CAS Negotiations Update: Waiting for the Administration

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Nearly four months of bargaining, and where are we? On June 1 we presented our proposals to the Administration to forge a better Collective Agreement for Contract Academic Staff (Part-time Librarians and Contract Faculty (CF)). We have met with the Administration more than a dozen times since then.

Our Members sent us a message loud and clear earlier this year, telling us on a survey that their top three priorities are job security, compensation, and benefits. The Administration seems focused on other priorities: discipline measures, weakening seniority, increasing PhD student teaching, and remaining silent on compensation.

One-year contracts: rejected; Standing Appointment improvements: waiting for the Administration; and the Continuing Instructor 10-month renewable contract position involving teaching and service: waiting for the Administration. But we did gain the right to be recommended for a two-year renewable appointment to teach a course which has been offered in three successive academic years and in which we have seniority. We proposed reducing the criteria to earn seniority pay: we are waiting for the Administration.

The compensation proposals we've made include a wage adjustment to help us catch up with other groups on campus (like administrative and laboratory staff), and to account for cost of living increases; remuneration for first-time course preparation; and increases to PER and research funds. While gains have been made on the monies available for research grants, \*all\* other compensation items are in No Man's Land, since the Administration \*still\* has not presented their “compensation package”, as they call it. They've promised to present compensation proposals by the end of July, then it was by the end of August, then in early September. Keep in mind that WLU has had a budget \*surplus\* in each of the last 10 years.

How are your teeth? Need eye glasses? Feeling blue? Essential to thriving in the workplace is anyone's physical and mental health---the things people take for granted until a crisis develops. CF (there are no part-time librarians at this time) know well the choices to be made: one can pay for rent/mortgage *or* food *or* child care *or* elder care *or* eye glasses *or* emergency dental work *or* therapy *or*.... All other groups on campus---including students---have access to health benefits. Not CAS.

We've proposed an opt-in benefit plan for CF who teach at least four courses per year similar to that already in place for post-doctoral fellows. We're waiting for the Administration. While our proposal for CAS to have access to child care facilities has been accepted, we are waiting for the Administration regarding our proposal on increasing the tuition benefit. While the Administration has agreed in principle to our proposals to increase the maximum periods of supplemental benefits for pregnancy and parental leave, and to provide compensation for members who care for a terminally ill family member, we have many other proposals about benefits that are waiting for a response.

We have successfully fought against the creation of an “unofficial” file that could keep track of anything about a Member's performance and then be used in a disciplinary vein. Likewise, we have convinced the Administration to withdraw their proposal which would put performance measuring means in the hands of Chairs, rather than Deans. (Keep in mind that Chairs are our faculty colleagues and are on the PTAC, which makes recommendations in hiring.) We also fought hard against the Administration's efforts to weaken our right-of-first-refusal system, seniority points/status. They proposed scenarios in which a Member's seniority points could be taken away or not awarded, and in which a Member with seniority status could be refused a course. Those issues are now in our court and we aim for a resounding strong return.

The Administration wants to increase the number of courses that PhD students can teach, from the current 44 (14 of those are already permitted by the Collective Agreement and the other 30 were established in a Memorandum of Understanding due to expire in 2019) to 40 percent of the total number of PhD students. Using 2015 figures, this means that 105 courses would be taught by PhD students who would bypass the normal hiring process, including, most importantly, the right of first refusal, taking away jobs from our Members.

Also important to our Members is their working environment. Each Member should have access to secure storage for their books, purse/bag, coat, boots, textbooks/resources, assignments, papers, midterms/exams, student theses, etc. Regular faculty, imagine having to share an office if only for the teaching component of your job. Not only is it utterly distracting and inconvenient to expect to get any amount of work done with colleagues on the phone, visiting with students, talking to colleagues, but would you leave your confidential work out, your phone and other belongings, every time you have to leave your office to go to the bathroom, make a private call in the hallway, consult administrative staff or a colleague, or go to lecture? Imagine also having to take home all of your daily work---textbooks and other resources, lecture notes, assignments, tests---every day, effectively wiping clean your existence in a space, however small, that you have carved out for yourself for a given day. Actually, consider that many CF don't have even that luxury: many do not have a desk to call their own let alone an office of their own. Many are offered only 1.5 hours per week of student meeting space, yet no space is provided to prepare lectures. This brings me to the fact that the Administration has rejected our proposal to provide T2200s (tax credit forms for home office expenses), which we asked for if a Member does more than 50 percent of their work at home. (Many of us \*have\* to work off campus to prepare syllabi, lectures, assignments, tests/exams, mark papers, etc.) Our proposal that Members who teach four or more courses be offered an individual desk is still in negotiation.

We are also hoping to improve respect for our Members by proposing that non-librarian Members be referred to as Contract Faculty (as opposed to Academic Staff) and that we improve CF representation in collegial governance. OCUFA and numerous academic affiliations around the world refer to contract instructors as faculty members. We are a growing, essential part of the academy. We hold post-graduate degrees. We teach at the university level. Some of us do research and present at conferences. Some of us supervise undergraduate and graduate students. Reclaiming our rightful title of CF is still under negotiation. Although CF proudly regularly teach about half of the student body at WLU---thus having a momentous effect on the key stakeholders of the University (the students), the Administration sees fit to reject our WLUFA Executive-approved proposal to allow a CF Member to be elected by the University Faculty Council to serve on Administrative search committees. With each wave of an imaginary wand, the Administration seems to hope that we will become invisible. An invisible majority.

If the experience of our respected CUPE 926 (custodians and tradespeople) colleagues on strike this summer is any indication of how the Administration will treat other groups at WLU, beware fellow Contract Faculty! And, for that matter, fellow Regular ("full-time") Faculty should heed the tide: you're on the Administration's chopping block next. While not all full-time faculty may be empathetic to the rights and plights of precariously employed Contract Faculty, we should stand together in solidarity, since we are all here to protect the rights and privileges of students to be enlightened and earn an education, to protect and uphold the institution that is higher learning, and through those efforts, to better society. Students are why we are here and we love them. We would not do this job if it weren't for them and the rewarding nature of teaching.

For more details on the current status of negotiations and for previous updates, see http://www.wlufa.ca/wlufa-home/contract-academic-staff/contract-faculty-negotiations-2016/ > Negotiating Team.

Stay tuned for updates and be sure to attend one of the next Bargaining Unit meetings scheduled for October 25 and 26. Together we can forge a better agreement for our Members! Your efforts at WLU are essential, not inconsequential!