

STEELDRUM

USW1998 NEWSMAGAZINE

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PRESIDENT'S
MESSAGE

Déjà vu All Over Again

As I write this, we are heading into the uncertainty of a new academic year in a pandemic. This time last year, our members who were working at home were worried about the safety of returning to work on campus.

Would the schools and daycares be open for their children? Is it safe to return? Would there be a third wave of the pandemic? USW worked with CUPE and UTFA on a safety campaign to advocate for the safest possible return to campus.

Because of the third wave, plans for a large-scale return to campus did not pan out and most of our members are still working from home. Unfortunately, we have had members on temporary lay-offs which were extended to September 2021. There was another round of

lay-offs at Victoria in the spring with about one third of that bargaining unit temporarily laid-off. We are optimistic that most of our members will be recalled to work in September.

As Yogi Berra said, "it's like déjà vu all over again." It's summer 2021 and we're back to all of the same uncertainty about a return to on-campus work. Once again, USW is working with CUPE, UTFA and, this time faculty associations and unions at York, OCAD and Ryerson/X University on a health and safety checklist for campuses. While high vaccination rates make us more

optimistic than we were last year, there are still uncertainties with the variants of concern. The University must ensure that people who must work on campus have all the safety measures in place – distancing, masking, hand hygiene and proper ventilation. The return to campus must be slow and gradual with only essential people coming back first. If that is successful and case counts stay low, then more people can return in time. Your union Local will be advocating strongly for the health and safety of our members as we face the fall term.

While we live in unusual times, the work of the union goes on, including Local union elections last spring. I have been acclaimed for another three years and look forward to continuing to work with and for our amazing members. I would like to welcome new members to the Executive: Andrea Burton and Fatima Ijaz as incoming Trustees, Steven Craig as St. Mike's President and Angela Noorlander as Casual Unit President. I'd like to acknowledge the members of the Executive who have been sworn in for another three years: Mark Austin, Richard Waters, Nick Redman, Alex Thomson, Betty Walters, Tamara Vickery and Martin Aiello, UTS Unit President. Two members who are renewing but in new roles are John Ankenman, as Vice-President in addition to being President of the Victoria Unit and Zack Sholdra, as our new Financial Secretary. Thanks to everyone for stepping up into these volunteer roles which are so essential for our Local.

Colin Harris and Cristina Huerta stepped off the Executive and I'd like to thank them for their contributions to the Local.

I'd like to thank Manda Vrkljan who

stepped down as President of the St. Mike's Unit. Manda's energy and drive helped to get the St. Mike's Job Evaluation process off the ground and progressing well.

I'd also like to recognize and thank Nick Marchese who stepped down as Casual Unit President and will be finishing his staff position as Casual Outreach Coordinator shortly. Casual members know first hand of Nick's hard work and commitment to casual members and issues of precarity both within the University and more broadly. He will be continuing as a union steward, so will still be involved in the Local.

I would like to end by thanking two people who have been very indispensable in our office and on our Executive for the past six years. Toni Eyre, our Financial Secretary, and P.C. Choo, our Vice President, both retired at the end of June. Both Toni and P.C. were involved in our Local since the organizing drive in the late '90's. Over the years, Toni has been a steward and health and safety representative before becoming full time Financial Secretary in 2015. She was instrumental in getting the finances of our Local back on track and has been watching the pennies and the investments and stewarding your union dues responsibly since then. P.C. started off as a Casual member before converting to Staff-Appointed many years ago. He has been editor of SteelDrum for many years and involved in Job Evaluation at the beginning of the project and again from 2016. As Vice President he has been a very trusted advisor to me and has always had excellent advice. Both of them leave very big shoes to fill and the Local is very grateful for their years of service. I wish them both a very happy retirement.

— **Colleen Burke**, President, USW 1998



After 15 years as Governor, it is time to say 'Goodbye'

The English poet and author, Geoffrey Chaucer, was widely credited with saying that "all good things must come to an end." So it is with my term on Governing Council, the highest decision-making body at the University of Toronto. After 15 years as one of two Administrative Staff Governors, it is time to say 'Good-bye.' Owing to health reasons, I am taking early retirement effective June 30, 2021 – my last day as Governor of our great University.

P.C.
on
G.
C.

I have served five terms of three years each: 2004-07, 2007-2010, 2010-2013, 2015-2018 and 2018-2021.

