

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



July 2017

Dear UMFA Members,

This is my first President's message, and I would first like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to lead the faculty association in 2017-18. I am honoured, and will do my best to serve the membership.

Things have been very busy in the UMFA office. First, on June 30, we said goodbye to our **professional officer Barb Yapps** as she begins her well-deserved retirement after many dedicated years at UMFA. Things will simply not be the same without her. Barb has helped hundreds of members over the years with a calm and cheerful demeanour, and defended them with fierce tenacity and determination. I know we all wish her the very best and will miss her greatly.

We have hired **Andrew MacIsaac** to join Jason Gisser, our other in-house legal counsel. Andrew is a graduate of Robson Hall, and has extensive experience with unions and labour law. We are very pleased to have him joining our team.

So, let me update you on some of our recent activities.

A legal challenge to the Public Sector Sustainability Act (Bill 28) and Bargaining in 2017

First, you've heard that UMFA has joined the **Partnership to Defend Public Services (PDPS)** in filing an injunction against the recently passed Public Sector Accountability Act. This act, once proclaimed, limits the University to wage increases of 0%, 0%, 0.75%, and 1% for union contracts negotiated after March 20, 2017. We have sought an injunction preventing the imposition of the act, whether it is proclaimed or not, as we firmly believe it is a violation of our constitutional rights. The injunction would allow us to fully engage in bargaining and address compensation issues at the bargaining table this summer. The [legal claim itself, the PDPS press release](#) that was sent out on Tuesday morning, and all the [press coverage so far](#) can be found on our website.

In parallel with this, we are preparing for bargaining as our last collective agreement ended on March 31. We thank all of you who took time to participate in our constituency meetings and filled out our bargaining survey. Using this information, our UMFA staff and the Collective Agreement Committee are now finalizing our package of proposals that will be brought to a **Special General Meeting later this month**. For a brief primer on bargaining, see our latest Newsletter, which can be [found at this link](#).

Some Reflections on President Barnard's Recent Comments

Finally, let me briefly address President Barnard's response to a letter that we sent him regarding the recently passed University budget (which is on our website, [here](#)). In his letter, he said he was challenged to replicate our claim that the welcome increase to the unit budgets only restored most of this year's cuts, but the units are still \$20.3 million below the 2012-2013 levels. Our numbers were based on the following:

Cumulative cuts to faculties, colleges and libraries baseline budgets since 2013-14	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Annual (cut) increase	-3.9	-4.7	-10.1	-7.8	6.2
Cumulative since 2013	-3.9	-8.6	-18.7	-26.5	-20.3

These come from Table 1 of the budget submissions provided to, and passed by, the Board of Governors for 2013-2016 budget years, and from Attachment 3 of the 2017-2018 budget submission. These budget submissions can be found within the Board of Governors open agendas at the following links:

- [BoG meeting of May, 2017](#)
- [BoG meeting of May, 2016](#)
- [BoG Meeting of May, 2015](#)
- [BoG Meeting of May, 2014](#)
- [BoG Meeting of May, 2013](#)

These cuts concern us – the administration's spending priorities must address U of M's core mission of research and teaching. We need to ensure faculty renewal, job security, fair compensation, fair workloads, safe and accessible facilities, reasonable class sizes, and adequate course offerings to provide our students with the quality of education they deserve.

I think it's also important to address several of President Barnard's other comments, particularly those in regard to an interview with Robert Chernomas, UMFA's Chief Negotiator in 2016-2017, that was published by CAUT not long ago (see <https://www.caut.ca/bulletin/2017/05/interview-robert-chernomas>.) I echo what Dr. Chernomas has said. The administration needs to understand that our position at the bargaining table is not the will of any single individual – we establish our bargaining positions through a participatory democratic process. When the UMFA bargaining team enters bargaining it is with a mandate.

President Barnard also took issue with Dr. Chernomas's assertion that strike votes are the only means by which academic freedom, fair salaries, and collegial governance can be protected.

Unfortunately, we have ample evidence from the 2013 and 2016 bargaining rounds to support Robert's position.

Without negotiated contracts, university administrations have control over the University's budgets and resources, discipline of members, how to define academic freedom, what metrics to use, when to amalgamate faculties and departments, and more. Sometimes the only way to convince the administration how important these issues are to our Members is with the threat of a strike. In the 2013 round of bargaining the three issues still on the table toward the end of negotiations were academic freedom, performance indicators, and amalgamation. President Barnard's bargaining team, during dozens of meetings throughout the summer, made it clear that they had no interest in providing any language that might limit their power to define academic freedom, amalgamate units, or impose performance indicators. It only under the threat of a strike that the administration made concessions on those matters.

Similarly, in 2016, after a long summer of bargaining, a strike vote, and a strike deadline, there was no significant movement from the administration's bargaining team on the issues of core concern to Members. It was only after 20 days of strike that President Barnard's administration agreed to language that began to address Members' concerns on workload, among other things.

Looking Forward

This is a new round and it is our sincere hope that we can move forward with good faith and resolve on both sides. What I learned during the strike was that strength comes from solidarity. When we stand together and support one another, our voices are more likely to be heard. We speak in Senate, we speak in our classes, we speak in the community, and we speak at the bargaining table. I am hopeful that this round we will be heard and will reach a satisfactory agreement without a labour disruption that is hard on all of the university community.

Please be looking for an announcement of the date of our special general meeting. I hope to see many of you there, and I look forward to a good year. Remember that we are just a phone call or email away if needed, and enjoy the summer sunshine.

Best wishes,
Janet Morrill
UMFA President