



Newsletter

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Fifty Years of MUFA

The McMaster University Faculty Association was founded fifty years ago in May 1951 in response to, and in recognition of, the changing nature of the professoriate and its place in the University. In the thirties, a sizeable percentage of the senior faculty had private incomes either personally or through marriage so that they could bank their McMaster earnings in toto. Consequently, there was little energy devoted to bettering conditions for those not in that fortunate position. Pensions were awarded to faculty members on the basis of their perceived needs; the perception being that of the President of the University.

In the forties, the war years, the faculty was called to do its patriotic duty, teaching students in accelerated programmes, and later serving the needs of the veterans returning from Europe and the Pacific. Pushing your own interests in those times was not an option.

So by the fifties, after those years of self denial, change was very much in the air. (CAUT was also founded in 1951 as were a number of other associations.) From the beginning, relations with the Administration were very good; some said the Association was too pliable and forgiving — a charge that is still occasionally levied! The associations that were born in discord (Manitoba comes to mind) continue to endure strife and dissension. We can thank our founders and our early Executives for hewing so tenaciously to the path of collegiality despite the many temptations to behave otherwise.

This being a negotiation year perhaps colours my judgement, but I think our Association's most notable achievement was contributing to the founding, by the Tripartite Committee in December 1984, of the Joint Committee. This has put the Association and the Administration on a more equal footing. In particular, when remuneration is considered, the existence of the Final Offer Selection process concentrates the mind wonderfully. In the four times the negotiations have gone to Final Offer Selection, we have won twice and the Administration has won twice, with the awards alternating.

In my opinion, our Association is a robust fifty year old and we can look forward with eagerness and anticipation to its next fifty years.

*Tom Davison
President*

Salary Negotiations — Getting Ready



Getting prepared for and participating in salary negotiations is a complex and time-consuming task. One of the major areas of concern of the Remuneration Committee in this regard has been trying to understand and encapsulate the needs and sentiments of MUFA members. Our use of focus groups and the subsequent request for input from MUFA members have proved invaluable in helping the Committee to prepare the groundwork for our remuneration brief this year.

The replies received by the MUFA office to the Focus Group Report have overwhelmingly supported what the focus groups told us. Faculty and librarians believe that we require not only a cost of living increase to “inflation proof” our earnings in the current year, but also a significant amount of catch-up for lost across-the-board increases over the Social Contract years and the previous three-year contract. So we will be asking for significant ATB increases. Of course the CP/M will also be implemented at the normal rate. As well, there is still a strong negative sentiment against multi-year deals that lock us into what appear to be less than adequate increases when compared with increases at neighbouring universities. Finally, most replies to the focus group summary felt that our benefits, in the main, were adequate and should be maintained with some minor modifications.

Other Issues of Importance

Two other issues relating to benefits have been brought up by the focus groups and mentioned independently by MUFA members responding to the focus group report, namely portability of the tuition bursary and the development of a supplementary retirement plan (SRP). Both of these issues are being considered by the Remuneration Committee (and have been considered in previous years), but need to be discussed briefly here to put them in historical context.

The form of tuition bursary benefit (not the amount) was agreed on in the two-year contract negotiated in 1996/97. To help the University to have a handle on the upper limit of spending on this benefit, MUFA agreed at the table to set the total pool of money assigned to this benefit at \$200,000 per year and that the benefit would be in the form of a bursary to the student. A committee was struck to design a benefit that fit with faculty needs. At that time portability of the benefit was seriously contemplated, but this would have meant that individual bursaries would have been reduced (\$1000-1200 rather than \$2250). Faculty voted overwhelmingly to maintain the higher award and keep the bursary in-house. In 1999, our experience with the bursary (we revisit the number participating and the total amounts spent annually since 1999) showed us that we had not spent the \$200,000 in any of the years in which the bursary was in force. Indeed, we had a surplus of \$90,000+ which should have been spent on bursaries for the MUFA group. Hence, we increased the amount of the bursary to \$3000 in 1999/2000 and kept it there in 2000/2001. Interestingly, even with the higher per student amount, the MUFA group only spent \$201,000 in 2000/2001. No one but MUFA has a restriction on the upper limit of the benefit's cost, i.e., MUFA's agreement to the \$200,000 cap.

Portability of the tuition bursary could still be a possibility if we recognize that to be portable the individual tuition bursary would be smaller than that currently awarded. A portable tuition bursary would be more equitable since more MUFA members could make use of the benefit. More use means more participants which translates into a higher cost to the institution. Simply put, if 50 people currently receive tuition bursaries of \$3000, the total is \$150,000. Portability would at least double participation, say, 100 x \$3000 or \$300,000. However, if the bursary were, say \$2000, then the total cost would only be \$200,000.

