



Representing Faculty, Librarians,
Veterinarians & College Faculty

News & Views

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The Broken Relationship between the Provost and the University of Guelph Faculty Association (UGFA)

A message from the UGFA Executive

Even when we are not at the bargaining table, the University of Guelph Faculty Association continues to work on behalf of all of its Members to ensure a fair workplace in which Faculty, Librarians, Veterinarians, and College Faculty (at Ridgetown and Clinton) can carry out their teaching, scholarship, and service work in an atmosphere of collegiality that is characterized by fairness and transparency. The work of the Association has become increasingly difficult and frustrating due to our relationship with the incumbent Provost, who is the Chief Academic Officer of the University. While we continue to address issues and resolve problems through the office of the Assistant Vice-President for Faculty and Academic Staff Relations, we would characterize the UGFA's relationship with the Provost as broken. We report this to our Members with heavy hearts and in the hope that you will make your voices heard so that collegial governance at this University might be restored.

Management has shown a deeply troubling lack of action on issues that the Association feels are critical to the relationship between UGFA Members and the University.

We summarize some key issues:

You may be aware of allegations made against a faculty member by a student of inappropriate remarks towards another student during a lecture. There was an immediate firestorm of national and even international media attention. The faculty member received numerous threats, including of physical violence. A change.org petition called for him to be fired. In a press release of January 16, 2018, the Provost said, "This morning, I learned about an incident involving a professor making inappropriate comments to a student" and "The Professor involved has been placed on leave while we look into the situation." These statements were made before the University had the opportunity to investigate the allegations made by the student against the faculty member. (The Association has filed a grievance about this matter, as we believe that the Provost failed to protect the privacy of this faculty member, and her initial statement suggests a conclusion had been made prior to an investigation.) In the weeks that followed, as it became clear that the incident in question occurred in a context far more nuanced than the initial reaction of the media and the University might suggest, the Provost continued in her failure to reassure UGFA Members that we have her support. Indeed, in a meeting of the Joint Committee on February 12, 2018, when pressed by the UGFA President for a statement of support for faculty who feel vulnerable in the wake of this incident, the Provost said that she would only issue a statement to the University community as a whole. One month later, even this has not been issued.

The Provost's refusal to reassure faculty came despite the fact that, in a Senate meeting on February 5, 2018, the Provost, in response to student questions about the incident, repeatedly stated that she was working with the UGFA on a response to the matter. Those statements to Senate were categorically untrue. The Association has been profoundly disappointed in the way the Provost has handled this matter.

Approximately eighteen months ago, the UGFA informed the University that we believe some Members' salaries to be inequitable. The University agreed and promised that the inequities would be corrected by August, 2017. While we routinely ask for this issue to be resolved, we are still waiting for this correction.

In recent years our Members in the School of Engineering embarked on a good-faith and focused mission to expand their programs and enrolments, taking on significant extra work. They have been hugely successful, and yet resources continue to lag behind ongoing growth. The Tenure, Promotion, and Performance Assessment process defined in our Collective Agreement (CA) is extremely challenging for the School due to its size and the diversity of areas in the School. The CA has an article on restructuring that would allow these problems to be diminished or even eliminated. The UGFA asserts that no meaningful structural changes have been made to support that growth, resources are inadequate, and our colleagues in Engineering are very demoralized. A similar situation, with growth encouraged but not sufficiently supported by resources, is occurring in the School of Computer Science.

At the March, 2017 Budget Town Hall, the Provost stated that the yearly 20% growth in the carry-forward would cease, and that, in fact, the carry-forward policy would mean that Deans could carry forward at most 10% of their unspent allocation. The Provost said she would "claw that money back to Central." Just one month later, we saw another 16% growth in the carry-forward, which is now a hair shy of \$100M. Indeed, in that fiscal year the "Internally Restricted" funds, which include the carry-forward, grew by 23% to \$320M. During our recent round of collective bargaining, we heard a few times that the University "has the money" to fund the going concern liability of the pension plan, and the UGFA, along with partner employee groups at Guelph, Queen's, and Toronto, has been working steadfastly to solve the pension problem for the University. But when it comes to using this set-aside money to fund structural change, including new positions, we have seen nothing meaningful.

Normally, members of the UGFA Executive Committee meet with the Provost and other Management representatives on a monthly basis from September through June. These Joint Committee meetings are meant to be an opportunity for collaborative problem-solving, yet we are concerned that these discussions seem to be of little importance to the Provost herself. The Management side rarely brings issues to the table; the agenda is driven almost entirely by the Association. The collegial relations that had been the hallmark of our working relationship with Management no longer extend to the Joint Committee, and as a result, the Joint Committee is no longer a joint working group.

Last semester, Management undertook a "wellness survey" addressed to all employees of the University asking about many workplace issues. We are hopeful that once the results of the survey are released, they will aid Management in understanding the concerns of our Members, which include workload, work-life balance, leadership, and communication. One again, we hope that a recognition of the importance of these issues may help to restore collegial governance at the University of Guelph.