

# University of Northern British Columbia Faculty Association

*Bargaining Bulletin 2019 #08*

## Message from the Chief Negotiator:

Dear Colleagues,

On Friday, 27 September, we had a very disappointing day of bargaining. There is some evidence that the Employer is responding to the added pressure that you have begun to exert. At the onset of negotiations, without a minute of discussion, the Employer offered to sign off on five articles. While we were happy to conclude these articles, doing so does not represent major progress. There were only a few words still in dispute in those five articles. Still, although the progress was not significant, it did suggest that the Employer is beginning to respond to your resolve.

That was the only bright spot of the day. For the rest, the Employer dug in. As you know, for months now, we have been requesting that the Employer provide accurate estimate of the salary savings to be achieved in the Early Retirement Offer (ERO) and Voluntary Exit Package (VEP). Even as late as Tuesday of last week, they gave us every indication that they would provide us with costing very soon. However, on Friday, the Employer's bargaining team made a complete reversal and announced that they will not be providing their estimate of the salary savings to be realized in the ERO/VEP. Neither do they intend to provide a costing of our salary proposal. They asserted that we are not entitled to the costing, and that they are not required to provide us it. Indeed, they have gone even further than that by now asserting that they intend to use the ERO/VEP to help the university "in managing [its] deficit," even though the terms and conditions of the ERO/VEP state that all of the salary savings of the ERO/VEP will go to address faculty salaries at UNBC. The President of UNBC acknowledged this commitment in his press release of 22 March 2019 when he wrote that "the ERO will provide budget savings to be used exclusively to help close the salary gap through the new compensation framework agreement between the Faculty Association and University" (<https://www.unbc.ca/labour-relations/early-retirement-offer>). Rest assured that the ERO/VEP will generate far more than \$750,000 in salary savings over the next three years. All of it must, by the terms of a signed agreement, go to address the salary issue at UNBC.

In announcing that it will not provide the FA with a costing of our salary proposal, your Employer in this round has broken with the practice that has prevailed in every previous round of bargaining at UNBC. It is established practice here, and at other universities in British Columbia, for the Employer to provide the faculty association with their costing of both parties' salary proposals. That way, if the parties disagreed on the costing, both knew where the disagreement lay. The Employer's Friday announcement seems to us to be an acknowledgement that the Employer has exaggerated the cost of both salary proposals, and has underestimated the salary savings to be realized through the ERO. It seems that they just do not want to admit it.



Rm. 3085/3089 Charles J. McCaffray Hall

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We have costed the salary savings of the ERO/VEP and the cost of our salary proposal very thoroughly, so we think we have a very good idea of how much our salary proposal would cost. We are pleased that we believe that it

- accomplishes the mandate that you set for us
- fits within the PSEC mandate, ERO/VEP savings, and agreement savings, and
- fits within the budget that the UNBC Board of Governors has set for our members' salaries.

If the Employer believes we have costed our proposal incorrectly, the onus is on the Employer, which has access to data that we do not have access to, to show us where we have gone wrong.

The Employer has countered with a salary proposal that would inevitably produce tremendous inequities in salaries at UNBC. This proposal is little changed since they first started talking about it at the beginning of bargaining. The UNBC FA bargaining team has attempted to understand how this very complex and opaque salary system would actually operate, but our modelling suggests that many of our members would actually be worse off under the Employer's proposal than if they were simply to receive 2% general wage increases each year, with the \$1,111 annual increments! Indeed, we believe that, overall, the Employer's proposal will permit it to divert to other uses, the money that PSEC believes is going to your salaries. The unwillingness of the Employer to provide us with any detailed costing of their proposal reinforces that belief.

The Employer's salary proposal offers no solution at all for the many Senior Laboratory Instructors who are stuck at the salary cap of SLI III, or for the Librarians. According to the Employer, the Librarians and SLIs should be happy with 2% general wage increases over the next three years, and those at the cap of SLI III should expect no annual increments for the rest of their careers. The Employer also proposes to strip away Market Differentials from people who are currently entitled to them under the Market Differential policy. In addition they demand that we concede some of the protections that we achieved for our term members during the last round, and that we agree to remove other language that prevents them from relying unduly on term employees when they should be hiring permanent employees.

The Employer also proposes a revamped tenure and promotion process that, if implemented, would significantly diminish the collegial nature of promotion and tenure decisions at UNBC. Their proposal would hand much more decision-making power to the Deans, Provost, and President.

Finally, the Employer surprised us by insisting, contrary to what has been communicated to from the beginning of negotiations, that there are no co-chief negotiators for the Employer's bargaining team and that for the first time at UNBC, negotiations with the FA are being led solely by a non-academic with a human resources background – Barb Daigle.

The members who attended our extraordinary meeting of 25 June unanimously passed a motion saying that:  
This meeting reaffirms its support for the mandate given to its bargaining team, namely, to achieve a fair compensation award while protecting the rights and working conditions of FA members. Secondly, we



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demand that the Employer refrain from negotiating with the membership, and negotiate with the union's bargaining team and only that team.

As you know, the Employer has again posted its (minimally changed) latest proposal directly to you, and the proposal continues to demand the same concessions as it demanded in June. Those facts alone show that the Employer has not learned to respect the wishes of the members of the UNBC FA.

The bargaining team remains confident that with your resolve and support, we will achieve our goals. We are encouraged by the fact that we have found a way to address the broken salary system at UNBC without exceeding the PSEC mandate. Now, we need only exert enough pressure on the Employer to convince them actually to live up to their stated commitment to fix the salary system, and to do so without ceding the rights and collegial governance that have been built through years of productive bargaining.

Thank you for your continued support.

Ted Binnema, Chief Negotiator, UNBC FA, and the rest of the team: Jacqueline Holler, Umesh Parshotam, Matt Reid, Donna Sindaco, and Stephen Rader (*ex officio*).