During my term as Governor, I have had the privilege of serving under three Presidents – Frank Iacobucci, David Naylor and Meric Gertler. I also had the privilege of serving under six Chairs of Governing Council – Rose Patten, Jack Petch, Richard Nunn, Judy Goldring, Shirley Hoy and Claire Kennedy. In addition, I served under four Chancellors – Senator Vivienne Poy; former Ontario Premier, The Rt. Hon. David Peterson; former Federal Finance Minister, The Hon. Michael Wilson; and Rose Patten. To each and every one of them, I thank them for their leadership and stewardship of our great university.

During my 15 years as a Governor, I worked with four of my fellow Governors who served alongside me – Brian Davis, Diana Alli, Catherine Riddell and Sarosh Jamal. I am honoured to have worked with each and every one of you in standing up for administrative staff.

I also want to express my sincere thanks to all my fellow Governors that I have worked with over the years. They represent various constituencies – Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council (LGIC), alumni, faculty, staff and students. I learned a lot from them. Some like Rose Patten (LGIC), John Switzer (Alumni) and John Stewart (Alumni) became my mentors who selflessly shared their experiences and wisdom with me.

I worked closely with Student Governors on many issues inside Governing Council. In particular, I have many fond memories of working with Graduate Student Governor Olivier Sorin, Undergraduate Student Governor Aly Madhavji (UTM) and Part-Time Undergraduate Student

Governor Susan Froom. To them, a heart-felt 'Thank You' for all the shared experiences, the solidarity on the various issues and the common bond of friendship built up over the years.

Above all, I want to express my sincere thanks to all the staff in the Secretariat of Governing Council. They are the ones who keep Governing Council functioning smoothly and they make our duties as Governors a seamless one.

What have I achieved during my years as Governor? For one, I have always stood up for administrative staff, without fear or favour. Administrative staff, for one reason or another, always seemed to be the junior partner after faculty, alumni, donors and students. One recent example was when the University took out full-page advertisements in the national press, thanking faculty, alumni, donors and students for their role in donating and helping with their time and resources as the University transitioned to on-line learning during the pandemic.

Administrative staff were conspicuous by their absence even though some of them were designated as 'essential' and had to continue to work on campus. I wrote to President Gertler about this glaring omission. The following week, the University took out a new advertisement with administrative staff included in the honour rolls.

Another issue that I had campaigned on was pension reform after the disastrous debacle of U of T Asset Management following the 2008-09 financial meltdown. Our pension plan lost more than a third of its value (\$1.3 billion out of \$3 billion). When the University



reached an agreement for a new pension plan with the Faculty Association and Steelworkers, I campaigned with our Union to promote the new plan, which became operational on July 1, 2021.

Has it been worth it? Some of my friends called me a glutton for punishment for staying so long on Governing Council. My answer is an unqualified 'Yes!' It has been truly worth it and I have enjoyed every single minute on Governing Council.

The greatest compliment came from the Provost, Professor Cheryl Regehr, who sent me a card wishing me a bright spring and in which she wrote: "PC, your commitment to governance is legendary – many thanks."

Finally, I want to express my sincere thanks to USW Local 1998 for enabling me to serve effectively as Governor by giving me the time to attend Governing Council meetings and to serve on its various committees.

Also, a big 'Thank You' to all those administrative staff who supported me and elected and/or re-elected me for a record five terms as Governor.

Thank you.

– **P.C. Choo**, Governor for Administrative Staff, Governing Council, University of Toronto

USW LOCAL 1998 EXECUTIVE ACCLAIMED

The entire Executive of USW Local 1998 was acclaimed at the March 9, 2021 General Membership Meeting.

THE NEW USW LOCAL 1998 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



Colleen Burke
President



John Ankenman
Vice-President



Mark Austin
Recording Secretary



Zack Sholdra
Financial Secretary



Richard Waters, Treasurer



Andrea Burton, Trustee



Fatima Ijaz, Trustee



Nik Redman
Trustee



Alex Thomson, Guard



Betty Walters, Guard



Tamara Vickery
Guide

The new Executive was sworn in at the May 2021 General Membership Meeting. Four members of the past Executive did not seek re-election: Vice President P. C. Choo, Financial Secretary Toni Eyre (both of whom have retired), Guard Colin Harris and Casual Unit President – **Margaret Bucknam**, Chair, Election Committee



MARK AUSTIN

Elected to *Victoria University's Board of Regents*

USW Local 1998 Recording Secretary, Mark Austin, has been elected to the Board of Regents of Victoria University.

He beat out three other candidates, with over 50% of the vote. He replaces Maria Quiroz, another USW 1998 member, who did not seek re-election.

Asked about his victory, Austin said that he is excited for the opportunity to be the sole USW member on the Board of Regents. "I look forward to the challenge and learning about the processes that shape the University's operations," he said.

