Published on *University of Toronto Faculty Association* (https://www.utfa.org)

Report of the Interim Vice-President, Salary, Benefits, Pensions and Workload, 2024-2025

April 8, 2025

SBPW Bargaining

UTFA's SBPW Negotiating Team and the senior Administration engaged in 24 separate bargaining sessions between November 2023 and September 2024. The parties mutually agreed to mediation and arbitration with Eli Gedalof, who also served as the arbitrator for the preceding round of negotiations that resulted in a sector-leading 10% salary increase over three years for our members. An arbitration hearing was held on March 21, 2025, after both parties had submitted their respective briefs. We anticipate Arbitrator Gedalof's decision to be issued by June 30th.

Mediation yielded several notable outcomes, both within and beyond the conventional scope of bargaining.

1. A historic, comprehensive revision of Article 7 of our Memorandum of Agreement (MoA), which governs the grievance and arbitration process, as outlined in the Report of the President, was achieved.
2. Retirees' equal access to health benefits improvements and (conditional) access to Microsoft 365 was preserved, as outlined in the Report of the Chair of the Retired Members Committee.
3. A Sexual Violence Policy Letter of Agreement (LoA) was established, as detailed in the Report of the President.
4. An agreement in principle was reached regarding the self-direction of Librarian Research Days and Professional Development Days, with an increase in the number of days from 14 to 16, as outlined in the Report of the Chair of the Librarians Committee.

Despite these accomplishments, the parties remain far apart on Salary, Benefits, and Workload issues.

UTFA's Proposals

UTFA's salary proposal comprises three distinct components. Firstly, we endeavoured to modernize faculty and librarian salaries by augmenting the salary floors (minimums) to more accurately reflect prevailing market rates. Secondly, we proposed a 6% across-the-board increase (ATB) effective July 1, 2023, followed by a 4.5% increase effective July 1, 2024, to be retroactively applied to all elements of salary, including stipends. Both increases are wholly justified by the need to narrow the inflation gap since the last salary award and to maintain UTFA members' top market status. Lastly, we sought to reverse the decline in the Administration's investments in the Progress Through the Ranks (PTR) pools, to have them reflect a higher percentage of our salary base.

The Negotiating Team successfully bargained a three-year agreement, where all matters pertaining to Benefits and Workload for the three years, and Salary for the initial two years of the agreement (i.e., 2023-2024 and 2024-2025), would be resolved through interest arbitration. Salary for the third year would be determined through bilaterals this summer, and if necessary, another interest arbitration scheduled for fall 2025. UTFA's rationale for pursuing a three-year agreement is that creating a break between rounds of actively bargaining with the Administration will provide us with time to engage more extensively with our members and formulate a stronger plan for the next round of negotiations.

On **health benefits**, we proposed a comprehensive range of enhancements that would provide meaningful increases for members at various stages of their lives. We remained steadfast in our position and successfully secured the preservation of equal access to health benefits for retirees.

The Negotiating Team consulted with the membership on several occasions throughout this round of bargaining to establish and maintain a firm understanding of members' priorities, beginning with the August 2023 UTFA Bargaining survey that underpinned the bargaining mandate approved by UTFA Council later that fall. This survey was followed by four virtual Bargaining Town Halls in the fall and winter, in-person members' meetings at each of the three campuses in the new year, and an in-depth presentation and discussion on bargaining at last year's Annual General Meeting. Our final Bargaining Update Town Halls for active and retired members, held in mid-January of this year, continued to be well-attended and enthusiastically received. Our final "flash" survey, sent out at the end of January as we headed to the end of mediation and the beginning of arbitration, provided members with the opportunity to shape our priorities for gaining health benefits improvements.

The responses resulted in the following rankings, starting with the most strongly supported:

1. Issues of particular importance to our members (e.g., protecting equal access to health benefits for retirees, addressing mental health benefits).
2. Implementing improvements that consider members' evolving needs throughout their lifespan (e.g., accommodating early career/young family members' requirements, such as orthodontia, and addressing mid-career members' needs, such as eyeglasses, and ensuring the needs of older/retired members, such as major dental).
3. Enhancing benefits where UTFA members' coverage falls significantly below sector norms or the high cost of living in the GTA (e.g., hearing aids, dispensing fees, Long-Term Disability (LTD), and Life Insurance).
4. Implementing a transparent process for evaluating benefit plan provisions and entitlements (e.g., the GreenShield claim adjudication and appeal process) and ensuring the value of benefits by aligning reimbursement amounts with reasonable and customary charges by service providers in

the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).
5. Ensuring equitable consideration of diverse family configurations and responsibilities within the membership regarding benefit coverage (e.g., accommodating single members without dependents, members with dependent children, spouses/partners, and elders, etc.).

There were several other non-health benefits that UTFA prioritized in this round that include housing, long-term disability, Professional Expense Reimbursement Allowance (PERA), childcare and workload.

