Working on Campus During COVID-19

Understanding the LOU
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Welcome back! Virtually, of course.

I hope that everyone was able to get some rest this summer in anticipation for what I am sure will be a busy, productive, and stressful term.

As I move into my first full semester as URFA President, I find that I have lots of my plate! First off, we have some changes afoot in the URFA office. Kevin Siebert, our Executive Director since 2017, has moved on to a new position with the Saskatchewan Health Authority. On behalf of the URFA Executive, I would like to thank him for his work at URFA, and for his help in my transition to my current role. We wish him the best.

I have exciting news for our Communications Officer, Eric Bell, who will be joining the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour as their new Strategic Advisor and Communications Officer. As we move into the provincial election period, Eric will be working with Saskatchewan’s labour movement to help them to continue the fight for workers’ rights. The URFA Executive wishes Eric all the luck in his new term position, but we will miss him.

From an URFA operations perspective, our talented staff in the URFA office continue to do outstanding work in this period of change. I will provide news when I have it on how we will address the changes in staffing in the office, but for now, a big thank you to our staff for continuing to represent our members so well and for keeping the office functioning in a time of flux.

URFA has some exciting initiatives that began under the previous Executive that have come, or will soon be coming, to fruition. First off, URFA was able to reach a new collective agreement for members at Luther College. Congratulations to all members of the bargaining team for that achievement. Second, we are very close to finishing our strategic plan and sharing it with the Council of Representatives near the end of September. The general membership will have the opportunity for feedback at the Fall General Meeting in October. Third, we look forward to hearing from the University of Regina on our proposed Letter of Understanding (LOU). It is a priority of URFA to come to agreement with the U of R on how they will work with URFA in supporting members in the challenges that we face due to COVID-19. Once we have an agreement with the U of R, we will engage our college partners as well.

Later in my term, I am looking forward to developing some environmental sustainability initiatives. We also have bargaining of both APT and Academic collective agreements at the U of R and the APT Agreement at FNUniv as well. Please look to your inboxes for the call to serve on the Bargaining Advisory Committee from which we will recruit negotiators to sit at the various tables.

As always, I and URFA, are always available for feedback, help, and advice. Best of luck to everyone in the start of the new term!

Britt Hall
President
University of Regina Faculty Association
I am delighted to take on the role of interim Executive Director of URFA with the support of my office colleagues and the Executive Committee. As there is much work ahead in the coming weeks and months, both continuity and stability are important, but not more so than the skills and experience I offer you in this position.

For those who don’t know me, a little background: I completed my post-secondary education at the U of R studying sociology and religious studies, then moved to earn undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees in Education with a focus on curriculum and instruction. I have worked as a sessional instructor across several faculties for the past 20 years, as well as several years as a U of R APT member. I have also been involved with URFA, having volunteered on the Sessional Advocacy (formerly the Status of Sessionals) Committee, and serving as chair of that committee and member of the Executive Committee for several years as well. Following several years working in the non-profit sector including as Research Representative for CUPE, I was hired at URFA as a term Member Services Officer in 2016, and later became a permanent member of the staff. Having the opportunity to work for URFA has been a highlight of my career.

In the months ahead, I look forward to continuing to serve URFA members in my new role, while also having the opportunity to move forward on some important projects: negotiating a letter of understanding with the University and College Administrations, finalizing URFA’s strategic plan, and working to begin negotiations for the U of R Academic, APT, and FNUniv APT collective agreements, all of which expire next year. Despite the staffing changes and challenges we are facing due to COVID-19, these projects and bargaining negotiations all remain a top priority for URFA.

The past six months have been a difficult time for many. The majority of us are still working remotely, and are doing our jobs as best we are able under these emergency circumstances. While we may all be “in this together”, our experiences are vastly different. Issues of healthy work environments, manageable workloads, health and family considerations, to name a few may be magnified for some more than others. Remember that you can and should always reach out to URFA if you are experiencing an issue in your workplace, have a question about language in your collective agreement, or just want some advice on a workplace matter. There is no question too big or too small. Our URFA staff is still here to assist you, and, though we will be working with a reduced staff complement in the months ahead, we will always endeavor to respond to you in a timely manner.

