



protecting academic quality

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**UVM's faculty union declares
impasse in contract negotiations**

*In an unprecedented second
bargaining impasse in one month,
union rejects UVM administration's
plan to leverage pandemic to roll back
faculty salaries and benefits*

Burlington, Vermont: United Academics, the faculty union of the University of Vermont, has declared impasse in contract negotiations with the administration of the University of Vermont after a prolonged bargaining process. This contract negotiation impasse comes three weeks after the administration and the faculty reached impasse in separate negotiations on the immediate impacts of COVID-19 to faculty work conditions.

Said Jane Knodell, economics professor and chief negotiator for the union, "The pandemic has created unprecedented difficulty and uncertainty for bargaining a long-term contract. This fact, combined with the very severe salary and benefit cuts presented by the Administration, ultimately made it impossible for us to come to agreement notwithstanding the 19 bargaining sessions that the two sides held starting in early February."

The UVM administration proposed 10 percent cuts to base salary over the next two years, followed by a year of salary freeze in FY 2023. The administration is also asking faculty to forgo all retirement contributions for two years, while upper administrators continue to receive substantial contributions to their retirement plans.

These proposals amount to a 30 percent cut to compensation over two years. If implemented, this would set UVM faculty salaries back five years and dramatically reduce retirement earnings over time. For a typical early-career assistant professor, this represents a loss of over \$100,000 of retirement savings through compounding.

The administration's bargaining team indicated that compensation cuts were only partly in response to COVID-related budgeting. The administration clearly showed their intent to take advantage of a crisis to roll back faculty salaries and benefits by to pre-2015 levels.

Acknowledging the challenges of bargaining during a pandemic, in April the United Academics team proposed pausing negotiations and extending the current contract. The union team also then proposed in June one-time progressive salary cuts for faculty. The administration rejected these good-faith efforts to compromise and to pause the bargaining process.

In addition:

- The administration's first proposals, released as the pandemic escalated, completely eliminated paid parental leave and reduced paid sick time, cut salaries, and eliminated all retirement benefits for two years. Although the parental leave proposal was subsequently withdrawn, the timing of proposing such dramatic take-backs, while faculty worked around the clock to convert well-established classes to an online platform in a matter of weeks, damaged faculty morale.
- The administration showed an additional lack of compassion during the crisis by permanently closing the only childcare center on campus and announcing work and pay cuts for nearly 70 full-time teaching faculty (which were later reversed after a successful union grievance)
- The union remains steadfast in its support of other critically important elements of a just contract, rejected by the administration, including preserving due process in disciplinary matters and expanding parental leave to foster parents, as well as shared parental leave for couples who are both faculty members.
- The union requested an institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion at UVM, including proposing a clear commitment to diversity and inclusion in faculty work and in UVM attracting and retaining faculty of color, and adopting gender inclusive language throughout the contract. United Academics was able to negotiate some progress toward this goal and recognizes the importance of reaching a full commitment with supports and accountability in place.

"It is unfortunate that we were unable to reach a fair contract without going to impasse. We are confident in the strength of our union and the justness, reasonableness, and compassion of our positions. We thank our dedicated bargaining team, our members and our community allies for their efforts thus far," said Julie Roberts, linguistics Professor and President of United Academics. "United Academics shares with students and UVM staff a commitment to high quality, affordable, personalized, and safe public higher education. These qualities are a hallmark of a UVM education. Faculty care profoundly about our students and their health, wellbeing and success, and we are committed to outstanding instruction for students,

accountable leadership, and effective and transparent communication” said Roberts.

United Academics also stands in solidarity with UVM staff members, who have had cuts unilaterally imposed on them. Clerical, technical and professional staff at UVM have yet to organize a union--which would require the administration to bargain any changes in wages, benefits and working conditions. The faculty union’s intent throughout the bargaining process has been to prioritize fairness and justice for all UVM employees, not just the faculty.

The next phase of contract negotiations will continue with the assistance of a mediator.

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About United Academics: UVM United Academics represents over 700 full-time and 100 part-time faculty at UVM and is affiliated with AFT Vermont, which represents 5000 higher education and healthcare professionals in Vermont, and AAUP.