



University of Victoria
Faculty Association

The F.A. Relay



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A Farewell to Jamie Cassels



We're pleased in this issue of the Relay to feature an interview that I conducted with our outgoing president, Jamie Cassels. As a historian, I appreciated the opportunity to talk with Jamie about some of his past experiences at UVic. Specifically, I appreciated learning about how he sees changes both in the university and in the relationship between the administration and faculty members over his 40 years at UVic.

I've known Jamie since the mid-1990s, when I was a very junior member on the FA Executive Committee, and he was Vice President of the FA. When we were in those roles, and more recently, we often had very different positions on a range of issues, and I can recall a few heated exchanges.

But at the same time, I always felt able to disagree with him and to work towards solutions. I appreciate his fundamental decency, deep integrity, and commitment to UVic's principles of collegial governance. In his 17 years of senior leadership, first as Provost, and then President, he has always worked extremely hard to support UVic faculty and the broader mission of the university. He has also worked hard to provide UVic faculty with a sense of stability while at the same time moving the university forward on many important fronts.

I hope you will find some items of both current and historical interest in this interview, which ranges from Jamie's perceptions of the changing relationship between faculty and

academic leaders, to his thoughts on communication between faculty members and the administration, and to the need to improve the status of teaching stream faculty. He also discusses what might be distinctive about UVic and what we both agree to be the undervaluing of leadership in academic culture. The FA fully recognizes that Chairs are over-worked and inadequately compensated for all of their important work, and at the same time, I also think that the positive elements of academic leadership need to be more recognized and valued within our culture.

In this interview, Jamie and I also discuss our different perceptions of the Petch Procedures, which are the ratification procedures unique to UVic's system of collegial governance in which faculty have to ratify their academic leaders (from Chairs to Vice Presidents) with a majority of at least 60%. Jamie argues that there are both positives and negatives with the Petch Procedures. He is particularly concerned about the relatively low voter turnout for ratification votes on more senior positions. As I note in our exchange, the Association views the Petch Procedures as an absolutely crucial part of collegial governance at UVic. At the same time, it is important that we educate a new generation of

faculty members on their rights and their responsibilities under the Petch Procedures. I encourage you all to inform yourselves about the issues involved when you are asked to vote on the ratification of specific academic leaders, and to take the time to exercise the important right that you have to vote on who will lead your unit, your faculty and your university

To conclude, on behalf of the Faculty Association, I would like to thank Jamie for his many years of valuable service to UVic, and to the university's faculty members. We wish you well in all of your future endeavours.

All the best,
Lynne Marks
President, UVic Faculty Association

Upcoming Events

Tenure & Promotion Workshop

Tuesday, October 20th. 5:30-7:30

Via Zoom

Chairs and Directors Forum

Tuesday, October 28. 2:30-4:30

Or

Wednesday, October 29th. 2:30-

4:30

Via Zoom

**Edited version of interview with Jamie
Cassels, President
of UVic, by Lynne Marks, President of the
UVic Faculty Association,
September 16, 2020**



LM: Can you start by giving us a short overview of your leadership roles at UVic?

JC: That started for me in the mid nineties. I was associate Dean of the law school, then Dean of the law school, then vice-president academic for 10 years, and finally president. So that's 24 years of leadership. I was always interested in getting engaged. I was chair of the university equity committee and, as you mentioned, I was on the executive of the faculty association. I've always enjoyed those roles as well.

Role in Faculty Association

LM: Can you say anything more about your experience when you were VP of the Faculty Association?

JC: It was great. I thought it was really important because I really believe in collegial involvement. I think one of the best things about it was that it was a way of learning about other disciplines and other points of view across the university. And I'm sure you've found that as well. We are a diverse place, not only in terms of academic discipline, but intellectual orientation. I found that that role was the first time I really began to understand that every new role that I've taken on is a new keyhole through which you can see how the university works. And none of those key holes are accurate. They're just different points of view. So you collect enough of them and then you've got a pretty good sense of how the place works.

