



protecting academic quality

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University of Vermont faculty union approves new three-year contract

Burlington, VT – Late Monday, December 5, United Academics’ full-time faculty union overwhelmingly (91% of those voting) ratified a new three-year contract with the University of Vermont, returning a clear vote of confidence and appreciation for the union and its negotiating team. United Academics had reached a tentative contract agreement on November 14 with the University of Vermont after ten months of negotiations and mediation sessions.

The new contract will run until July 2014. It provides modest salary increases, improvement in workload conditions, and retention of all existing health benefits and premium rates for active employees. It protects existing sabbatical rights and tuition remission benefits, and increases job security for more experienced lecturers at risk of being replaced by lower paid faculty. On the other hand, the contract raises the retirement benefits eligibility age from 60 to 65 while increasing the post-retirement premium payments for future retirees. While the University had proposed eliminating completely its contribution to post-retirement health benefits for new hires, UA successfully negotiated the establishment of a new benefits plan in which the University provides yearly contributions to accounts held by new faculty, which they can use on retirement to pay Medicare supplemental insurance premiums or other health costs.

The negotiating team was composed of Nick Danigelis (Sociology), Sue Dinitz (English), Mary Peabody (Extension), Richard Single (Mathematics & Statistics), and Denise Youngblood (History), with David Shiman (Education) as chief negotiator.

“Salaries for full-time faculty received a substantial increase over the past few contracts, but these are different and difficult economic times,” said Nick Danigelis, professor of Sociology and a member of the negotiating team. “The approximate 5% increase over the three-year contract will not keep pace with the ever-increasing rate of inflation and cost of living. Although we remain fairly competitive with other institutions where faculty have received little to no salary increases in recent years, all faculty recognize that more substantial salary increases will be essential in the next contract if we are to successfully recruit the best and brightest new faculty in the future.”

UA's president and lead negotiator, David Shiman, professor of Education, reflected upon the lengthy process of negotiation and the contract reached by both sides. "This was a respectful negotiation that accomplished much but left us with major challenges."

"Some of the improvements in the contract will help us protect academic quality at UVM. However, we are confronted with an administration that has substantially increased undergraduate enrollment over the last few years without comparable increases in the size of the faculty," Shiman said. "University investment in its academic mission has not kept pace with its expenditure on debt payment and administrative support. Course sizes continue to increase and the amount of time and individual attention faculty can spend with students continue to decrease. The university's appeal to students as a student friendly, small university of quality is at stake. The faculty must do everything it can to reassert the primacy of this academic mission."

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