

October 23, 2024

Insights

Article 75 - “Collective Bargaining Spring 2025”

Time really does ‘seem to fly’ when it comes to collective bargaining. It feels as though we just finished ratifying and implementing our 2023-2025 Collective Agreement and now we are already turning our attention to collective bargaining for a new Collective Agreement which will take effect 1 July 2025. For those of you who have recently joined UNBC, you might not be aware of the collective bargaining process, or what we have achieved since 1994....

A Look Back...

Thirty-two years ago, the interim governing council of the University approved the “*University of Northern British Columbia Faculty Handbook*”. Its purpose was outlined in the preface, which stated:

Until there is a significant complement of faculty, UNBC requires an interim set of policies and procedures to make available to prospective faculty members and to be used in the early stages of operations....Part One...sets out general principles and guidelines and some regulations and operating procedures. Part two, consisting of the remaining regulations and operating procedures, will be prepared by the Administration in the coming months leading to a complete interim Faculty Handbook for IGC approval no later than December 1992. As soon as practicable, the Handbook will be administered by a joint committee consisting of two members of the administration and two faculty. Once a faculty organization is formed it is hoped that a cooperative approach will be developed to reach a faculty agreement.

Following an intensive round of hiring the first and founding faculty members at UNBC, the **University of Northern British Columbia Faculty Association** was formed and received its certificate of incorporation on November 18, 1994 under the BC Societies Act. Under the leadership of Dr. Lee Keener, the Faculty Association’s first chief negotiator, the first Faculty Agreement was ratified and came into effect from 1994 – 1998. Negotiations were at times difficult, but the Board of Governors and the Faculty Association shared the same goal of bringing a collective agreement to UNBC that reflected the mainstream in Canada at that particular time. The Faculty Association was able to negotiate five more Faculty Agreements up to June 30, 2012.

The spring 2012 round of collective bargaining was particularly challenging for the Faculty Association once again as they sought to change an Agreement that became significantly out of step with those in the university sector. The parties



went to binding arbitration and Arbitrator Vince Ready awarded the first Faculty Agreement that was not ratified by the Board of Governors and the Faculty Association. Disappointingly, the Association did not achieve its mandate for a better Faculty Agreement through binding arbitration, and the roadmap to certification of the Faculty Association became obvious. On 29 April 2014, the Faculty Association became certified as a union under the BC Labour Code and commenced negotiating its first collective agreement as a union to take effect 1 July 2014. Following protracted negotiations, and the Faculty Association's first strike in March 2015, the Faculty Association wound up back in binding arbitration with Arbitrator Stan Lanyon. Hoping to make significant gains on the compensation structure, pensions and benefits, sick leave, sabbatical and professional leaves, and tenure and promotion, the Association was disappointed once again with the Arbitrator's award.

And so the University and Faculty Association were back at the bargaining table once again in spring 2019. Following months of protracted negotiations once again and significant roadblocks, the Faculty Association received a mandate from its membership for a second strike in Fall 2019. With the assistance of a provincial mediator to address Articles that remained in dispute, followed by arbitration hearings scheduled well into Spring 2021, the University and Faculty Association found opportunity to settle the remaining Articles in dispute outside of arbitration, and the first ratification of the Faculty Association Collective Agreement since 2010 was achieved.

Dr. Ted Binnema, Chief Negotiator for the Faculty Association's rounds of bargaining in 2014 and 2019, wrote the following to our members:

The UNBC Faculty Agreement of today, is the product of significant struggles, during which the Employer has, on multiple occasions, sought an agreement that was out of step with the university sector.

It is important to know that it is only because of the resolve of the membership that we enjoy the protections we have today.

A Look Forward...

Although the ink is barely dry on our 2023-2025 Collective Agreement, preparations will soon be underway for the next round of negotiations. So what does this process look like and how do our members shape the Faculty Association's next bargaining mandate?

It all starts with the Executive Committee appointing the members of the bargaining team. Normally this happens in the Fall semester prior to the expiration of the Collective Agreement, so this work is currently underway and an announcement will go out to the general membership when the team is officially appointed.

Then the *real work* of preparing for collective bargaining begins...

The bargaining team is informed by the membership and directed by the Executive Committee to make its best efforts to achieve specific "gains" in the Collective Agreement at the bargaining table. We refer to this as the Faculty Association's bargaining mandate. This means a lot of engagement with the Faculty Association's membership -- first through a membership survey followed by various focus groups, and finally by identifying priorities that you -- our membership -- have communicated to the bargaining team. Please watch for the membership survey to come out in late January, and we strongly encourage our members to attend at least one of the focus group sessions that will be organized in late February or March.



Rm. 3085/3089 Charles J. McCaffray Hall

Then the Faculty Association’s bargaining team will prepare a formal written bargaining proposal to present to the Executive Committee, and once approved by the Executive Committee, the Faculty Association’s bargaining mandate becomes official and it’s off to the races – or at least to the bargaining table.

The next step is for the University and Faculty Association’s bargaining teams to serve notice to each other in the late Spring to commence bargaining. Dates will be secured for bargaining sessions, and collective bargaining will start with each party presenting an overview of the Articles they intend to open for negotiations, followed by discussion and exchanging of proposed Article language amendments.

The negotiation sessions are closed sessions, so how can our members stay abreast with the progress at the bargaining table? We keep our members informed through regular bargaining bulletins, and from time to time may call a membership meeting on significant issues.

Once the parties have completed negotiations at the table, the Employer sends the draft Collective Agreement to the Board of Governors for ratification, and the Faculty Association sends the draft Collective Agreement to the membership for ratification. Ideally, ratification should happen before the expiry of the current Collective Agreement, but sometimes that doesn’t happen. In this case, the current Collective Agreement remains in force and effect until a new Collective Agreement is ratified. Once ratified, the Employer and Faculty Association will need to negotiate a ‘transition’ Article to address retroactive implementation of the new Collective Agreement.

And once this is all done, the negotiating teams disband, work gets underway through the Joint Consultation Committee to implement the new Collective Agreement, and *hopefully* everyone gets a rest before the next round of bargaining begins!

So, please keep a sharp eye out for the announcement on the Faculty Association’s bargaining team, survey in January, and focus group sessions scheduled in late February/March. By filling out the survey, you demonstrate that you are engaged and interested in bettering your Collective Agreement. Your participation in both the survey and in focus group consultations will be critical to the negotiating process and will help us achieve our goals on your behalf at the bargaining table.

