

STUDENT UPDATE: Part 1

Open Letter to Dalhousie Students October 27, 2020

The Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA) and the Dalhousie Board of Governors (the Board) have been in collective bargaining for a new collective agreement since June. To this point, the two sides have been unable to come to any substantial agreement.

Members of the DFA include most of the professors, instructors, counsellors, and librarians at all of Dalhousie's campuses. Most classes are taught by DFA Members, but there are some exceptions. If you are uncertain, do not hesitate to ask your instructor.

We have put together a few points, highlighting how we got to this stage and what you, as a student, can do to keep your studies moving ahead if there is a labour disruption.

This is Part 1 of our Student Update, providing key facts that all students should know. Part 2 will be available later this week and is designed for those students wondering about the issues at the heart of this round of collective bargaining.

2020 Bargaining Milestones

The collective agreement between the DFA and the Board expired June 30, 2020. Bargaining over the summer/fall immediately following the expiry of the agreement is typical.

The DFA suggested to the Board that bargaining be delayed for a year, allowing time for uncertainty caused by the pandemic to settle a bit. This proposal was rejected which led to bargaining over the summer months. Beginning in June, the two sides held seven bargaining meetings but were unable to reach agreement on most issues being discussed, both monetary and non-monetary.

The DFA filed for conciliation on September 22, and a conciliation officer was appointed by the Province. He met with the two parties on October 19 to try and facilitate an agreement between the parties, but conciliation was unsuccessful.

The conciliator notified the Province on October 22 that an agreement was not reached. This began a 14-day countdown for legal job action. As of Friday, November 6, at 12:01 am, DFA Members (including professors, instructors, counsellors and librarians) can go on strike, and/or the Board of Governors can lock-out the faculty. Job action could begin November 6 or anytime thereafter. It is a legal requirement that 48 hours' notice is required before a strike or lock-out is possible.

As is typical in bargaining, the conciliator continues to try and reach agreement during the 14-day countdown. There are two additional days scheduled for talks to continue. On November 3 and 4, the conciliator will meet with the two sides again to see if job action can be avoided.

Is there going to be a strike?

Earlier this week, the DFA Members voted on whether or not to accept the Board's best offer presented during conciliation on October 19. The vote closed Monday, October 26 – more than 89% of our membership voted; and over 95% of those members voted to reject the Board's offer.

The DFA held a strike vote in early October. Over 86% of DFA members voted, and over 90% of those voting supported going on strike if necessary. This does not mean that there *will* be a strike, but rather that faculty is *prepared* to go on strike if no agreement is reached. As noted earlier, 48 hours' notice will be given if there will be a strike or lock-out.

If there is a strike, how long could it last?

There is no way to predict how long a strike would last. In the 42-year history of the DFA, there have been four strikes: 1985, 1988, 1998 and 2002. They ranged in length from one day (1985) to almost four weeks (2002). In 2012, an agreement was reached in conciliation just before job action was scheduled to begin.

If there is a strike or lock-out, and if it lasts for several weeks or more, there is a possibility that the Fall semester will not be completed at the expected time and it could even disrupt the timing of the Winter semester. Strikes and lock-outs always end, and every effort will be made by the DFA and the Board of Governors at that time to find ways to get students back on track.

What specific activities would be interrupted?

Job action (strike or lock-out) would interrupt specific activities that are normally the work of DFA Members. The vast majority of Dalhousie's professors, instructors, counsellors, and librarians are DFA Members. Students should expect disruption to: synchronous face-to-face and online classes, access to some or all course materials, tests, grading, and communication with students on academic matters. Access to asynchronous materials could also be disrupted.

Before a strike or lock-out students will receive more detailed information about what disruptions to expect, and when.

Senate will be suspended.

Supervision of research students (both undergraduate and graduate) will be paused. Thesis defences, other presentations, access to librarians will stop. There will be reduced access to some counseling services.

Internships, practica, and other academic activities that take place off campus might be disrupted depending on who is responsible for supervision. You will certainly receive updates from program administrators about what to expect.

Laboratories and tutorials could be disrupted. Most of these activities are not run by DFA Members but they could be affected so you should ask for updates from the course instructor.

This will happen at ALL campuses.

The Administration may communicate to you additional programs and services that will be affected by job action. Sometimes during a strike or lock-out, services that are not offered by DFA Members could also be disrupted but this is not within the control of the DFA.

There will be physical pickets around campuses and there will be new online activities and messaging related to the strike.

What would a strike look like?

A strike during COVID-19 would look different than other strikes. DFA Members would walk on the edges of Dalhousie campuses with picket signs, following public health guidelines. It is ok to talk to people who are on strike and to ask questions. There will be lots of messages on social media platforms talking about the strike and the issues at stake. If you are not physically present on campus the only thing you might notice is that your classes are not running and you will not be able to communicate with your course instructor, and you might not be able to access teaching materials from the usual places.

How can students keep their studies moving forward if there is labour disruption?

In the event that a strike occurs, we suggest that you treat the temporary cessation of classes like a “working study break” and continue reading, studying, learning, writing papers, etc.

Many course instructors will provide specific examples of what to focus on prior to a strike. Because your workload may be more intense than normal after classes resume, stay current or ahead in your courses; at the end of a strike, faculty would try to work out a revised completion of courses that is fair and reasonable.

Finally, although we cannot predict exactly how long a strike would last, we expect that you would have an opportunity to complete your courses although it might not be at the time that you expected. Both the DFA and the Dalhousie Administration have every motivation to help students succeed.

Regular updates will be provided via Twitter, Instagram and FaceBook (@dalfacultyassoc), and posted to [DFA website](#) in the Student Info Tab.