



Hilary Turner

From the Chief Negotiator

Report on the 2012 Bargaining Survey

One of the key steps towards the next round of bargaining has been taken—asking members what they want. Many thanks to those who responded, and especially to those who commented so extensively. Thanks also to Tanja Rourke who collected and tabulated the results with her usual cheerful efficiency.

We kept the survey simple this time, partly in recognition that we had perhaps been overly ambitious in the 2010 round of negotiations, and partly in anticipation of the miserly mood that is almost certain to prevail among employers as collective agreements across our sector are reopened in April and May this year. It seems strategically naïve to turn up at the table with a raft of small demands that are only likely to bog things down when the overriding issue—some might say the *only* issue—is money.

We received 409 completed surveys, these fairly evenly divided between faculty and staff (53% faculty to 47% staff). The total return rate represents about 40% of all members. In both the faculty and staff categories, a salary increase was the highest ranked priority, selected by 28% of faculty and 39% of staff. Salary was ranked either second or third by 30% of faculty and 5% of staff.

Numerically lesser, but still significant choices for “top priority” were (for staff) a phased retirement plan (12%) and the extension of medical and dental benefits after retirement (10%); and (for faculty), a phased retirement plan (12%) and a system of rank and tenure (19%) [see below]. The emphasis on phased and post-retirement considerations came through loud and clear, with many among both faculty (15%) and staff (27%) selecting it as either their second or third priority. This is the case, even though only 5% in each category are planning to retire in the next two years. For faculty, a more flexible sabbatical plan also emerged as important. Though only 3% ranked it as their highest priority, 21% ranked it second or third.

The Question of Rank

Questions on rank, tenure, and promotion, sent only to faculty, deserve special attention here. Although only 19% selected the implementation of rank, tenure, and promotion as their highest immediate priority, 11% placed it second, and 4% placed it third. Recent discussions on the ways in which rank, tenure, and promotion are related (and how these might be implemented) have been collegial and forward-looking—and the responses to all the related survey questions reflect some movement toward solidarity on the issues. On the other hand, the figures on the next page still indicate that not all faculty members are of the same mind, and that a significant number remain undecided on key aspects of the subject.

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One important function of the FSA is to be alert to these situations and to safeguard against arbitrary or inhumane treatment of people undergoing immense difficulty. We can work with Employee Services and with Management to see that people are offered support in times of crisis. But all of us share the responsibility to show a measure of compassion. The next time you feel annoyed with a fellow employee who doesn't seem to be functioning well, pause until you find out whether there are pressures you don't know about, cut that person a little slack—perhaps respond with an encouraging word. You may never know how much that random act of kindness helped; however, the next time it's your turn to be overwhelmed by life, a culture of compassion may make all the difference.

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Questions (compressed, to save space)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Rank, tenure, promotion should be bargained in this round.	35%	26%	22%	9%	8%
Rank and promotion connected to tenure.	33%	28%	28%	7%	4%
Rank, tenure, promotion connected to academic freedom	52%	35%	12%	1%	0%
Academic support faculty included in rank, tenure, promotion	27%	20%	23%	15%	15%
Grandparent all post-probationary faculty equally	43%	33%	13%	7%	4%
Grandparent all post-probationary faculty at rank of Associate	37%	27%	21%	9%	6%
No associated workload increase	60%	31%	6%	3%	1%
Future workload adjustments should be transparent and public	61%	33%	6%	0%	0%
Rank should not be tied to salary	32%	21%	25%	14%	8%
Future salary adjustments in the context of rank to be collectively bargained	51%	35%	12%	1%	1%
Promotion criteria should recognize diversity	62%	32%	2%	4%	1%
Promotion should include an appeal process	60%	35%	3%	1%	0%
Conditions for rank, tenure, promotion should be laid out in the Collective Agreement	63%	29%	6%	1%	0%

Staff Issues

Staff seem primarily concerned with monetary issues, in various guises. In addition to their top priorities listed above, they would like to see the enrollment of dependents at UFV supported with both early registration and earlier notification of their right to a tuition waiver. They would like to see an increase in their own tuition assistance (with 52% strongly agreeing that the current level should be increased to match that of faculty).

Surprisingly, support for release time to participate in more university committees than is currently allowed was lukewarm: only 11% strongly agreed with the idea, and only 30% agreed. Staff do not seem enthusiastic about building their Educational Leave Fund with salary contributions: 12% strongly agreed that this should be done, 23% agreed, 36% were undecided, and the remainder (28%) didn't like the idea at all. They did, however, support the idea of broadening the criteria for access to this fund, with a respectable majority (59%) agreeing, or strongly agreeing, that these should be based on more than mere seniority.

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Additions and Comments

Items added to the survey and comments appended were also revealing, and many were supportive and helpful. We received 57 suggestions and comments from staff members, and 83 from faculty members. Although all comments and suggestions have been noted and considered, I have room for only a few examples:

- Dental check-ups should be every six months, not nine.
- Employees who engage in snow removal should be specially compensated.
- Professional staff salaries here lag behind those at other post-secondary institutions.
- If a salary increase is out of the question, we should be getting a cost-of-living increase.
- We used to be able to combine coffee breaks with lunch hours. Now we are not allowed to.
- Temporary employees who pay dues should have access to benefits.
- Staff should be able to evaluate their Directors.
- Specialist medical appointments for dependents should be covered under "special leave."
- Auxiliary staff should be entitled to mileage allowance between campuses.
- Only when the FSA and UFV make greater strides to treat Sessionals more equitably will departmental cultures begin to change.
- If the PhD is to be a requirement for new hires, more assistance is needed for current faculty to upgrade.
- I will *not* vote to approve rank and tenure until I know what constitutes rank and tenure.
- Faculty overloads should be paid at a higher rate.
- Teaching loads should be reduced from 7 to 6.
- If all post-probationary faculty are to be given rank, it should be that of Assistant Professor.
- Current faculty who are grandfathered should be ranked as Full Professor after 16 years.
- Department Heads are not compensated adequately.
- Fewer restrictions on when Trades Faculty can use their twenty "non-instructional days"
- 7 courses and \$83,000 is crazy. Either the first number has to be smaller or the second bigger. Everything else is minor in comparison.

Job Action

In a previous column, I explored some of the issues that surround a possible strike in 2012. The survey was not intended as a strike vote, overt or covert, but the last couple of questions did attempt to test the waters on some form of job action. It is not customary to release percentages based on informal questions like these—especially so far in advance of bargaining, or to rely on them as the last word on the subject. I will say, however, that members who feel strongly about the issues that they have identified—yet not so strongly that they would consider a strike—need to do one of two things. They need to forget about any monetary gains in this round of bargaining, or they need to rethink their position on job action. As we all know, hardly anything comes without a price these days.

Of course it is entirely up to you. The bargaining team will respect your wishes in all things.



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