

# Collective Bargaining & Negotiations between AUFA and Acadia's Board Of Governors

## FAQ for Acadia Students

### What is collective bargaining?

Collective Bargaining is the negotiation of an employment contract or collective agreement between a union of employees and an employer. Collective bargaining is a legal process. In Nova Scotia, the process is regulated by the [Trade Union Act](#).

Within the Acadia context, this means negotiation between the Acadia University Faculty Association (AUFA) and the Board of Governors (i.e., those who are responsible for the University's finances) regarding the terms of employment for AUFA members.

### Who does the Acadia University Faculty Association (AUFA) represent?

The professors, instructors, librarians, archivists, and the curator of the Art Gallery at Acadia University. In other words, the people who are responsible for teaching your courses and labs, those who ensure that you have access to books and journals in the library, as well as learning opportunities through the Art Gallery.

### Why are unions important?

Unions protect the rights of employees and allow them to establish good working conditions for **every** member of the union.

Teacher unions have long noted that "teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions." Academic unions like AUFA ensure that the working conditions at Acadia allow the faculty to provide the kind of quality education Acadia prides itself on. An important part of this is making sure that there are *enough* professors, instructors, and librarians so that students have access to the personalized education that Acadia promises.

### What principles are motivating AUFA's proposals?

AUFA is committed to negotiating a collective agreement that:

- strengthens the academic mission of the university
- secures good working conditions
- values, prioritizes, and trusts the faculty workforce
- promotes sustainable equity and diversity initiatives
- reinforces stability over precarity for our members
- enables and empowers collegial governance structures that characterize universities

## What is AUFA asking for?

In an effort to strengthen and build upon our existing Collective Agreement, AUFA has presented many proposals during these negotiations, all of which are motivated by the above principles. Our proposals include:

- A cluster hire of Indigenous scholars
  - This upholds our commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and we also know from research that hiring a cluster of scholars from under-represented groups is important for retaining them. Most importantly, although it is all fine and good to say that we support Indigenous peoples and are committed to righting historical wrongs, unless we are also prepared to *invest* in this commitment by hiring Indigenous scholars, our words are ultimately empty.
- Increased focus on equity in hiring while protecting precedence, academic excellence, and departmental oversight.
- Improved working conditions, security, and fair remuneration for part-time employees. Including: extending sick leave and pregnancy leave; tuition discounts; increased professional development funds; and a substantial increase in remuneration.
  - Did you know that about 1/3 of the faculty at Acadia are working part-time? That means they get paid per course they teach. We want to make sure that they receive better pay and benefits, and we want to make sure that they have some job security (what we call “precedence”), rather than having to re-interview for the same course year after year.
- A fixed complement (minimum number) of tenure track faculty, librarians, and contractually limited term (CLT) appointments.
  - Acadia’s strategic plan wants to recruit more students. But unless they also commit to a minimum number of faculty members, librarians and CLTs, there’s no guarantee that Acadia’s quality academic experience (small class sizes, sufficient honours thesis supervisors, and other learning opportunities) can be sustained.
- 12-month contracts for all continuing appointments.
  - As it stands, many contractually limited term (CLT) employees are given contracts that last only 9.5 months (or less). Ensuring that they receive full-year contracts would provide them with stability and would allow them to contribute more to the university via service commitments, research projects, and student supervision.
- Improved benefits and a mental health spending allowance.
  - Better working conditions and support for faculty = a better overall educational experience for students.
- A fair salary for all faculty that keeps pace with cost-of-living increases
  - To continue to attract excellent professors to Acadia, we need to make it a desirable place to work. This is why we pay our University President 1.8 times the salary of Canada’s Prime Minister: because we want to attract good administrators. The same reasoning should apply to faculty salaries. With that said, we are not asking to be paid as much as the President, nor are we asking for substantial salary increases. In fact, our proposal is well below current inflation numbers. We only want to minimize the impact of inflation on our salaries.