LM: I was on the Executive Committee of the FA when you were VP, at least for one year, in the mid nineties when I was pretty junior. My recollection was at that time the Faculty Association was a fairly male-dominated, even sexist organization. I don't know if you have any recollection of that.

JC: Yes, well I think it was certainly male dominated probably, as was the entire university.

We were negotiating the Framework Agreement at the time and... it was a relatively informal organization at that point and like a lot of informal organizations, I thought it was male dominated. And I can only imagine or try to be empathic that that's experienced as sexist and sometimes misogynist by people who aren't members of the club.

LM: I do remember you as an ally in that context. It was certainly, I think it was my first university wide committee and [the sexism] was a bit of a shock because my department, while not perfect, was fairly welcoming.

LM: Do you have any thoughts on the evolution of the FA since the 90s?

JC: I think by and large it's been a very positive trajectory of evolution; that it's become much more organized, more formalized [and] more influential because of that. And also more effective right up to the point of becoming certified as a union, which gives it a whole known and transparent, understandable structure that I think works better because roles and responsibilities are more clear...the irony is that when I was vice president of the faculty association, I was also the associate Dean of the law school. ...Until it was politely suggested to me that that might not be a good thing. And, you know, I didn't see any conflict actually, but I thought if others did. So that's when I ended my time on the executive. Now you certainly couldn't [be Associate Dean and VP of the FA].

Other Leadership Roles

LM: ...Can you say anything about what you have particularly enjoyed about your leadership roles?

JC: I think it was David Johnson I once heard say something like this, but for me it's the cause and the company. Noble cause. Great people. When you think about why, why do you like coming to work in the morning? It's because it's rewarding work and you look forward to seeing your colleagues and working with the teams that you're working with. So for me, that's really what has motivated me. I just really appreciate the opportunity to work at a place that's doing what I think is, some of the right things. You know, we're research intensive, student centered. So we've got, I think we've got a balance that many universities can't boast about, that sense of collegiality and collaboration, some public impacts in areas that are geared to all of us-- environment, oceans, climate, reconciliation, you know, anti colonialism just those resonate with me personally...

JC: And so I'm grateful that I've had the opportunity to be part of that and to support it. But the day to day stuff really is that we're in the best business in the world. And we work with amazing people.

LM: Yeah, no, I wouldn't disagree. So is there anything in your years in leadership, maybe particularly as VP and president, that you would be particularly proud of?

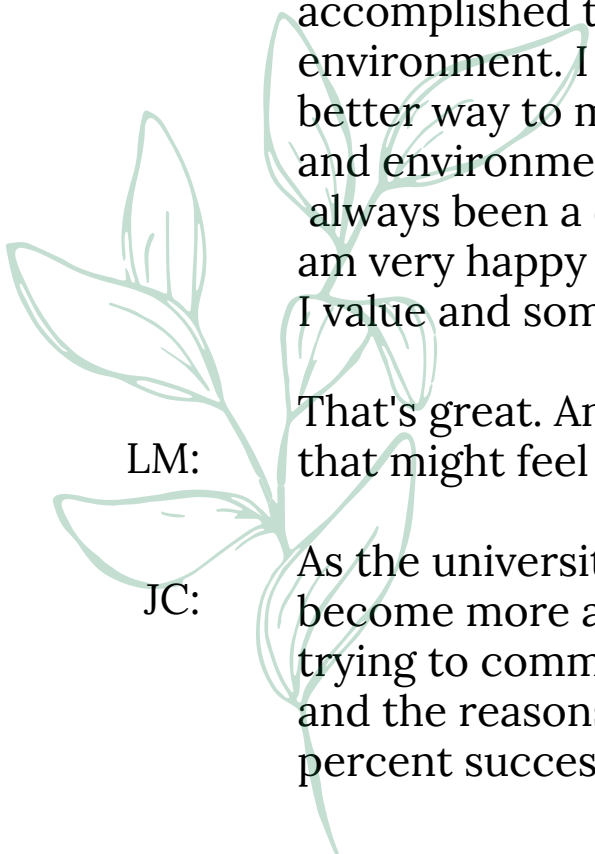
JC: It's really the things that I just said. I don't experience personal pride around stuff. I experience gratification but I know what I'm about to say is just such the standard line, but it's just so true that nothing that you accomplish, can you attribute to yourself.

