



Differing Views on the Meaning of Benefits Renewal

by Charles Drainin

As you may recall from the report that Shelley Reuter and I published last year, benefits renewal has been on the agenda at Concordia for quite a long time with very little progress. This is a brief review and update to help you understand the difficulties CUFA has encountered and what we are doing to overcome them.

Last spring we had reached the point where the Benefits Review Sub-Committee was ready to consider proposals from the consultants, Mercer. Unfortunately, from the point of view of the employee and retiree representatives on the Sub-Committee (the representatives of CUFA, of the staff, and of the retirees) it soon became clear that the consultants' idea of an improved plan design was the introduction of a flex plan for our health, dental and vision care*. As we saw it – and continue to see it – such a design may be good for some (including the employer), but, by undermining the insurance principle on which our plan is based, it is a step

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Associate Membership for CUFA Retirees

by Tony Costanzo

Unless we plan to leave Concordia University before our retirement, most of us will want to keep ties with the colleagues and institution where we spent most of our professional life.

It is in this spirit that the CUFA Executive decided to set up a committee to find ways of keeping CUFA members involved in our Association after retirement. Consisting of CUFA Member-at-Large Tony Costanzo and CUFA retiree Howard Fink, the committee worked throughout the summer researching how other Canadian universities have included their retirees in their Associations. After exploring different possibilities, the committee decided that Associate Membership for our retirees would be the best option. A report was submitted to the CUFA Executive and after some revisions it was approved unanimously. It was then presented to the CUFA Council where it was also approved unanimously. In the near future the whole membership will have the opportunity to vote on it as part of a revised CUFA constitution.

We count on our members to approve the proposed constitutional changes so that we can welcome back our CUFA retirees.

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backward for most plan members. In addition, the consultant presented a disturbing scenario that embodied a sharp increase in the healthcare contributions of retirees. The consultant argued, rather disingenuously in our view, that this was done for the purpose of initiating a discussion on the distribution of benefits. We don't know if these positions were a reflection of the Administration's intentions or had even been discussed with the Administration beforehand. However, if put into effect, the first of these two proposals would lead to a reduction of the Administration's share of the cost of healthcare plan over time, and the second would greatly increase retirees' healthcare insurance costs immediately.

In July, the employee and retiree representatives on the Sub-Committee wrote to the Administration protesting the direction the Sub-Committee was taking. At about the same time, the heads of the other unions at Concordia wrote to the Administration claiming that their unions played no role whatsoever in the benefits renewal process. The Administration responded in October by offering to wind up the Benefits Review Sub-Committee on the condition that all the unions agreed to "bargain benefits plans as part of total compensation at the bargaining table starting immediately." The negotiations would take place separately or at a common table. In early December, all the unions including CUFA accepted the offer and as a result preparations are now underway for two sets of benefits negotiations – CUFA at one table, and the other eight unions at Concordia together at another. In this connection, you should note that each union also bargains benefits on behalf of its own retirees.

Because we had committed to enter into negotiations with the Administration on benefits, the issue of benefits renewal was placed on the agenda of CUFA's December General and Council Meeting. The discussion included a presentation on the CAUT Benefits Trust from Neil Tudiver of CAUT. The Executive requested and was given a mandate to investigate joining the Trust, which will involve getting cost information from the Administration and then putting this option on the table when the actual negotiations open. The understanding the Executive gave to Council was that no decision would be made before we see how joining the Trust

compares to whatever the Administration offers us by way of a revision of the current Benefits Plan. Finally, since these negotiations will be part of our collective agreement, Council confirmed the composition of the negotiating team – Ian Rakita (chief negotiator), Ian Irvine, Genevieve Robichaud and Michael Sanford (Michael Sanford is CUFA's benefits consultant).

Not a great deal has happened since then. In January we wrote to the Administration to request the cost information that is necessary to begin the negotiations. (A similar request for information was made last spring; we expect a full response this time if negotiations are to proceed.) We have had one informal meeting since then to resolve some questions that the Administration had about our request for cost information.

We have some reason to think that we will begin to see some progress soon. The Administration has acknowledged our earlier concerns about the process. But what will be telling, however, will be the extent to which the Administration shares our view of what these negotiations are about and what forms the basis for a fair settlement. In CUFA's view, a fair settlement on benefits is built on the recognition that the benefits we are negotiating are *our* benefits — those of the active and retired members of CUFA — and as such our Benefits Plan must reflect our interpretation of our needs.

