

Opening Statement for Collective Bargaining with the Faculty Association

Read on April 10, 2025

As we open this bargaining round, I want to further acknowledge Dr. Skip Dick who shared with us important teachings to guide our work together, through reminding us of the teaching of laləmāt – to be careful with your words, as well as to keep in mind at all times the commitment that we have as members of this community to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion and to make positive and systemic changes that will improve the lives of the communities that we serve.

I would like to start by thanking each of you sitting at this table for your commitment to this important work that we are about to undertake in shared service to the University of Victoria. Collective bargaining is both a very challenging and rewarding process. A successful bargaining round rests on good faith, on a meaningful commitment on the part of both parties to reach an agreement, the frank and transparent exchange of ideas and interests, courageous conversations, pragmatism and compromise in order to reach an agreement that benefits our community. We have identified five broad areas of interest that align with the commitments and priorities our university has identified for this round of collective bargaining that I will outline shortly. Before we get into those areas of interest, however, it is important to acknowledge some of the contextual elements that frame our work this bargaining round.

You will all be aware of the challenges associated with political and economic uncertainty globally, nationally as well as provincially. Translating the value of the university to our community – through impactful research, teaching that transforms students' lives, and driving prosperity and well-being – has arguably never been more important. Shoring that up with responsible stewardship of public funds is also front of mind as we start this bargaining round.

Overall, constrained fiscal resources and uncertainty about future funding means that the financial horizon for the post-secondary sector as a whole is fraught; many of our peer institutions are facing layoffs, program closures or other austerity measures. Thankfully, through strong and careful planning and the good work of our staff, faculty, librarians and leaders we have so far been able to navigate this challenging and constrained context and have a balanced operating budget for 2025/2026, without the need for reductions. At the same time, we do not anticipate having any additional funds, beyond the PSEC mandate, for monetary improvements to the Collective Agreement.

Another important element of our bargaining context is the rapidly changing expectations and needs of our students, driven by a move towards access-centered pedagogies that prioritize inclusivity and equitable access to education. Our commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment is not just a response to external pressures but a reflection of our core values and dedication to student achievement.

I also want to acknowledge the importance of framing all of the work that we will do over this round through the lens of shared interests, and as part of a larger university collective that includes colleagues in other bargaining units. We are all interdependent; none of us can thrive unless all university employees are valued and supported to pursue our common interests.

Finally, while we recognize that bargaining is often an adversarial process, let us strive to always remember the things that matter to us and that we agree on. We all care deeply about our university – this is why we are here. We share a deep commitment to reconciliation and Indigenization and to equity as a driving force in all that we do. And we all recognize the critical role of financial sustainability and resilience; and how building our reputation as a research-intensive, student centred, and Community-Engaged university has deep and meaningful benefits for all of us, collectively, as well as individually.

We are fortunate that at UVic, we are bargaining a mature agreement. Improvements are incremental and seek to add clarity and reduce ambiguity. At the same time, the agreement has grown over time, both in terms of the number of articles as well as the complexity of the processes that are included. It may be time to take a sober look at the agreement and determine where we have language that is working to full effect, and where we might not be achieving the intended outcome. We are hopeful that doing this together can help the agreement become more efficient and in so reduce workload for faculty and librarians and potentially the length and complexity of the Agreement.

Turning now to the University's areas of interest. The following points are general in nature; we will provide more detail once we exchange the list of issues in May and following the approval of our bargaining plan when we start exchanging proposals. We recognize that we may need to pause bargaining if the mandate is further delayed. However, given the historically significant language that is bargained between the University and the Faculty Association, we believe it is important to get a head start on non-monetary items, even if we are not able to sign off on articles until after the mandate has been provided to us by the Provincial Government. This approach will maximize our efforts to get mandate money into the pockets of faculty and librarians as soon as possible.

First, we will look to processes and language throughout the agreement that will support the University's aspirations to operate with excellence and to grow and enhance our reputation as student-focused research-intensive university.

Second, we must examine and address workloads to ensure they are manageable and conducive to delivering high-quality education and support. By prioritizing workload assessments, we can foster a healthier work environment that benefits everyone.

Third, we are committed to supporting Indigenous bargaining in alignment with a self-governed Indigenous Space. Our goals include strengthening Indigenous education, supporting Indigenous leadership, promoting cultural respect and reconciliation, and ensuring equitable access to resources for Indigenous faculty and librarians.

Fourth, we will continue to focus on the Equity Action Plan implementation, including by creating flexibility and addressing the conditions of work for faculty members and librarians. This approach aims to ensure equitable and supportive environments for all members, fostering excellence in teaching, research and service.

Finally, we will prioritize prudent management of fiscal resources in our resource constrained context and ensure the most efficient and equitable distribution of mandate funds to Association members.

We look forward to engaging in this process with a good mind and a good heart, and we are prepared for the work to come.

Thank you for listening.

Pamela Richards, Executive Director, Faculty Relations
and Academic Administration (Chief Negotiator)

Helga Hallgrimsdottir, Deputy Provost (Chair)

Lisa Goddard, Associate University Librarian

Lois Harder, Dean of Social Sciences

Lalita Kines, Director, Indigenous Strategic Priorities

Annalee Lepp, Dean of Humanities

Joaquin Trapero, Director, Strategic Research Initiatives