

# NEWS & VIEWS

OCTOBER 2009

## From the President's Desk

Brad McKenzie



The fall term is well underway and, on behalf of the Executive and staff, I extend our best wishes for the new academic year and a special welcome to new Faculty Members and

Librarians who were recently

hired. Should you have any questions about matters relevant to the Association, please call the UMFA office. Be sure to review your Collective Agreement, which is also available on the UMFA website, and become familiar with your rights and benefits. The last round of bargaining resulted in a new article on *Intellectual Property* (Article 14), and provisions in this article on copyright and ownership of intellectual property, including teaching materials, are particularly important.

It has been a busy summer and early fall at UMFA. Along with the usual work on Members' rights and grievances, we have been finalizing the new website and developing information for our consultant on the pension plan. We are also immersed in preparations for the upcoming round of bargaining.

It seems only a short time ago that we concluded the last round of bargaining, but our current Collective Agreement only runs until March 31, 2010. There was a very good response to the bargaining survey that was sent out in the spring, and we thank all who responded, many with additional and helpful comments. Survey results were analyzed over the summer and this information is being used to help identify our bargaining priorities. Mark Gabbert is chair of the Collective Agreement Committee (CAC), and it is this committee's

responsibility to recommend issues for negotiation and new language to the UMFA Executive. Three subcommittees of the CAC have been formed (Finance, Governance, and Communications) to help with this task. These subcommittees are meeting regularly to complete the preparatory work for bargaining. Once proposals are developed and reviewed by the CAC, by the Executive, and by the Board of Representatives, a general membership meeting will be held to seek membership support for these proposals.

But don't wait until the Membership meeting to find out about the issues or make your voice heard. There are two major opportunities for membership input to the process that are available now and over the next few weeks. Each constituency of UMFA has one or more positions on the Board of Representatives and the Board meets monthly to make decisions and review recommendations of the Executive. You are invited to contact your Board member with any questions or concerns you might like to raise about bargaining or any other matter. And if your constituency has not yet appointed a member to the Board, consider volunteering for this role. Your voice and the views of your constituency are important. A second opportunity is to attend one of the general constituency meetings on bargaining that are being held over the next couple of weeks. The dates, times, and locations of the constituency meetings are posted on the UMFA website under "Meetings & Events".

The first bargaining newsletter, one in a series of special bargaining newsletters, has been sent to all Members. As always, your comments and feedback are much appreciated.

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### Upcoming Constituency Meetings on Bargaining

Friday, October 30, at 2:30 pm in Rm 306, Tier Bldg

Monday, November 2, at 1:30 pm in Theatre C, Basic Medical Sciences Bldg, Bannatyne Campus

Monday, November 2, at 4 pm in Rm 224, Education Bldg

Wednesday, November 4, at 7 pm in the UMFA Boardroom

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## What's New with Staff Benefits

Cameron Morrill

### **The Long-Term Disability Plan**

For some time, UMFA Members have been concerned about the tax inefficiency of the university's long-term disability (LTD) plan. Premiums for this plan are split between the university and its employees, which mean that any benefits paid from the LTD plan are fully taxable. In the worst case, a university employee who becomes disabled might see a decrease in take-home pay of nearly 30% relative to regular take-home pay.

In the last round of bargaining, UMFA proposed that its Members pay all of the LTD plan premiums, which would make LTD benefits non-taxable, and that the university's share of LTD premiums be either paid directly to Members or used to fund some other benefit. This proposal was not successful. However, the mediated settlement resulted in a letter of understanding that required the university to convene a working group composed of representatives from all unions participating in the LTD plan and hire a consultant funded by the university to investigate the LTD plan. Based on results, the working group will make recommendations on restructuring the plan.

After a one-year delay, this working group is active again and is searching for a consultant to undertake this analysis. It is difficult to predict when the working group will complete its task, but we will provide you feedback on results when these become available.

### **The Pension Plan**

Under Manitoba pension legislation, pension plans must file an actuarial valuation at least once every three years. The valuation is used to determine funding requirements for the period up until the next valuation. 2009 is an important year for the U of M pension plan as it is the year in which the university must file

an actuarial valuation. Following the poor performance of the pension plan assets in 2007, and then the 16% investment losses incurred in 2008, there was concern that the university could face substantially increased pension funding requirements. There was a flurry of activity in the spring of this year as the university announced that it would apply for an exemption from some of the pension legislation funding requirements.

The exemption could reduce next year's additional pension funding requirements substantially. What this amount will be depends on the financial condition of the pension plan as at the end of 2009. Over the last six months, stock markets in Canada and around the world have rebounded and the condition of our pension plan has improved. The extent of the improvement will not be known until some time in 2010 but it is likely that the plan will continue to be underfunded according to the 2009 valuation.

Generally speaking, there are two ways to fix an underfunded pension plan: (1) Reduce the guaranteed defined benefit that plan members can expect upon retirement (currently 2% multiplied by years of service multiplied by best average annual salary, with an adjustment for the Canada Pension Plan); and/or (2) contribute more money to the pension plan. UMFA Members have indicated strongly that they want to preserve the current defined benefit provisions and are willing to contribute more to the pension plan to ensure that it is properly funded. Presently, actuaries working for the university administration, UMFA and the Association of Employees Supporting Education Services (AESES) are analyzing U of M pension data with a view to identifying workable solutions. Pension considerations are likely to figure prominently in the upcoming round of negotiations.

