



acifa

Alberta Colleges & Institutes Faculties Association

# Faculty Circuit

January 2025

## Solidarity: The Key to our Collective Strength

by Shauna MacDonald, ACIFA President

Since stepping into the role of ACIFA President in July, I've had the privilege of connecting with the leaders of our 13 member associations, who represent 7,000 dedicated academic staff across Alberta's post-secondary institutions. While I haven't yet had the chance to meet many of you directly, I look forward to visiting each of your campuses, attending meetings, and connecting with as many members as possible. I know the depth of the challenges we face, the resilience we demonstrate, and the opportunities we have to strengthen our collective power through solidarity.



Solidarity is not just a principle; it's a necessity. The issues confronting faculty today—wage stagnation, increasing workloads, precarious employment, declining international student enrollments, and provincial budget cuts—demand a united response. Our strength lies in our ability to support one another within our local faculty associations, within ACIFA, and through partnerships with other organizations, students, and communities. Together, we can amplify our voices, achieve fairer outcomes, and advocate for the quality post-secondary education that our students and society deserve.

### The Challenges We Face

Across Alberta, faculty associations are in various stages of negotiating collective agreements. These negotiations occur against a backdrop of questionable fiscal austerity, with institutions facing repeated budget cuts. Many of you have felt the strain as workloads continue to grow, while salaries fail to keep pace with inflation. The value of our work, central to educating the next generation and advancing knowledge, is being eroded.

Compounding these challenges is the crisis in international student enrollment. Changes to federal Post-Graduation Work Permit policies and the cuts to Foundational Learning Assistance Program (FLAP) funding have made Alberta less competitive as a destination for international students, resulting in a significant decline in revenue for our institutions and, in some cases, position abolishment. These changes, coupled with rising tuition and reduced funding, create uncertainty not just for students but also for faculty whose jobs and resources are directly impacted.

Furthermore, the rise of precarious academic employment is transforming our profession. Many of our colleagues work on short-term contracts, without job security or equitable compensation, despite their vital contributions to our institutions. This proliferation of precarious employment threatens the sustainability of our profession and the quality of education we provide.

## **Solidarity in Action**

In the face of these challenges, solidarity is our greatest tool. Within our local associations, solidarity begins with listening to one another, identifying shared priorities, and standing together at the bargaining table. It's about ensuring that every member—whether permanent, sessional, or on contract—feels supported and valued.

At the provincial level, ACIFA provides an essential platform for collaboration and mutual support among faculty associations. By sharing strategies, resources, and experiences, we enhance our collective ability to advocate for better working conditions, fair compensation, and investment in post-secondary education. ACIFA also represents our interests to the provincial government, highlighting the critical contributions of Alberta's colleges and institutes and pressing for the funding and policies needed to sustain them.

Our solidarity does not stop with faculty associations. Through ACIFA's partnership with the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA), we are building bridges with university faculty across the province. This connection allows us to share a united message about the value of post-secondary education, the importance of academic freedom, and the need for fair treatment of all faculty, regardless of institution.

Nationally, ACIFA works with the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) to address systemic issues like precarious employment, declining government investment, and shifts in federal immigration policies. By engaging with our national counterparts, we advocate for systemic change that benefits us all.

Finally, solidarity with students is critical to our mission. Faculty and student associations share many common goals: the accessibility, affordability, and quality of post-secondary education. Students are not just the recipients of our efforts—they are our allies in advocating for strong, well-funded institutions. By collaborating with student associations, we amplify our collective voice and demonstrate that faculty and students stand united in their commitment to education.

## **Advocacy Through Collective Action**

Solidarity enables us to advocate not only for ourselves but also for one another and for students. When we stand together, we can push back against policies that undervalue our work and threaten the accessibility and quality of education.

Here in Alberta, we have an opportunity to make our voices heard. We can demand salary increases that reflect the rising cost of living, push for equitable treatment of precarious faculty, and call for adequate funding to support teaching and research. By partnering with students and building alliances across sectors, we strengthen our collective ability to ensure Alberta's post-secondary institutions thrive.