LM: But leaders, leadership makes a difference.

JC: Leadership makes a difference. Yes. I've had the opportunity, to support, encourage..., a continuation of that culture that you and I both really appreciate, that sense of collegiality and collaboration...[I] pushed this sense of trying to integrate our mission of research, education and community impact so that they're not competing against each other, but so that they're mutually enriching. And I think to some extent we've accomplished that. Personally, I have a passion about the natural environment. I spend all my free time in the wild. And so what better way to make a contribution than to promote sustainability and environmental stewardship in our climate research. I've always been a champion around Indigenous reconciliation. So I am very happy that there's been some synergy between the things I value and some things that the university is known for.

LM: That's great. And anything, in terms of your years in leadership that might feel less positive to you or more challenging?

JC: As the university got bigger and bigger, communication has become more and more of a challenge. I've been passionate about trying to communicate so that people understand our directions and the reasons for our decisions, but you're never a hundred percent successful.



JC: In fact, you're rarely more than 50% successful at communicating to create shared understanding. So I have sometimes been frustrated by that challenge of communication, which then results in misunderstanding, and a lack of cohesion amongst the people who are affected.

Perceptions of Change Over Time at UVic

LM: You just talked about this a bit, but you've been at UVic for a long time, longer than me. I've been here 28 years. So I just wondered if you wanted to talk a bit about how you see change over time at UVic.

JC: The first is that the campus, the physical campus has grown enormously.

LM: Yes. When did you start [at UVic]?

JC: 1981.

LM: A lot of things weren't here then.

JC: The Business school was a skylark field.... The physical campus is more than twice what it was before. For me that is unequivocally a good thing. I think the quality of our infrastructure is so much better because we've grown in people as well, faculty, staff, and students. I find the campus ...much livelier, which I think contributes to its intellectual vitality. The only downside is that there's trade-offs and you do lose that sense of greater intimacy, more personal connections, that we may we have had 40 years ago or even 30 or 20 [years ago]. Research intensity is the other obvious area of growth. I think we were on a gradual trajectory of becoming more research focused and I think we did a pretty good job...of ensuring that that research culture continued to enrich the student experience, but like other universities we went off like a rocket in the late nineties. And it wasn't just because we were chasing money, but there was a whole national ethic that universities were going to be the center of research and innovation in Canada...

JC: So when I say the late nineties, you know, there was a two or three year period when the Canada Research Chairs program was launched, the Canada Foundation for Innovation, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, a doubling of the funding to the Tri Councils all in two or three years. And like every other organization we responded. And that [major growth] changed the culture. It's changed the orientation, as faculty members it has changed the business of the university in terms of the kind of services and infrastructure that's required. But so long as we do continue to try to remember that education and knowledge dissemination are part of our mission as well as discovery and creative activity, I think it's been... a good thing.

Teaching Stream Faculty

LM: I remember when I came into the [History] department in 1992, there was definitely a tension between those who wanted to focus more on research and people who thought that teaching was what mattered... And it's interesting that now we have the teaching stream as well. One concern we have in the FA is that we don't want a two tier system between teaching stream and research stream faculty. We want both to be valued and respected equally.

JC: Yes, I agree with that. You know, I was part of creating that teaching stream and it was partly to support research because, of course, research faculty were reducing their teaching. We were, seeing a loss in teaching capacity. We were seeing an increase in the use of sessionals and I at least wanted to try to make sure that we didn't simply create that fragile and more precarious labor force to an extent much larger than we should. So we created a better position [of teaching stream faculty].

