



May 10, 2021

## **After 14-Month Negotiation, UVM Faculty Vote to Ratify Four Year Contract**

On May 10, after more than a year of negotiations, University of Vermont faculty voted overwhelmingly in favor of ratifying a new four-year contract. The bargaining process leading to this tentative agreement was drawn out and arduous as the UVM administration initially proposed steep cuts to base salary and benefits over several years. United Academics, the faculty union at UVM, pushed back repeatedly. In key outcomes for UVM faculty, the union negotiating team protected salaries and benefits and guaranteed an administrative commitment to diversity in faculty hiring and retention.

Jane Knodell, economics professor and chief negotiator for United Academics, says: “We are pleased that the team was able to bring to members an agreement which preserves benefits; secures modest salary raises; increases professional development funds, minimum salary levels, and per diem compensation; protects intellectual property rights, incorporates a commitment to diversity and inclusion; and increases transparency in workload policies.”

Negotiations between United Academics and the UVM administration began in early February 2020 and proceeded remotely through the COVID-19 pandemic. The union bargaining team, committed to compromise and good faith from the start, proposed progressive, temporary salary reductions in the early months of the pandemic, and explored possible avenues for cost savings when the fiscal effects of the pandemic were uncertain.

Despite these efforts by the union, negotiations reached impasse in October over a series of both economic and non-economic issues. In the meantime, United Academics advocated for non-tenure track Lecturers whose pay was cut (and later restored), protested the abrupt closure of UVM’s Campus Children’s School, challenged the administration’s termination of key humanities and science programs and haphazard plan to reorganize colleges within the university, questioned the administration’s overall financial management, and stood with three beloved and long-serving senior lecturers who were not reappointed in the name of budget cuts.

Since November, the parties have worked with a federal mediator to try to reach a fair and reasonable compromise. The faculty union successfully fought back against the administration’s austere initial proposal, which included 10 percent cuts to base salary, eliminated UVM retirement contributions for 2 years, reduced sabbatical benefits, reduced severance pay for non-renewed Senior Lecturers, introduced more restrictive sick leave, and other stress-inducing and

demoralizing schemes. Through negotiations, the faculty union ended up securing raises of 5.5% over the next three years and protection of retirement, sabbatical, severance pay, and other benefits.

“We are confident that the strength of our union throughout collective bargaining is what prevented the administration from imposing the deep and lasting cuts to base salary and benefits that they proposed, and that our pressure helped tip the balance toward the restoration of staff pay that had been cut” says United Academics president Julie Roberts.

Many United Academics faculty are relieved to finish negotiations after an uncertain and, for many, devastating year. Faculty remain steadfast in their commitment to UVM’s mission of providing affordable, high quality, student-centered, and accessible education for Vermonters.