

President's Update

On Friday, the many members who attended the Negotiation Town hall expressed their frustration with the pace of bargaining and showed their willingness to support the Negotiating Team should they decide to move to Formal Mediation under the Alberta Labour Code. They also overwhelmingly showed their support for the team to move the Association to Job Action Alert at the same time. Now more than ever, we must be prepared to show our resolve to find a fair deal at the table.

My report echoes the concern and frustrations I noted in my previous report at the MRFA's Regular Meeting on November 29, 2021. As I noted then, Senior Administration appears committed to managing the University with little regard for provisions in the Collective Agreement. Indeed, the number of grievances remain at an all-time high for a number of reasons.

First, while the Association has supported vaccine mandates since August 2021, the University's approach to vaccine enforcement appears inconsistent and in contravention of Article 25 of the Collective Agreement. The Association has repeatedly pressed senior management to follow the Collective Agreement but to date they decline to do so. Consequently, the Association still resists the President's invention of 'non-disciplinary leaves without pay,' a measure President Rahilly claims is related to managing the pandemic. Yet, when asked to provide this rationale in writing, the President has demurred, leaving all faculty at risk of being subject to this new unfettered Presidential power.

Moreover, I cannot report much progress on three important policy grievances. While we still wait for the long-awaited appointment of an Associate Vice-President, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, the Administration has not yet signed off on a partial settlement of the Association's policy grievance related to systemic racism at MRU. While there has been some recent interest in addressing the issues we have grieved, this movement comes after the Grievance Committee recommended that the grievance move forward towards arbitration.

Similarly, the Association has pressed senior administration to provide a timeline by which the University will address any salary anomalies related to pay equity. Although it has been eight months since the consultant's report on pay equity was finally released, the Administration has repeatedly asked for more time to study the matter. Members are understandably impatient about this approach. When we return in January, I will ask the Grievance Committee to revisit our options under the Collective Agreement.

On another front, the Association also continues to move forward with a policy grievance pertaining the Human Resources' investigation process. The Association has emphasized our willingness to work in a problem-solving manner to address the problems faculty have identified, but again we have found ourselves with little response from senior management.

Interestingly, despite our expressed willingness to find solutions to these important issues, senior administration frequently positions the Association's grievances as unnecessarily confrontational. I want to assure you that the Association and the Executive Board remain committed to playing a constructive role in moving the University forward-- although not at the expense of our members' rights under the Collective Agreement or with our legitimate role in collegial governance.

Finally, I have heard your concerns about the recent turnover in senior management. Indeed, a number of senior administrators have announced plans to leave the University. These departures is in addition

to a 17-month long vacancy of the Provost's position where a search is only now getting started. The Executive Board shares your concerns about the effects of these changes on the University and we will raise them where we can.

Despite these challenges, I nevertheless remain optimistic that the next year will be better than the one we leave behind. After all, we have managed to deliver a semester of in-person teaching so far without a major outbreak; we continue to work on making the Association a more inclusive welcoming organization; and most importantly, we have remained united in our goal of keeping MRU a place where students come to learn and where faculty can come to prosper.

In closing, I wish each of you a successful conclusion to this semester. After all the grading is over, may you all have some time to relax, regroup, and re-energize. The MRFA Office closes Monday, December 20, 2021 and reopens January 5, 2021. Happy holidays to all!

Sincerely,

Lee