



News & Views

Bulletin #5

WE'RE A UNION ! - and now the work begins.

On Tuesday May 16th, faculty, librarians and staff veterinarians at the University of Guelph voted “YES” to the University of Guelph Faculty Association being their representative organization under the Ontario Labour Relations Act. The UGFA Executive and Council thank you all for the clear support you gave to this initiative, both in the April card-signing drive and in the certification vote.

Filing an application with the Labour Board for a certification vote requires evidence that cards have been signed by 40% of the proposed bargaining unit. The fact that UGFA's application for certification could be filed within 4 weeks of starting the drive, and with cards signed by 56% of the proposed bargaining unit, indicated strong support. This same message was clear in the vote on Tuesday, when two-thirds of the voters agreed that UGFA should be their representative union. Voter turnout was 68% of the proposed bargaining unit, and included a “flying poll” conducted by a Labour Board officer at the UofG Kemptville, UofG Ridgetown Campus, Guelph-Humber, Vineland and Simcoe.

The bargaining group proposed by UGFA in our application to the Labour Board includes faculty, professional librarians, and staff veterinarians. Faculty and Librarians have traditionally been part of UGFA, whether they were on full- or part-time appointments, in tenured, tenure-stream or contractually-limited faculty appointments, or on permanent or contract appointments as librarians. UGFA has also always included Chairs and Directors as members, and this is the situation in all other unionized faculty associations in Ontario. Staff veterinarians, in the Veterinary Teaching Hospital and the Animal Health Laboratory, are recognized for the unique contribution they make to teaching, training and research in the Veterinary program at the University of Guelph. Including them in the bargaining unit is consistent with several years of effort by staff veterinarians to become part of UGFA.

In responding to the UGFA certification application, the Administration challenged the inclusion of Departmental Chairs and Directors in UGFA, as well as the inclusion of the Staff Veterinarians. When these people voted, their votes were sequestered – sealed in a double envelope – to be counted, or destroyed – once the Labour Board has heard the arguments for and against their membership in UGFA. This will occur in the next few weeks. However, the “Yes” vote that was counted on Tuesday night was so strong that the Labour Board Official conducting the count declared that **UGFA had won status as the representative union.**

The UGFA Organizing Committee, UGFA Executive, and UGFA Council thank you for your support during this transition process, as UGFA becomes an association with access to better tools and processes for representing you. We also recognize that there are people who have expressed concerns about the potential effects of UGFA becoming a certified union. To everyone, we would like to give the same message – UGFA is **YOU!** It is what you make it, and what it does is directed by what you tell it to do. Please be involved!

BEING INVOLVED:

UGFA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

May 25, 2006 at 3:00 p.m. in McKinnon 117

UGFA Committees need volunteers.

Please consider helping in an area of your interest...
such as: Pensions, Benefits, Mentoring, Intellectual Property, Workload etc.

Send UGFA messages about your concerns, and things you want to see happen!
(facassoc@uoguelph.ca)

What next? (The work begins!)

As a result of Tuesday's vote, we are a union, and recognized by the Ontario Labour Relations Board. In the next few weeks, UGFA will be making representation to the Labour Board concerning disputes with the Administration over who is in the bargaining unit (i.e. departmental chairs, staff veterinarians). Fairly soon, we will receive a union certificate from the Labour Board, and we will advise the university administration that we want to begin bargaining of our **first collective agreement**. By doing this, current agreements we have with the University (Special Plan, Faculty Policies, Salary Agreement, etc.) are held in place so that the institution has functioning procedures until a collective agreement is negotiated. For example, you will fill out your TAPSI forms, elect TAPSI committees, and be evaluated by those committees as usual. Faculty Policies are still in effect, and all the committees they engender! There will be no *changes* to the policies, because these become issues during negotiation of the collective agreement.

A **collective agreement**, as the name implies, pulls together all aspects of the terms and conditions that affect you in your workplace. Thus, it would include all the things that we now find by looking through the Special Plan Agreement, Faculty Policies, Salary Agreements, and a range of other agreements that have been written over many years. (If you are unfamiliar with academic collective agreements, you can have a look at ones from other Ontario universities by following links on the UGFA website (www.uoguelph.ca/~facassoc) to those associations. (Wilfred Laurier University has an agreement that provides a clear picture of the issues that are covered in a collective agreement.) The advantage of a collective agreement – and our new status as a certified union – is that collective agreements are not only binding in principle, but also swiftly enforceable under the Labour Relations Act.

Negotiating a first collective agreement is hard work! Over many years of discussing policies, salary structures, and establishing working practices, UGFA and the Administration have already developed many of the things that might become part of a first collective agreement. On some issues, we know we have been frustrated and discouraged with the difficulties of making progress, and we would want to negotiate more effective mechanisms in a first collective agreement. In the next months, UGFA will be working hard on preparing for negotiations, and we ask that you participate in important work by volunteering, by returning surveys we send and by giving feedback to UGFA Executive and Council.