

President's Message

Wednesday, August 27, 2025

Dave Westwood, DFA President 2025-2026



It was not my intention to send you another President's update so soon after the last one, but the Board's latest antics have compelled me to yet again issue a message of clarification in the hopes of reducing your anxiety level, if not your anger.

The Board's insistence on bargaining in public raises the serious question of an unfair labour practice, which I will ask our DFA Executive Committee to consider at a meeting tomorrow morning. It seems that the Board has unlimited time, energy, and appetite to prepare misleading and inaccurate news and social media releases, but no time to join us at the bargaining table to have an actual conversation and discussion. Every moment that they waste with such weird behaviour is another moment that delays a resolution to the crisis that they have created with their lockout.

The Board's public-facing message suggests that the "labour dispute" (they are careful to avoid saying "lockout" out loud) could be resolved without disruption to the start of the Fall semester if the DFA agrees to proceed to "interest arbitration". Let me offer a few remarks intended to provide some truth and clarity.

Board's "offer" not presented in a bargaining meeting

First, a serious procedural matter. This "offer" was not presented in a bargaining meeting at the table, it was delivered to our lead negotiator with a copy sent to our conciliation officer and it was followed a few hours later with the public release that you – and many Dalhousie students – have likely already seen. **It is a thinly veiled attempt to seize control of sentiment across campus (and more widely) by suggesting that the Board is interested in a quick resolution to a rapidly looming crisis, and if the DFA does not agree then we will be presumably held up as being the reason that the start of term is delayed.** They fail to mention that the crisis is entirely of their own making, which they created by locking out DFA Members last Wednesday.

I would like to remind you all that we warned the Board repeatedly of the dangerous game that they were playing by threatening, and then ultimately following through with, a lockout in August. By coincidence, our bargaining team happened to be in a virtual meeting when these events were transpiring, so the team had an initial opportunity to consider the implications of a potential interest arbitration. Thursday morning our DFA Executive Committee will have the opportunity to discuss the situation, after which we will be able to share more information about what comes next.

Board's "Offer" is conditional on DFA dropping all unresolved proposals

Second, a key omission changes everything. In their public-facing message the Board did not communicate that their "offer" to proceed to interest arbitration is conditional on the DFA dropping all unresolved proposals. In other words, **it would be an interest arbitration on the sole issue of the IMC.**

As a reminder, we have many proposals still on the table that deal with important issues to our Members: conversion of "long-term" limited-term appointments to career-stream appointments; expanded parental leave benefits; expanded access to childcare; increased flexibility in class scheduling policies to acknowledge caregiving responsibilities. **Many of these proposals would provide clear and immediate benefits to early-career academics who are clearly struggling with many economic and other challenges.**

To put this another way, if the DFA agreed to the Board's "offer" it would mean abandoning all of these important issues for the next three years, with the hope that the Board might be in a more accommodating frame of mind next time.

Board denies the reality that the lockout will delay Fall semester

Third, the Board continues to deny the reality that the Fall semester is going to be delayed because of their lockout. **It is clear to everyone except the Board that the Fall semester will not start on time, and it creates false hope in students to continue suggesting otherwise.** We have been locked out for a week already, at a time when most of us would have otherwise been preparing our courses to begin at the scheduled time. At a minimum, we need an additional week to do the work that we were prevented from doing by the Board's lockout. **A return-to-work timeline has never been discussed between the parties, because nothing has been discussed between the parties since August 11.**

It is worth noting that **if the Board had engaged in meaningful and substantive bargaining in all the time that was available since late May, it is possible that we could have already ratified a new collective agreement with no disruption to the Fall semester.** The Board's repeated assertion that "labour disruption was inevitable" is simply a different way of stating that the Board never intended to reach an agreement through negotiation, and **always intended to use a lockout as a tool to bully DFA Members into accepting a new contract on the Board's terms and timeline.**

As I mentioned above, I will be discussing these issues with our Executive Committee tomorrow morning. I will provide an update as soon as possible outlining our next steps.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'D. Westwood', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dave Westwood
DFA President