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Contact: Tom Streeter, thomas.streeter@uvm.edu

UVM Faculty ratify contract with the administration

Burlington, VT—Today, the full-time members of United Academics, the faculty union of the University of Vermont, voted overwhelmingly to ratify the agreement reached with the administration for a contract after fifteen months of negotiation.

Faculty won an 8.5% salary increases over the three years of the contract (2.5% the first year, and 3% the following two years), increased pay for promotions and summer teaching, a workload reduction for non-tenure-track faculty, and more. Administration proposals to reduce faculty control over their intellectual property were rebuffed, and benefits won in previous contracts were maintained.

According to Prof. Tom Streeter, President of United Academics, “many public university administrations across the country are seeking to undermine faculty professionalism and autonomy by letting salaries stagnate, reducing job protections, reducing or eliminating research sabbaticals, and reducing faculty control over what and how they study and teach. In that context, this contract represents a victory for the faculty and students of the University of Vermont. Students will continue to learn from teacher-scholars at the forefronts of their fields. The disciplined free inquiry that has made UVM an environment conducive to bold and cutting edge research has been preserved.”

UA Vice President and Professor of English Sarah Alexander noted that “over the long term the struggle over control of universities continues. For the good of UVM and its students, we will continue to press against the tendency of university administrations, including UVM’s, to treat the university as if it were a private business where students are merely revenue sources and faculty are an expense to be minimized. **Universities exist to serve the public good**, and United Academics will continue to serve as an important protector of that role.”

Almost all issues for the contract were settled during bargaining between January and September of 2017. The main sticking points going into mediation in September were salary and an administrative effort to reduce faculty’s rights to the intellectual property in their courses under certain circumstances. The administration dropped the intellectual property clause in December, which meant the only issue going into fact finding was salary. After a fact finding hearing in February and submissions of final exhibits by both sides on March 23rd, a report by Fact Finder Michael Ryan was released to both parties on May 7th.

The report to a large degree supported UA’s analysis. Regarding the administration’s claim during negotiations that UVM faculty were already competitively paid, the fact finder noted that “**objectivity balks at [the administration’s] selection**” of the **Oklahoma State Univ. (OSU) annual survey of faculty salaries** as a comparator (the basis for the administration’s public claims during negotiations that UVM faculty were at 104% of national averages). “It is hard to envision,” he continued, “what [UVM] might have in common with the University of North Dakota, the University of South Alabama, and Central Michigan University, to pick a few examples from the OSU list.” There is, he concluded, a “**continuing need to increase the bargaining units’ salaries to be more in line with their comparable peers.**” (UA’s exhibit on UVM faculty salaries in a national context, authored by Prof. Beth Mintz, is attached.)

The fact finder also noted that **“There is no doubt that the University is currently on a firm financial footing. Enrollment is stable or increasing. The revenue picture is generally positive, and the reserves are strong. The bond-rating agencies have recognized this performance, commenting on the University’s ‘strong’ financial profile and ‘stable outlook.’”**

“This has been a long process – too long,” said Streeter. “The end results are better than what we would have gotten without hanging tight, and they should give the administration pause before they choose to drag things out through mediation and fact finding in the future. But we can safely say that our union has acted successfully to protect the well-being of faculty and the intellectual vitality of the University of Vermont.”

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