

University of Northern British Columbia Faculty Association

Bargaining Bulletin 2019 #07

Message from the Chief Negotiator:

Dear Colleagues,

Your bargaining team needs to report to you that contract negotiations continue to progress poorly. You will recall that, at the extraordinary meeting on 27 June, faced with an unacceptable settlement offer from the Employer, the members of the FA unanimously passed a motion that said, in part, 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.” Unfortunately, during the summer, the Employer did not provide the FA with the information it had been requesting since 20 June. We have especially been asking the Employer to provide us with realistic costing of our salary proposal, and of the projected salary savings to be realized from the Early Retirement/Voluntary Exit Packages (ERO/VEP). We believe that, should the Employer do so, the information will confirm our belief that our salary proposal is realistic and reasonable.

At the beginning of the current negotiations, the parties appeared to be on the same page as far as our compensation was concerned. The Employer acknowledged that our salaries were extraordinarily low, and that those low salaries were not just a problem for us, they represented an “enterprise risk” for the university. So, when the Employer and the FA struck a Joint Compensation Working Group (JCWG) in 2016, the JCWG had a shared understanding that faculty salaries were a problem for faculty and for the Employer.¹ In October 2018, after 18 months of work, the JCWG finalized a memorandum to the Chief Negotiators of both parties that stated a clear recommendation for salaries of UNBC FA members – that they should match the salaries at the 50th percentile of our comparators (University of Victoria). So, when we entered negotiations this past spring, we were optimistic that we could settle the issue of salaries quickly.

You can imagine our dismay when, in June, the Employer tabled a salary proposal that does not meet the 50th percentile of our comparators, and, if accepted, would allow the Employer to use money earmarked by the government for our salary increases, for other purposes. On 20 June, the UNBC FA bargaining team tabled its salary proposal that meets the recommendations of the JCWG. Our very careful costing of our proposal shows that, thanks to the ERO/VEP salary savings and savings found within the Collective Agreement, **the money that**

¹ The JCWG consisted of Barb Daigle and Erik Jensen, who are now the co-chairs of the Employer’s bargaining team, and Jacqueline Holler, Matt Reid, and Ted Binnema, all of whom are now on the FA bargaining team.



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the provincial government has already committed to pay for faculty salary increases at UNBC through its PSEC mandate is enough to pay for our proposal. Furthermore, our proposal fits within the budget that the Employer has already set for faculty salaries.

Beginning on 20 June, and repeatedly thereafter, we have asked for the Employer to provide us with an accurate costing of our proposal, and although we gave them a deadline of 31 August, they have not done so. On 6 September they did provide an updated costing of the projected salary savings to be realized through the ERO/VEP, but it still very significantly underestimates the amount of money that that the Employer will save through the departure of 24 of our members. Our request for clarification has not been answered.

During August and early September, the bargaining team developed a settlement offer intended to settle all outstanding issues. This was in reply to the Employer's settlement offer submitted to us on 21 June. On 6 September, we submitted this offer to the Employer, seeking a response by no later than the end of the day on 11 September. Unfortunately, the Employer has apparently rejected this settlement offer.

At this time, the Employer has shown no sign that it will provide us with an accurate costing of our proposal, no signal that it will improve its salary proposal, and no indication that it will withdraw the concessionary proposals that it tabled in its June settlement offer. Under the circumstances, the bargaining team has come to the conclusion that there is little prospect for significant progress to be made at the table unless the Employer acknowledges the merits of our proposals.

Members of the bargaining team continue to be buoyed by your words of encouragement and support. It is truly humbling to have witnessed the resolve of that the membership of the UNBC FA has shown, for about seven years now, to achieve fair compensation for all of our members.

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*).