## **Reaffirming Our Commitment**

As your ACIFA President, I am committed to fostering solidarity across our member associations and beyond. While much of my work focuses on connecting with the leadership of our 13 associations, I am eager to meet more of you directly. I hope to visit your campuses, attend meetings, and hear about your experiences and priorities firsthand.

But solidarity requires all of us. It requires a commitment to each other within our local associations—to show up, to engage, and to support one another. It requires a willingness to collaborate across institutions and disciplines, recognizing that our struggles are interconnected. And it requires us to look outward, building alliances with students, faculty across the province, and national organizations to address the systemic issues we all face.

## A Call to Action

Solidarity is not just about words; it's about action. As we navigate the challenges ahead, I encourage each of you to think about how you can contribute to our collective strength:

- **Engage in your local association.** Attend meetings, participate in events, and share your perspectives. Your voice matters, and your involvement strengthens our ability to advocate effectively.
- **Support your colleagues.** Small acts of solidarity—encouragement, advocacy, or showing up—can make a big difference.
- **Collaborate with students.** Partner with student associations on shared goals. Together, we can push for accessible, well-funded education.
- **Stay informed and connected.** Follow ACIFA's work and share updates with your colleagues.

## Looking Ahead

While the road ahead is challenging, I am optimistic about what we can achieve together. Through solidarity, we can navigate this difficult moment, advocate for the respect and resources faculty deserve, and ensure the continued strength of Alberta's post-secondary system.

I am honored to serve as your President and to work alongside such dedicated and talented colleagues. Let's stand together—within our unions, within ACIFA, and with our partners. By doing so, we can create a brighter future for ourselves, our students, and our institutions.

Solidarity is our strength. Let's use it.

In solidarity,

Shauna MacDonald  
President, ACIFA  
[president@acifa.ca](mailto:president@acifa.ca)

### 2024 – 2025 Executive Council

Shauna MacDonald – President  
Alexandru Caldararu – VP Internal  
Peter Johnston – Beresford – VP External  
Mark Kaethler – VP Communications  
Cameron Gall – VP Finance & Records  
Blair Howes – Past-President  
Brian McCullouch – Labour Relations Officer  
Karen Roberts – Administrative Officer

# Western Regional Conference - Victoria, B.C. October 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024

by Peter Johnston - Beresford, ACIFA VP External

In my role as VP External, ACIFA Executive Board member, I, Peter Johnston-Beresford, ventured forth to a very rainy Victoria, B.C., for the 2024 Western Regionals Conference. The basis of the meeting is to give western-based universities and colleges (west of and including Manitoba) an opportunity to meet and greet and ostensibly to discover common ground and deliberate on issues facing post-secondary education. There are many. One primary difference and one of particular interest to the writer that comes to light are the differences between universities and colleges on the matter of shared governance. Universities have always had a more even go of it with established institutional tools and committees, plus they have a considerably more consultative nature. If I may so bold, colleges have scant understanding as to what collaborative governance actually is, never mind how to approach or implement it.

The differences in scale between most universities and colleges belie the fact that common issues do abound. Funding shortfalls, declining academic freedom, reliance on short-term positions as opposed to permanent full-time...the list goes on and on. An array of notable speakers addressed each of the issues...however, the meeting itself was opened with a welcome by Elder Dr. Skip Dick of the Songhees Nation. The theme of Indigenous education raised by Dr. Dick was emphasized throughout the entire conference but in particular in one session entitled, 'How UVic Supports Indigenous Members Through Bargaining.' Their model of devoting time, resources, and supports should be used to support others in precarious positions or those whose interests and needs are lost in the broader mix. Clearly, there is a lot more that can be done to welcome, include, and support our members.

