

Message from the Chair

Welcome to the new academic term and the new year. I want to take this opportunity to introduce myself as I begin my new role as USFA chair. Patricia Farnese, in a wise winter decision, accepted a call to the Bench in Belize, giving me the opportunity to step into this role. While I might like to be spending January in the Caribbean, I am honoured to serve in this role and work for the good of faculty at the University of Saskatchewan. I have been a faculty member in the College of Education since 2007. While my home department is Curriculum Studies, I am currently the department head in Educational Foundations. I have served on the USFA executive since 2019 and am committed to the important tasks of advocating for faculty in a variety of situations and working to improve our academic lives.

January of 2022 found us in a very similar place to January of 2021 – teaching remotely, research trajectories interrupted, shadowed by uncertainty as governments and university administrations make decisions about operations during a pandemic. But has the University of Sas-

katchewan, ‘the university the world needs’ responded in ways that this community and the world needs? Could our resources have been used in other ways that would have kept the population safe, contributed to our local community, and facilitated in-person learning? Certainly, VIDO has been hard at work developing a vaccine. Microbiologists have worked with waste water testing to predict the course of Covid-19 in our community. Epidemiologists have been outspoken in offering insight into the trajectory of a pandemic. And members of the medical community have worked tirelessly to treat those who have contracted COVID-19 and been hospitalized.

While the choices that have been made have certainly protected the health and the well-being of our university community, could other choices have been made that did not have the same level of disruption. *The Atlantic*, in an article entitled “The Colleges that Took the Pandemic Seriously,” (<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/01/colleges-took-pandemic-seriously/617879/>) looks at the choices made by Indiana University in a decision to open safely in the fall of 2021. I was struck by

the way they drew on the knowledge and experience of faculty and staff to achieve their goal and their commitment to the both the university and the local community: “we did not want to be a burden on our host communities by co-opting resources – including medical capacity – that might otherwise be used for those who were ill.” They did this by activating a testing system, using event staff to run testing centres and using university labs to process tests. Students in health sciences programs were trained to administer vaccines and deployed across the state. These choices cost Indiana University \$700 per student.

Ultimately, we may never know which strategy was the best, moving to remote for a year or investing in the available expertise to remain open. But as I consider the challenges faculty and students have faced, the isolation that has impacted mental health, and the ongoing uncertainties of whether a return to classrooms is safe, I’m left wondering if we have been the university the world needs over the last 24 months.

Geraldine

Bargaining Trends Across Canada

Following is a summary of bargaining trends as reported by CAUT in its December 2021 issue of *Facts & Figures*. This provides a snapshot of settlements negotiated by CAUT academic staff associations since February 2021. Also included are some very recent happenings.

Bargaining processes and outcomes have been constrained by two key factors: government interference with free collective bargaining and the projected financial fallout of the pandemic. This has resulted in some faculty unions extending current agreements, and others negotiating short-term contracts. There have been no serious concessions in recent agreements despite financial projections and government interference.

Agreements concluded in the later period of the pandemic have not included serious concessions, despite ongoing government interference. For instance, the McMaster University Academic Librarians' Association blocked their employer's proposal to cancel post-retirement benefits for new hires.

While some pandemic-related constraints are real, there have been opportunities to make significant non-financial gains. For instance, Algoma University Faculty Association's new

agreement establishes a joint Restorative Mediation Committee to develop and implement a restorative mediation model to resolve workplace conflicts as an alternative to the complaint, grievance and arbitration procedures. The Concordia University Part-Time Faculty Association achieved increases to large class stipends and a reduction in the number of credits of seniority required to be shortlisted for a Limited-Term Appointment.

While taking different forms, Government interference is happening in almost every province. It's explicit through legislation such as Ontario's *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act*, 2019, SO 2019, c 12 (known as Bill 124) — the public sector wage suppression legislation passed by the Ford government in 2019 where many Ontario faculty unions have made gains in other areas. In Alberta, informal public sector mandates and drastic provincial funding cuts have yet to play out in negotiations that are still in progress. In Manitoba, the Court of Appeal reversed the Court of Queen's Bench decision that struck down the *Public Services Sustainability Act*, S.M. 2017 c. 24 as unconstitutional and while informal government mandates replaced the legislation, a number of unions in the broader public sector successfully pushed back. In Saskatchewan, changes to the Post-

Secondary Education Act, under the guise of modernization, are being proposed.

Whether it was real or exaggerated by university administrations, financial fallout from the pandemic had a greater impact on bargaining at the start of the pandemic and the threat of enrolment collapse was used in attempting to constrain unions' financial demands. Even where enrolment predictions were the direst, in the Maritimes, associations were able to negotiate salary increases. However, many associations chose to negotiate extensions to current agreements due to uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Also reflected in recent settlements are common challenges facing faculty. Some agreements include provisions to address workload, equity, performance reviews, teaching evaluations and collegial governance.

In addition, it is becoming more common for academic staff associations to seek job action mandates from their membership with some seeking the mandate even before bargaining begins. It is also becoming more common for academic staff associations to take job action.

