

Faculty Association Applies for Certification

By Sarah Murphy

An application for certification was made by the UPEI faculty association on February 23rd to the Prince Edward Island Labour Relations Board. Two hundred and sixty association members voted in favour of starting a union.

Don Gillis, president of UPEI's faculty association, told the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) that, "The response was incredible, it is clear the time was right to join our colleagues in unionized faculty associations across Canada."

Eighty per cent of Canada's university faculty associations are unionized. The only other university in Atlantic Canada where the faculty is not unionized is St. Francis Xavier.

Two main reasons have pushed faculty to vote in favour of certification. The faculty association and the large majority of its members felt that there is a need to develop a policy on how to handle grievances and that UPEI must catch up to other universities in Canada, Gillis said.

Leo Cheverie, President of the PEI Federation of Labour and Staff Members, supports the members' initiative. "UPEI is one of the few universities without a faculty union," said Cheverie. "I think a union which includes all faculty, including sessional [instructors] will ensure that the same rules will apply to everyone and that there are set rules for resolving issues."

Gillis said money is not an issue with professors at UPEI and it was not a motivation for the application. He also added that although a union would give the faculty the right to strike, there is no fear of a walkout any time soon.

"I think [the possibility of a strike is] way in the future," Gillis



told CBC. "There's no thoughts of that at all. I don't think there's any reason for it actually."

Faculty unionizing does bring concern to UPEI Student Union President BJ McCarville, but she is supportive of the initiative nonetheless.

"I think it is a really good initiative, McCarville said. "I recognize that it will create difficulties in bargaining with the university about budgeting, but I think it is an essential part of our university that our faculty are properly represented and getting the pay they deserve, and the treatment they have merited as faculty."

"I would even say our faculty's benefits should not be compromised in the pursuit of lower tuition fees," she continued. "That is not what we are asking as students, we are focussing on accessibility with proper funding, not at the cost of the faculty which are the life blood of our university."

The proposed bargaining unit includes Atlantic Veterinary College faculty and UPEI School of Nursing clinical instructors.

The terminal date fixed on the association's application is March 23th. Under PEI labour law, a vote will be held only if the labour relations officer deems it necessary. Gillis doubts there will be any objection. "Clearly, we feel our majority is significant enough to warrant automatic certification," he told the CAUT.

The next step for the association if the application is approved, is to determine priorities for bargaining. Committees and working groups will be struck to discuss items members will want addressed in first contract negotiations. A union could be in place by the first of April.

With files from CBC and CAUT Bulletin



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