Some of these proposals have financial implications for the university. Education is a labour-intensive field, so in a contract negotiation within any educational institution, proposals with financial implications are inevitable, as an employer must invest in and value its workers to ensure sustainable working conditions. In addition, the values of any organization are reflected in its budgeting priorities. Acadia University is a public institution that prides itself on excellent and innovative personalized education and high quality research. Investing in faculty is a way to commit to those values, not only in words but in deeds. As such, AUFA is not asking for anything that would threaten the sustainability of the university. We want to make Acadia a better and *more sustainable* place for academic teaching and research, not a less stable one. Our proposals have been carefully thought through and are motivated by a desire to strengthen Acadia's academic mission and reputation.

### **What is the Board of Governors asking for?**

The proposals presented by the Board Team work *against* AUFA's efforts to improve working conditions, job security, and stability for its members. As well, some of the Board proposals would take away some important and valuable rights that are already in our contract. They are proposing:

- Taking the determination of the need for long-term sick leave out of the hands of a faculty member's physician and putting it into the hands of a medical consultant who works for the insurance company that would be responsible for paying part of the salary of the member on sick leave.
- Refusing to guarantee a minimum number of full time faculty, Librarians and CLTs working at Acadia.
  - We know from experience that this is a bad idea for students and faculty: In the 13th Collective Agreement, AUFA agreed that—for the duration of the contract—the Board would not have to replace any tenure-track faculty who retired or resigned. In that four year period, we lost almost 40 tenured/tenure-track faculty.
- A salary freeze for the next 2 years and only 1% increases for the following 2 years.
  - This makes it harder to recruit any new faculty, including the part-time faculty that Acadia relies on to run all its programs.
- Taking away faculty rights to vote in departmental hiring processes
- Taking away current opportunities for part-time and CLT faculty to convert to full-time continuing positions.
- Taking away our current ability to collectively vote on any changes to our health and benefits plan.
- Proposals that work against the principles and practises of faculty self-governance that are at the heart of how a university functions.

## **What is the current state of collective bargaining between AUFA and the Board of Governors?**

The current collective agreement (i.e, the contract) between AUFA and the Board expired on June 30, 2021. Normally, the two sides aim to negotiate the details of the next collective agreement before the last one expires. Although AUFA was ready to begin collective bargaining as soon as we were legally able to do so—May 1, 2021—the Board was not ready to start bargaining until two months later, in July (after the current agreement had already expired).

After negotiations began, the two sides met approximately 16 times but were unable to reach agreement on many substantial issues. In fact, the Board's Team refused to respond to 20 of our proposals except to say "no." On November 2, 2021, the Board of Governors' Team declared an impasse, walked away from the negotiating table, and filed for conciliation. This is a process in which the provincial government appoints an impartial conciliator to facilitate negotiations between the parties, and represents a step that must be taken before a strike or a lockout can occur.

Despite being the ones who filed for conciliation, the Board team showed little interest in negotiating with the help of the conciliator. On Friday, January 14th, the conciliator filed a report with the province declaring an "impasse" in negotiations. Following the submission of this report, there is a two-week "cooling off" period. At the end of those two weeks, and with 48 hours notice, Acadia can "lock out" the faculty and/or AUFA can begin a strike. Negotiations can continue, with or without the conciliator, during this period. AUFA is willing to continue to negotiate during this period in order to reach a tentative agreement without a strike or lock out.

## **What is a strike? What is a lockout?**

In a strike, the employees withdraw their labour and picket until a new (tentative) collective agreement has been made with the employer. In a lockout, the employer prevents employees from working (for example, by prohibiting workers from entering the worksite) until a new (tentative) collective agreement has been made with the employees. (Note that strikes and lockouts are not mutually exclusive, often occurring together.)

## **Will AUFA go on strike?**

If a new tentative agreement is reached, then no. AUFA is prepared to continue negotiations in order to reach a fair and equitable agreement. In any negotiation, both sides have objectives that they want to achieve, and it is expected that they will engage in a process of give and take until they reach an agreement. The Board's team walked away from negotiations without addressing most of AUFA's proposals. At the same time, they are insisting on changes that AUFA feels would make working conditions worse. If AUFA goes on strike, it will be because the Board refused to be a real partner in negotiations and did not meaningfully respond to our proposals.