I look forward to working with you all in my new role in the coming weeks and months ahead.

Heather Ritenburg
Interim Executive Director
University of Regina Faculty Association
2020/2021 URFA Executive

President
Britt Hall

Vice President, Academic
Paitoon Tontiwachwuthikul

Vice President, APT
Megan Milani

Grievance Officer
William Arnal

Sessional Representative
Barbara Meneley

2020/2021 URFA Council of Representatives

President
Britt Hall

Faculty of Arts
Darlene Juschka
Claire Carter
Robin Ganev

Faculty of Business Administration
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Trina Joseph
Candace Cappo

Finance Committee
Youngsoo Kim

Equity Committee
Claire Carter

Pension and Benefits Committee
Peter Douglas

Sessional Advocacy Committee
Christian Thompson
Barbara Meneley

Bylaws and Resolutions Committee
VACANT

Grievance Chair
William Arnal
During the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the University shut down campus and the shift was made to emergency teaching measures, it soon became evident that there were common issues arising among URFA members across all bargaining units.

In March, the URFA Executive passed a motion to form a team of members who would explore the possibility of developing a Letter of Understanding (LOU), to be proposed to The University of Regina, Campion and Luther Colleges, and First Nations University of Canada in order to resolve some of these issues. Members were surveyed in April, a draft LOU was submitted to the URFA Council of Representatives in May, and was later shared with URFA members. A final version of the LOU was sent to the University of Regina Administration in June, and FNUniv Administration in July.

Why an LOU?

The LOU is meant to provide, in writing, URFA’s understanding on the differences in the types of teaching prior and due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also seeks to address the issues due to COVID-19 that have been most commonly brought to URFA by members, and to address issues faced by members from across all bargaining units. An LOU is a way for URFA to clearly identify problems and propose solutions to the University and College Administrations.

What is URFA’s position on teaching during the pandemic?

It is URFA’s position that courses being taught in the fall semester are, like in the spring/summer, emergency teaching measures. These are synchronous or asynchronous courses taught as a result of extraordinary circumstances, where the instructor has been directed by their university to adapt their in-person teaching to a form of remote teaching. Compared to other forms of teaching, where the instructor has opted to deliver their course in-person, online asynchronously, or remotely synchronously, this form of instruction is not chosen by the instructor and does not meet student expectations of remote learning. Like online instruction, which would normally be worth 1.5 caseload, emergency remote teaching is more time consuming for the instructor.

What does the LOU say about...

Emergency Teaching

Courses that have normally been delivered in person have shifted to emergency teaching measures. To address this, the LOU proposes that:

• It must be acknowledged that “emergency teaching measures” require additional hours in preparation and delivery. Some form of compensation must be provided.

• The financial compensation for Sessionals should be at least 1.25 stipend per course.

• Faculty members should be provided with at least one teaching release in a future semester for every four such courses.

• The effects of this kind of delivery on research and service should be recognized in the performance review for the next five years.

• Students should be made aware that the quality of teaching is going to be different and will require drastic adjustments that may not live up to the expected ‘academic excellence.’

Caregiving

Some URFA members have to work at home and provide care for dependants, including schooling for children, elder care, and others with special needs, while other URFA members do not. This is an important equity issue which can have long term implications on career progress. The University of Regina has a duty to accommodate. The challenge of family care during the COVID-19 situation must be taken into account in the performance review.
Many URFA members cannot conduct their research because of interruptions to travel, to access to libraries, labs and specialized equipment, inability to conduct face-to-face research and for a variety of other reasons. In the LOU, URFA proposes that the delays occurred on performance reviews should take into account for the foreseeable future, provide extensions of research grants deadlines where possible and request the research office to advocate for extensions with granting agencies.

