

Dear Colleagues,

We write to you today with an update on bargaining between UFWW and WWU. In late 2019 the UFWW Bargaining Team began preparations to negotiate a full successor agreement to the CBA that was set to expire on September 15, 2020. Formal bargaining began in early March 2020, only to be ground to a halt less than two weeks later with the explosion of the pandemic. Our team and the University team met to discuss how to proceed and we signed an MOU on April 29, 2020 (see the MOU [here](#)) to extend the CBA for one calendar year (until September 15, 2021). This extension guaranteed that all terms of the contract would continue uninterrupted. Given the budget uncertainty at the time, the MOU also delayed bargaining over possible salary increases until October 2020.

In October, the UFWW team began meeting with the University team to negotiate salary increases. The process was upended in mid-December with the release of the Governor's budget proposal, which proposes significant cuts to public higher education budgets. Both UFWW and the University agree that these changes are unacceptable and are working hard in Olympia to make sure they do not make it into the final biennial budget. The Governor's budget is just the beginning of the process and we are cautiously optimistic that the final biennial budget will not have cuts to higher education. This upheaval has pushed discussion of salary increases alongside the full bargain for the new contract. UFWW has in no way forfeited or changed our position on salary increases for the current academic year, but once again we need to show patience as we wait for the budget process in Olympia to conclude.

Our preparations for bargaining a new full contract this spring are based on a bargaining survey sent to all faculty in late 2019, numerous conversations with UFWW leadership, and discussions with the faculty community more broadly. UFWW continues to prioritize competitive salaries and compensation in a national market for faculty along with continued improvements in the faculty working conditions that are our students' learning conditions. Until the next Collective Bargaining Agreement is concluded, we continue to work under our current contract along with the series of emergency COVID MOUs (the details are on the UFWW website and are available [here](#)) executed by UFWW and the WWU administration.

There is one issue we'd like to specifically highlight and that is workplace safety. Recently, Western's administration unilaterally sent a survey to faculty and staff asking about their level of comfort in returning to work on campus. UFWW wants to be clear: workplace safety is a fundamental working condition and is a mandatory subject of bargaining. Our approach to safety will always be based on science and data and will put the safety of Western faculty and the campus community first. We support the desire of faculty to return to campus, but only when it is safe to do so.

Probably the best hope for a return to normal campus operations is the vaccination of as many people as possible. Most indications are that any member of the Western community who wants a vaccination should be able to get one before the beginning of fall quarter, but the rollout of vaccine in Washington has been sluggish, especially in Whatcom County. All of the

unions representing Western employees have been working hard with government and health officials to increase the rate of vaccination. The Washington Education Association, along with all the other education unions in our state, continue to work hard to convince Governor Inslee to prioritize the vaccination of all education employees, including higher education employees (https://www.washingtonea.org/file_viewer.php?id=42416 ; https://www.washingtonea.org/file_viewer.php?id=43156).

We'd like to close by once again recognizing the substantial work of Western faculty during the pandemic. The emergency transition to online teaching in March and the effort required to refine our courses going into the 20/21 academic year involved a tremendous amount of extra work. This incredible performance is the primary reason that Western has retained almost all of our returning students this year. It is an honor to advocate for faculty as dedicated and passionate as you; we will not forget your efforts at the bargaining table.

Sincerely,

Matthew Roelofs, Economics
Chair, UFWW Bargaining Team

Ricardo López-Pedrerros, History
President, UFWW