



To: MRFA Members

From: MRFA President

Date: March 28, 2023

Re: Amendments to MRFA Negotiations Committee Bylaws 10.8 and 10.18

The Executive Board is recommending a number of changes to the Bylaws that establish the bodies responsible for collective bargaining.

What is the Problem Being Addressed?

In our consultations, many wondered, "What's the problem that these changes solve?" Here are three major reasons for the proposed changes.

Move to a Strike/Lock out Regime.

In 2017, all faculty associations were moved to the Alberta Labour Relations Code, which returned the MRFA to a strike/lockout rather than mandatory binding arbitration as the only dispute resolution process. Since then, we have seen the University drag bargaining out, forcing the Association to use mechanisms under the Alberta Labour Relations Code to arrive at a collective agreement. We need to be prepared to take all measures to support our bargaining committee at the table and ensure more timely settlements.

Government Interference in Collective Bargaining

Although job action is a last resort, the role of the provincial government has also created a different bargaining environment. Given that our Employer has been bound by secret government mandates that constrain their

ability to negotiate a fair collective agreement, we need to be prepared for all eventualities including job action. The impact of these government mandates was evident in the last round of collective bargaining. Under government pressure, the University initially proposed wage rollbacks and then when we rejected those, they proposed no increases for three years. It's important to note our contract negotiations were resolved only after formal mediation even as the Association made plans for the first strike votes since 2003.

Government mandates are part of our bargaining reality. We need a structure that will engage members sooner in the collective bargaining process and ensure we are ready for all eventualities in collective bargaining process, including taking strike votes and initiating job action, if necessary

Need to Involve More Members in Collective Bargaining

At its planning sessions in June and August 2022, the Executive Board identified the need to engage more members in preparing for collective bargaining earlier. In the past, this work was delegated to the Negotiating Committee and to a lesser extent to CBAC. We are proposing that more members become involved earlier in the process by:

- Clearly defining the bargaining priorities for each round earlier in the process;
- Extensively consulting with members more often;
- Bringing appropriate expertise to the bargaining process.

The proposed changes are aimed at addressing this new environment with the goal of achieving reasonable settlements in collective bargaining.

Proposed Changes to the Negotiations Committee Structure

Replace the Collective Bargaining Advisory Committee with a Collective Bargaining Caucus (CBC). The Collective Bargaining Caucus will develop the bargaining priorities for each round earlier than the in the past and will provide on-going support during bargaining. The Collective Bargaining Caucus (CBC) is designed to ensure more direct communication with members, consulting with Member Directed Groups, the IDEA Council and specific employee group such as permanent employees (Lab instructors, senior lecturers) clinicians and/or members in the Library, the ADC and Counselling. Most importantly, this expanded group will distribute the work of preparing for bargaining more evenly.

Create a Bargaining Committee from the members of the Collective Bargaining Caucus. This subset of the CBC will undertake the actual negotiations with the Board. Armed with a ratified mandate from members, this committee will represent members at the negotiating table. The Collective Bargaining Caucus will provide support the team, offering advice and support to the team as negotiations unfold. The Bargaining Committee continues to have the responsibility and authority to arrive at the best settlement possible according to the conditions at the table.

Refine the role of the Long Range Bargaining Goals Committee-- Established in 2013, this Committee has been responsible for monitoring the progress at the table on the Association's long-range priorities. This Committee's role has been more clearly defined as the body that holds the historical record of the Association's collective bargaining, recommends priorities for each bargaining round, and reviews the progress made once a new agreement is ratified. We also propose to add the Equity Diversity and Inclusion Officer to ensure that EDI interests are consistently integrated into the Association's priorities. Finally, to ensure continuity and to draw on the experience at the table, the most recent Negotiations Officer will chair the Committee.

Summary

All of these changes are connected to the proposed *Negotiations Policy*, which will guide the Association's collective bargaining processes. In response to members' comments, the proposed changes clarify the relationship between the Collective Bargaining Committee

Many thanks to the members of the current Negotiating Committee who offered important insights into the proposed changes. I would also like to thank all those who offered some thoughts including Brady Killough, Anupam Das, Gerry Cross and David Sabiston for their helpful comments.

Sincerely
Lee Easton