Performance Review

Deadlines for tenure, promotions, and performance reviews have been extended for Academic and APT members. However, the URFA LOU also requests that the Universities/Colleges take into account the lack of caregiving supports, delays in research and adjustment in teaching for this and near future review periods.

As well, during emergency teaching, given their inadequacy, students’ evaluations shall not be used as evaluation tools. Making use of the students’ evaluations shall be at the instructor’s discretion for as long as learning is done under “emergency teaching measures” and shall not be used negatively against an instructor.

Adjustments for APT members

APT workload has dramatically increased in some units. Vacation requests in some units were suspended in order to be able to handle the move to emergency teaching measures. APT staff have put in many hours of overtime and cancelled vacation plans and restricted their use of SDOs.

The LOU proposes that the Universities negotiate to rearrange adapted provisions that will genuinely provide the flexibility required to truly meet the needs of such APT staff.

Many APT members were also reassigned to jobs that did not fall within the parameters of their JEQs, quickly learning new tasks with minimal training under the duress of extreme pressure. Some of the new, beyond-JEQ work was suited to a higher pay scale, and some of the work, though
essential, was menial and beneath their pay scale.

URFA proposes that the desired flexibility provisions stated above be fairly negotiated to an arrangement that ensures APT staff that their work/life balance and mental health needs will be fully addressed. This can be resolved with minimal cost to the University. We are only asking that flexibility provisions be increased. As well, proper training should be provided for APT staff who are required to do new work that goes beyond their current skill and knowledge bases.

Job stability and benefits for sessionals

Sessionals could face course cancellations due to COVID-19 or may not be able to deliver emergency teaching measures. As a result, sessionals could lose their benefits or preference/priority status. To address this, the LOU proposes that No sessional should be adversely affected with respect to continuity of benefits stemming from cancellation of courses due to COVID-19, and Sessionals who cannot do remote teaching or whose classes are cancelled should not lose their preference or priority.

The insecurity of sessional work and accompanying benefits must be also acknowledged. Given the circumstances, the University has a moral duty to maintain benefits during the COVID-19 situation if, because of low enrollments, contracts are not offered when they are normally offered.

Changes to programs

The LOU proposes that there should be no changes nor suspension of programs without consultation as per the collective agreements with the Faculty members. Course and/or program development shall not be delayed or accelerated or changed in any other way without consultation as per the collective agreements.

Home ergonomics and health and safety on campus

Some URFA members have had to find work space at home. Such space should have good ergonomics, appropriate equipment and Internet access that are adequate for the member’s needs. As well, some members may be asked to return to work on campus but don’t feel safe doing so. To address these issues, the LOU proposes that the university provide the proper equipment necessary to meet members’ needs. Home wi-fi should also be an authorized allowance. This also must be provided to sessionals.

For members being asked to work on campus, The University shall recognize that members have the right to refuse to work in an environment that could compromise their health.

Mental Health

The sudden and complete change in working conditions, combined with the stresses brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, have had an adverse affect on the mental health of some members. The LOU proposes that University supervisors shall enquire how their employees are feeling and provide mental health support on an individual basis. Adjustments to vacation time deadlines should allow for the flexibility required to manage the stress of the situation.

What’s Next?

As of publication of this newsletter, URFA has still not heard a response from either the University of Regina or FNUniv administrations. It remains our hope that we will be able to negotiate solutions to the issues identified in the LOU. As members continue to work from home, these issues are not going away and there is an urgent need to come together to find solutions. It is URFA’s intention to share the LOU with administration of Campion and Luther Colleges in the near future as well.

It is hoped that the university administrations will work with us, and we will continue to communicate updates on the LOU to members and keep members informed of any agreed upon solutions.

A copy of the LOU submitted to the University of Regina and FNUniv Administrations can be found on our website at: https://www.urfa.ca/resources/covid-19
While the majority of classes this semester are being taught via emergency methods, there are still some labs and studio space that will have some instruction on campus. There are also URFA members who are still working on campus or, for various reasons, have to be on campus for work reasons despite the majority of URFA members working from home.

