

# The Faculty Association: An Overview

The Faculty Association is established under the *Post-Secondary Learning Act* and is a trade union for the purposes of bargaining. Therefore, it is subject to the province's *Labour Relations Code*, as well as the *Post-secondary Learning Act*. The Faculty Association's primary functions are to negotiate the terms of employment for its members, to protect the interests of academic staff through the filing of grievances where appropriate, and to represent the academic staff.

Academic staff express their collective interests in the University through the Faculty Association of the University of Calgary under joint agreements arranged through negotiations with the Board of Governors. This role was formalized in 1981 through amendments to the *Universities Act*, which granted the Association responsibility for negotiating collective agreements with the Board on behalf of the academic staff. The role was confirmed in the *Post-secondary Learning Act* in 2004. Further, in 2017, Faculty Associations were brought under the province's *Labour Relations Code*. This change also established the Faculty Association as a trade union for the purposes of bargaining.

Being an academic in a university setting means taking some responsibility for the University as a whole, and particularly defending the rights of colleagues for the academic freedoms and processes that are unique to our environment. This is necessary because as scholars we know well what a university should be and why society needs good universities. The traditions of good universities must be protected, and this protection must come from the academics that make up universities. It is the role of the Faculty Association to do just that: to ensure individual faculty members have equal access to justice, and that proper policies and procedures are in place to ensure that this goal is achieved. A 'fair environment' that discourages favouritism and protects faculty members from arbitrary decisions is the essential foundation of an intellectually independent and open university.

## What the Association Does:

### 1. Negotiates the *Collective Agreement* with the Board of Governors

Under procedures established in the *Collective Agreement*, an Association committee negotiates the salary and benefits agreements (Schedules "A" and "B") and the *Collective Agreement* whenever it comes up for renewal. The Board of Directors is kept fully informed during negotiations and ultimately makes the decision to present any tentative settlement before the membership (with or without a recommendation) for ratification. Further to this, if a tentative agreement cannot be reached or is not accepted, under the *Labour Relations Code*, both Parties can agree to voluntary arbitration; the Association membership can vote to go on strike; or conversely, the Governors can decide to lock out academic staff.

Members of the Association have the opportunity to participate in the consultative process that guides the Association's bargaining endeavours. Within the limits of confidentiality inherent in the negotiating process, Department Representatives are kept up-to-date as to the status of negotiations, and participate in the ratification of the final contract. Full participation in the consultative process is sought, and Department Representatives are briefed on the status of the negotiations.

## **2. Protects Academic Staff Interests (Grievances)**

The Faculty Association works to resolve conflicts between members and the administration. Whenever possible, the Association strives to resolve conflicts informally. Where appropriate, the Association works formally through the filing of grievances. The Faculty Association maintains control or carriage of all grievances and brings them forward on behalf of an individual academic staff member as per the process in the *Collective Agreement*.

When an academic staff member contacts the Faculty Association office, they will reach a Faculty Association staff member who will treat the call or email with the utmost confidentiality. Faculty Association staff are not employees of the University of Calgary. The elected officers of the Faculty Association are not informed of any confidential personal information without the member's consent.

## **3. Promotes Academic Staff Interests**

The Association names representatives to serve as non-voting members on faculty and university-wide committees which deliberate on important matters such as tenure and promotion, and the assessment of performance and award of merit increments. The Association's watchdog role helps to ensure fairness in these proceedings and helps to establish equity in the treatment of staff in the various disciplines. The Association also jointly appoints representatives with the University to various committees involved in assessment, and tenure and promotion including the General Merit Committee (GMC), Tenure Appeal Committee (TAC) and the Promotion Review Committee (PRC).

## **4. Represents Academic Staff in the Councils of the University**

Association representatives sit on the General Faculties Council (the principal arena in which academic policy is formulated), on the Board of Governors' Budget Committee, on the Academic Planning and Priorities Committee and on several other committees established for the governance of the University such as the Research and Scholarship Committee and the Teaching and Learning Committee.

The Association's representatives on academic committees are relied upon to ensure due process and to speak for the academic interests of all academic staff. The importance of this activity cannot be minimized. The Association actively submits briefs and makes oral submissions to committees of the University as they affect our membership.

## **5. Speaks for the Academic Staff in the Public Forum**

The Faculty Association participates in public discussion of issues affecting post-secondary education and research and attempts to ensure that the interests of academic staff are attended to in the halls of government, both federal and provincial. As much as possible, the Association tries to cooperate with the other parts of the campus community for effective public and government relations. The Faculty Association is non-partisan and works to maintain active communication with government ministers and key civil servants to advocate for the interests of academic staff and the broader mission of the University.

The Faculty Association is an organizational member of the **Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)**, the national organization of academics. Through our membership in CAUT we are able to lobby nationally on issues of importance to our members, such as transfer payments, academic freedom, casualization of the academic workforce (the misuse of sessional instructors), corporatization of universities, equity issues, copyright issues, etc. CAUT provides information and interpretation of academic traditions such as academic freedom and tenure, and formulates positions and guidelines on new developments as they affect academic institutions. CAUT publishes the CAUT Bulletin, which includes policy statements, commentary and news – local, national and international – of academic interest and includes announcements and advertisements of academic positions.

## **6. Provides Information to Members**

Information on Association matters and topics of professional interest are routinely provided to members. Depending on the nature of the communication, the Association may choose to send information to its members through email or by regular mail. General information is also available on the Faculty Association website ([tucfa.com](http://tucfa.com)). Specific information pertaining to an individual's unique situation is best acquired by contacting the Association directly.