This is an important issue for many MUFA members, but not for all.

The second area that has received attention by MUFA members is the establishment of a supplementary retirement plan (SRP). We are members of a defined benefit pension plan, i.e., we make defined contributions per year based on our salary during our employment life and our pension is based on our best four-year average salary and the number of years of service. This is a very simple scheme until we realize that the Federal Tax Department established a maximum pensionable salary of about \$97,600 in the early 1990s and has not adjusted it since. This means that pensions are limited to a little over \$60,000 unless some other way is developed to pay pensions on earnings over the maximum. This is where the SRP enters. A number of schemes exist in practice (at the University of Toronto for example) where employee and employer make contributions on “excess earnings” over the maximum and this becomes part of the “pension” on retirement. SRPs do not have the same tax deductibility as our regular pension plan, but they can be tax-sheltered to an extent during the employment years.

Immediately after the pensionable maximum salary was frozen at \$97,600 in the early 1990s, the University negotiated a time-phased (ending in 1997) SRP for faculty who were above the maximum in the early 1990s. The argument made at that time was that the people included in the temporary SRP had been making pension contributions on their whole salary and had been promised a pension based on that salary. The change in the law did not change the contractual obligations of the Pension Plan. At the time that the temporary SRP was established, the Pension Plan was revised so as to gear deductions only to maximum pensionable salary. There were, at the time, expectations that the Federal Authority (now the CCRC, i.e. Canada Customs and Revenue Commission) would again begin to index the maximum pensionable salary and maximum pensions could then increase. These expectations have not been realized. In fact, the situation at many universities with defined benefit plans is similar to McMaster’s, namely people are reaching the maximum pensionable salary at an earlier age than they did previously, and their pensions are being eroded. We at MUFA have been cognizant of the need for an SRP open to all members for many years. Indeed, in a number of the original schemes for the pension surplus distribution (which we hope will happen in 2002) the establishment of an SRP was put forward as a partial use of the pension surplus. The University Administration has suggested a number of times that it recognizes the need for an SRP as both a recruitment and a retention tool and that it is actively working on an SRP proposal.

Whether the SRP should be a matter for negotiations is an open question. Pension matters normally apply to all University employees and require approval from all groups. At least one other group, the Clinical Faculty, is actively pressing the Administration for an SRP. While MUFA is committed to being part of the development of an SRP, nevertheless, we would be only one of the groups that would benefit from such a scheme.

Schedule of Critical Milestones in Negotiations

The following schedule gives MUFA members an idea of the time-line involved in the current negotiations.

Late November-Early December 2001

Preparation of MUFA Remuneration brief by Remuneration Committee

December 10, 2001

Approval of Remuneration Brief by MUFA Executive

December 11, 2001

 Submission of MUFA Remuneration Brief to the Joint Committee

 Mailing of Remuneration Brief to MUFA membership

Early January 2002

Discussion and Approval of Remuneration Brief at the MUFA General Meeting

January 31, 2002

Progress Report to MUFA members from the Joint Committee

March 15, 2002

Close of Negotiations at the table

- If agreement has been reached, then the Agreement is submitted to the membership for a vote.
- If no agreement is reached, MUFA and the Administration have approximately one week to each prepare briefs of their positions to submit to the Selector. A hearing before the Selector would then be held after which the Selector would choose either MUFA's or the Administration's as the final position.

Our negotiation process has been in place since 1984/85 and has worked well in most instances. It is important, however, that we know and understand our members' needs. There is still an opportunity to put in your "two cents worth" for the remuneration brief and the negotiations and we urge you to do so.

*Bernadette Lynn
Remuneration Chair*



The Final Oral Examination of PhD Theses

In late September, the weekly request from our Thesis Coordinator, Elvira Evangelista, for examiners of PhD theses was prefaced by a brief message from me regarding the examination process. That led to an invitation from the MUFA Executive to provide some additional information to MUFA members about the process.

McMaster's regulations for the final oral defence of a PhD stipulate that the membership of the examining body includes "two representatives of the faculty at large" (often referred to as "internal externals"). Long years of experience have shown that the most effective way to find people to serve this role is to publicize the list of theses coming for defence, and to let faculty members volunteer. (I can recall as Associate Dean a dozen years ago being asked to identify, and occasionally to call, faculty who would have an interest in a particular topic. Relying on the knowledge and memory of the Associate Deans, well-informed though they are, is clearly not the best way to find these examiners!)