Since the University has made masks mandatory on campus effective September 1, URFA has placed an order for a limited number of reusable cloth masks for members who have to be on campus this fall. If you are spending time on campus and would like a mask, please contact the URFA Office at urfa@uregina.ca, provide us with your mailing address, and we will send you one, free of charge once our supply arrives.

On campus this fall and need a mask? URFA has a limited supply of reusable cloth face masks for members.

Email us at urfa@uregina.ca, provide us your mailing information and we will send you one.
On campus during COVID

While the majority of URFA members have been working from home since mid-March, some, like U of R APT member John Papendreous never left campus.

When campus closed, John Papendreous stayed behind. In his role as Manager of Custodial Services, Papendreous, who has worked at the University for 34 years and calls it his “second home,” has had no shortage of work for him and his team. In addition to their regular duties, they have also had to spend the summer planning for what is arguably one of the most important tasks: making sure that campus is kept clean and sanitized for the small number of students and staff who will be on campus throughout the fall semester.

Despite a busy schedule, Papendreous took some time recently to chat with URFA about working on campus during the pandemic, and how he and those who are working to keep our campus running have adjusted to working in the empty halls and rooms of a largely shuttered campus.

What has the COVID-19 pandemic changed about the way you work?

It really hasn’t changed much, as cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting is what ‘we’ (Custodial Services) specialize in. I have a professional staff that is very good at what they do. We have tweaked a few things.

Our core scope of cleaning prioritizes the frequency of cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting, especially in high traffic areas. This has been enhanced. We will be relying on students, faculty and staff to assist us in cleaning and disinfecting their personal work areas.

It has reinforced the importance of the use of PPE, following stricter safe work practices and
the use of better technology to enhance the work that our staff performs. For example, the use of Varsity Electrostatic Sprayers for disinfecting a variety of surfaces.

Everything has been designed to keep members of our university community, including members of Custodial Services, safe.

How have you adjusted to being one of the few people working on campus during this time?

First, let me clarify, I am not one of the few people working on campus during this time. There are hundreds of others who, like me, work in critical and essential service areas. My staff are not able to do their work remotely.

I find the work that I do very similar to that of a coach. I have coached sports for over 35 years and during this time I have learned how to adapt to ever changing demands, often with little or no warning. It is like coming out at half time, down two scores, and you get possession of the ball to start the third quarter- only to find out that you have lost your starting quarterback to injury, the wind has picked up and it is now starting to pour. Do you quit? Absolutely not. You have no choice but to deal with it and adapt, all the while trying to keep your team members positively focused on the process, not the outcome.

I understand and fully support the U of R’s position on asking staff to work remotely and I have been encouraged, where possible, to do the same. As a leader of an essential and critical service in which members of my team are not able to perform their work remotely, I feel it is important for me to be on site to support them. Besides, game plans seem to be changed almost daily and so having me on site to communicate the changes in protocols etc. has proven beneficial.

What has been the most challenging part of working on campus during the pandemic?

There are a few that I would like to mention. I think the greatest challenge centers around the uncertainty of what each day brings and what the future holds. At some point the fiscal realities will hit the U of R extremely hard and my staff have this gut feeling that, even though they have been onsite working every day, a number of them will end up being laid off.

Initially the 12 -14 hour work days required to develop safe work plans, updating core cleaning priorities, enhanced staff training, all with little or no turnaround time in an ever changing environment, all the while having to deal with added staff anxiety was a very challenging process to work through.

Another ongoing challenge that I face every day is whether or not we are able to obtain and keep in stock critical cleaning supplies. I am working with SMS and a number of suppliers to ensure that our needs are being met. However, this has not been an easy process.

I am proud to say that our staff has adapted well considering the added anxiety of not being able to work from home, the constant changes in protocols, the increase in activity on campus with students, researchers, and other and how the university plans to deal with those who may refuse to wear masks and those students who do not follow our social distancing guidelines. This is unfortunately, something we have to deal with multiple times during the day.

