

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



MAY 2016

Now that you've survived the late nights and caffeine binges of the grading crunch, I hope you are all getting a well-deserved chance to breathe. Summer in Winnipeg is a great time to re-set, turn a focused eye to our research, and start some fresh thinking about next fall's courses. At UMFA, things continue to accelerate as we move into June, with bargaining now in full swing, a transition in government, and the UM budget having been approved by the Board of Governors.

Since our last newsletter, we've had two full meetings of the membership—a Special General Membership meeting at the end of March to discuss bargaining proposals, and the Annual General Meeting (AGM), mid-May. We had very good participation at both, and I want to thank all of the Members who attended one or both. The AGM is covered elsewhere in this newsletter, but I wanted to say how much I appreciated hearing all of your ideas for making UMFA more responsive and welcoming to more of our Membership. I hope and expect that some of these ideas will be taken up over the next year, and we'll be asking for your involvement to help support them. It was also excellent to get a chance to talk with many of you after the formal proceedings wrapped up.

In the usual patterns of ups and downs, the good mood generated at the AGM was cut short when the Board of Governors met last week and, with “nary a murmur,” according to UMFA VP Jan Morrill, who was at the meeting, passed a budget that cuts yet further and unnecessarily into educational quality at UM and our working conditions. The refrain from the administration this year is the same as last year, and it rings just as hollow. As seven-figure gifts to the University are announced, and with a \$68 million dollar surplus of operating revenue over operating expenses, the administration is yet again crying poverty, and has already begun a public relations campaign blaming salaries for their financial woes.

My apologies if you are experiencing a bit of *déjà-vu* here. I was writing almost the exact same message last year, and I am sick of hearing myself say this, we have to say it so often: the University of Manitoba is in fine financial shape. There is no crisis requiring cuts. The administration has made choices about how to spend their increasing budget which do not prioritize maintaining faculty numbers, protecting the high quality of education at UM, or enhancing the student experience—the bulk of which happens in the classroom, field, or lab in interaction with professors and instructors. Academic salaries at our university are not driving any imbalance between revenues and expenses. They are declining as a proportion of expenses.

This final point brings me to bargaining. We are, and will continue to do our best to keep you informed about what is happening at the table. Having unsuccessfully attempted a “fast-track” bargaining round with administration, we are now at the table with a full slate of bargaining priorities as they were approved by you at the Special General Membership meeting in March. We are putting forward a number of crucial governance and benefits issues, and we will carry those forward with determination.

The number one priority expressed in our survey, however, was salary. Listening to administration, you might get the impression we were already bleeding the university dry through salaries, so why would we be asking for an increase? When you hear this, as you are likely to do in the upcoming months, remember that comparing our average salaries at any rank to either the “Saskatchewan 8” group of comparators, or to the U-15 group of comparators, we’re in the sub-basement. Everyone agrees on the need to boost our capacity to recruit great new faculty. Nothing will make that happen quite as effectively as closing the gap between UM salaries and those at other Canadian research universities.