In recent years, we have had about 130 PhD students defend annually. This implies the need for 260 "representatives of the faculty at large" each year. In addition, we need 130 chairs for defences (who serve as my delegate according to the Graduate Calendar — and believe me I do appreciate their willingness to be delegated that task). According to the most recent numbers I have seen, there are just over 500 full-time faculty members in the five Faculties other than Health Sciences. In Health Sciences, there are roughly another 300 people with graduate faculty status. Clearly, if all eligible members of faculty participated in the examination of theses as "internal externals", no one individual would have to be involved more than once every two or three years. Unfortunately, only a minority of faculty volunteer for this responsibility. Fortunately, those who do participate often do so several times a year,

with the result that we are able to maintain the procedures as they are described in the Calendar.

At the Graduate Council meeting on October 18, I raised the issue of our PhD examination procedures, and especially the role of the “internal externals”. I suggested that perhaps we did not need them, or that the number could be reduced to one if the external examiner attends the defence. Neither suggestion received much support. Many people present at the meeting had been at examinations where the contribution of the “representatives of the faculty at large” had been an important component, including some where they asked more difficult questions than the members of the supervisory committee.

Consequently, there are four “take-away” messages from this discussion. First, if you have participated as a chair or “internal examiner”, thank you very much for your assistance in this important part of the University’s PhD programs. Second, if you have not accepted El+vira’s invitation to participate in one of these examinations, please do so. It could be considered a responsibility that goes along with the privilege of supervising your own graduate students. It can also be enjoyable and interesting. Third, if you are not on the list, and would like to be, please let me know, and I’ll pass your name on to Elvira. And finally, if you have suggestions for improving the process, please let me know. We in Graduate Studies, and at Graduate Council, are always open to ideas for improving our regulations.

Fred L. Hall
Dean of Graduate Studies

Same Sex Survivor Benefits

Reminder to Designate Your Beneficiary

The McMaster Pension Plan has, for some time now, included income protection for partners of lesbian and gay employees. A lesbian or gay employee can, in other words, designate a same sex partner (defined as a person with whom she/he has lived in a conjugal relationship for not less than one year) as a survivor for pension purposes.

To do so, it is necessary to complete the pension section of the Beneficiary Appointment Form, noting “same sex partner” under the “relationship” category. NOTE: earlier completion of Human Resources’ Qualification of Partner as Spouse form (necessary in order to qualify for other employee benefits) is not sufficient.

For information or clarification about this, contact Dina LoPresti (Human Resources Officer, Pensions and Benefits, loprest@mcmaster.ca, ext. 27253).

Jane Aronson

It was a dark and stormy night...

The Edward Bulwar Lytton prize is awarded every year to the author of the worst possible opening line of a book. This has been so successful that Penguin now publishes five books-worth of entries. Some recent winners:

As a scientist, Throckmorton knew that if he were ever to break wind in the

10.

sound chamber he would never hear the end of it.

9. Just beyond the Narrows the river widens.

8. With a curvaceous figure that Venus would have envied, a tanned, unblemished oval face framed with lustrous thick brown hair, deep azure-blue eyes fringed with long black lashes, perfect teeth that vied for competition, and a small straight nose, Marilee had a beauty that defied description.

7. Andre, a simple peasant, had only one thing on his mind as he crept along the east wall: Andre creep ... Andre creep ... Andre creep.

6. Stanislaus Smedley, a man always on the cutting edge of narcissism, was about to give his body and soul to a back-alley sex-change surgeon — to become the woman he loved.

5. Although Sarah had an abnormal fear of mice, it did not keep her from seeking out a living at a local pet store.

4. Stanley looked quite bored and somewhat detached, but then penguins often do.

3. Like an overripe beefsteak tomato rimmed with cottage cheese, the corpulent remains of Santa Claus lay dead on the hotel floor.

2. Mike Hardware was the kind of private eye who didn't know the meaning of the word "fear", a man who could laugh in the face of danger and spit in the eye of death — in short, a moron with suicidal tendencies.

AND THE BEST OF ALL:

1. The sun oozed over the horizon, shoved aside darkness, crept along the greensward, and, with sickly fingers, pushed through the castle window, revealing the pillaged princess, hand at throat, crown asunder, gaping in frenzied horror at the sated, sodden amphibian lying beside her, disbelieving the magnitude of the frog's deception, screaming madly, "You lied!"