

Faculty Association

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA ♦ 100-29 DYSART RD., WINNIPEG, MB R3T 2M7 ♦ PH - (204) 474-8272 ♦ FAX - (204) 474-7548
♦ FAUM@UMFA.CA

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Sent via email

Ms Jelynn Dela Cruz

President
University of Manitoba Students Union
Winnipeg, Mb

Dear Jelynn,

I just wanted to follow up on the discussion that Orvie and I had with you and the Board of Directors of the Student Union on Oct 22. It's good to hear that the administration will have a chance to address the Board of Directors next Monday, so that Directors can hear both sides of the story.

I have a new development to share with you and the Board: on Monday night UMFA had a large general meeting about how to proceed in bargaining. Prior to discussing a potential strike vote we discussed the possibility of creating a fund to help support students who are in equity seeking groups, particularly those students who are black, indigenous, or people of colour. There was overwhelming support for creating such a fund. We passed a motion that will see us start work on the fund when negotiations are complete.

While we're currently working on the form of the steering committee that will develop the fund, we have insured that the fund will be created only after consultation with UMSU, other student groups on campus, Elders, community groups, and other members of the University community. In this way we hope the fund will address existing needs, as communicated to us by students themselves.

The pandemic has been tough on everyone, but doesn't affect everyone equally. We hope this small gesture of solidarity helps lift some spirits. More than that, once the fund is established we hope we can in some small way help alleviate some of the financial pressures faced by students of equity-seeking groups in in these trying times.

Lastly, as an addendum to this letter you'll find some of the key points that motivated our decision to call a strike vote, which will be held this weekend. By Monday next week everyone should know the results.

In the meantime, we have developed a short FAQ for students, available at this link:
http://www.umfa.ca/images/pdfs/UMFA_STRIKE_VOTE_FAQ_-_STUDENTS_2020_FINAL.pdf

I'm sure it will answer some, but not all, of the Board's questions. They can feel free to send other questions to umfa-communications@umfa.ca: the more direct communication we have with students, the more accurate we can make our FAQ.

Yours,



Michael Shaw, President
University of Manitoba Faculty Association

Why we decided to call a strike vote

We've given our best arguments, presented a petition with some 700 signatures, and publicly protested around the Administration Building. The administration continues to reject binding arbitration. Without a strike vote we have no other way to pressure the administration to change its position.

Not taking a strike vote means we have little recourse but to accept the status quo – a 0% increase to salaries, the same salary grid, no additional financial support for child and dependent care, and no payment of the salaries that the government snatched away.

At this point neutral, third-party arbitration is the best way forward for both sides: where the administration has rejected all our reasoning, an arbitrator will have to take it into account; where the government has mandated a 0 percent increase, the binding decision of an arbitrator will allow the University to say the final decision was in line with the law and going rates in the post-secondary sector.

The administration has responded to all our requests with a flat no. A strong yes vote will demonstrate that we're serious about our proposals, and that they need to make some movement at the bargaining table.

There are other reasons we've decided to take a formal strike vote:

- The University is in good financial health, and can afford to pay
- We're paid some of the lowest salaries among medical-doctoral institutions in Canada. The administration acknowledges this problem, and is on record stating that they want to change it. We need to give them an incentive to do so.
- Enrolments are up – in terms of credit hours, over 10% in the summer and over 3% in the fall – this means there's still a demand for a University education, and that the University is receiving more income.
- We're working more hours because of the pandemic, and inflation is effectively shrinking our salaries.
- The government intervened in negotiations in 2016 because they knew the salary offer the administration made would set the tone for the rest of the public sector. We joined a coalition of unions to fight the Pallister government's wage-restraint legislation because we were all under attack. If we accept another 0, we set a precedent that other employers are sure to follow. If we get an increase, other unions can point to us as a precedent. The administration has heard our arguments and is unmoved.

No one wants a strike, but if we don't demonstrate a willingness to withdraw our labour, the administration has no reason to change its current offer.