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UVM Part-Time Faculty Contract Negotiations at Impasse: United Academics Seeks Job Security, Health Insurance

Burlington, Vt., May 29, 2009—After five months of negotiations, the University administration and United Academics have failed to reach agreement on a second, part-time faculty contract. The parties mutually agreed to declare impasse yesterday and expect to begin mediation in June. Approximately 160 faculty members belong to the part-time unit of United Academics.

The UVM administration tends, according to United Academics, to view part-time faculty as a surplus labor pool who come and go, with little relationship to UVM. Administrators often portray them as a transient group of people with full-time jobs outside the University who teach a course or two from time to time for extra money. On the contrary, a closer look at the members of UVM part-time faculty reveals a group of highly qualified professionals who depend on their teaching income. Many part-timers have been teaching at the University for more than eight years.

Despite having taught here for many years, most part-time faculty do not know from one semester to the next whether they will be rehired. Beth Haggart, part-time art professor and member of the bargaining team, says, “Almost all of us teach from semester to semester, living in fear with the knowledge that the administration can replace us with a newcomer for any reason and without any explanation. We have served this University well and are entitled to some job security.”

Although President Fogel recently reported to the Board of Trustees that UVM has “weathered this year’s economic vicissitudes,” and talked of his confidence in the “the strength of UVM’s position in today’s challenging environment,” the administration is only willing to offer the 160 members of the part-time unit a total of \$15,000 in salary increases. That is one half of one percent, an average of \$100 per annum per member of the bargaining unit in the first year of a new contract and only slightly more in subsequent years.

And, when one looks at health insurance and other security-related issues, David Shiman, union president and chief negotiator asserts, the administration’s position is even worse. He portrays the University’s bargaining stance as a “brick wall.” He states, “we propose a slight increase in job security, with those in the bargaining unit getting preference for teaching courses over newcomers, but all we hear is NO. We propose University contributions to a retirement plan, as is found in the Vermont State College system, but

we hear nothing but NO. We propose the University make a partial payment of the premium for the very expensive High Deductible Insurance Plan it offers faculty, but all we hear is NO. In fact, almost every proposal we make receives a resounding NO. We hope that the University will be more responsive to our concerns in mediation and indicate, through their proposals, that they value and respect the important role played by part-time faculty at this institution.”

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