## Western Regional Conference Report

The Western Regional Conference, a meeting of Faculty Associations in Western Canada, took place in Brandon from October 15 to 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009. There were approximately 50 participants, with UMFA represented by Executive Director Linda Guse and Vice-President Cameron Morrill. Jim Turk, CAUT Executive Director, and Penni Stewart, CAUT President, also attended.

A number of Associations reported on their administrations' claims of severe budgetary constraints but also stated that these claims were not being taken at face value as some administrations seem to be using the economic downturn as an opportunity to reduce programs and staff. Some universities have made bad financial decisions in the past that continue to have an impact. One example is Lakehead University, which incurred major debt in order to finance capital projects. The current repayment of that debt limits available funds in the operating budget from which salaries and benefits are paid. It is likely that the same claims of poverty will be made by other university administrations in upcoming years as well. There is also a concern that the Harper Government may reduce future transfer payments to the provinces and that this

could affect the funding available for post-secondary education at the provincial level.

One of the other major topics of discussion had to do with the "Respectful Work Place" policies in place at many universities. Some of these policies attempt to restrict the rights of academics, including those in leadership roles in their faculty association, from criticizing the university administration by labelling such criticism as disrespectful. There was also a concern that the normal, sometimes very passionate, discourse that occurs between members of the academy could be considered as a violation of such policies if any form of discomfort resulted. The investigation process instigated following a complaint under these policies is very often slanted towards the complainant, in that the respondent may not be given the names of witnesses called by the complainant and most often is not told what the witnesses have said. It is very difficult to effectively defend oneself without full information.

The Western Regional meetings continue to be a good way of sharing common experiences and problem-solving efforts as well as identifying emerging trends at our universities.

**UMFA  
has a  
new  
website!**

Visit  
[www.umfa.ca](http://www.umfa.ca)

## UMFA Obtains Seat on MFL Executive

The Executive Council of the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is made up of the President, two Vice-Presidents, and Treasurer, who are elected at Convention, and additional members selected from affiliated unions, labour councils, the Workers of Colour Caucus, and the Aboriginal Workers Caucus. A number of positions are filled from larger unions. The group of smaller affiliates select one representative and one representative each is selected from the Workers of Colour Caucus, the Aboriginal Workers Caucus, and each local labour council in the province. There is also one position for a representative of retirees. Prior to 2009, UMFA was a member of the group of smaller affiliates, but we now qualify as a member of the larger union group and have a designated position on the Executive. The Board of Representatives approved the appointment of Brad McKenzie as the UMFA representative to the MFL Executive at its September 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting. A seat on the Executive will give UMFA a stronger voice in promoting issues important to our Members.

## Did you Know?

The latest data from the CAUT Almanac provide some food for thought about post secondary education funding in Manitoba. In 2007-08, Manitoba was second last among all provinces in the amount it spent on post secondary education (PSE) as a share of total provincial expenditures. Only Prince Edward Island was lower. In that year, the Manitoba government spent 4.9% of provincial expenditures on PSE. The national average was 6% and Saskatchewan, roughly comparable in geography and population, spent 6.8%. Provincial transfers to colleges and universities in Manitoba were \$13,860 per full time student equivalent in 2007-08, more than \$4,200 below Saskatchewan in the same year and well below

the 1998-99 Manitoba figure of \$17,319 per student. In 2007-08 the average salary at the University of Manitoba at the Associate Professor level was 6.6% below the University of Saskatchewan's average salary for this rank, and the difference at the Assistant Professor level was 6% in favour of the University of Saskatchewan. Not much has changed in the past two years; in fact, the salary gap between the University of Manitoba and the University of Saskatchewan has widened. For example, while our salary schedule increased by approximately 5.8% over the past two years, academics at the University of Saskatchewan enjoyed an increase of approximately 8.8%.

## Paul Fortier Prize for Student Activism

Paul Fortier was a long-serving and very active member of UMFA. He was President of the Association in 1999-2000 and very much involved during negotiations with the administration, chairing job action preparation committees and energizing the membership. He cared passionately about Members' rights, academic freedom, and the greater good. Paul died on October 15, 2005 and is much missed by his friends and colleagues in the Faculty Association. The Paul Fortier Prize was created in his memory.

Alon Weinberg, a graduate student in Native Studies, was presented with the 2009 Paul Fortier Prize for Student Activism at the September 23, 2009 meeting of the UMFA Board of

Representatives. Alon is actively engaged in a number of social issues but his work in ecological and indigenous issues is of particular note. He is an active member of the Winnipeg Indigenous Peoples' Solidarity Movement, was a founder and coordinator of the AdaMan'itoba Project, bridging Manitoba's Jewish community with other faith and local aboriginal communities, and was a co-founder of the Decolonization Cinema Film Series at the University of Manitoba. He has also been involved in the Boreal Forest Network, the Volunteer Elders and Traditional Peoples' Gathering, the Elat Chayyim Jewish Retreat Centre, and the University of Winnipeg's Ecological Males and Females in Action Group. The list goes on.

Through the Paul Fortier Prize, UMFA is proud to recognize the important role that students play in building a society based on social justice principles.



## 2009-2010 EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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Brad McKenzie      *Social Work*

Vice President  
Cameron Morrill      *Accounting & Finance*

Past President  
Brenda Austin-Smith      *English*

Treasurer  
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Executive Secretary  
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### UMFA STAFF

Linda Guse, Executive Director  
Barbara Yapps, Professional Officer  
Louise Hébert, Administrative Assistant  
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