



2014 Negotiations Committee Members:

Ted Binnema (Chief Negotiator)  
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Dear Colleagues;

Representatives of the UNBC FA and the UNBC Board of Governors resumed contract negotiations on 25 and 26 February. Negotiations began with the Employer tabling proposals relating to all outstanding articles, including tenure and promotion, benefits, and salaries.

In terms of tenure and promotion, the Employer tabled a proposal with some significant differences from previously tabled language. Given the inherent complexity of the tenure and promotion process, and the significance of the changes to the Employer’s proposal, this issue was put to the side during the past 2 days while we focused on issues where prospects of agreement seemed more promising: benefits.

In terms of benefits, the parties understood that, over the course of negotiations, certain sums of money had been “saved” in other areas (such as the elimination of the Dispute Resolution Officer position) and could be reallocated within the agreement to benefits. Given the likelihood that we could quickly come to agreement on some items, we focused first on the allocation of those funds. We are pleased to say that this permitted us to come to agreement on a few issues: post-retirement benefits, professional development allowances, and reimbursement for those who have to relocate to take up employment at UNBC. We are also pleased to say that the new agreement will add out-of-country medical insurance for members aged 65 to 70. We do believe that the result is a better allocation of funds than existed previously, but we do emphasize that the Employer has not agreed to add a penny to our non-salary compensation items—not even to make up for inflation. Thus, although we think we’ve sliced up the existing pie in a better way, after inflation, the actual benefits pie will continue to get smaller at UNBC unless the Employer also injects new money into that portion of the agreement. There are deficiencies in our benefits that we will be unable to address simply by reallocating money.

We can tell you that, faced with the clear resolve of our membership, the Employer did add money to its salary offer. Unfortunately, the Employer proposes to allocate this new money in ways that may serve the



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priorities of the Employer, but do not address the current problems with our salary structure, and would—if we agreed to them—move us further away from industry standards and make it much more difficult for us to address those problems in future rounds of bargaining. It is a complex proposal, but in short, the employer proposes to abolish Career Development Increments as we have known them at UNBC for 25 years (and as they exist at all of our comparators), and replace them with a complex merit-style increment scheme according to which your performance would be rated on a 7-step scale—incurring a considerable new load of work upon each member, especially upon department chairs. By the end of their proposed 5 year agreement some members might be receiving industry standard levels of CDI but if, and only if, other members were receiving considerably less. Accepting this scheme would require us to reopen our reporting and evaluation article, and relinquish some important gains we have made on your behalf in that article. We have rejected this offer.

So, the bad news is that—as the parties agreed, at the end of yesterday’s session we are still far apart on salaries. The good news is that we have now learned that the Employer *can* spend more money on salaries; the question now is whether the Employer will choose to address the real problems with our salary structure. The UNBC FA ended the day by presenting a revised salary proposal. Although that proposal is slightly less expensive than our previous proposal, we presented it primarily because it would bring us more quickly and clearly into a sector-norm salary grid. At a recent meeting with UNBC students the Acting Provost of UNBC, John Young assured students that “UNBC has been, and continues to work on finding solutions to close that [salary] gap [between UNBC and our comparators].” It is now time for the Employer to make good on its commitment. They can do so on the morning of 4 March, when we are scheduled to meet again.

Ted Binnema  
Chief Negotiator