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Bargaining Update: Still seeking agreement with the Administration on ‘urgent’ issues

July 30, 2021

Dear UTFA Colleagues,

We are writing to update you on salary, benefits, and workload negotiations. UTFA’s bargaining team has been working on your behalf since the spring of 2020. Last week we spent four full days in mediation with Kevin Burkett, a highly respected mediator-arbitrator, who sought to assist the UofT Administration and UTFA in reaching an agreement on a range of pressing issues that would mitigate some of the impacts of COVID-19 on our working lives. (Recall that UTFA’s request to engage Mr. Burkett as both a mediator and arbitrator was rejected by the Administration.)

What UTFA is hearing from faculty and librarians

As September approaches, members are contacting us to express their fear and frustrations about the Administration’s plans for the Fall term. In particular, many are asking questions and reporting concerns in relation to the following areas:

- Health and Safety protections;
- Accommodation processes;
- Protections against the requirement to employ “hybrid” or “dual delivery” (online and in-person) modes of instruction within the same course;
- Reimbursements for COVID-related expenses;
- Unfair use of Student Course Evaluations;
- PTR for the academic year 2020-2021; and,
- Excessive and inequitable workloads.

These are all issues that UTFA and the Administration have been negotiating since early 2021, after the Administration agreed to UTFA’s request that we seek to resolve urgent COVID issues through an expedited process to negotiate a dedicated Letter of Understanding (LOU).

A tentative agreement on the LOU?

Although we had hoped the Administration's response to our members' concerns would be significantly more timely and substantive, the two parties have made some progress on items that would provide greater clarity and some meaningful improvements in some areas. We also know that since the fall term is nearly upon us, our members need assistance *now* before several of the provisions within the LOU become moot. Accordingly, the UTFA bargaining team has indicated to the Administration that we will accept their last offer. We anticipate this will conclude the COVID LOU negotiations.

In keeping with UTFA's governance model, if the COVID LOU is signed back to UTFA by the Administration, UTFA's bargaining team must then present the tentative agreement to UTFA Council for ratification. If it is ratified, we will circulate the full terms of the agreement to the UTFA membership.

Negotiating the broader Memorandum of Understanding that expired June 30, 2020

Once we conclude the COVID LOU, the UTFA team will be returning to the bargaining table to continue negotiating the broader Memorandum of Understanding that expired on June 30, 2020. As reported by the Vice-President, Salary, Benefits, Pensions, and Workload in our last AGM Newsletter, UTFA tabled a full suite of proposals to the Administration in May 2020 based on membership-identified priorities, including:

- Fair compensation, including the payment of PTR going forward & ATB for 2020-2021;
- Fair and equitable workloads;
- Mental health benefits improvements;
- Streamlined accommodation procedures;
- Health and safety protections; and,
- Protecting retirees' access to the benefits plan available to active members.

While we are constrained somewhat by Bill 124 (which sets a 1% limit on salary and benefits increases for workers in the broader public sector) there are a number of domains in which UTFA is able to bargain to advance the interests of faculty and librarians, especially as relate to improved policies, including the Workload Policies and Procedures, and other working conditions.

UofT is in a very healthy financial position in large measure due to the extraordinary work of faculty, librarians, and staff

The University of Toronto is in a very healthy financial position. UofT's net revenues are up 65% for the year ending April 30, 2021. In fact, the University has been running a consistent budgetary surplus for the past several years and has a significant carry-forward of hundreds of millions of dollars. Notably, this healthy financial situation is the result of a continued growth in student enrolment. According to UofT's Financial Report, the University increased enrolment 8.3% from 2017 to 2021 due to population growth in Ontario, increased higher education participation rates, and our growing reputation around the globe as a destination of choice for international students.

Since a university's standing and reputation is overwhelmingly determined by the people who teach courses, conduct research/scholarship, and engage in professional practice, the fact that the University's appeal to students, both domestic and international, continued to grow during the pandemic is a remarkable tribute to the extraordinary efforts of faculty, librarians, and staff.

In that light, the University reports significant growth in student enrolment and tuition revenues over the same period in which UTFA members have reported extraordinary workload increases and high stress and burnout.

In short, the University of Toronto's healthy financial picture is due in significant measure to the very heavy workload demands placed on, and high productivity of, faculty and librarians. The UofT Administration can well afford to negotiate fairer and more equitable workloads and benefits improvements in light of our members' extraordinary contributions to the core academic mission of the University.

For our more detailed analysis of UofT Finances and UTFA Bargaining, see here.

We hope to update you again with good news on the COVID LOU in the next week or so.

Sincerely,

Terezia Zorić, UTFA President

Jun Nogami, UTFA Vice-President, Salaries, Benefits, Pensions, and Workload

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