Bargaining 101 and Members' Role in the Process

Presented by Guy Obrecht, MRFA Negotiations Officer, 2023 – 2025
January 10, 2024 (prior to the commencement of the 2024 bargaining round)

A recording of the presentation portion of this session available here and notes from the Q&A are below.

Question: Why are there two meeting times for the mandate ratification?

Answer: These are the same meeting and both times are being held to ensure that all members are able to attend and be informed and engaged in the process. All Members who attend the meetings will receive an online ballot to vote on Tuesday January 16.

Comment: The bargaining Blog is a great addition to the process. Having a constant connection with the bargaining team is a real improvement and it will really help members to remain connected to the work of the bargaining team.

Response: this blog will be ongoing and as we advance through the bargaining stages there will be enhanced detailed communications via the bargaining blog

Question: has the new process created more work for negotiations or is it helpful so far?

Answer: the CBC is a very large group of people. The intent was to engage with a larger group of people to get them thinking about negotiations, to support members wanting to get involved in negotiations, and to support the work of the Negotiating Team. Having different perspectives and voices at the caucus level has been very helpful in the creation of the bargaining mandate. However, having the caucus would reduce the Bargaining Team's ability to be nimble and to make discussions on the fly if it were required to go back to consult with the CBC. However, it has been clarified that as we go into Negotiations, the Bargaining Team goes into the bargaining process on its own and will be coming back to the caucus for more information and for support and research: essentially, after stage 1 the CBC will become more of a resource group than a directing body.

Question: How big is the Caucus?

Answer: There are representatives from various additional academic units and there are also members on standby with particular interests and or expertise to serve as a rotating observer at the table.

Question: will there be categories of communication in the blog? Will there be an action requested in the blog? (Can there be direction for members to take action; for instance, go look at the mandate, go look at these items, consider attending the next PD session etc.?) In the Blog, can there be a clear indication of the benefit to the member for getting involved and staying up to date with the blog or what the benefit is to members of a specific item being discussed at the table.

Answer: This is a good idea. Boiling the blog down to precisely what Members should be doing at this point and getting that message out there. This could be part of the blog and it can be incorporated in the Index in the Bulletin. In terms of "how does this benefit me?" this is a big question, and it is difficult to distill in a short space (given the limited time members have to engage in the details). There is a lot of value to us, as academic staff, to support collective bargaining and to support PSE in general is visible in the PSE system in the US.

Action: Work will be done, where applicable, to incorporate clear and distinct weekly / monthly tasks for members to engage in the process and these will be included in the timeline graphic that is included in the bulletin. With the nature of the slow process of negotiations, the blogs will help members stay abreast of the progress and this will help members stay informed which will help Members to better engage in the moments of action that are required to support bargaining.

Question: Regarding the Long-Term Bargaining Goals Review Committee – how long has this committee been around and how does its work inform the bargaining mandate?

Answer: The background of the committee was reviewed. The type of work that it does has been done for the past 20 years; however, the committee has only more recently been formalized in the Bylaws and the Negotiations Policy as part of the process. The committee tracks progress on items at the table and updates an extensive document that compiles all this data which is, then, submitted following the end of each round to the Executive Board. The document is used to generate initial priority considerations which can be brought to the membership for consideration and refinement at the beginning of each round. Members' engagement with this process then directs the creation of the mandate that the membership considers/approves.

Comment: The data in this document should be used to indicate why these items matter to faculty Members: looking at where progress has been made as it is recorded in the document and identifying where messages could be tailored to enhance members' appreciation of the importance of this work in their terms and conditions of employment.

Answer: *Action*: The document could be used in this way and this action could be referred to the applicable MRFA committee to take up.