## **Will Acadia lock out the faculty?**

If a new tentative agreement is reached, then no. Ultimately, it will be a decision of Acadia's Board of Governors whether they will lock out the faculty. If you want the Board to reach a fair and equitable tentative agreement that supports the academic mission of the university, contact Peter Ricketts (Acadia University President), Dale Keefe (VPA & Provost), and Henry Demone (Chair of Acadia's Board of Governors).

## **How will a strike or lockout affect students?**

### ***Will classes be cancelled?***

If there is a strike or a lockout, classes will be temporarily suspended until there is a tentative agreement on a new contract. How long it will take to reach a tentative agreement is uncertain. AUFA went on a three-week strike in October 2007, and classes resumed once a tentative agreement was reached.

However, AUFA remains committed to the collective bargaining process and hopes to avoid a disruption to classes, or at least minimize the duration of any disruption that may occur. With that said, the Board of Governors must also be committed to collective bargaining, so AUFA's ability to control this situation (and minimize the negative impact of a strike or lockout on students) is limited by the actions of the Board.

### ***Should students continue to do their course work?***

If there is a strike or lockout, classes will be temporarily cancelled. Course expectations may change depending on how long a strike or lockout lasts. Your faculty will not expect you to carry on with course work as normal, and you will not be penalized for not doing class work while classes are cancelled.

### ***Can students go to classroom buildings and the library?***

If there is a strike, faculty will be picketing outside of campus. The faculty picket lines won't prevent you from accessing any campus buildings, but you are welcome to join your profs and show your support!

### ***Will faculty respond to student email?***

A strike means that faculty will be withdrawing all their labour from the University. In past strikes, AUFA members were actually cut off from their acadiau.ca email accounts. Students should not expect replies to any emails about classes or expect that assignments will be graded and returned.

**Graduate students, Research Assistants and Teaching Assistants will most certainly have other unanswered questions:**

- I'm a TA, will I still receive my pay?
- What about the deadlines for my thesis progression? Will these change?
- Will I still have access to my lab, office and library?
- Will I still receive my funding?

Student accommodations have been made during strikes or lockouts at other Canadian universities for such things as letters of reference and scholarship/grant deadlines. However, these questions can only be answered by Acadia's administration. We recommend you ask them directly.

**What can students do?**

We know it can be frustrating to be in students' shoes. By law, collective bargaining involves only the relevant union and employer, but even though students cannot play an official role in collective bargaining, there are lots of ways to get involved and to express your support for AUFA members—the Acadia faculty—in trying to achieve a fair and equitable collective agreement.

**Learn about collective bargaining, unions, and labour history:**

- Follow AUFA on Twitter (@AcadiaFaculty)
- [Learn about the role that students have played at Acadia in the past](#)
- Read about the history of the Canadian labour movement:  
<https://canadianlabour.ca/who-we-are/history/>

**Become informed about the situation and issues:**

- Read the "Negotiator" newsletter: <https://bit.ly/3Hhv1ta>
- Examine Acadia's [most recent financial report](#) and notice that Acadia is in a relatively good and stable financial situation

**Voice your support for faculty**

- Good, stable working conditions for faculty strengthen the academic mission of the university and improve the overall quality of your educational experience.
- Contact the ASU and voice your support for faculty.
- Contact Peter Ricketts (Acadia University President), Dale Keefe (VPA & Provost), and Henry Demone (Chair of Acadia's Board of Governors), and ask them:
  - Why is the administration not responding to AUFA proposals to ensure a stable, sustainable and equitable work environment for faculty?
  - Why isn't the Board committed to investing in faculty to strengthen students' academic experiences?
  - Will the administration reimburse my tuition?
  - Will the administration reimburse me for any potential lost income?
  - If Acadia is so concerned about money, why are they paying for an expensive lawyer to be their chief negotiator?
- In the event of a strike or a lockout, join us on the picket line!

For further information, check out Acadia's website: [www.acadiafaculty.ca](http://www.acadiafaculty.ca)  
and our twitter feed: @AcadiaFaculty