

President's Message

June 25, 2025

Dear colleague,

With our strike vote open until Monday, June 30, I wanted to provide further context for why we are asking for you to vote “yes”, and to address a concern that I have heard from several DFA Members about the Board’s characterization of Dalhousie’s financial situation.

What Our Members Prioritized

Our DFA proposals were built to respond to the issues that you told us were priorities for you. Across the Membership it was clear that fair wages were the top priority by a very large margin. Other key issues were identified ranging from workload to job security, and a host of issues related to caring for children and other loved ones.

Many of the qualitative comments from the survey were written by DFA Members in the early stages of their careers, and noted the particular challenges of affording to live in Nova Scotia given the dramatic increases in housing costs that have happened since the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. These increases have not been matched by wage increases.

I encourage those of you who have been at Dalhousie for ten or more years to take some time to speak to your junior colleagues to find out what life is like for them, and how their living and working conditions differ from your own. Inadequate access to childcare and healthcare were identified as specific barriers that limited career progression for female academics, and other DFA Members with caregiving responsibilities.

We have tabled proposals that would help to address some of these challenges.

Concession Bargaining: No Changes to 90-10

As we head into conciliation, the Board has taken the position that DFA Members must agree to make changes to our 90-10 rule to receive wage increases that merely keep pace with inflation over the coming three years, forcing DFA Members to accept the Board’s false narrative that it is not possible to make gains in collective bargaining – concessions are required in order to see any changes in our workplace. We do not yet know yet whether the Board will address any of our other substantial proposals that would improve your working conditions and help families better balance home and work responsibilities.

DFA Bargaining Unit Meeting

Wednesday, June 25, 2025

7:00 p.m. Halifax

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88462549031?pwd=7P3CvtRa8laCVz6ZH2bayl1ObtSvli.1>

Meeting ID: 884 6254 9031

Passcode: 085837

Join us this Wednesday evening for an update on bargaining, outstanding proposals, where we stand with conciliation, and to discuss the need for, and implications of, a strike vote.

This is a repeat of the meeting held Monday, June 23.

As I have written elsewhere, agreeing to any changes to the 90-10 rule would grant the Board their wish of being able to replace DFA Members with lower-paid workers who are employed on a precarious and insecure basis, either immediately (in the case of DFA Members on limited-term appointments) or in the future as DFA Members retire, resign, or otherwise leave the institution. Like many of my long-serving colleagues, I have enjoyed the benefits of a good, stable career as a Professor at Dalhousie for the past 23 years, and I have no intention of “pulling up the ladder” behind me when I leave Dalhousie – I want the next generation of scholars to have the same or better opportunities and working conditions.

We Need a Strong Strike Mandate

It remains my firm position that our bargaining team needs a strong strike mandate from the Membership to make further progress in conciliation on the issues you told us were your priorities. This is not “just” a vote about whether you are prepared to strike over monetary issues, it is a vote about whether you are prepared to stand up for yourself and your DFA colleagues who are seeking better working conditions.

By telling the Board that you are prepared to go on strike, you are demonstrating your commitment to your stated priorities. The Board will be motivated to put forward better proposals and to respond positively to ours.

Dalhousie's Financial Situation

Let me spend a few moments addressing a concern that I have heard from some DFA Members, which is, in essence: “Dalhousie is in a very difficult financial situation, and I do not want to make the problem any worse by going on strike over money.”

Like most post-secondary institutions across Canada, Dalhousie is facing financial challenges that are created by a variety of external factors beyond our direct control (i.e., decreased numbers of international students, decreased tuition from domestic students because of the new tuition freeze imposed by government, and a 2% increase to core funding from the provincial government that does nothing to replace the decades of losses in real terms due to inflation).

Relying on Facts: In bargaining we have asked the Board to walk us through their current financial situation so that we can be certain that we understand exactly what these impacts look like today and in the near future. Several aspects of the proposed budget remain mysterious and we await further explanation and clarification. It is important to remember that the widely circulated Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) reports focus exclusively on the operating budget, which is only a fraction of the University's total financial resources.

