

University of Northern British Columbia Faculty Association

Bargaining Bulletin 2019 #14

Message from the Chief Negotiator:

Dear Colleagues,

We have had intense negotiations in the seventy-two hours after UNBC FA Executive served notice to strike. On 4 November, progress appeared to have stalled, but in the following two days we appeared to be making significant headway. However, progress remained slow. At about 1:30 am on 7 November, we presented a proposal that we hoped would be a breakthrough on salaries. Unfortunately, at 2:45 the Employer stated that they would consider that proposal only if we agreed to delay the start of the strike. Given the number of unresolved issues that remained and the significant distance between positions, postponement was not an option.

The UNBC FA Bargaining Team understands that it is a grave thing to undertake job action at UNBC. Indeed, it is the last resort. We acknowledge that doing so greatly inconveniences the very UNBC students to whom we are so committed, and our valued non-FA colleagues at UNBC. We are grateful for all the support that has been shown to us so far.

Early on during negotiations, the Employer presented a proposal that would allow the Employer to break their contractual obligations to some of our members. On the basis of legal opinion, we have consistently and repeatedly told the Employer that it is simply impossible for us to agree to this demand as presented. This major sticking point remains unresolved.

There remains a fundamental difference in the methodology and principles for the costing of the Early Retirement Offer and Voluntary Exit Package (ERO/VEP). Agreement on the basics of costing the ERO/VEP is essential if we are to move forward on a new compensation structure.

The status of proposals that affect our most vulnerable members remains in question. For example, it is not clear whether the Employer will accept the current language in the agreement, or whether they will continue to seek to abolish the three-year term contract.

Some of the crucial issues in this strike might seem arcane to those outside the academy, but they are central to the functioning of universities. The Employer has tabled a number of proposals on matters such as tenure that are crucial to the way universities traditionally operate. These proposals are unacceptable to the FA because they would diminish collegial governance and would make UNBC an unattractive place for faculty to work—even if our salaries were higher.



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On the issue of salaries, the parties may be converging, albeit slowly. The FA has been working on the salary issue for the better part of a decade, through three rounds of bargaining, two arbitrations, and a strike. All our resolve has been and is directed towards one goal: a settlement that will ensure serene labour relations at UNBC for the foreseeable future. The UNBC FA is eager to achieve a Collective Agreement that provides as much assurance as possible that students, faculty, and staff three years from now will not face the kind of uncertainty – or job action – that they do now.

It is time. The members of the UNBC FA can do nothing less than to accept reluctantly the unpleasant obligation that has been placed upon us.

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*).