LM: I totally agreed that it's better. In the FA we are just trying to ensure that the culture values the work of teaching stream faculty equally to that of research stream faculty.

JC: That's great. And I think we have a common interest in that the challenge is that, you know, there still is at least a narrative out there that the gold standard is being the research prof with a ton of course relief. But we have to think of...ways of making sure that [teaching stream faculty] are honored and treated as equal partners in the faculty.

Graduate Programs and Research

JC: The other part of the rise of research intensity has been, we've grown generally, but we've really exploded in terms of graduate programs. So, over the course of about five years, we put Masters and PhD programs in almost every department as part of that that research growth. So that's been a big, big change.

LM: Well, I was hired when History got a PhD program...That was an early piece.

JC: That was an early one...And it was interesting, you know, that tension, you talk about came up there as well, because a lot of places resisted. Yeah. I did, early in my life at the law school. I thought a graduate program is going to take quality away from the undergraduate program. But gradually I think I learned that no, that's not the case.

LM: Yeah. But anyway, graduate education, I think in Humanities in particular is challenged right now, but we don't have to go off on that....

JC: Okay. The final note I made to myself about change, and this is external to the university, but affects the university is just a huge growth in access...which creates accessibility for a much more diverse cohort of students and accompanying that, I don't know if there's any cause and effect here, but just an incredible increase in public interest and public scrutiny of universities. 20 years ago, you'd struggle to find an article in any newspaper about a university. And today it would be rare to go a day without seeing a fair bit of media.

LM: You think, because so many people have, or have had kids in university it's just much more central.

JC: Oh, I think so. And I think it's related to the research as well, that you know, as we've positioned ourselves as the engines of knowledge creation and dissemination in the country, people are saying, okay, prove it. And so they watch, and there's much higher expectations.

Collegial Governance

LM: Okay. and in terms of collegial governance, do you see any change in that regard at UVic, or more continuity?

JC: I guess it's not for me to say if we're going forward... Looking back I think related to what I said about, "the good old days", which I wouldn't characterize always as the good old days, but there was less of an industrial relations relationship, with faculty through the union, it was what you might call a more collegial relationship. So it's become more formalized. But that said, I think that faculty both through the Faculty Association, but also just through all of the other organs of university governance, you know, departmental governance, Faculty governance, Senate governance, and Board governance that it's pretty healthy. I wish it was more widespread...I wish that everyone wanted to pursue some opportunities to be on a Senate committee or be on the Board of Governors or to participate perhaps more robustly. And some of...what I hear [are] sometimes under attended Faculty meetings. And so it's up to us, I think, to make sure that there is stuff of sufficient engagement there that people want to be engaged in governance.

LM: Yes. I mean, I guess this comes to the Petch procedures, but coming at it sideways, I'm hearing from other FA Presidents that they have a really hard time getting faculty involved either in FA governance or in other university governance...

LM: And I know Faculty Council meetings are sometimes not well-attended, but it does seem as though UVic has less of a problem in getting faculty involved in university governance than some universities. So I... wonder if you have thoughts on that.

JC: I couldn't say comparatively. I know that we do, you know, the University Secretary's office and I sometimes have to do a bit of a beating of the bushes to make sure that we're able to populate those important committees...but we always do. But I don't know comparatively if we have to work harder at it or not as hard as at other places. And I think that people find, say [with] a search committee, a faculty member might've been reluctantly, acclaimed by their Faculty to be on it. And they come...in going, "Oh, well, you know...this is my service for the year," but at the end of the process, they say, "Holy smoke, did I ever learn a lot. And I want to do that again."

Changes in Communication Styles

LM: I know you said, and I've seen it, we've gotten much bigger, so there's less of a relationship between faculty and administration and communication is difficult. I just wondered if you had any more thoughts on that, whether it's just inevitable as something grows and all universities become more bureaucratized.

