

UMFA Membership Votes to Authorize Potential Strike UMFA Calls for Arbitration – Graduate Student Assoc. agrees

Winnipeg, October 29, 2020 – The University of Manitoba Faculty Association is conducting a strike vote over the weekend. The vote is in response to the University administration’s refusal to accept binding arbitration, and follows a large general meeting where union members voted 89.4% in favour of calling the strike vote. The Association also took steps to create a fund in support of students in equity-seeking groups, many of whom feel the effects of the pandemic more acutely than others.

“The University could bring an end to negotiations tomorrow – all they have to do is agree to our proposal to bring in a neutral, third-party to arbitrate a final decision”, said UMFA president Michael Shaw.

The Association is bargaining for a more equitable salary grid, a modest increase to wages for the 2020-2021 contract year, and extra supports during the pandemic for those with dependent care responsibilities.

Class enrolments at the University were up over 10% this summer, and over 3% this fall. UMFA workers are educating more students than ever during the pandemic. Yet, salaries at the U of M are near the bottom in the sector when compared to other research-intensive universities in the country.

This translates into a recruitment and retention problem at the University, which hurts students. With some of the lowest salaries in the country, it is hard to bring new talent to Manitoba and keep it here.

The Association has also taken steps to create a fund to support students in equity-seeking groups, particularly those students who are Black, Indigenous, or people of colour. The fund will be used to ease some of the financial burdens placed on students because of the pandemic.

“We’re all educators, and we care about our students. The pandemic has been rough on everyone, but more so on students in equity-seeking groups. This fund will help ease some of the financial burdens they face.”

On Monday night the Graduate Student Association at the U of M voted to support the Association’s demand for binding arbitration. Next Monday, UMSU – the undergraduate student union – will be entertaining a similar vote.

“We don’t want a strike. The University can prevent one by agreeing to our proposal to bring in an arbitrator to settle the issues,” Shaw said.

The Association is also asking that the wage offer that was taken off the table in 2016 be restored, and the wages that were denied be paid to UMFA workers. The wage offer was taken off the table in 2016 after the intervention of the Pallister government. The Manitoba Labour Board later declared the University’s actions an unfair labour practice and imposed a fine.

This was quickly followed by the government's austerity legislation limiting wage increases in the public sector. This June the Court of Queen's Bench called that legislation "draconian" and declared it unconstitutional.

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