotiated Letters of Understanding in the spring to address COVID-related issues. Generally, these concerned tenure and promotion timelines, deferral of sabbaticals, and ways to ameliorate potentially negative evaluations resulting from the sudden shift to remote instruction and impediments or disruptions to professional activities. In less supportive environments, several employers have sought concessions such as wage rollbacks or suspension of negotiated increases.

Associations with expired contracts or contracts about to expire have faced or now face the decision of whether to negotiate by videoconference in a context where institutional revenues including tuition may be unpredictable. Some have agreed to delay negotiations or roll over existing agreements; others have proceeded and have reached settlements. And some negotiations have proved exceedingly difficult. CAUT identifies “hot spots” in the country as follows:

Cape Breton University Faculty Association is facing proposed concessions by the employer. Their collective agreement allows the employer to make “a practical, early intervention” in consultation with the Association to avoid financial distress, based on “catastrophic loss of revenue totalling at least \$3.5 million in one year (grant and/or tuition).” The employer projects such a loss based on its heavy reliance on international student fees. Proposed concessions in-

cluded demands that the Association:

- forego annual salary increases for 2020/2021
- forego annual step increases for 2020/2021
- agree to wage rollbacks for those with salaries in excess of \$100,000
- agree that On-line Course Development Stipends will not apply in the current circumstances
- discuss compensation if class sizes are impacted by public health requirements

The Association submitted an information request asking the employer to disclose the basis for its revenue projections, and to explain how the projected loss fits into the university’s overall financial picture, why it cannot absorb losses in light of recent surpluses, and what other measures have been taken to either reduce revenue loss or decrease expenditure. The Association also requested that the employer detail the cost savings that would be realized through each proposed concession and the number of layoffs that would be avoided as a result. Though not satisfied with the information provided by the employer, the Association asked its membership to vote on the proposals and recommended they be rejected.

The membership voted against the proposals.

Dalhousie Faculty Association requested a delay of negotiations for one year because of uncertainties due to COVID, but these requests were rejected by the employer. The Board demanded wage rollbacks of 5% in the first year and 0% for the last two years of the agreement, as well as pension adjustments:

- full CPP integration, which could result in a decrease in annual pen-

sion benefits of up to \$21,000 a year

- changes that would negatively affect indexing during retirement, which would result in decreased pension for current and future retirees.

The parties reached impasse and filed for conciliation in September. In early October, the Association obtained a 91% strong strike mandate with an 87% turnout of its membership. After the first day of conciliation in October, the parties reached impasse again when the Board presented its best offer of 0.25% year one, 0.25% year two, a wage reopener for year 3, and no change to the pension proposal. The Association put the offer to a vote by the membership and 95% voted to reject it.

Lakehead University Faculty Association has continued to pursue a better pension plan than the current hybrid plan into which members pay disproportionately. The employer has proposed a number of concessions, including a proposal for short-term layoffs that is counter to existing financial exigency protection. Job action preparation is underway.

Laurentian University Faculty Association paused negotiations with the employer in October pending a report by Ernst and Young on the university’s financial situation. Negotiations had been already delayed by the lack of information to substantiate the employer’s claims of financial crisis. The employer has tabled monetary concessions. Additionally, a judicial review has been filed over the unauthorized and unilateral suspension of admissions to seventeen programs.

There is also a dispute over the future of Laurentian programs housed at three small federated campuses whose funding was massively cut just before the pandemic.

University of Manitoba Faculty Association faced challenges after their last round of bargaining, wherein they negotiated a salary reopener to deal with the impact of the Public Services Sustainability Act, which was later declared unconstitutional. The Manitoba government is appealing that decision and has continued to pressure the University of Manitoba administration not to offer any salary increases. A members' strike vote at the end of October showed 80% in favour of job action. Additionally, 700 members signed a petition demanding that the University agree to settle the salary reopener through binding arbitration, but as of November 4th, the employer was still refusing.

[Since CAUT's report was generated, the Association narrowly voted in favour of ratification of a deal, with less than 55% of voting members accepting the University administration's final offer. Nevertheless, members are agreed that urgent political action is necessary to ensure investment in higher education and the public sectors, as well as to end government intervention in the university's governance.]

