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## Crunch time for University of Victoria union drive targeting faculty, librarians

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Students take part in orientation activities in September at the University of Victoria. Photograph by: ADRIAN LAM, Times Colonist

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The University of Victoria Faculty Association begins a final push this week to get professors and librarians to sign union cards.

A team of volunteers will fan out across campus Wednesday to rally support and recruit new members, association vice-president Jason Price said.

Organizers have until Jan. 5 to sign up at least 45 per cent of the 850 faculty and librarians on campus before asking the B.C. Labour Relations Board to hold a certification vote.

But Price, who is leading the union drive, expects to announce the results of the mass sign-up at a general meeting Dec. 12 — well in advance of the deadline.

“We are very confident that we will have very robust numbers and it will show an overwhelming support for holding a vote on the questions of certification across campus,” he said.

Price said the drive has “exceeded our expectations” in part because professors are frustrated that their salaries trail colleagues at comparable schools across the country.

Faculty also want a formal process to deal with non-monetary issues like tenure, discipline and promotions, he said.

The drive gained momentum following a recent arbitrator’s decision that left faculty salaries at the back of the pack, Price said.

“The reaction on campus is one of disappointment,” he said.

Faculty received a two per cent increase in each year of a two-year deal retroactive to July 1, 2012. They also got two one-time-only lump sum payments of \$1,000.

The UVic administration said the arbitrator’s award was higher than the university was authorized by government to offer.

But administration spokesman Bruce Kilpatrick said the university took earlier steps to trim its budget and set aside contingency money to prepare for the increase.

“We knew there would be a significant impact, so that’s already been taken care of,” he said.

The total impact of the increase on the university is about \$6.1 million over two years, and an ongoing increase of \$4.2 million annually.

Kilpatrick said the university acknowledges faculty salaries lag behind those at comparable universities.

“We’re continuing to try to improve the relative salary situation for the faculty and librarians over time, but in order to do that we have to get more flexibility from government” he said.

“If we’re able to achieve it, we then still need to find a way to increase our revenue or we’d have to start reallocating resources.”

Kilpatrick said UVic’s administration has taken no position on the union drive, other than to ensure that faculty and librarians have accurate information on which to base their decision.

To that end, the university has set up a web page to answer questions on the issue.

The page states that the faculty’s lower-than-average salaries are “not a reflection of the university administration’s attitude towards faculty and librarians.”

Rather, it says “the salary gap is the result of a historical pattern, driven by nearly 20 years of public sector wage control in B.C.”

The site also notes that there have been five faculty strikes at Canadian universities since 2008, including a 31-day strike at Vancouver Island University in 2011.

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