

FAUST President to Consult Members Ahead of LOU Discussions

Dear Colleagues,

These trying times have proven our resourcefulness, and shown how strong we are together. We completed a tough end of semester, and many of us are still teaching with great strength and commitment. We successfully completed our bargaining process and signed our Collective Agreements – all despite the uncertainties we continue to face. Kudos to us all for that.

During this exceptionally unusual summer as we prepare to do remote teaching, this seems like a good time to reflect on the work FAUST has been engaged in on your behalf regarding our workplace. Here, I'd like to give an overview of what we have done so far, the challenges ahead of us, and our strategies in addressing them.

I. AGM Echo: Motions

You have given us clear directions by means of a set of motions we passed during our AGM on April 14, 2020 (<https://www.faustnb.ca/gmm-minutes>). I want to highlight these motions, as they are significant for the substance of my message:

MOTION 1:

Recognizing that online teaching requires significant additional hours of work, and often access to additional resources, compare to in-person teaching; and

Convinced that it is essential for Part-Time instructors in particular to be fairly compensated for and supported in work they are obliged to take on in addition to their regularly-contracted hours;

Be it resolved that: FAUST condemns the St Thomas University administration's failure to provide additional compensation or resources for Part-Time instructors who agree to teach courses online as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

MOTION 2 a)

Whereas collegial governance is essential to university life; and

Whereas collegial governance requires the full participation of university faculty members in all important decision-making; and

Whereas FAUST is the sole authorized bargaining agent for faculty working at St Thomas University;

Be it resolved that: FAUST condemns the St Thomas University administration's refusal to collegially negotiate a Letter of Understanding for the purpose of regularizing COVID-19 pandemic-related changes to faculty working conditions.

MOTION 2 b)

Whereas collegial governance is essential to university life; and

Whereas collegial governance requires the full participation of university faculty members in all important decision-making; and

Whereas FAUST is the sole authorized bargaining agent for faculty working at St Thomas University;

Be it resolved that: FAUST demands that any future COVID-19 pandemic-related changes to faculty working conditions must be collegially negotiated in a formal Letter of Understanding.

MOTION 2 c)

Whereas collegial governance is essential to university life; and

Whereas collegial governance requires the full participation of university faculty members in all important decision-making; and

Whereas FAUST is the sole authorized bargaining agent for faculty working at St Thomas University;

Be it resolved that: FAUST hereby provides notice that its members will not agree to any future changes in faculty working conditions that are not collegially negotiated in a formal Letter of Understanding.

MOTION 3:

Be it resolved that FAUST calls upon the St Thomas University administration to immediately engage in serious collegial discussions with faculty concerning possible changes to the University's regular functioning that may be necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic during the teaching year 2020-21.

II. An outline of the work we have done since the last AGM

It is your commitment to and trust in FAUST, and your continued demands for our collective needs to be met in a more equitable workplace, that have allowed us to make some crucial strides:

- We formed a **faculty-led COVID-19 Task Force** (April).
- We established a **Part Time Liaison position** under the Executive (June).
- We had our first **Part-Time only Town Hall**, and we have conducted a **follow up survey with the Part-Time faculty** (June).
- We have **raised our outstanding concerns with the VP Academic and Research (VPAR)**, and shared it with you as "Questions from FAUST; Answers from the VPAR" (July)
- We have conducted our **third survey, "Online Teaching – Fall Back to Work Protocol"** (July).
- We have an initial analysis of both of these surveys on our website (July).

Building on the work we have engaged in since our AGM in April, and as we prepare for the Fall, we are now at a critical moment. **We are finally in the position to re-initiate a collegial negotiation of a Letter of Understanding (LOU), with the purpose of regularizing COVID-19 pandemic-related changes to faculty working conditions.**

- As you know from the “Questions from FAUST; Answers from the VPAR”, in response to our demand the Employer has now indicated a willingness to revisit an LOU, but also indicated a firm position contrary to that of the Union, on compensation.
- We will continue to pursue the issue of compensation for unpaid work on behalf of our Part-Time Members, and other COVID-related issues on behalf of all our Members, but **at this juncture we need your further direction. Therefore, we are calling for a GMM on August 13, 2:00 pm.**

III. Status of Identified Issues

Our overarching concern is how well prepared and supported we will be for meeting our teaching, research and service commitments in the Fall 2020 semester and beyond. All of these commitments involve “regularizing COVID-19 pandemic-related changes to faculty working conditions.” The feedback we received from Survey 3 has revealed the overwhelming level of worry and anxiety around these issues. We are troubled by the prospect of compromises to workplace equity.

The work we have done since April has repeatedly revealed a set of core issues that are not yet resolved, and have become more immediate. The Executive has been consistently communicating our concerns to the Employer, and demanding responses to various questions about how the administration is addressing pandemic-related challenges to our working conditions:

Support for remote teaching

- FAUST has shown that there has been sufficient demand for regularly scheduled group training sessions around remote teaching, and strongly suggested that the administration proactively offer such sessions as soon as possible.
- The Employer is now in the process of responding to the issue FAUST raised on behalf of the membership, with a commitment to offer training in the relevant software, and the training needs assessment recently conducted by the Ad-Hoc Committee.