JC: Yeah. I think to some extent it is inevitable and, you know... bureaucratized in sometimes used in a pejorative way, but, you know, it's a sociological concept that I think Max Weber really popularized. Large complex organizations tend to require more formal mechanisms and organization. And that can be a source of regret for people who have that more personal sense of things. The communication challenges associated with that - I think you can still communicate well...[but] not simply by extending the older ways of communicating. You know, 40 years ago, the pathways were well-trod between the different buildings and you'd just find the right path and you go and you knock on the door and you just can't do that any longer. It was a beautiful way to communicate, but that sort of individualized personal touch just does not work as easily any longer.

LM: What do you think - this wasn't the question, but it's a pet peeve of mine. I'm not criticizing any particular person, but the university now has a very professionalized communications structure. And sometimes that feels to me as though the way they do it gets between faculty and the leaders. Because there's now a certain way, a professional way of communicating.

JC: Yeah. I understand that, like all the attributes, there's probably virtues and vices associated with anything. I mean, I know why it's had to become more professionalized and it's because of what I said: that if it's just all over the map, it's not going to be terribly effective. But yeah...the more professionalized it becomes, the more it feels bureaucratic to use that pejorative sense of bureaucratic. And I think that's the inevitable trade-off. But you can get better. It's inevitably going to feel a little bit more formal and remote to people, but we can always try to make it better.

LM: ...[yes, sometimes the broadcast emails from the administration]... feel a bit professionalized.

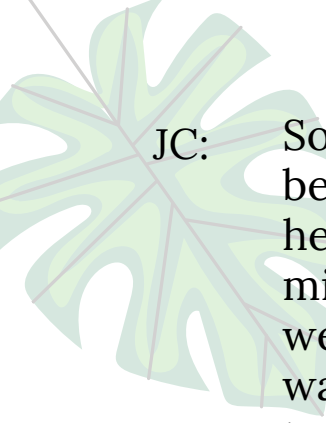
JC: No I get that. I sometimes take out some of the polish because I want it to sound at least semi authentic. So I get exactly what you're saying.

The Petch Procedures

LM: So, [changing the subject here] I know you knew and respected Howard Petch. Were you here when he was President?

JC: I was.

LM: So obviously one of the things that makes UVic unique in Canada is the Petch procedures. So do you recall why they were brought in... I've heard a couple of versions...



JC: So I don't recall because they were brought in, oh five or six years before I got here...but I've read a fair number of histories. And here's my potted version... is that Howard was appointed in the mid-seventies...And that one of the first things that he brought in were those confidence votes and the historical analysis was that it was a fence-mending. UVic had just gone through some very, very turbulent times...the relationship between faculty and the administration was bad. And that that was one of the things that Howard did to try to mend that relationship.

LM: And you've lived with [the Petch Procedures], you've governed with them. So can you say anything about what impact this unique part of our governance structure has had?

JC: I thought about this last night, Lynne, and I'm going to give you an ambivalent...I'm ambivalent about them. You know, as I said, everything's got...an upside and a downside. I think it has contributed to an ethic of engagement and ownership of faculty--it's maintained their interest in appointments. And from the side of someone who's been through it many times, if you get through it and you get through it successfully, it gives you a mandate to die for. You know, as a confidence vote [it] is a great way to start in.

LM: Yes, I did it twice as Chair. Right.

JC: So those, I think are all upsides. Here's the downsides. And it might well be that someday that we need to give them a rethink. First of all, I know directly from very talented people who won't apply...for positions here because they don't want it to go through that. So I think it does limit, I couldn't say how much, I don't have a quantitative analysis of that, but it does cause some people to self-select out of some of our jobs...

