

LETTER FROM ALL FACULTY MEMBERS OF DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

To: All Undergraduate and Graduate Students in the Department of Geography and Environment

RE: Strike Vote and Student Interests

Date: 1 February 2022

Dear Students,

All Department of Geography and Environment faculty members **unanimously** support a YES strike vote. The University of Lethbridge Faculty Association (ULFA) position represents preserving the quality of education that we currently offer, and protecting the rights of educators and student interests now and in the future. It is about equity, parity, and most of all, respect. We respect our students, and we are determined to ensure the best outcomes, just as we do each day in class.

Our Department's unanimous position of all its faculty members is that it is clearly in the best interests of all students that this situation be properly resolved. Now that a strike vote has become necessary, the only way to achieve proper and rapid resolution is by voting YES. This will give ULFA the essential support needed to negotiate to achieve settlement of these matters, either without actually needing to strike, or, if a strike starts, that it would be brief. This clearly represents the minimal disruption to the Spring 2022 teaching semester.

The alternative is dangerous for students and faculty, and would result in immediate and long-term damage to the University of Lethbridge. Longer-term damage also includes not being able to attract and hire the same high-quality professors in the future, and keep them here.

The reasons that faculty may strike are multiple. While some of the dialogue to date has tended to focus on salary issues, and those issues are real, they are not the only nor main concerns. Your instructors in the Department of Geography and Environment are deeply worried about the province's treatment of post-secondary education and the long-term implications for the UofL, for the City of Lethbridge, and for Alberta as a whole.

We have to look out for the short-term interests of the students this semester, and equally important, the long-term health of the university and protect its future and its reputation.

We also fully recognize that the COVID-19 situation has already impacted your education and created additional uncertainties, and that a strike will make you nervous about how your semester will play out. We as a Department are fully committed to do absolutely everything that we can to help you through this time.

If we do strike, there will be limited contact that we can have with you in our roles as professors. The expectation with a strong YES mandate is that a settlement would be reached without a strike, or that a strike would only be brief, but during which we would not be able to teach you or advise you on academic matters.

We, along with your other professors, are fighting to ensure that you will get the university education that you deserve, and that we are firmly committed to providing with the continued highest standards possible.

Further information on this matter from the ULFA website is contained beneath our names.

Thank you.

Signed by all faculty members of the Department of Geography and Environment:

Jesse Aspinall
René Barendregt
Phil Bonnaventure
Shawn Bubel
Jim Byrne
Laura Chasmer
Spencer Croil
Marcus Dostie
Caitlin Hanrahan
Chris Hopkinson
Tom Jensen
Hester Jiskoot
Dan Johnson
Tom Johnston
Stefan Kienzle
Kevin McGeough
Derek Peddle
Ivan Townshend
Julie Young
Wei Xu

Note: Department Chair Prof. Craig Coburn is the ULFA Representative on the Board of Governors, and is therefore not eligible to vote.

From: https://www.ulfa.ca/job_actions/why-should-i-vote-in-favour-of-a-strike/



WHY SHOULD I VOTE IN FAVOUR OF A STRIKE?

- January 25, 2022

Our working conditions are students' learning conditions. Our members deserve the working conditions that we have been fighting for and our students deserve faculty members who have reasonable workloads and the conditions to perform their best work. ULFA members perennially note that their workloads have increased for years in a piecemeal fashion. Recently, some ULFA members have been assigned additional classes to teach without any additional compensation.

Many members note they now teach more students than before, without any additional classroom support. This puts our Members in the difficult position of choosing between spending less time with each student or putting in additional hours of unpaid overtime. We can't improve these conditions without applying additional pressure on the Board. This has been demonstrated by many universities, most recently by Concordia University of Edmonton and the University of Manitoba.

We need to break a cycle of accepting bad deals and salary erosion. This has gone on for over a decade with no indication of changing course. We have lost COLA for years and fallen behind inflation. ULFA members took a 1% pay cut in 2013 when the university was in financial trouble and no other faculty association in the province did so. We've never recovered these losses. ULFA members are expected to continuously accept losses when times are tough, but we do not realize gains when times are good. We are already 10-15% behind our colleagues at comparator institutions. This impacts recruitment and retention at our university. **Our members have already given enough.**

The status quo is inequitable. Over 80% of our Members self-report working more than 40 hours a week. The Board has admitted in writing that they have not abided by our Collective Agreement since 2018 by failing to produce and implement policies to ensure that workloads for all members are equitable and reasonable. In terms of salaries, 32% of ULFA members earn less than the average income in Lethbridge. There is little transparency about pay equity at the U of L. Additionally, approximately 100/ 550 ULFA Members teach contract to contract without job security or basic health benefits and professional supplements. The University did not provide them with financial support for the costs associated with transitioning to online instruction and ULFA stepped in to provide this. ULFA members typically pay more than comparators for our own healthcare and premiums and yet the Board refuses ULFA's proposal for joint stewardship over our benefits. This stewardship is necessary to ensure Member's are getting the best health benefits possible.

Time's up. The Board has a continued pattern of delays and prolonged negotiations. The only times that we've seen real movement have been when we have taken decisive action (e.g., hosting an information rally, withdrawing from mediation, etc.). We've been bargaining for over 600 days. This has gone on long enough. **A strong strike mandate is the fastest way to bring negotiations to an end.**

The Board's current offer is insufficient. We have not made progress on the issues that our members gave us a mandate to fight for. We have primarily fought off 4% rollbacks, erosion of academic freedom, and other harmful language – all of which were unlikely to ever be accepted. These are not gains. They simply maintain the inequitable status quo. The salary offer remains lower than the current government mandate and other public sector settlements.