Housing

UTFA's initial proposal sought to develop a joint, comprehensive, multi-year, faculty and librarian housing strategy to address affordability requirements, access to family-sized units, and ensure that funds are transparently and equitably distributed. Unfortunately, the Administration refused to engage meaningfully with us on this proposal, despite acknowledging that housing is a top issue for UTFA members.

At the same time, the Administration has provided UTFA with scant data and little information on how the University Administration makes decisions with respect to housing, what criteria, if any, are assessed, or what financing supports are available to members. As a first step, UTFA's proposal deals with the Administration's lack of transparency so that UTFA can negotiate this crucial benefit on behalf of our members. UTFA seeks to add additional requirements to provide necessary information on the housing and loan programs, as well as language confirming UTFA's role in negotiating future changes to these benefits, as required under Article 6 of the MOA.

Long-Term Disability

UTFA proposed an increase to the maximum earnings covered under the long-term disability (LTD) plan. Our members have consistently expressed their inability to afford to take LTD leaves due to the insufficiency of LTD benefits. The current plan only covers 70% of a member's annual earnings up to $150,000, which means that the benefit amount is capped at $105,000. This cap has been in place since 2016. UTFA proposed increasing the maximum earnings covered under the plan to $250,000, which would raise the maximum benefit amount to $170,000. UTFA also proposed annual cost of living increases to protect against future erosion. If awarded by the arbitrator, this increase will ensure that our members can afford to access LTD when they need it.

Professional Expense Reimbursement Allowance (PERA)

UTFA proposed that our PERA amounts should rise annually with the rate of inflation due to rising costs, and to address the erosion of the value of PERA over time. Further, UTFA is seeking parity between the PERA amount for full-time members and part-time members whose FTE is at or above 50% because many part-time UTFA members with significant teaching or administrative responsibilities have similar, if not identical, professional expenses to full-time members where such costs are fixed. Lastly, UTFA proposed that we add tuition fees as an eligible PERA expense.

Childcare

UTFA proposed reasonable adjustments to the age eligibility, daily maximum, half day rate, annual

maximum, and total maximum reimbursement amounts for the Child Care Benefit. Details follow:

1. The age eligibility to be increased to under the age of 12 (from under the age of 7) so that meaningful coverage can be provided to members with children in need of care support, accounting for the full spectrum of ages in which children are likely to require supervision.
2. Daily reimbursement of up to $40 (from $20) and half-day reimbursement of up to $20 (from $10)
3. Annual reimbursement per child up to $4,000 (from $2,000)
4. Administration reimburses members $2 million per year (from $1 million)

These adjustments are necessary in order that meaningful coverage is provided to members with children in need of childcare support, and it is imperative that the Administration support our members' family obligations so that they can fulfill their professional obligations.

Workload

Since 2011, when workload became a term and condition of employment that the Administration agreed could be negotiated and arbitrated, UTFA has received a mandate from its membership to make substantial workload improvements. As UTFA's Salary, Benefits, and Workload Negotiating Team argued in its most recent interest arbitration brief, members have consistently affirmed that workload is a top priority and policy consideration. For a detailed analysis of Workload, refer to the Report from the Vice-President, Grievances.

You can access the parties' arbitration briefs here.

Joint Benefits Committee

The VP, SBPW co-chairs the Joint Benefits Committee (JBC) with the Administration which UTFA won in a previous round of bargaining. The JBC reviews and monitors claims experience to identify trends and patterns, and addresses any concerns raised by UTFA on behalf of members, or by the Administration. The JBC also reviews the annual plan financial statements and makes recommendations for renewal or premium adjustments.

UTFA is committed to amending the Group Benefits Plan to support the goals of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Indigeneity (EDII). This amendment aims to address systemic issues and experiences of our marginalized members regarding benefit accessibility and coverage.

UTFA will insist that any benefit plan amendments meet the needs of our diverse membership. To ensure this, the JBC will seek feedback from our members regarding issues and experiences of accessing appropriate benefit coverage. Stay tuned for more details!

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the dedicated members of the SBPW Negotiating Team who have persisted through another long and arduous round of bargaining: Sherri Helwig, Raymond Kwong, James Mason (advisor), Arjumand Siddiqi, Harriet Sonne de Torrens, and Terezia Zorić (co-lead negotiator). I will note that Ariel Katz was VP, SBPW for most of this past round, ending his term in January 2025. I thank him for his work in this role, including all his work with bargaining. I also look forward to meeting with the Salary, Benefits, Pensions, and Workload Committee in the coming weeks to review past work and discuss future plans.

I would especially like to thank UTFA President Terezia Zorić for her continued leadership and engagement, the crucial support provided by Executive Director Nellie De Lorenzi, legal support from UTFA Counsel Geoffrey Dunlop, and logistical support from Executive Assistant Jessica Martin. It has also been a pleasure to work with our external counsel at RavenLaw LLP: Wassim Garzouzi and Julia Williams.

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Interim Vice-President, Salary, Benefits, Pensions and Workload

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Source URL (modified on Apr 24 2026):https://www.utfa.org/content/report-interim-vice-president-salary-benefits-pensions-and-workload-2024-2025