David Robinson, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), gave a fascinating and highly informative seminar entitled, 'Changing Realities of University Finance — Shrinking Government Funding and Changing Demographics — Strategies for Academic Staff Unions.' Full of engrossing, factually based information with a ton of graphs and figures, David painted the sorry state of government funding and how it has compromised academic performance in a multitude of different ways. Most importantly, Robinson's talk made it clear that PSE's reliance on International students and their role in addressing financial shortfalls seems short-sighted and quite possibly exploitative. Indeed, with recent projections of the impact of Federal legislation concerning international student enrolments in Ontario and British Columbia with potential or projected layoffs and cuts and it doesn't look like things are going to change soon, at least not in ways that address the problems. Just brilliant planning by everyone in charge, I must say...

Another talk on collegial governance, 'The Erosion of Collegial Governance – How Can We Respond?' frankly left me aghast. Coming from a college that experienced considerable financial pressures over the past year, I've come to the conclusion that increased faculty participation by way of increased Shared Governance might have prevented or at least mitigated the issues we faced. Yet, like our more familiar set of circumstances, there is a steady trend to more hierarchical thinking ... you know, the boss knows best. It's nonsense of course and along with administrative bloat that exacerbates the issues surrounding finances, we're all trending

towards a worse place. Some sage advice...don't participate in Town Halls, reject the hiring of expensive consultants and object to anything that delays and neglects the real problems that we're all facing.

The last talk involved a panel discussion. Titles, 'Provincial Realities in University Finance,' where differences amongst the provinces were highlighted. In some respects, Alberta is the worst but it isn't the best either. Government support for private (profit-making) colleges seems to be an Alberta specialty...the ultra-low rate of support for the public school system on a per student basis is apparently the lowest in the country. What does this translate into for these students in PSE? For such a rich province as ours clearly is, there is clearly a disconnect. In addition, the gradual shift of government financial support more towards skills-based training (apprenticeships) clearly comes at a cost to other programming that don't follow this model. Will some programs disappear due to their not being perceived as valuable? Probably. What are you going to do about it? At Olds, we're fighting tooth and nail to try and preempt what some might feel is the inevitable.

Lastly, perhaps the best experiences for me were derived from hanging out with like-minded individuals with a touch more experience in labour matters. I'm by no means a novice when it comes to labour issues...CUPE, OPSEU, KC-UofG FA and now OCFA...I have decades of experience including numerous positions in all of them plus, for the sake of some street cred, a couple of strikes under my belt. But this meeting was different and more keenly attuned me to where we should be going as an organization (ACIFA). The camaraderie was extraordinary, and I obtained a great deal of information and general advice by speaking with fellow union leaders. This was an irreplaceable and key event for me.

<b>Upcoming ACIFA Events</b>		
January 26, 2025:	President's Council	Edmonton
January 26, 2025	Professional Affairs Committee & Negotiations Advisory Committee	Edmonton
May 10, 2025	Executive Council	Banff Springs
May 11, 2025	Presidents' Council	Banff Springs
May 11, 2025	Professional Affairs Committee & Negotiations Advisory Committee	Banff Springs
May 11 – 13, 2025	ACIFA Conference	Banff Springs
May 13, 2025	Annual General Meeting	Banff Springs

# Bargaining 101 - What to Expect When You're Expecting a Stubborn Employer

By Trevor Zimmerman  
Labour Relations Director & Bargaining Spokesperson  
NAIT Academic Staff Association (NASA)

Most ACIFA members have likely not taken a course on collective bargaining, and very few will have participated directly in the process themselves. With so much at stake in this round of bargaining it's good to peel back the curtain to look closer at how bargaining works and how academic staff can see improvements.

While there is not a slate of common demands through ACIFA affiliates, there are common priorities and themes that most are bringing to the table:

- Significant wage improvements in the face of generationally high inflation eating into the real value of ACIFA members' incomes.
- Workload reductions to improve quality of education and better reflect the hours of work that ACIFA members are paid for.
- Job security to avoid turnover, provide stability in ACIFA members' lives, and slow or reverse the trend within post-secondary across the world of turning academic work into gig work.

Long-standing negotiations practices and the Alberta Labour Relations Code itself do not specify that your employers have to:

- Agree to any proposal your bargaining committee brings forward.
- Withdraw any concessions (aka rollbacks) they tabled to make your collective agreement worse.
- Or even complete negotiations within what most would consider a reasonable timeframe (say the year the existing agreement expires).

