

UWOFA Librarians and Archivists Bargaining Bulletin

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UWOFA-LA collective bargaining has begun. Now what?

Your UWOFA-LA negotiating team, led by chief negotiator Jeff Tennant (French Studies), began negotiating a new collective agreement for librarians and archivists on Tuesday, June 16. Several half-day sessions are scheduled with the employer this month before bargaining pauses in July until mid-August. An additional 25 bargaining dates have been scheduled starting Aug. 17. The current four-year contract expires June 30, 2015.

Collective Bargaining 101

During negotiations, UWOFA-LA and the employer's negotiating teams will hold a series of meetings to exchange proposals and respond to each other's positions. Each side also meets separately throughout the process to discuss and redraft their respective proposals. This can be a very time-consuming process. Both sides generally do not comment publicly on the positions on the table. So, while we are all curious about what is going on, our negotiating team can usually only give us the broad strokes of what is happening – for example, which articles have been signed off and which have yet to be negotiated. At times, agreements reached at the table can be announced immediately; in addition, members may be informed of crucial matters that are affecting the progress of negotiations. UWOFA will publish more detailed negotiating reports when possible in future Bargaining Bulletins.

While the two sides do not have to meet with any particular frequency or structure, the Ontario Labour Relations Act does require that they negotiate in good faith and make every reasonable effort to reach a collective agreement (CA). Though it rarely occurs, both parties can agree to refer some or all issues to arbitration at any time. While UWOFA is hopeful that an agreement can be reached without third-party assistance, either the union or the employer has the option, if a major impasse is reached or impending, to apply to the Ministry of Labour to have an appointed conciliation officer meet with both parties and help them reach an agreement. If conciliation is unsuccessful, the minister of labour can state that a conciliation board will not be appointed, and after 17 days following such a "no-board report" either a strike or a lockout can legally take place, though this is far from inevitable.

A vote open to the entire librarians and archivists bargaining unit will be held before a new collective agreement is ratified. The decision to call such a vote is made by the Board of Directors of UWOFA.

What can change and what remains the same during negotiations?

According to the Ontario Labour Relations Act, the employer may not alter wages or any other employment condition while collective bargaining is going on, unless UWOFA has given consent. It would be inappropriate, for example, if an employer offered employees a general pay cut or increase during negotiations (unless previously agreed to with the Association), or changed any other employment provisions.

Everything essentially stays the same. It's worth noting, however, that the procedures currently in place for changing individual members' employment remain in effect during negotiations. For example, we can still obtain continuing appointment and promotion, or get an administrative stipend for being appointed director.

Of course there are always gray areas. If UWOFA felt that a proposed change to someone's employment violated the "freeze" during negotiations, the issue could be decided by the Labour Board if it could not be resolved with the employer alone. Example of previous board rulings, involving other unions, where employers violated "freeze" conditions include:

- Restructuring work to abolish positions
- Introducing procedures to monitor employees
- Revoking privileges previously enjoyed
- Unilaterally changing work hours
- Method of payment
- Vacation calculation/accrual

If you come up against any of these situations, UWOFA is here to help. Contact the Association at 519-661-3016.

Your negotiating team has your best interests at heart and is bargaining for an equitable new collective agreement with improved working conditions as determined by members' recent ratification of bargaining goals.