

## Four myths about unionization at UVic

Over the last month, some individuals opposed to certification at the University of Victoria have repeatedly made several claims regarding the impact of unionization, the state of university finances, the allegedly nefarious intentions of the Faculty Association's Executive and officers, and the negotiating positions the Association has taken and will take in the future. We do not intend to respond to each and every one of these claims, but we do think it is important to address four major assertions that have been made, three of which have appeared repeatedly in emails sent to listservers, in a flyer which was distributed across campus and/or in materials posted on websites, and the other of which we consider to be particularly pernicious.

*First: The Faculty Association assumes that there is a \$100 million slush fund which could pay for salary increases, which is totally false. There is no slush fund and no extra money. In fact, we need to believe our administrators when they talk about a fiscal crisis.*

The Association's position during negotiations, mediation and arbitration, has been that when an institution repeatedly, over the course of more than a decade, racks up surpluses such that revenues exceed expenses by \$10 million per year, that institution is far from being broke, and that furthermore, such an institution has some discretionary ability to allocate resources to forego staff layoffs and provide faculty and librarians with better salaries. While the cumulative amount of these surpluses over the course of a decade has not simply been squirrelled away into a "slush fund," it is not a small amount of money.

A full discussion of university finances, the salary arbitration and the university's "ability to pay" can be found on the Association's web site under "Negotiations 2012" (tab OnTheUVicSalaryArbitration; url: <http://www.uvicfa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/OnTheUVicSalaryArbitration.pdf> )

*Second: "Faculty unions tend to redistribute salary from junior to senior faculty."*

We responded to this claim in an earlier discussion, but since this claim has been repeatedly re-introduced, we will reproduce key portions of our extended response below:

"Across Canada across 21 comparable universities, those in the 60-64 age band make about 1.5 times as much as those in the 30-34 age band (source: Statistics Canada, 2010-11 Faculty Salary Data). Interestingly, this "generational inequality" doesn't differ much between unionized universities (14 of them, average ratio of 1.538) and non-unionized universities (7 of them, including UVic, average ratio of 1.546) – which helps to dismiss the argument that unions have redistributed from younger to older faculty, at least in the Canadian context."

The university which has probably done the most for junior faculty is Queen's, which is unionized. There, the career progress increment is augmented by a "junior increment" for those within the first few years of appointment.

*Third: "If we unionize, there's a good chance we'd go on strike."*

The University of New Brunswick recently went on strike, but only after 90% of Association members voted to do so. UNB had never been on strike before. Unlike staff unions or private sector unions, faculty association negotiating teams and Executives tend not to go on strike without very strong

support from the membership in a strike vote. Realistically, what this means at UVic is that a strike is unlikely unless the issue is so compelling to faculty and librarians that *some portion of those who are currently opposed to unions altogether are persuaded that a strike is justified*.

The Administration's web site places emphasis on one of the longest strikes in recent history, at Vancouver Island University. What it doesn't say is that this strike was driven by arbitrary lay-offs and program closures against which the union wanted some modicum of protection failing the university's ability to demonstrate financial distress. Extremes of this sort are more common at community colleges (or, in the BC case, the former university colleges) than they are at research universities, though they do occasionally happen everywhere. The UVic Faculty Association represents regular faculty and librarians, but not sessional faculty. If we were to compare only like unions (i.e., those that represent regular faculty), of the 14 comparable universities, there has never been a strike at Carleton, UBC, Ottawa, Queen's, Saskatchewan and WLU (we have data for 25 years, from 1988). Faculty at Western get added to this list, but librarians do not, since there was a librarian strike there in 2011. Including this librarians-only strike and including the current strike at UNB, there have been 3 strikes in this group of 14 in the last decade (since 2003; the other strike was at Windsor in 2008). Is this a "good chance we'd go on strike"?

*Fourth, the Association shut down its listserver to shut out opposing points of view.*

This claim was made during the debate on January 9. The Association's listserver, uvfac-l, was always intended only for Association-to-member communications, limited to a couple of messages per month during normal times and a few messages a week during times of exceptional Association activity. It was never intended as a general discussion listserver since not all members would wish to be bombarded with emails. Indeed, if we would have added substantially to the email traffic from this listserver, we would have run the risk of having a large proportion of the membership "unsubscribe," leaving us with only the costly mechanism of print distribution to reach members.

In the summer of 2012, when Framework Agreement negotiations failed, quite a number of pro-union "unionize now!" messages appeared on our listserver. We were surprised, because we had thought that staff had set the listserver up so that only "administrators" could post or, alternatively, approve messages posted by others. We received perhaps a couple of dozen messages but also two complaints from members who did not want to receive all these emails. We set the listserver on "emergency shutdown" while we waited for staff to figure out how permanently set the listserver so that only messages from the office would be sent out. Staff later reconfigured the listserver so, as far as we knew, only administrators could post.

Last month (December), we were surprised when an anti-union message appeared on the listserver. We investigated and found that, while most members were not able to post to the listserver, a few (apparently those with more recent appointments) were. We do not know why this was the case, but we corrected it. At the same time, when individuals opposed to unionization asked us to open up the listserver, we declined to do so but we immediately set up a separate discussion listserver for members who were interested in subscribing. We announced the presence of this new listserver by way of email to members but also on our website.