What are you looking forward to the most when things on campus eventually return to normal?

I remain optimistic. However, I do not see the University of Regina returning to normal for quite some time. I think this will be a well thought out and methodical process. I may be long retired by that time!

The University is a diverse and dynamic space. It is a wonderful place to work, play and engage. I cannot wait to see our corridors, recreational spaces, common areas, teaching and research spaces full of students and being vibrant once again.
Equity Committee Update

The Equity Committee met recently and talked about ideas for start of term, with respect to COVID-19. Some members shared that they were going to include a blurb in their syllabi and others are going to include a slide in their introductory lecture about the challenges faced by URFA members as a result of emergency remote instruction. The committee would like to make all members aware of the following information:

1) As of fall 2020, we are continuing to work in an emergency teaching context due to the COVID-19 pandemic

2) This situation is having different and unique circumstances for everyone - students, staff, and faculty.

3) There are equity implications within this broader context of emergency teaching and COVID-19 (unequal burdens related to: caregiving responsibilities, physical and mental health concerns, loss of social and financial resources, etc.)

4) As instructors, we will do our best to support and accommodate needs of students and staff.

If URFA members have any issues pertaining to equity they would like to discuss and/or need support with, please get in touch.

Claire Carter
Chair, URFA Equity Committee

Member Mobilization Committee Update

The Member Mobilization Committee (MMC) met multiple times over the summer to discuss mobilizing strategies for the upcoming year.

Megan Milani, APT Vice-President and Britt Hall, URFA President attended and brought constructive comments to meetings. Conversations included scheduling an URFA membership virtual town hall in August about the Letter of Understanding that was submitted to the University. That meeting was held, and attended by over 100 URFA members. Thank you to everyone who attended, and for your questions and advice on how URFA can move forward in negotiating an LOU with our administrations.

Given the success of the virtual town hall format, another membership virtual town hall is planned for early fall. Discussion items include updates to the new APT and Academic bargaining teams, MMC’s role in bridging member mobilization and bargaining, and how all URFA members can indirectly contribute to bargaining.

As we continue to work remotely, the Member Mobilization Committee will continue to work to find new ways to engage the URFA membership.

The committee is always looking for new members to join us, from across all bargaining units. Our meetings have typically been held every three weeks, over Zoom. If you are interested in joining the committee, please get in touch by contacting the URFA Office at urfa@uregina.ca

Michael Shires
Chair, URFA Member Mobilization Committee
The URFA Sessional Advocacy Committee continues to meet virtually, to advocate on behalf of Sessional Academic Staff. The committee has had a busy summer working on addressing a number of issues and committee initiatives.

In the spring, URFA members passed a constitutional amendment allowing for a member of the Sessional Advocacy Committee to sit on the URFA Executive Committee. This is an important step to ensuring that sessional members have proper representation, and that decisions are made with sessional members in mind. SAC Co-Chair Barbara Meneley has taken on the role as the Sessional Representative on the URFA Executive for the 2020-21 term.

The committee also ensured that sessional members had representation and input on the team of URFA members that created the Letter of Understanding (LOU) that has been shared with the University of Regina and FNUniv Administrations. SAC member Dwayne Meisner was the sessional representative on the committee. His voice ensured that sessional issues were included and addressed in the LOU.

The committee is also working on a newsletter catered directly to sessional members. A draft of the first issue has been completed and will be sent to sessional members soon. Keep an eye on your email!

We continue to hear from sessional members who are dealing with issues related to COVID-19, as well as general workplace issues. A reminder that if you need assistance, please contact the URFA Office for a Member Services Officer. However, if you wish to discuss sessional issues more informally, want to know more about the committee, or want to get involved, feel free to reach out to us directly. We can be reached via email at urfa.sacchair@uregina.ca.

Christian Thompson
Barbara Meneley
Co-Chairs, URFA Sessional Advocacy Committee

Save the Date!