University of Ontario Institute of Technology Faculty Association was presented with proposed mid-contract concessions by the employer early in the pandemic, ostensibly to alleviate financial pressure that might require layoffs of support staff. These included a salary freeze that would negate previously negotiated across-the-board increases, no Career Development Increments, and no merit pay. The employer did not

substantiate the need for such measures, and at a well-attended meeting organized by the Association, members discussed possible cost-saving measures that would not require opening the collective agreement and voted against accepting the concessions.

The collective agreements of six CAUT members in the **Province of Alberta** expired in early June (**University of Alberta; Athabasca University; University of Calgary; Grant MacEwan University; University of Lethbridge; Mount Royal University**). Many employers said they cannot table salary or compensation until late October or November, likely because they are waiting to receive bargaining mandates from the provincial government. Last fall, the government gave itself the power to set binding and secret bargaining mandates for public employers, including universities and colleges. Associations expect employers will pursue salary and other compensation cuts as well as increased management rights and flexibility. In the wage re-opener arbitration decision between the University of Calgary and the Faculty Association of the University of Calgary in July, the employer proposed a 2% salary cut; however, the Association was awarded a retroactive 1.7% salary increase. One association has been informed by the employer that they may seek to have the cost of sabbaticals covered by members through extra teaching.

Full Settlements since March 2020

British Columbia Institute of Technology Faculty and Staff Association

Total of 6% over 3 years

Brock University Faculty Association

Total of 3 % over 3 years

Faculty Association of the University of St. Thomas (PT)

Total of 5.34% over 3 years

Faculty Association of the University of

St. Thomas (Regular)

Total of 5% over 3 years

King's University College Faculty Association

2% over 2 years in addition to a salary anomaly exercise.

Royal Roads University Faculty Association

Total of 6% over 3 years

University of Regina Faculty Association, First Nations University of Canada Academic Unit (RAS)

Total of 3.75% over 4 years

Wilfrid Laurier University Faculty Association

Total of 3% over 3 years (+\$900 system adjustment payable July 1, 2022, if Bill 124 is struck down)

Rollover settlements since March 2020

Association des professeurs, professeures et bibliothécaires de l'Université Sainte-Anne

Total of 1.75% for 1 year

Association des bibliothécaires, professeures et professeurs de l'Université de Moncton

Total of 3% over 2 years

Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers (RAS and PT)

Total of 1.8% over 1 year

Brescia Faculty Association

Total of 1% over 1 year.

Laurentian University Faculty Association – Huntington University Unit

Total of 1% over 1 year

Laurentian University Faculty Association – Thorneloe University Unit

Total of 1% over 1 year

University of Prince Edward Island Faculty Association (RAS)

Total of 4% over 2 years

University of Prince Edward Island Faculty Association (CAS)

Total of 4% over 2 years + additional \$300 to each step

Grievance Matters

As unionized employees, the USFA both negotiates and protects your working conditions. The Association Grievance Committee (AGC) leads efforts to protect your rights whenever the University Administration fails to comply with the terms of the collective agreement or provide for any bargained rights that flow from the collective agreement, such as benefits. We also represent employees who are participating in processes that may lead to discipline, such as those falling under the University's harassment policy and the Responsible Conduct of Research Policy. We will assist members in preparing appeals for denials of tenure and promotion. Finally, the AGC fights to protect the scope of our certification order, which means we work to ensure that employees are properly designated as in-scope USFA members. USFA represents all full-time academic employees at the U of S, including Librarians, Instructors, Lecturers, Special Lecturers, Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors. Most of the work of the AGC is completed without ever filing a grievance. The AGC meets monthly with employer representatives at the Joint Grievance Committee (JGC) where we look for informal resolution of issues.

Often, issues arise because of a misunderstanding or lack of familiarity with either the Collective Agreement or the University policies and procedures. The AGC, however, has found that there are pockets of the University where informal resolution is difficult and matters must be elevated to a formal grievance to get results. Sometimes formal grievances are also filed to meet timeline requirements to initiate arbitrations in the event a resolution cannot be found through JGC. It is only when all avenues of informal resolution have been exhausted that the AGC recommends to USFA's Executive Committee that the grievance proceed to arbitration. The Executive Committee then decides whether to proceed to arbitration.