Why did he choose to run? "It is important to have a USW member on the Board of Regents that will bring the concerns of its members, and all administrative staff, to the University's highest governing body to ensure that their voices are heard and to advocate on their behalf," Austin explained. "There has been a move from the Board of Regents to make the discussions and information provided to guests at the meeting highly confidential. It is important that there is a

member of the administrative staff present at the meetings to be part of the discussions and to report back to the Vic community the information that is not deemed confidential."

Austin's election was first reported to USW Local 1998's Executive Committee at its meeting in April 2021 by Victoria University Unit President John Ankenman, who described Austin as a "stellar candidate." A modest Austin said that he is "humbled by John's description of me as a stellar candidate."

The Board of Regents is the governing body of Victoria University and is similar to the Governing Council for the University of Toronto. It has 37 members, including one administrative staff member. The Board appoints the Chancellor, the President, College Principals and other senior officers of the University.

Congratulations, Mark! Welcome to the world of university governance!

— **P.C. Choo**, Outgoing Editor, Steeldrum

ACCLAMATIONS GALORE

in USW Local 1998
Constituent Elections

A **ccclamations were the norm** in almost all the constituent units of USW Local 1998 when nominations closed.

CASUAL UNIT



Angela Noorlander
Unit President



Scott Eldridge
Unit Secretary



Karen Hampson
Unit Grievor

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY UNIT



John Ankenman
Unit President



Alex Thomson
Unit Secretary



Mark Austin
Chief Steward

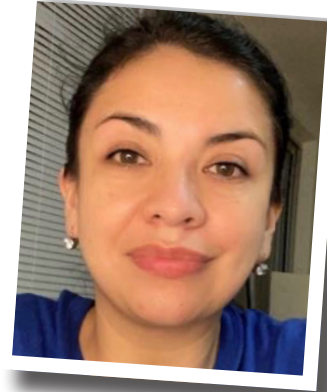
ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE UNIT



Steve Craig
Unit President



Kenneth Schnell
Unit Secretary



Vanessa Gonzalez
Chief Steward

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SCHOOLS UNIT



Martin Aiello
Unit President



Jennifer Cypher
Unit Secretary



Kevin Brice-Lall
Unit Grievor

RESIDENCE DONS UNIT

**Unit President
Vacant**



Michelle Nurse
Unit Secretary



Mrinmayee Sengupta
Steward (University College)

LOCAL HAPPENINGS

KRISTY BARD IS NEW EDITOR OF THE STEELDRUM

Kristy Bard is the new Editor of Steeldrum and Co-Chair of the Communications Committee for USW Local 1998. She takes over from P.C. Choo, who had been Editor from 2003 to 2021, except for a brief interlude in 2013-14.

The Editor is appointed by the President of USW Local 1998. In a statement, President Colleen Burke said, "I am delighted to appoint Kristy as the new Editor of Steeldrum and I look forward to working with her. She's done great work in our Local with the Next Gen and Women of Steel committees and on climate justice issues. I'm sure she'll bring her passion and energy to this new role."

Former Editor P.C. Choo also welcomed Bard's appointment. "Kristy is a very passionate person who cares deeply about the issues she believes in. I am confident that she will serve with distinction."

As for Bard herself, she said, "P.C. Choo leaves big shoes to fill, but I am excited about taking on this new role in our Union to ensure Steeldrum continues to serve as an informative and accessible publication for our members. Luckily I have a great team to rely on to take on any challenges, such as our Outreach and Communications Officer Margaret Bucknam, the Steeldrum layout guru Kim Walker, and our President Colleen Burke. Anything I am able to accomplish as Editor will be in large part thanks to them. If you have any article ideas for future issues of Steeldrum, please send them my way!"

Margaret Bucknam remains as Co-Chair of the Communications Committee with David Eden (U of T Libraries) as the alternate.





MARY-MARTA BRIONES-BIRD IS NEW JOB EVALUATION COORDINATOR

Mary-Marta Briones-Bird is the new Job Evaluation (JE) Coordinator for USW Local 1998 effective June 1, 2021. She takes over from P. C. Choo who is taking early retirement.

"One year into the pandemic, there are many new challenges facing job evaluation at the University. I am confident that Mary-Marta will take the Job Evaluation Committee to greater heights," said Choo.

"I look forward to assuming the role of Job Evaluation Coordinator in the Local and to serve the membership in all units of our amalgamated union. The pandemic has limited our ability to meet face to face and our hope is that in the near future when it is safe to do so for us, to join you on all three campuses," said Briones-Bird.

