

President's Report: UWFA Spring AGM; 9 April 2024

We acknowledge that we are gathered on ancestral lands, on Treaty One Territory. These lands are the heartland of the Métis people. We acknowledge that our water is sourced from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation.

Introduction

Thanks to Lisa McGifford and Marissa Dudych for their work on behalf of the Association!
Thanks to Council and Executive members.

In particular, I want to recognize the two Ians! First, Ian Burley, who is not running for re-election as member-at-large, but has served on UWFA Council since 2016. Since being on Council and especially since being elected president, I've appreciated Ian's contributions to myriad debates and discussions on Council. Second, Ian Fraser, who is not running for re-election but has been Librarian rep since 2016. Similarly, since becoming UWFA's president, I've appreciated Ian's reflections and contribution to Council debates and discussions. While it'll simplify the minutes, we'll nonetheless miss both Ians! Thank you!

And to those members who put their names forward for the vice-president, treasurer, and three member-at-large positions, thank you for doing so. Our Association is at its best when we have an engaged membership, and a vibrant democratic process reflects that. Thank you and good luck to all candidates.

Thanks to members for making the time to attend today. We had hoped to have a normal term, what with the various issues the last few years, and even last year being a tentative return from the pandemic-inflected terms. Alas, as we all know too well, we've been working under terrible conditions since March 25 when the cyber attack was revealed. Some of this has been solved thankfully with the restoration of Nexus – complete with data intact – but we know the extension of term and the exam period has brought turmoil regardless. Since March 25, I've been in almost daily contact with the Employer, and we've been especially focused on workload implications for CAS members because of the extra week of term. Lisa and I met with the President last week, and I'm confident we'll come to an agreement on extensions of contracts *with pay* and have something formalized very soon.

Since last Thursday when the extent of the data breach was made public, we've been working on issues related to it as well. UWFA was not informed of the scope and specifics of the breach prior to the Thursday email. We were informed about two hours prior that there was a breach of personal data, but without any specific detail whatsoever. We reached out to members, CAUT, and the Law Society of Manitoba for assistance. We arranged a meeting with the President last Friday, and we're meeting with the Provost tomorrow to discuss further. As I said in my email yesterday, the forensic investigation is in progress, so while we can bring up questions and concerns, some specific details are not available right now. We'll continue to push for complete transparency, the best protection for our members, and, eventually, an explanation as to how and why this happened, especially given the rollout of the Information Security Policy over the last six months or so. We're happy to hear further concerns and questions from members.

With that, I'll turn to some updates on specific issues since we last met in November.

RAS Agreement

One of the major accomplishments of the past six months was the negotiation of a new collective agreement for the RAS unit. I'll begin by thanking the members of the bargaining team: Chief Negotiator Janis Thiessen, Carlos Colorado, Stefan Dodds, and Lisa McGifford. The team worked tirelessly with dozens of meetings, some late into the evening, to secure an agreement that represented the best terms we could negotiate. Thank you very much on behalf of the Association. The technology services outage has delayed publication of the full agreement online, but I'll share some highlights here with the full membership. As in any negotiation, there is give and take, and while we made progress on almost every part of the bargaining mandate given to us by RAS members, there were concessions and areas where we didn't get as far as we'd like. Let me start there:

- The Employer was entrenched on RAS instructor teaching load. They began with a proposal that would have seen RAS Instructor load rise from 3.0 to 5.0 FCE. There was, initially, no monetary proposal. Over the course of bargaining, we held to the current load, but in the end, the team conceded a 1.0 FCE increase and an agreement that Instructors may be scheduled across three terms; but, we pushed hard to obtain a substantial and across-the-board increase to Instructor salary above and beyond the other salary increases in the agreement. We would have liked more salary and no increase in load, but this was the compromise we reached; while money is not everything, we were satisfied that the new agreement makes RAS instructors at UofW one of the highest paid teaching-intensive positions across comparable institutions and comparable positions.
- We spent a lot of time at the table and amongst the team on Librarian issues, especially compensation but workload issues as well; we even brought a Librarian member to the table directly. We were extremely disheartened to find the Employer deeply averse to the myriad sensible and positive changes we put forward for Librarians. I still scratch my head as to why they refused to consider so many options that were at little cost and would improve the working conditions for our members and Library operations more generally. In the end, Librarians obtained the same salary increases Full Professors above the floor, but we know that we will need to keep pushing the Employer in the next round on Librarian issues.

