

# Q and A



## More information about the potential faculty strike

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### Will probationary faculty be asked to strike?

Yes. All members of the Faculty Association, including probationary employees, will be expected to support our collective efforts to achieve a fair contract.

The point of a strike is to show the employer that the membership of the Association is unhappy about the current state of negotiations. By participating, you can ensure that the strike is successful and of short duration.

### Why is it important that I support the USFA?

The Collective Agreement is the legally binding contract that governs your employment at the University. It contains all of the provisions dealing with tenure procedures, sabbatical leaves, benefits, rates of pay, maternity and parental leaves, how your work is assigned and a whole host of other matters. It is also the only document that protects your academic freedom. Every member of the faculty association benefits from this Collective Agreement. That's why you need to support the USFA's effort to achieve significant improvements to it.

### Can a strike be averted?

We certainly hope so but it's up to the Board of Governors. Four other faculty unions in Canada have dealt with the exact same situation we are facing this year: Brock, Carleton, Western Ontario and St. Mary's. All of these unions were facing an intransigent employer at the bargaining table and called for a strike mandate from their members. In all cases, an actual strike was averted when management faced-up to the sobering possibility of a faculty strike. The success of the job action at these other Universities was linked to the strong support from union membership. Additional information about these other faculty job actions are contained in the fact sheet "*Delay, Delay, Delay & Brinkmanship*" at [www.usaskfaculty.ca](http://www.usaskfaculty.ca).

## **I have large student loans and just purchased a house. What could I do about these payments during a strike?**

Talk to your bank or credit union about what they can do to help. Most banks will make some sort of provision for people on strike. Your regular pay cheques will resume after the strike so your bank should be willing to assist you. Faculty are generally viewed as very low risk borrowers, especially given the permanency of the University as an employer. Contact the Association office and we will supply you with a letter explaining the situation and requesting that your bank or credit union assist you during the strike.

## **What happens if I have unexpected expenses?**

Normal strike pay of \$75 per day (non-taxable income) from the Contingency Trust Fund (CTF) will be made available to all Association members in exchange for picketing or other strike duties. A portion of the CTF has been put aside to provide emergency loans to members encountering financial difficulties. Further details will be provided in the event that a strike is necessary.

## **How long would a strike last?**

When they can't be averted, faculty strikes in Canada are traditionally of fairly short duration. A complete listing of faculty strikes in the past 10 years and their duration is contained in the fact sheet "*Faculty Strikes in Canada*" posted on the USFA website.

## **What happened the last time the USFA was on strike?**

The USFA was on strike for less than two weeks in April of 1988. The provincial Conservative government, led by Grant Devine, declared faculty work an essential service and eventually legislated the USFA back to work. The Conservative government was subsequently defeated in the next provincial election in 1991. The USFA slogan after returning to work was "Here by Devine Intervention".

## **Will this provincial government do the same thing?**

The political situation in the province is very different this time around. In 1988, the Conservatives had a clear majority in the legislature and were early in their term as governing party. Currently, the NDP government lead by Lorne Calvert has a bare majority and will be heading into a provincial election in the very near future, quite possibly no later than the fall of the year. A major provincial employee union (SGEU) was just on strike and the NDP government did not act to legislate these workers back to work. Thus, it is highly unlikely that the provincial government would legislate the USFA back to work this year.

## **What do I tell my students?**

Feel free to answer them directly if you are comfortable in doing so. A number of issues in dispute at the bargaining table centre around protecting the role of academics at the University and ensuring that we are able to carry out our various duties in a reasonable manner. This includes our ability to offer high quality educational experiences to our students. If there is a question you can't answer, refer them to the USFA website ([www.usaskfaculty.ca](http://www.usaskfaculty.ca)) or their student organization: USSU for undergraduates and GSA for graduate students. The USFA is communicating directly with USSU and GSA and these groups will no doubt make additional information available to their student members.

## **My department traditionally conducts teaching evaluations during March. What will happen to these if we are on strike?**

Department Heads (or deans in non-departmentalized Colleges) are responsible for conducting these evaluations. The USFA encourages you to speak with your Department Head about this if you have concerns. One possibility is to have teaching evaluations conducted right away. Any strike is still in the future and there should be time to collect this important information. However, if you feel that these evaluations are being negatively influenced by USFA job action to date or the mere possibility of a strike, contact the USFA and we will assist you in dealing with this. Possible remedies include having a note included in your file that these evaluations were conducted at a time when students were upset by actions of the USFA membership generally, or in extreme cases, removing these inappropriate evaluations from your record. It is well known that factors not related to your teaching ability can influence the overall results of teaching evaluations.

The USFA takes the position that teaching evaluations must be about teaching ability, not events unrelated to the classroom. In fact, this is our position at any time, but we will be especially vigilant during this period of job action by the membership. Your right to participate (or not) in job action is legally guaranteed by *The Trade Union Act* and the Collective Agreement (article 6.1 and 9, in particular). Both documents specifically protect individual union members from any form of retaliation as a result of union membership or participation.

## **Where can I get answers to specific questions about my situation?**

Call (966-5609) or email the USFA office ([usfa@usask.ca](mailto:usfa@usask.ca)). Our staff may be able to answer your question, but, if necessary, your question can be referred to a USFA Executive Committee member for an answer. Questions or concerns specifically about your situation will be treated as confidential.