- University of Manitoba Faculty Association went on strike for 35 days before a tentative agreement was reached in early December 2021.
- Concordia University Edmonton Faculty Association reached a deal after a two-week strike (the first job

- action by an Alberta academic staff association) in early January.
- University of Ontario Institute of Technology Faculty Association (UOITFA) sought a mandate after six months at the bargaining table and gave a strike deadline of January 31, 2022. On February 5th, UOITFA reported members rejected the latest offer from university administration.
 - After issuing a strike deadline of February 1, 2022, Acadia University Faculty Association is entering the 2nd week of a strike.
 - University of Lethbridge Faculty Association (ULFA) has been without a contract since June 30, 2020. ULFA members voted 92% in favour of job action at a series of town halls held January 31.
 - Mount Royal University Faculty Association has been at the bargaining table for two years. Statutory mediation took place in late January and the parties are in a cooling-off period, which is necessary before any job action can be taken.

Financial Settlements:

Several settlements in Ontario are as per s. 10(1) of the *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act*, which limits salary increases from 2020 to 2023 to a maximum of 1% per year for organizations that received more than \$1 million in provincial funding.

Algoma (Regular Academic Staff) Total of 3% over 3 years. Settled 7 months into contract term.

Bishop's (Full-time faculty members) Total of 4% over two years with contract extension, to June 30, 2022, and agreement to begin next round by June 1, 2021.

Bishop's (Librarians) Total of 4% over 2 years with contract extension, to June 30, 2022.

Bishop's (APBU Staff Members) Total of 4% over 2 years with contract extension, to June 30, 2022.

Concordia University Part Time Faculty Association Total of 5% over 2 years.

Concordia University Faculty Association Total of 5% over 2 years + 5% increase to stipends for Academic Unit Heads and for teaching additional courses.

Hearst (formerly affiliated school of Laurentian) Total of 1% with one-year contract extension.

McMaster Librarians Total of 3% over 3 years.

Moncton Total of 0.75% with one-year contract extension.

Mount Saint Vincent Total of 3.5% over 2 years + \$500 increase to overload stipend, \$300 total increase to professional development fund and total of 9% increase to benefit allowances.

New Brunswick (AUNBT Full-Time Group 1) Total of 1.8% with one-year contract extension.

New Brunswick (AUNBT Contract Academic Employees Group 2) Total of 1.8% with one-year contract extension.

Ontario College of Art and Design (OCADFA) Total of 3% over 3 years.

(Salary was settled through interest arbitration. Arbitrator remains seized to reopen compensation if constitutional challenges to *Protecting a Sustainable Public for Future Generations Act* succeed or legislation is modified or repealed with retroactive effect, or for other legally relevant reasons.)

Ottawa (APUO) Total of 3% over 3 years + \$575.00 increase to professional expense funds with expenses incurred in last 5 years eligible for reimbursement.

Regina (URFA — First Nations University of Canada Sessionals) Total of 4% over 3 years + signing bonus for members who taught more than five classes in 2019, \$5,000 professional development fund, new hourly rate for university service and training, increased pension contributions, increased per course professional expenses, 5% increase to sick leave and parental leave top ups.

Saint Mary's (SMUFU) Salary increases of 1.6% for faculty and 1.7% for librarians and lecturers with 1 year extension of agreement.

Saint Paul (PASPU) Total of 3% over 3 years + 25% and \$500, available for two years in recognition of extraordinary work undertaken to help university and students through pandemic-related adversity, increase to professional development and research expense fund, \$2500 research start-up funds for new hires, tuition exemptions for family and librarians, credit toward teaching release for thesis direction, employer to provide up-to date computers.

Member Engagement Committee Meetings with USFA Members

In the coming weeks, the USFA Member Engagement Committee will be meeting with small groups of USFA members. The purpose of these meetings is to hear from a broad cross section of the USFA membership. While there is no firm agenda for these meetings, some of the topics up for discussion will include assignment of duties, workload, administrative processes, and Indigenization.

Invitations to these meetings will be sent to randomly selected members. However, if you would like to participate in one of the meetings, please contact Abbie Reich at abbie.reich@usask.ca.

Improving Administrative Processes at the U of S

The Association is collecting the difficult experiences of faculty members with administrative processes in the hopes of gaining a fuller picture of the problem, to challenge the employer's claim that these problems are isolated incidents, and to argue that inflexible blanket policies are harming research activities at this university.

The Association has had several discussions with senior leaders about the delays, obstacles, and absurdities that faculty experience with respect to administrative processes. These extend from

grant applications and management, to research ethics, to Connection Point and expense claims, to IT and equipment purchases and software licences, to Concur travel rules, and to locking our computers and preventing research software installation. The Association is concerned these difficulties are having a cumulative negative effect on the ability of faculty to pursue their research, to build collaborations and partnerships, and to support students. However, when these issues are raised with the employer, the Association is met with the assertion that these problems are "exceptions to the rule" and the employer insists on ad-

ressing issues on a case by case basis because they are "exceptions." We disagree.

The Association is asking USFA members to assist in working to improve administrative practices at the U of S by contributing to a [Google document](#) or, if members prefer to keep their identity and/or story confidential, by reaching out to the Association directly at usfa@usaskfaculty.ca. Many members have added their experiences to the Google document and several have contacted us directly. If you have had a difficult experience with administrative processes, please tell us about it.