Safe and equitable access to the campus

- FAUST has been asking for clearer communication with the Part-Time Members on what sorts of **access to the campus** they can expect. We have insisted that the University provide **safe and equitable access to usable offices, and shared university spaces.**

- We have also sought clarity on behalf of all Members about what can and cannot be done in person. We have been demanding solutions to these concerns that are both safe and equitable.
- The Employer is now in the process of responding to these issues we raised on behalf of the membership, with a commitment to provide part-Time Members access to office space (or support working from home in the alternative – see below) and recording suites, including a forthcoming needs assessment on office access.
- The Employer has also recently provided clarification about the use of assigned classrooms for in-person meetings with students.

Equitable and just working conditions

- FAUST has been advocating **equitable access to hardware and software** in preparing for and delivering our courses.
- We have recommended a **needs-assessment** concerning access to technology and teaching resources, and office spaces.
- We have also insisted on having the T2200 made available for our Part-Time Members who would be working from home (through which the Canada Revenue Agency allows employees who work from home to deduct certain home-office related expenses when an employee files their income tax return).
- The Employer is now in the process of responding to these issues we raised on behalf of the membership, with a commitment to provide the necessary hardware and an individual office space/hardware needs assessment about to take place, as well as the software training commitment and needs assessment that recently took place.
- The Employer is also now working to make the T2200 available to our Part-Time Members if they choose to use a home-office, during 2020-21 academic year.

Reasonable accommodation and remote technology

- More recently, FAUST has also pressed for serious responses to inquiries regarding **reasonable accommodation for members with disabilities**, experiencing accessibility-related issues regarding the technology required for remote teaching, research, and service.
- We continue to seek assurance that reasonable accommodation will be provided where necessary for all faculty, staff, and students, in accordance with the University's obligations under the Collective Agreements and the New Brunswick Human Rights Act.

- The Employer has not yet formally responded to the issue, but following a prompt from FAUST is now in the process of preparing a response.

Compensation for Part-Time faculty

- Being aware that preparation for online teaching is considerably more intense than normal teaching, and that the time commitments required constitute unpaid labour for Part-Time faculty, FAUST has repeatedly raised this issue with the Employer since the issue arose.
- The Employer has indicated a firm position contrary to that of the Union: “the University cannot support an LOU that includes additional compensation for either full-time or part-time faculty members, as the President has already stated.”
- Although the Employer wants to deny us the opportunity to bring this issue to the table, we will continue to insist that “Part-Time Faculty compensation” is a central concern.

IV. Getting further direction from the membership

Even though we still have many challenges ahead of us, I am convinced that because of the work we have already invested, and due to your commitment and trust in us, FAUST is well equipped to take collective actions as needed, and to demand action from our Employer on your behalf.

As stated above, the Employer has now indicated a willingness to revisit an LOU in regularizing COVID-19 pandemic-related changes to faculty working conditions.

A Joint Committee between the Union and the Employer is in place “for the administration of [the Collective] Agreement[s]”, as per article 3.11.1. The Union and The Employer have now formed the Joint Committee to serve for this purpose. Your FAUST representatives are myself, along with Marvin Claybourn and Mike Fleming who bring their negotiating experience from the Bargaining Team.

A Joint Committee meeting scheduled for August 10 will be a first opportunity for us to reiterate the need for a Letter of Understanding, as we begin collegial negotiations in regularizing COVID-19 pandemic-related changes to faculty working conditions. This meeting will (in part) serve as an initial platform to communicate our concerns and set the ground for negotiation.

For us to make strong political arguments, we need you to be behind us. Therefore, FAUST calls for a **GMM meeting on August 13, 2020**. We will report back from this initial meeting, converse, get directions from you, and make critical decisions for addressing the Employer’s actions and policies regarding the issues I listed above. Your attendance at the GMM meeting is imperative.

Your participation and your support are vital to your Union. We all depend on each other, and we are strongest together. Please get involved in any way you can, whether by communicating your concerns, or taking part in the Task Force, or joining any of the other ad-hoc committees.

More than ever, this is a time for solidarity at many levels. We are fortunate to have a strong faculty union in FAUST. Our strength is internal, but it also comes from broader union activism. We are not alone. Our provincial federation (the FNBFA), the national association (the CAUT), and other sister organizations across the country and around the world are our collective. We are sharing our experiences and best practices with each other, and are ready to support one another during these hard times.

Let's keep all that in mind as we prepare for a challenging academic year ahead. Despite the pandemic, we can and will continue to make STU the best possible academic community, and most equitable workplace for each and every one of us.

Let's put our collective demands on the table in regularizing COVID-19 pandemic-related changes to faculty working conditions.

See you at the GMM.

In solidarity,

Gül Çalışkan, FAUST President.

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@FAUST_STU

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CANADA

St. Thomas University is located on the unceded and unconquered territory of the Wəlastəkwiyik, a place bound by the Peace and Friendship Treaties of 1725-1779