

Opening statement – Faculty Association June 17, 2014

Before discussing what we're hoping to achieve in this round of bargaining, I want to take a few minutes to reflect on how we got here. By this I mean not just our history as partners in collective negotiation toward successive versions of the Framework Agreement, though I do mean that; nor just our history of collegial governance at the University of Victoria, though I mean that, too. Beyond these foundational elements, I want to reflect as well on the recent certification vote, and what the Faculty Association understands that vote to represent.

The Framework Agreement, for all its weaknesses, represents two decades' worth of cumulative effort to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment for librarians and faculty at UVic. This means that it deserves our respect, representing as it does the collaborative history of our two sides' interaction. Fundamentally, we regard the Framework Agreement as the basis for the first collective agreement we have embarked on negotiating together.

The university's current Strategic Plan (entitled A Vision of the Future: Building on Excellence) declares in its mission a commitment to "collegial forms of governance that provide appropriate opportunities for all members of the university community to participate" (p.6). The university has made much, in past years, of the phrase "collegial governance," and the Association has not objected to its use. Indeed, the Association believes strongly in this concept, as does this Negotiating Team. It may be that our two teams have different notions of what this concept looks like in operation, but the FA Negotiating Team will be pursuing its objectives in line with its understanding of this concept.

While we agree that the actions of individual librarians and faculty are crucial to the process of collegial governance, we take the view that the collective body empowered to represent individual librarians and faculty should itself have an official role within university governance. To some extent, therefore, our bargaining objectives will include the confirmation, clarification, and extension of the rights articulated under Article 7 of the Framework Agreement.

Which brings me to the recent certification campaign, and the vote in favour of certification.

If the Association's members had been comfortable with their overall place at the university, the campaign would not have been successful, and indeed there may not have been the momentum toward a campaign in the first place. Two issues came up in every conversation any of us had about certification: the salary gap between UVic and other schools, especially in relation to the cost of housing in Victoria, and in relation to this university's consistent success in national and international rankings schemes; and a perceived reduction of collegiality in decision-making at UVic, over the last several years, that included an erosion of standards of fairness and transparency that are so paramount in collegial environments. A vote for certification was not a vote against this university, and not entirely a vote against its administration. Instead, it was a vote in favour of pushing this university to live up to its own standards and its own history. As more than one colleague told us, the Petch procedures have enormous symbolic value here, because they mean that faculty and librarians have meaningful roles to play in the university's governance structures. At UVic, voting for a union represents something akin to a demand for expanded, invigorated Petch procedures.

Certification was therefore not a rejection of the principles of the Framework Agreement, or of the notion of collegiality that has been such an important piece in the University of Victoria's narrative about its own identity. Instead, it should be seen as a reaffirmation of these principles, and a declaration of concern that these principles were at risk.

With that being said, however, a certification vote doesn't pass when the voting employees are happy with the situation in which they find themselves. We would encourage the administration's negotiating team to keep this in mind, and particularly to think about issues of collegiality and collaboration.

We turn now to the principles that will govern our bargaining.

First, for all the reasons outlined above, the Association negotiators take the Framework Agreement to be the necessary base document for negotiations. One effect of certification is that the Framework Agreement must be replaced by a first collective agreement, but as we have explained, it would be inappropriate to read certification as an attack on the previous contract. In consequence, we regard the Framework Agreement as logically the foundation on top of which, and from which, we will build the first collective agreement.

To be clear: we will not be submitting or suggesting a fundamentally new table of contents or organizational structure. While we accept that many potential benefits might flow from reconfiguring the past contract, we think that this process should occur organically. In the end, we are not looking to reconfigure the relation between the Faculty Association and the university, but to confirm it and above all to strengthen it.

Second, as suggested above, a crucial principle behind our work toward a first collective agreement is what we take the phrase "collegial governance" to mean. In general, collegial governance at UVic has come to emphasize the notion of involving individual librarians and faculty members within decision-making processes. We believe that this should continue. However, we also interpret the certification vote, and the many discussions surrounding it, as a signal that individual Association members see a need for the Association's role in university governance to be strengthened.

Following past practice, and having regard for the sensitivity and special complexity of negotiating a first collective agreement, it would be our intention to sign a two-year settlement, rather than a longer contract.

We turn now to areas of special interest, working from the assumption that the Framework Agreement properly represents the starting point for negotiations.

1. Collegial rights of Association members

Association members must have the right to participate in the formulation and recommendation of academic policies and procedures within the University. Although there is persistent cynicism across campus about the terms "collegiality" and "collegial governance," we think that there is no disagreement between the teams about the importance of this notion, which is fundamental to the very concept of a university. These rights relate not just to research and teaching, but also to matters of governance.

2. Association rights

Under Article 7 of the Framework Agreement, the university was required to obtain the Association's agreement before making changes to policy or procedure that affected the terms and conditions of Members' employment. As we have said already, Members should have the right to participate in the formulation and recommendation of academic policies and procedures within the University. It is our view that the Association itself should have the same right, since it operates collectively on behalf of individuals who have it.

As well, the Association has significant obligations to serve and represent its Members, obligations which have expanded following certification. It is therefore crucial that the first collective agreement recognize these duties and provide mechanisms for fulfilling them.

3. Conditions of work

While the Association considers that the terms and conditions of employment at UVic are generally good, several issues need to be discussed closely. In particular, the Association wants to emphasize one particular principle, and one area of special interest.

First, the Association takes the view that Members' employment needs to be assigned and rewarded on the basis of workload equity within units, and comparability of workload across units. Different areas and units must be free to pursue the approaches that are typical and traditional within those disciplines, rather than pushed toward a centralized, average, or median approach. Inside units, though, it is important that workload (and the accompanying recognition for the same) be distributed on principles of equity and fairness.

Second, the Association has several concerns about the evaluation of Members' performance. This includes what we understand as the generally uncritical, unscientific use of CES scores as a proxy for evaluating instructional achievement; the merit process generally; and the time commitment involved in documenting one's own work.

4. Salary and benefits: comparators

Finally, the Association and its Members are aware that among the list of comparator universities relied upon by the administration during the 2012 bargaining round, UVic has the lowest median and mean salaries. (Since the 2012 round, settlements at Manitoba and New Brunswick mean that their salaries are now higher than ours.) While statistical information on this is difficult to obtain at present, due to changes at Statistics Canada, those changes are recent enough that the last available data can still be relied upon at this point, and efforts are being undertaken in several quarters to resume collecting this information. This salary gap is of long standing, but deserves no respect for its age: it is a serious issue for Members and for prospective Members.

The Association recognizes the complexity of public-sector union bargaining in British Columbia, including the influence of the provincial government. We insist, though, that the administration needs to work creatively if it wants to overcome the deep frustration associated with this salary gap.

In conclusion:

- **the Association is seeking a two-year settlement;**
- **we regard the Framework Agreement as the only logical basis on which to construct a first collective agreement;**
- **the Association and its Members place a premium on issues of collegiality, fairness, equity within and between units, and transparency between senior administration and academic units;**
- **the Association and its Members are keenly aware of this university's low average salary compared to that of every single comparator institution; and**
- **the Association's recent certification should be interpreted as a declaration in favour of this university's identity and history, specifically in favour of a definition of collegial governance that emphasizes the individual rights of Members as well as Members' rights as a collective.**

We look forward to working together in the coming months to develop a first collective agreement that lives up to these principles.

Sincerely,
Richard Pickard, Chief Negotiator

For:

- Douglas Baer
- Carol Gordon
- Helga Hallgrimsdottir, and
- the members of the UVic Faculty Association