URFA Fall General Meeting
Wednesday, Oct. 28
1:00 PM
Online via Zoom

(Link will be sent to your email)
Collective Bargaining Updates

FNUniv Sessional Academic Staff
Negotiations for FNUniv Sessional Academic Staff began in October, 2019. As with FNUniv Academic, the bargaining committee is working with the employer using an interest-based model. The bargaining committee has met multiple times with FNUniv Administration, and have recently moved negotiations to an online format as a result of COVID-19.

Negotiations are still ongoing and the bargaining committee met with FNUniv Administration multiple times in June, and has dates scheduled for further negotiations in September and October.

Thank you to bargaining committee members Christian Thompson and Juliet Bushi for their continued work and many hours dedicated towards reaching an agreement for FNUniv Sessional Academic members.

Luther College
Negotiations for a new agreement for Luther College Academic members began in May. Due to COVID-19, negotiations between the bargaining committee and Luther College Administration were held entirely online, which made for its own sets of unique challenges. Many hours of online meetings were held with the bargaining committee strategizing and drafting language before meeting with the administration. After meeting with Luther College Administration multiple times throughout May and June, a tentative agreement was reached in early July. Members were able to review the new agreement and voted in favour of acceptance later that month.

The new agreement includes increases in compensation that maintain parity with Academic members at the University of Regina, increases to pension contributions, increases to APEA accounts, and improvements for sessionals including expansion of rank and reimbursement for professional development.

Thank you to bargaining committee members Louis Awanyo and Dorothy Lane for their work towards reaching an agreement for Luther College Academic members.

Collective Agreements Negotiated
University of Regina Academic (Expires 2021)
University of Regina APT (Expires 2021)
Campion College (Expires 2021)
Luther College (Expires 2021)
FNUniv APT (Expires 2021)
FNUniv Academic (Expires 2022)

Collective Agreements Expired
FNUniv Sessional Academic Staff (Expired 2019)

Work for U of R Academic, APT, FNUniv APT negotiations to begin soon

With seven bargaining units across four campuses, bargaining is a continuous process for URFA. If you are a U of R Academic, APT, or FNUniv APT member, your contract expires next year (2021). It is time to start thinking about the next round of bargaining negotiations, and what members would like to achieve your next collective agreements. Soon, URFA will begin the process of forming bargaining negotiations committees, holding membership meetings, surveying members and collecting feedback.

Despite COVID-19, it is URFA’s intention to begin bargaining these contracts as soon as possible. The pandemic has only highlighted the importance of the need for strong collective agreements that provide important protections and job security for our members.

Please keep an eye out- in your inboxes and on our Facebook and Twitter pages, for more information on U of R Academic, APT and FNUniv APT negotiations, and how you can get involved.

Find your collective agreement
All of URFA’s collective agreements are posted online at www.urfa.ca. A limited number of printed copies are also available by contacting the URFA office.
The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) has compiled a database of the reopening plans of 110 Canadian post secondary institutions, finding the less-than-surprising result that the majority of institutions have started the fall semester with courses primarily online.

Other results of CAUT’s analysis of reopening plans include:

- The majority of institutions (55%) will be delivering their courses primarily on-line for the fall semester. Most instances of in-person learning in these cases are limited to course components that cannot be held virtually.

- Twenty-five percent of institutions are going forward with blended learning, meaning a mix of online, hybrid (i.e. online and in-person components) and in-person classes.

- Sixteen percent of institutions will hold courses fully online.

- Few institutions are going back to “traditional” teaching, with only two percent holding classes primarily in-person and one percent fully in-person.

- Two percent of institutions had yet to announce their fall semester plans at the time of publication.

CAUT determined fall delivery plans by reviewing each institution’s website, using language within statements, course schedules, FAQ sections, and other relevant areas within the sites to identify the delivery plan type.

CAUT is continuing to monitor how post secondary institutions are protecting the health and safety of their students and employees. More information on CAUTs analysis of fall semester reopening plans can be found on their website.