

STUDENT UPDATE: Part 2

July 25, 2025

This second update provides students with key information about the contract negotiations happening between Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA) and the Dalhousie Board of Governors. This gives an overview of the issues at the heart of this round of collective bargaining.

DFA wants to continue bargaining, but Dalhousie Board of Governors has so far not accepted our invitation to come back to the table. If you have concerns about how this situation will affect the fall term, please contact:

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Bargaining Highlights

As explained in [Student Update Part 1](#), the DFA and the Dalhousie Board of Governors (the Board) began negotiations on May 26, 2025. On June 2, after only a few days of bargaining, the Board filed for conciliation. The DFA contested the filing, saying it was premature and full discussions on many proposals had not yet taken place. The Minister of Labour agreed to wait until the DFA Bargaining Team and the Board's team met one last time on June 20.

On June 23, the Labour Board appointed a conciliation officer and conciliation meetings were held July 9, July 15 and July 16. Midway through the July 16 session, the Board presented a 'best and final offer' and withdrew from further discussions, leaving several outstanding matters unresolved, despite progress being made.

As is typical in bargaining, the conciliator meets with both sides to try and reach agreement. If an agreement cannot be reached, the conciliator files a "no board report" with the Minister of Labour, which triggers a 14-day countdown. At the end of that 14-day period, the employer could lock out employees or the union could go on strike.

In DFA's case, the conciliator is scheduled to file a "no board report" on July 28, which means the Board could lock out faculty members at midnight on Monday, August 11 at the earliest. We are concerned that the Board's procedural choices and rapid escalation signal a lockout strategy. **The DFA will not initiate a strike in August.**

The Main Issues

Typically, in conciliation, the two sides discuss the few remaining items not agreed to in bargaining. We were making progress in several areas including moving expenses, Indigenous ceremonial leave and some workload proposals. However, because the Board filed for conciliation prematurely, and walked away from conciliation while DFA was still ready to bargain, these items and many others are still on the table.

Salary

The DFA is currently proposing a salary increase (also known as the Income Maintenance Change, or IMC) of: 7% in the first year; 4% in the second and 4% in the third. We moved from our initial proposal of 9%, 6% and 6%. The Board is offering 2% in each year, up only .25% a year from their original offer before conciliation.

It is important to note that the Board's salary offer is tied to a major change in the 90-10 Clause (see p. 3) that would allow the Board to employ more sessional instructors to replace work normally done by DFA Members. **They are not offering a conditions-free cost-of-living adjustment.** The Board's proposal of an increase close to the expected level of inflation depends on accepting a dramatic change to the academic staffing at the institution. This change would affect DFA members who could lose their jobs, and it would impact the student experience, as more sessional (part time) instructors will be teaching your courses.

For the past year, the Board has talked about the grave financial situation facing Dalhousie. The DFA has asked the Board on several occasions to help us understand the financial situation and its impact on operations. Despite our requests, we have not received adequate explanation and we are concerned with the apparent lack of a plan to ensure the integrity of the academic programs at Dalhousie. Several aspects of the operating budget lack transparency or detailed explanation.

The Board has a long history of moving substantial funds out of the operating budget and into capital projects to fund things like buildings and the new arena. Between 2003 and 2021, Dalhousie's financial statements show a cumulative operating surplus of more than \$464M, yet they are now somehow facing a significant deficit that they are using to implement extreme operational cutbacks. Dalhousie's historical surpluses and discretionary capital expenditures suggest sufficient flexibility to fund cost-of-living adjustments for academic staff.

Over the past three Collective Agreements, the salary increases negotiated with the Board have fallen short of inflation. As a result, DFA Members have in essence, incurred a wage cut of almost 9% in real terms over the past decade.

For five years the Board offered salary increases below 2% (the normal expected level of inflation). Then, in the years when the Board agreed to raises above 2%, inflation was much higher than expected (e.g., up to 7.53% in 2022). In this 2025 round of bargaining, salary increases must make up for the 9% accumulated wage cut and ensure that we do not slide further behind the expected increase in cost of living.

It is the Board's responsibility to pay fair wages to the employees who do the critical work of the institution. Fair wages help us keep pace with the cost of living in Nova Scotia. It is the only way to continue recruiting top quality faculty.

The 90-10 Clause

The 90-10 clause – dating back to 1978 - ensures that no less than 90% of the teaching is done by DFA Members, with a maximum of 10% allocated to non-DFA Members (e.g., CUPE 3912 sessional instructors and non-unionized instructors). The Board is proposing a change to the 90-10 clause that would allow them to eliminate up to 76 full-time, tenure/tenure track faculty positions, and and increase their reliance on precarious, lower-paid academic staff.

The 90-10 rule protects the integrity and quality of academic work at Dalhousie, and enables the DFA to protect the working conditions of the majority of academic staff at the institution. It is fundamental to our purpose and values as a faculty association.

Librarian Appointments and Workload

The Board proposes to change the way librarians are appointed, from being appointed to a specific to an appointment to the library system. So, our librarians could be in the Law Library one term, and in the Health Sciences Library the next; in the MacRae Library in Truro one year and the Killam in Halifax the next. No specialty, no consistency. The Board also proposes to remove provisions for librarian workload, including overtime.

Child Care and Parental Leave

All of the DFA proposals targeted to improve working conditions for less senior faculty with families remain on the table. To date, the Board has declined to support any of the DFA's proposals in this area, including: improving child care, extending parental leave top-up and academic scheduling to address caregiver responsibilities.

Abuse of Limited-Term Appointments (LTAs)

The Board has not been willing to discuss converting LTAs that have existed for over five years. Some of our DFA members have been in limited-term positions since as far back as 2008.

Indigenous Leave

The Board has not agreed to adequate leave for Indigenous members to engage in days of importance, traditional, and cultural Indigenous practices, and ceremonies and celebrations.

Health Spending Account

Despite a majority of DFA members using the maximum amount of their Health Spending Account, the Board has not agreed to an increase despite the growing needs of members.

Retirement Incentive

The Board has no interest in discussing a retirement incentive program, even though it would save money in its budget. Paying senior faculty is far more expensive than paying those early in their career.

Professional Counsellors: Cost of Professional Fees and Workload

The Board will not discuss covering the costs of professional fees for Professional Counsellors who are hired to provide important mental health services for students that require them to be licensed. Additionally, the Board won't discuss proper hours of work for Professional Counsellors.

August Disruption Jeopardizes the Fall Term

A lockout in August causes significant disruption for not only faculty, but for students and their families, and puts the success of the fall term in jeopardy. Students attending classes over the summer will have their studies interrupted, move-in dates may be affected, even the decision of whether or not to come to Dalhousie or continue your studies at our university could be impacted. Faculty are being forced to shift their focus from preparing your courses to contingency planning , a consequence of the unresolved bargaining situation.

The DFA Bargaining Team remains ready and willing to bargain, and we encourage the Board to come back to the table.

We invite students to stay informed and ask questions about how ongoing negotiations may affect your programs. We are currently working on a FAQ document based on the questions we have heard from students in recent weeks. Your understanding and engagement are deeply valued.

To stay up-to-date on our bargaining, please follow us on [Bluesky](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [X](#). We will also post information for students to the [DFA website](#). You are also invited to read our [bargaining updates here](#).