We will keep you informed as this process unfolds. In addition, the Executive would like to know your views on Benefits and the benefits renewal process. In the near future, you will receive a survey from the Executive asking for your views on a number of issues of concern to the Association including benefits renewal. I encourage you to complete it.

*In the context of benefits renewal, the Benefits Plan comprises certain components of the Concordia Benefits Program excluding the Concordia Pension Plan which is administered separately. For active members, the Benefits Plan are the five components of the Concordia Benefits Program which are paid for, wholly or in part by the employer (Article 41.01, items b) to f)): Concordia Health Care Insurance; Long-Term Disability Insurance; Basic Life Insurance; Dental Care; Vision Care. Sick leave (Article 33) is not currently a part of the Benefits Plan.

For retirees, the Benefits Plan comprises Concordia Health Care Insurance and Vision Care.

News at a Glance

General Meeting: The Spring General Meeting of CUFA will take place Monday, March 15, in the Hall Building, room 767. The meeting begins at 1 PM and there is a lunch provided at 12 noon. This meeting will be held jointly with the March Council meeting.

Meet the Candidates: The General Meeting is being held early this year to give members the opportunity for the first time to meet the candidates for five Executive positions before the election. The candidates will have presented short position statements with their nomination by March 10 and the meeting gives members a chance to hear their presentations and respond to questions. This will be the Executive that will be responsible for preparing us for the next round of contract negotiations. It is important for you to become acquainted with them.

Update on Benefits Review: This issue of CUFA Report has information from the President that reviews the status of the Benefits Review currently underway (*page 1*).

Associate Membership: Also in this issue, Tony Costanzo discusses the new category: Associate Membership for retirees (*page 1*).

Polling Members

by Greg Butler

CUFA is exploring the use of online polls to better stay in touch with members and to be informed of their opinions. The planning for the first poll is nearing completion. The poll will be multi-purpose. It will help CUFA plan for the next round of negotiations. It will seek the members' opinions on work-related issues. It will address a proposal to increase CUFA dues.

The poll will be run through BigPulse. It will be anonymous. The mechanism is simple: CUFA provides its membership list and email addresses to BigPulse (who guarantee privacy and anonymity); members will receive an email with a link to a web

page; clicking the link will take them to the questionnaire which they can fill in. Reminders are sent to those members who do not complete the questionnaire. When the poll is closed, BigPulse provides CUFA with the anonymous aggregated results.

Although negotiations are not in the immediate future, CUFA expects to have regular polls in preparation for the next round of negotiations. At first the poll will be quite coarse: it poses a broad range of high-level issues, and allows members to write-in issues that are not mentioned. Later polls will focus on the issues of greater importance to members and in greater depth.

The poll also includes questions on work-related issues and seeks to understand members attitudes or opinions to aspects of their work. Indirectly it reinforces the topics of importance for negotiation.

The issue of increasing dues came up at Council, and is under consideration by the Executive. CUFA wishes to know the opinion of its members with regard to an increase in annual dues. Please note that this is not a vote on whether to increase dues or not. The CUFA constitution gives Council the power to set dues. However, the Executive and Council think it advisable to consult with the membership.

There is a last set of questions in the poll dealing with demographics of the membership. CUFA knows the demographics of its membership, however, we wish to connect the answers to previous questions with the demographics of the individual member answering the questionnaire. We need to put the answers in context. This is very important during negotiations when we must make sure that all of our membership are considered. Demographic questions can be sensitive for some members so there is the option of answering 'NA' (No Answer). However, CUFA urges all members to provide as much information as possible as it helps understand the needs of different constituencies within the membership.

CUFA understands that we are all overloaded and that another poll is not a welcome addition to our workload, but please take the time to communicate your opinions via the poll as it is essential input for negotiations and the day-to-day work that CUFA does.

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Upcoming General Meeting

When: Monday, March 15, 2010

*Where: SGW Campus
Room H765-767*

Time: 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

*A buffet lunch will be served
starting at noon*

Call for nominations for

Council and the Executive

*will be accepted until
4:00 pm on March 10, 2010*

CUFA Report is published by the Concordia University Faculty Association

Editorial Board: Aaron Brauer, Christopher Gray, William Sims