JC: I have [also] been frustrated many times by low levels of participation [in ratification votes] at more senior levels, I think very high levels [of participation] at the department [level], pretty good at the Faculty level and then diminishing levels of participation as you go up and there might be an explanation for that, that some people just don't know [the people up for ratification]. And the Petch Procedures made beautiful sense in a time when this place was small and intimate, right? 1975, I don't know, 300 faculty, 5,000 students. Everyone knew each other...those pathways that I was talking about. So every faculty member actually would know what a President did and how they were doing... And I worry that as we've become larger that ability to be an informed participant is hampered because of that. And that causes some people probably not to vote. And then, I don't know if this is, you'd have to ask election experts, but I think what that does is that it amplifies the negative, that people who are happy will either vote yes. Or say, I'm fine. I'm not even going to bother voting. Whereas the negative tends to come out in greater and greater volume.

LM: Well...[as] you know, the FA totally supports the Petch procedures, but maybe we could do a better job of helping to encourage people to get out and vote and educate themselves about it because it's an important right. But then it's also a responsibility... And yeah, there have been a couple of votes over the years that I haven't totally agreed with, but I think [it is a much better system] than what I see as the way it works at other universities where [faculty members]...have much less input in these decisions [of who governs them].

JC: I think we've created more, more robust input than we used to have through our processes. And that's another thing about the procedures, the Petch procedures, the negative side, it to some extent undermines collegial governance, because, so we have, you know, 15 faculty members on a committee that's appointing a Dean...and the committee spends a hundred hours informing itself, educating itself, interviewing, receiving all of this kind of information....

JC: And then their recommendation gets vetoed [in a ratification vote]. There's that at least if not undermining, there's at least a bit of a contradiction there that I wonder about because I've seen committees slightly demoralized.

LM: For the FA...it still is a valuable system to defend [in giving faculty members a voice in who governs them], but yeah, I hear your point.

JC: No, and I get it and especially from a union point of view you know, it's also a point of power, point of potential leverage. So I totally get why,

LM: ...I would see [the Petch Procedures] more as something that the FA leadership values as [an integral part of UVic's tradition of collegial governance], that we value very much... Because the union, I don't know, in terms of power has other...

JC: Has other means. Yeah...Oh, I get that. But like I say...I'm ambivalent at this point.

Advice About Considering Leadership Roles

LM: I have a couple more questions, but one I'm really interested in here is if you were giving advice to younger faculty members who are considering going into university leadership, what might you tell them?

JC: So I might say, maybe slightly facetiously, something you reminded me, I said to you one time, go for it. You might enjoy it.

LM: I remember that.

JC: And that would generally be my first response, because I mean, I never pursued leadership consciously, but opportunities presented. And I don't know, I just kind of enjoy stepping through doors and trying it out. And you can always change your mind. Less facetiously you know, particularly for young faculty members, they're making important career choices and, you know, I've made career choices, there's trade-offs to everything, everything that we do. So you want to be conscious of the trade-offs. You want to do a good inventory of what motivates you where you are, what your skills are, where you get that desire to get up in the morning and go to work. Will you get the kind of positive energy that you want out of that, but all that said, I'd say, go for it.

Leadership is great. You know, back to what I said, we're in the best business in the world. So to have an opportunity to have an influence, you know, in any domain... chairing a university committee, it's amazing the difference that that you can make-- getting involved in the union, getting involved in departmental governance, Chairs, Deans, it's incredible, the difference you can make.

LM: Yes. I mean, I think one problem, and this is not just at UVic but as academics, there's a kind of looking down on going into administration in any form, which I have certainly seen. I've certainly not done anything like what you've done, but I've stumbled into the different leadership things I've done. And I found that I liked it. And you were one of the only people who said you might enjoy being Chair. It was a new idea. I just thought, okay, I have to do this because it's my turn.

JC: It's my turn. Yeah. I've heard that so many times,

LM: I don't think that younger faculty get the message [that academic leadership can be a positive experience] and they get a pretty strong opposite message. Possibly that's not a bad thing. So people who want to go into leadership have really had to think it through and know that they want to do it. But I do think that having a clearer message for junior faculty [that this could be a positive option] would be helpful.

