



VIUFA President

2023-24 Report

Dear Colleagues,

The year has been a momentous one for our union, marked by achievements such as the negotiation of the Collective Agreement, and by the challenges of financial exigency and layoffs. I have been proud to be a VIUFA member as collectively and individually we support each other through thick and thin. The challenges of the year have lifted into view the diversity that exists among the priorities of our members. It indicates that the job for the union, in the year ahead, will call for consultation, discussion, and creativity.

Each year we say goodbye to some colleagues who are opting to move on to retirement or other opportunities. This year, many of our members have been, or feel the threat of being, laid off for reasons of financial exigency or due to program redundancies that we know are also motivated by the financial situation. My heart goes out to those members who receive layoff notice. I received such a notice in 2008 from VIU, and I know it to be one of the most difficult events that can be visited upon us as employees. Our staff representative and the Chief Steward are tirelessly engaged in mitigating as much as possible the situation for members who are directly affected.

This year marks the first budgetary layoffs under the Financial Exigency provisions of our Collective Agreement. The provisions require that there be no budgetary layoffs except in the case of verifiable financial exigency; that the University share financial data with the Union so that we can verify the state of exigency; and that we are given the opportunity to make recommendations that may, if taken up, diminish or eliminate the need for layoffs.

VIUFA exercised its rights and responsibilities under these provisions. Jean Blackburn, University Budgetary Analysis Chair, and I combed through financial reports and asked for more (and generally got them); we generated spreadsheets and analysis, and developed recommendations. We presented to the University Administration and to the Board of Governors, and some of our recommendations have been taken up. For a more complete treatment of the activities of the union with regard to financial exigency, please see Jean Blackburn's report to the members as this year's UBA Chair. These efforts have activated a relationship between VIUFA and the Board that I intend to continue, if re-elected as President: the Union has a lens on the University's activities that can be useful to share with the Board via Board presentations.

Activities as President this year have included the following scheduled meetings:

- Chaired 10 Executive meetings and one Executive Retreat
- Chaired 12 Table Officers meetings
- Chaired 4 General Membership meetings
- Bargained (as spokesperson) and co-chaired bargaining caucus meetings for 165 hours
- Co-hosted, with the Bargainer, 5 bargaining consultations
- Met with the Provost 6 times
- Met with the President of VIU 3 times
- Bargained (as spokesperson) with our CUPE employee group, 24 hours
- Meetings with HR outside of bargaining, 4 times
- Served on Union Activism Fund Selection Committee
- Substituted for Executive members who were on sick leave

- University Budgetary Analysis and Deficit Mitigation, 14 meetings and presentations, totalling 19 hours
- FSPE Presidents' Council meetings, 6 days
- FPSE PC/PAC Trustee Selection Committee, 3 hours
- Chief Steward meetings and backfill, 21 hours

Planned for the year ahead are a number of initiatives.

- A comprehensive review of the union's system of releases for VIUFA work is needed, so that needed VIUFA work can be undertaken in a timely manner. For some of this work, VIUFA is planning a member-populated committee.
- Several committees arise from the Memorandum of Understanding that can impact aspects of our work, such as student project supervision workload, graduate programs workload, initial salary placement for those with Indigenous community experience, terms for providing supports for students with complex accommodation needs, and chair release.
- A review of the value proposition that membership in FPSE offers VIUFA.

It takes a collective to do this work; it is not only that we elect Executive members and task them with union business – VIUFA is all of us, not just the Executive. The work of the union is also done through your participation as members, in the various committees, and other roles and actions such as responding to a survey or proposing a PD event for the membership. Please consider taking an active role as a VIUFA member when a call for participation goes out. We are stronger together.

I thank all those who step up for roles big and small: the Contract Negotiating Committee, the Stewards, Salary Appeals Committee, PD Leave Committee, Elections Committee, the PD Events Committee, the committees that arise from bargaining. My deep thanks go to the VIUFA Executive and a truly excellent Bargaining Team. This year I am especially grateful for the service of Clay Armstrong (Chief Steward), Jane Wodlinger (Bargainer), and Jean Blackburn (University Budgetary Analysis Chair): from each much was asked and even more given. VIUFA staff Laura Buechler (Office Manager) and Neil McLeod (Staff Representative) keep us going, and are a joy to work with.

Yours in solidarity,

Gara Pruesse
President, VIUFA