In negotiations prior to 2017, ACIFA members had a guarantee of arbitration if they reached an impasse with their employers. That guarantee no longer exists, as ACIFA members now have full bargaining rights including the right to strike, but also the employer now has the unnecessary power to lock you and your co-workers out to pressure you into a weaker collective agreement.

Now, if an impasse is reached, either party can apply for mediation to try to resolve the issue. While mediators will try to find compromises on both parties' positions, we should be mindful that they tend to keep things close to status quo.

That will likely mean a mediated settlement:

- Will not recommend significant changes to language in the agreement, especially where proposed language can not be found in a comparable Alberta institute.
- Will not recommend wages that catch up and keep up with inflation. There are recent mediated settlements as low as [three percent over three years](#), or [even zero percent](#)!

Your employer knows this, and so has no incentive to agree to anything that won't be awarded by a mediator.

Members of the United Nurses of Alberta took this into account [when they voted to reject an offer](#) that only provided wage increases of twelve percent over four years. RNs that I spoke to said they voted against this proposed agreement because it was far below catching up and keeping up with inflation, and that they did not feel comfortable setting a precedent of accepting a lower wage settlement that could impact other public sector workers in Alberta.

Now their committee is returning to negotiations with a clear mandate to seek a better deal.

Educating your co-workers about this reality and the need to reject sub-par deals by voting no on mediated recommendations that aren't good enough, and giving regular feedback to your bargaining committee is an important part of bargaining from a position of strength. That way it can be demonstrated to the employer that your bargaining committee is not speaking just for themselves, but for all of you who expect better.

The future of post-secondary education requires academic staff who have better work-life balance, and can be recruited and retained through wages that are not being cut by inflation.

ACIFA members can reach out to their bargaining committees to find out more about how you can support your own negotiations.

### Member Associations

Alberta College of Art and Design Faculty Association  
Keyano College Faculty Association  
Lakeland College Faculty Association  
Lethbridge College Faculty Association  
Medicine Hat College Faculty Association  
Northwestern Polytechnic Academic Staff Association  
NAIT Academic Staff Association  
NorQuest College Faculty Association  
Northern Lakes College Faculty Association  
Olds College Faculty Association  
Portage College Faculty Association  
Faculty Association of Red Deer College  
SAIT Academic Faculty Association

The views expressed in Faculty Circuit are those of individuals and do not necessarily reflect ACIFA's policies and positions.

### Join the Conversation!

**FACEBOOK:** <http://www.facebook.com/ACIFAcA>

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#### ACIFA Contact Information:

ACIFA  
410- 10171 Saskatchewan Drive  
Edmonton, AB T6E 4R5  
Phone: 780-423-4440  
Email: [admin@acifa.ca](mailto:admin@acifa.ca)  
Website: [acifa.ca](http://acifa.ca)

# ACIFA Conference – Register Now!!

by Karen Roberts, ACIFA Administrative Officer



## ACIFA 2025 Conference – May 11-13, 2025

Join us at the picturesque Banff Springs for the ACIFA 2025 Conference, themed "*Grow with Academic Integrity*." This event is designed to support post-secondary instructors in engaging in meaningful discussions and learning effective strategies for maintaining academic integrity. With over 30 presentations, it's an excellent opportunity for professional growth and networking.

To register, please visit [ACIFA 2025 Registration | acifa](#). Deadline is April 4th, 2025.

New this year, we are accepting EMT as a method of payment. Select 'pay later' and send payment to [admin@acifa.ca](mailto:admin@acifa.ca). Please email the password to the ACIFA office at [admin@acifa.ca](mailto:admin@acifa.ca). Visa, MasterCard, and cheques are still accepted.

If you need assistance or more information, please contact Karen at [admin@acifa.ca](mailto:admin@acifa.ca).

## See you at the 2025 ACIFA Conference at Banff Springs!