JC: I think you're right about that. That overwhelmingly, it's almost back to how do we value teaching [stream] professors, there's an intellectual elitism out at work and that the gold standard is being at the pinnacle of your research career and, you know, I could never deny that that's not a trade-off. Although, another piece of advice I'd give [anyone considering going into academic leadership] is get an awesome co-author. Elizabeth Adjin-Tettey and I, we're working on a new edition of a book that I never could have carried by myself. So, you know, you can still have partnerships and, and get engaged, [while doing academic leadership].

You need to be aware of the trade-offs and, and what you're saying is a really good idea, I think because I don't think we put out the counter story very often about no, you know, it can be, it can be pretty rewarding. You learn a lot, you stretch yourself professionally, intellectually -- you make a difference...

Perception of What Makes UVic Different

LM: Okay. So we've talked a fair bit about what may make UVic different, but I just wonder, because you work with other university presidents a lot, if you have any more sense of that, or maybe we're not that different...

JC: I can tell you what people say. What they say is that we are known for our collegiality, for our collegial culture. And people who come here say that as well. You know, when people come from other universities they frequently comment to me about, Oh man, this place is great. It's a good working environment. I enjoy my colleagues and there's a sense of common purpose...We are known to be community engaged. And I'm not sure where that message comes from, but I frequently hear it said about us that faculty, our staff as well, really engage in the community... that the research is aimed at having some kind of a community impact or at least... it's important to disseminate in the community.

JC: We're known as a leader in relation to Indigenous education and research contributing to reconciliation....I think it's partly because of place...and I think there's a huge impact of place on who we are. I don't think it's surprising that environmental stewardship is really important to everybody here and that it's therefore become an important part of our research and our education. And I don't think it's any surprise that we've had a strong focus on Indigenous issues because of a place and history of place that those issues here are much more prominent and visible to us because of the history of this province.

LM: Yes, I have heard some of this from colleagues at other universities. And I do think we have a strong collegial culture. [to some extent] this may just be me, because I'm finding this less true now [for younger faculty], but I've never been afraid at UVic to speak my mind, in my department or anywhere else.

JC: No, you haven't.

LM: For better or worse 😊.

JC: For better.

LM: ...But I am concerned that more people lately - faculty - are not willing to [speak their minds publicly]. So I think that's something [to be concerned about].

JC: What are the consequences that they're worried about?

LM: For junior faculty, there can be real consequences... In their department [re tenure and promotion]. And I agree with you that we generally have a more collegial culture, but [there are also climate issues in some parts of campus]...

Final Thoughts

LM: I wondered if you have any last thoughts on your time in leadership at UVic and the direction UVic has gone in the last 40 years.

JC: It's been great, you know...it's been a privilege for me... I've had five different careers at this university and every one of them has had both challenges, but huge rewards. I'm proud of the University. I think we stand out in many ways in Canada. I think it's got great momentum. I think it was Howard Petch who [said]... the secret sauce of this place is super talented people working in a collegial and collaborative environment, and that's not going away. So there's really great momentum for the next couple of decades.

LM: Okay. And do you think that you can address the challenges around issues of anti-racism?

JC: Absolutely. I think we're obliged to on two dimensions. Of course we have to ensure that we're a model organization because we're part of society and we have to follow best practices. But we also need to remember that our greatest impact is through our mission of education and research. And there, I think we've got a huge opportunity to make a contribution towards anti-racism.

Thank you, Lynne, fun conversation.

An Addition to the FA Staff

Nathan is the former President of CUPE Local 3906, the Union representing Teaching Assistants, Sessional Instructors, and Postdoctoral Fellows at McMaster University. Nathan is a PhD Candidate in Philosophy, writing on Hannah Arendt. Nathan is excited to join the FA as the new Executive Assistant, where he will be supporting the Executive primarily with the management of communications, finance, bargaining, and governance.