The Board's History of Exaggerating Financial Crises: It is worth noting that the Board claimed that a severe financial crisis was looming during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic which motivated them to propose wage rollbacks for DFA Members. Furthermore, they have routinely claimed that our Pension Plan is in a severe financial crisis and requires significant and immediate changes to remain viable. Both assertions proved to be grossly inaccurate. I

think it is safe to say that DFA Members should be glad to have not accepted the Board's gloomy financial narrative during collective bargaining in those previous bargaining rounds, and to have stood up and pushed back against what time revealed to be unnecessary and unjustified concessions. You will have to forgive me if I am not inclined to take the Board's financial rhetoric and assumptions at face value this time around without asking difficult questions at the bargaining table.

Even if Dalhousie's revenues are down as much as we are being told, does this mean that DFA Members should accept concessions to our current collective agreement rights and benefits, and a monetary offer that does not even keep pace with inflation? Absolutely not.

There is plenty of money available to fund adequate cost-of-living adjustments for all Dalhousie employees including DFA Members.

As our previous external review of Dalhousie's Financial Statements has shown, [the Board has a long-standing history of moving substantial funds out of the operating budget and into capital projects](#).

Between 2003 and 2021, for example, Dalhousie's audited financial statements show a cumulative operating surplus of more than \$464M.

The Board Spends \$36.5M on a Hockey Arena While Claiming Financial Hardship: There is no question that some of Dalhousie's buildings and facilities are aging and in poor condition, and new buildings can help to advance Dalhousie's academic mission. But it is an absolute scandal that the [Board decided to spend what is now at least \\$36.5M on a hockey arena](#) while having the audacity to suggest to Dalhousie employees that there is a financial crisis that might require layoffs and concessions in collective bargaining. Without a strong collective pushback against the Board's narrative of financial hardship by standing up for fair wages and good working conditions, **the Board will continue to make the same kinds of financial choices in the future – buildings ahead of people.**

Dalhousie's Massive Fundraising Campaign: Most of us have noticed the dramatic increase in the number of senior administrators at Dalhousie over the past 10-15 years, which carries the reasonable assumption that many highly qualified and skilled individuals are working to ensure the financial sustainability of Dalhousie. Indeed, [Dalhousie is in the midst of a massive \\$750M fundraising campaign entitled "Bringing Worlds Together"](#) which has already raised about \$387M. Presumably this substantial infusion of new resources will go a long way to addressing the current financial challenges that DFA Members have been hearing about recently.

Senior Leaders Remain Quiet on Lack of Public Funding for Universities: One might also expect that, with such a robust complement of senior administrators, a team of experts would be working hard to leverage the provincial government to live up to its obligations for funding post-secondary education in Nova Scotia.

Like me, you might be surprised to learn that Dalhousie's senior administration team has not issued any public statements expressing concern about the current state of provincial funding for post-secondary education.

Perhaps the approach of remaining silent will pay dividends in the future, but it seems to me that most Dalhousie employees would prefer to see some indication that senior leaders are fighting back against the systemic erosion of funding for universities in Nova Scotia. After all, it is the responsibility of the provincial government to provide adequate funding for post-secondary education.

If senior administrators genuinely believe we are in a financial crisis, presumably they would speak up about the need for increased funding.

The Kaplan Award at Acadia: Setting aside an analysis of Dalhousie's actual financial situation, it is worth highlighting a particularly relevant interest arbitration from Acadia University and the Acadia University Faculty Association in relation to a wage reopener for the fourth year of their collective agreement (2024-2025). [Noted labour arbitrator William Kaplan awarded a 3.75% wage increase \(similar to our Income Maintenance Change or IMC\) for July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025.](#) He noted that Acadia's Board raised serious objections to an increase of this magnitude given their current state of financial hardship and the lack of adequate government funding, but he dismissed these objections as being irrelevant to the core principle of ensuring that employees receive wage increases that are comparable to those working in similar occupations and similar institutions.

Kaplan's point is clear. **Employers have an obligation to provide fair wage increases for their workers, even if they claim financial hardship.** Presumably, labour arbitrators understand that employers like Dalhousie's Board of Governors must make difficult financial decisions to ensure that employees are fairly compensated for their work.

Please Vote "Yes"

We are asking you to vote "yes" in our strike vote, giving the DFA the legal authority to strike should it be deemed appropriate. A strong strike vote will help us to actually avoid a strike by encouraging the Board to make an acceptable offer during conciliation. You have my promise that we will present to you the Board's best and final offer after conciliation before we would consider triggering a strike.

Sincerely,



Dave Westwood
DFA President 2025-2026