Besides these two concessions, however, we were very pleased at the substantial progress made on salaries more generally, especially but not only for those at the lower ranks, in particular Assistant Professor. Assistant Professor floors at UWinnipeg have been extremely low, but with this agreement, we see them rise to highly competitive rates that not only pay our current members more, but they also will help with recruitment and retention. On that note, substantially increased salary floors at the Associate and Full ranks will help in that respect as well. These are major and historic salary gains for this institution. General salary increases were also strong, and help mitigate some of the effects of high inflation over the last few years; we fought for and obtained strong increases in 25-26 and 26-27 that may – time will tell – be above inflation by the time they kick in. We also pushed for and obtained one year of backpay to compensate our members for the year during which the Employer was slow getting to the actual negotiating table. We pushed hard on some of the Employer's disappointing proposals on collegial governance, and we are pleased to say that we have maintained the strong faculty-centred

governance processes at the University of Winnipeg. These are not guaranteed nor to be taken for granted.

In the end, as with most agreements, this one is imperfect. However, the team and Council was convinced that it's a strong and vital agreement for our members. RAS Members endorsed it with a very strong majority and high turnout. The agreement runs until March 31, 2027, so we'll be back to bargaining preparations for RAS members in about two years.

Budget

Amid the fallout of the technology outage and data breach, we also saw a provincial budget come down. While the numbers in the budget may have initially looked good for post-secondary (6%), the UWinnipeg grant and those of other PSIs are around 2%; the remaining money is focused on health education only. As you'll appreciate, with a 2.8% inflation rate in February and two new UWFA CAs with significant salary increases, a 2% increase in the grant is a functional cut. It's highly disappointing to see this from the NDP. While we understand the challenges facing other sectors, and the constraints the new government has chosen to work under (with respect to revenue generation), post-secondary education funding is a primary lever for the economy broadly and socio-economic advancement individually. We expected multi-year and sustainable budgets from this government and have not received them; we expected international student health care to be re-implemented and it hasn't happened; we expected Bill 33 to be repealed, and we're still waiting.

On the federal side, we're awaiting the budget next week, I believe. Along with other CAUT member institutions, we have been pushing for increased funding to the tri-agencies, both directly for research and for graduate student awards. I published an op-ed about these issues as UWFA President in the *Free Press* a few weeks ago (<http://policyfix.ca/2024/02/27/basic-research-key-to-future-progress/>), and I have written on behalf of the Association to the responsible ministers; I encourage members to reach out to their MPs on this issue.

Academic Labour

The academic labour movement has been quieter this year, after last year's historic number of strikes. We've supported a few Associations that have gone on strike per our policies, including non-CAUT-member graduate student associations. I know there is a pending potential grad student strike at Western, where the Employer has sent reprehensible letters essentially asking for scabs; we'll be watching these events and offering support if necessary. Lisa and I will head to the CAUT meetings in Ottawa in about two weeks, so we'll get more info on the lay of land in post-secondary, especially since the federal budget will have been presented by then. I did have the chance to attend a fascinating conference on University governance put on by CUFA BC, the provincial association of faculty associations; we learned about the strong collegial governance language in Canada, and I came away with ideas for the UWFA, including perhaps training and orientation on governance for our members. CUFABC will publish papers and reports from that conference, so let me know if you're interested in them.

Labour Movement

As UWFA president, I've continued my participation in bodies and forums from the broader labour movement. I sit on the steering committee of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative

Manitoba as Labour representative and on the Manitoba Federation of Labour Executive Council as a vice-president. These are incredibly interesting activities and I continue to learn much about the labour movement from friends and colleagues. At the forthcoming MFL convention in Brandon, UWFA and UMFA have co-sponsored resolutions that call on the MFL to lobby the provincial government on post-secondary funding. I look forward to seeing these passed and to the MFL using its substantial connections with government to help make the case for investment in post-secondary.

On the broader labour movement, we were very pleased to see the provincial government introduce two important bills to re-balance labour rights in this province: the first to ban replacement workers during work stoppages, and the second to make it easier to join and form a union. These are major gains and we look forward to them being passed by the Legislative in due course.

Next

And so, in closing two items that are forward-looking, beyond the immediate work we'll be doing with the data breach and technology outage:

- First, UWFA Council agreed to form a subcommittee of Council composed of instructors from each faculty, one librarian, and the UWFA President and Executive Director to begin research and preparations for the next round of RAS collective bargaining. The scope of the committee's work needs to be fleshed out once it's formed, but this committee will build on the excellent work completed by the RAS bargaining team on Instructors and librarians, so that we have an even stronger base from which to negotiate in the next round. Please look for more information on this subcommittee, likely after the first meeting of the new Council in late May.
- Second, the main item on our calendar over the next year until our spring 2025 AGM is Collegiate bargaining. The Collegiate unit agreement ends March 29, 2025, so we'll be moving in earnest towards bargaining preparations almost immediately, with an eye to get to table as quickly as possible. Collegiate members have many priorities, and we'll look to consult with members to build a mandate, and, of course, to compare with other private and public schools in Winnipeg and Manitoba.

-Submitted by Peter Miller, UWFA President, 9 April 2024