## **The Organization of the Faculty Association**

The Association is governed in accordance with the by-laws of the Association. Association policy is set by the elected members of the Board of Directors. Day-to-day management of the affairs of the Association is overseen by the Executive Committee. This committee operates under the policy directions and delegated authority of the elected members of the Board, with the assistance of Association staff members. Board members are unsalaried volunteers.

## **Role of Department Representatives**

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The role of the Faculty Association's Department Representatives is established in Article 10 of the by-laws of the Association.

"The members of the Association in each department (or, in the case of non-departmentalized Faculties, each Faculty) shall annually elect one member of the Department as Department Representative. The Department Representative is responsible for maintaining liaison between the Board of Directors and the Department, and for advising the Board of Directors on behalf of the members of the Department. In the case of units composed of non-teaching Board appointees, representatives shall be elected from units administratively similar to Departments and Faculties, as those members shall decide."

The functional role of the Department Representatives is an evolving one. As the Association has grown and its internal structure changed, the Department Representatives have become increasingly important.

The Board needs to inform its members and receive feedback from them on a variety of issues and uses meetings with Department Representatives as one way to achieve that.

On a regular basis, during the academic term, the Departmental Representatives typically meet with the President and/or other Officers for a briefing on Association initiatives and important areas of activity. Department Representative meetings are considered closed meetings with only Department Representatives, their alternates, Board of Directors members and Association staff invited to attend. At the President's discretion, guests (such as members of the bargaining team, or members of other Faculty Association committees) may be invited to attend the meetings.

The Association asks the Department Representatives to keep the academic staff members in their units informed about the activities and issues raised by the Faculty Association, and provides Department Representatives with summaries of the items addressed during the meetings (plus urgent items that come up between meetings) to share with their units.

The Association may also ask Department Representatives to consult with academic staff members on matters of interest in order to receive their input.

Input from the Department Representatives is particularly important during salary and benefit negotiations.

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Department Representatives are also encouraged to consult with their members to identify any concerns they have that the Faculty Association may be able to address. These may be raised during a Department Representative meeting, or before the meeting if the item is likely to be extensive. In the case of concerns specific to the unit, the Department Representative may wish to meet with the Faculty Association (accompanied by other members of the unit if desired) separately.

Involvement of individual members of the Association as Department Representatives is seen as a way to encourage future involvement of those individuals as either members of the Board, as committee members, or as Association Representatives to faculty promotions and/or tenure committees.

Department Representatives are often approached by members of their departments or units with questions or problems in relation to academic staff matters and asked for advice. Since answers to many such questions and problems have complexities, ramifications, and implications legal and otherwise of which the Department Representative may not be aware, the Department Representative should always refer such questions, problems and requests for advice to the Faculty Association office.

For similar reasons, if a Department Representative is approached by a colleague for advice and assistance on FMC/FTPC matters, they should refer the colleague to the Faculty Association office.

## Communication

The role of the Department Representative is to be a liaison between the Faculty Association Board of Directors and the Department or Faculty.

In order to maintain effective communication, both from and to members, the Association has established regular Department Representative meetings. Through these meetings, discussion can take place on the current issues facing the Association, its members, and the University community.

We all have an obligation to communicate and work together in a safe and abuse-free way. The Faculty Association has a *Policy Against Abusive Conduct* that explains this responsibility in more detail. As a result, we will not tolerate any inappropriate behaviour, which includes offensive or insulting language or behaviour; harassment; abusive or threatening language; or violence. Participants should not make accusatory or vexatious comments. Participants who disrespect these expectations will be asked to leave the meeting.

As Department Representative, the Association encourages you to be diligent in gathering and relaying information in both directions. To facilitate this, we suggest the following approaches:

1. Advise the members of your department/faculty that you are their Representative, and that, as such, you are interested in communicating their views to the Association, and will be informing them of the Board of Directors' priorities, positions and activities. If you are unclear about who are the members of the Faculty Association in your unit, contact the Faculty Association office. Please note that sessional instructors are members of the Association, as are academic administrators below the level of Dean.
2. Attend the scheduled meetings whenever possible. This is the best way to keep informed and share your views and those of your colleagues.
3. Establish an email list of the members you represent, and send summaries of the Department Representative meetings. This can either be based on your own notes or the summary provided in the Department Representative Bulletins. If you use the Department Representative Bulletin for this purpose, we encourage you to write a short preamble or note highlighting what you think is the most important issue. Encourage members to send you their comments or feedback or to forward these directly to the Faculty Association office. Depending on the situation and the urgency of the issue, forward the comments of your colleagues to the Association immediately, or summarize them and bring them to the next Department Representatives meeting.
4. Share the Department Representative Bulletins. The Bulletins are summaries of the discussions that take place at each meeting. Bulletins are published on the Association's web site so that any member can access the information. We suggest circulating the bulletins by email, by hard copy handouts in mailboxes or at department meetings, or by posting them on a bulletin board in a central location.

5. Request that Association issues be placed on the agenda of Departmental or Faculty meetings. This is an excellent opportunity to report on what is happening at Department Representative meetings and receive the input and opinions of the members, as well as responding to any questions they may have.
6. Email or phone the office if you or the members you represent have issues or concerns that the Association can address. The Association is very sensitive to issues of confidentiality. The Association staff work only for the members and are not University employees. Please assure your colleagues that they can be confident that their concerns will be responded to with sensitivity and confidentiality.

If there are any ways that the Association can aid you in communicating more effectively with the members of your unit, please contact us. We would be happy to assist you.

If you have strategies that have worked in developing communication to and from members in your area, please share them with your fellow Department Representatives and the Association. We are always looking for new ways to improve the two-way communication with members.