The resolution of grievances is rarely quick. Because the JGC only meets monthly, it often takes months for the informal resolution process to unfold, as the employer representatives need to investigate the circumstances surrounding the issue. They often come back the following month with new information that the AGC must then follow up with our members to confirm or refute. If a matter heads to arbitration, resolution is delayed further as arbitrations are often scheduled up to a year in advance. Until the grievance is resolved, members are required to

comply with the Employer's interpretation of any policy, procedure or term of the collective agreement.

As unionized employees, USFA members have a legal right to "fair representation" from USFA. If a USFA member is facing serious consequences such as dismissal, the USFA must represent the member regardless of the conduct. Contrary to popular belief, the union's role is not to help members avoid consequences of bad behaviour or failing to meet the tenure standards, rather we are there to ensure that a transparent and fair process is in place to assess whether those consequences are justified. Fair representation does not mean, however, that the grievance committee will take on all disputes brought to us by members. As a committee, when deciding to file a grievance we consider whether the grievance will be successful by assessing the evidence in support of the grievance, existing precedents from our University and elsewhere arising from similar disputes, and the consequences of winning or losing the grievance for all our members. We regularly consult with USFA's external legal counsel to ensure that our assessments of whether to file a grievance are informed and meet our duty of fair representation.

USFA Planning & Assessment Committee

The Planning and Assessment Committee of USFA is tasked with setting goals for the Association, planning ways to meet those goals, and assessing whether or not the goals have been met. This year, the committee is focusing on several areas:

1. clarification of the roles of the Equity Officers on the executive committee
2. identifying and encouraging members to run for executive committee positions
3. determining ways in which the Association can become more proactive rather than reactive.

Call for Participation University Administrative Practices Committee

The University Administrative Practices (UAP) Committee was piloted in 2013 and met with small groups of members for constructive conversations about how university administrative practices were impacting faculty careers. Among its main findings were that the increased overburden of time-consuming administrative tasks, bloat in the para-presidential and -decanal ranks, and the top-down operation of the institution were impediments to the success of faculty in teaching, research and outreach.

The recently reconstituted UAP Committee conducted a survey shortly after the COVID lockdown to follow up on those concerns and also look for new trends.

Faculty remain very concerned about the problems raised in 2013. Faculty members made it very clear that administrative practices continue to consume faculty time. Both Connection Point and Concur were identified as trouble spots; UnivRS and the new CV format were particularly excoriated as duplications of effort and waste of time

A new problem is the marginalization of faculty doing basic curiosity driven research. Faculty expressed the view that, for those doing targeted research in signature areas, there is preferential treatment. As well, the measures of success are research metrics, and, increasingly, money. In teaching, the divide is increased between those who wish to chal-

lenge students with critical thinking, and those who wish to teach towards learning objectives and achieve student satisfaction.

The USFA wishes to ensure faculty are successful across a wide range of research and teaching methodologies. Faculty report that the pandemic has exacerbated these problems and a recent news article suggests that senior administrations at both provincial universities consider that a move to online is likely to be at the forefront of post-pandemic changes to post-secondary education in Saskatchewan.

For details, [read the initial 2021 report](#). The [2013 report is also available](#).

The UAP Committee asks your help in discussing these concerns constructively in smaller groups. To be a part of these discussions, [contact the USFA](#), quantifiable publication records, as well as securing money. By devoting resources to big-ticket research, those faculty designated as “minor” researchers are being marginalized along with those who teach and those who make contributions to the university and external communities.

The pandemic has made clear how extensive these problems are. We wish to continue this work in the style of the 2013 report by organizing constructive discussions of these issues and invite members to indicate interest by replying to this newsletter.

USFA Executive Committee

Chair: [Allison Muri](#), English

Vice Chair: [Doug Chivers](#), Biology

Secretary: [Geraldine Balzer](#), Curriculum Studies

Treasurer: [John Gjevre](#), Medicine

Grievance Officer: [Patricia Farnese](#), Law

Equity Officer: [Susan Fowler-Kerry](#), Nursing

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