"In addition to supporting members and informing them about the reclassification process, we also commit to continuing to educate members on what job evaluation is all about and also what falls outside of job evaluation," said Briones-Bird.. "The JE team has a lot of experience in working with members on this project and I am confident in our commitment to advocate for you in seeking equitable and fair compensation. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank P.C. Choo for effectively shepherding the Job Evaluation project for the past seven years. Thank you, P.C., and all the very best in your well-deserved retirement!"

LIESL JOSON THE NEWEST MEMBER OF JOB EVALUATION TEAM

Liesl Joson is the newest member of the USW Local 1998 Job Evaluation tTeam. She replaces Mary-Marta Briones-Bird, who takes over as Job Evaluation Coordinator.

Briones-Bird is delighted to have Joson on the Job Evaluation team. "Liesl joins us from the Kelly Library at the University of St. Michael's College. She has experience working on the Job Evaluation Team, which is underway there. She is an analytical, hardworking, and dedicated advocate for members. Liesl will be a great addition to the USW Job Evaluation team."

Joson comes out on release time effective July 1, 2021.





Victoria University Unit Report: MAY 2021

The University's (Vic's) Temporary Layoffs Cut Deeply

One way the University is dealing with their significant COVID-19-related loss of revenue is by not accepting any students into residence this summer and by implementing an unprecedented number of temporary layoffs. Although we need to acknowledge that the University did not implement layoffs during the past academic year when the number of students living in residence was significantly lower than usual, we also need to recognize that the University's decision to not house any students this summer prevented any revenue from being realized from that source. The decision has led to the layoff of all Food Services USW members from May 3 to August 23 and the temporary layoff of all but

seven Housekeepers and one Lead Hand Housekeeper.

Temporary layoffs have also been implemented in Events Victoria and in the Physical Plant Department. A total of 58 USW members have been laid off (including two casual employees who did not receive a layoff letter but who were terminated as of May 1). This equals 38% of the total active membership of our unit.

Last summer the University provided to qualifying laid off employees a top up to the federal government's CERB, up to a maximum of \$250 per week and they paid the employee's share of health care benefit premiums of each laid-off employee. This year the University informed the Union that it was not going to implement either of those

supplementary measures, even though the University of Toronto administration is currently providing them to laid-off members of the U of T Staff Appointed Unit. The Vic administration said that they could not afford to provide them this year. The Union was eventually able to convince the University to cover the employee's share of the health care benefit premiums, but the University would not change their position on the unemployment benefit top up, even though we raised the possibility of a lower maximum dollar amount than what was available last year.

The University's decision to not provide any Employment Insurance top-up is particularly frustrating given they made operational decisions that decreased revenue and increased the number of layoffs. Also, the nature of the duties done by almost all the laid-off employees caused them to have to report to work on campus throughout the pandemic and thus be exposed to a higher risk of being infected with COVID-19.

While we have members on layoff, we need to be extra vigilant for managers doing the work of union members who have been laid off.

Work Done by Part-time Employees on Statutory Holidays

The collective agreement states that any authorized work performed by an employee on one of the statutory holidays listed in Article 22.01 shall be paid at the rate of time and one-half, in addition to holiday pay. Holiday pay equals straight time pay for each hour

worked on a statutory holiday.

In October 2017, the Union became aware that at least some part-time employee members who worked on statutory holidays had not been paid properly for that work. It took a long time to figure out what was happening, but we eventually confirmed that part-time Housekeepers who worked on a statutory holiday were paid time and one-half for all the hours they worked but, because the University was applying an averaging of hours provision found in the Employment Standards Act instead of the relevant collective agreement language, the part-time Housekeepers only received holiday pay for some of the hours they worked on a statutory holiday. The result was that part-time Housekeepers were typically not paid holiday pay for a few of the hours they worked on each statutory holiday.

In discussions with the University, the Union took the position that part-time employees should not be paid holiday pay for a number of hours determined by an averaging calculation, but instead they should be paid straight time holiday pay for all the hours they worked. The University eventually agreed to our interpretation of the collective agreement and, as a result, 16 part-time Housekeepers were paid the wages owed to them for their work on statutory holidays, retroactive to Family Day 2017. The Union will now investigate whether the same problem with holiday pay exists in other departments.

A 1% Across-the-Board Wage Increase Retroactive to July 1, 2020 to be Implemented for Vic USW Staff

In late March, the University of Toronto announced that they would be implementing a 1% across-the-board wage increase for active USW Staff Appointed Unit members, retroactive to July 1, 2020. In subsequent talks with the Union, the University of Toronto agreed to also implement a 1% increase to Child Care Benefit payments made in

Continued on page 17



GRIEVANCE Committee **REPORT 2020**

Did the year of the pandemic impact the number of grievances filed?
The short answer is, not really.

Not a single grievance was filed related to health and safety, which is a testament to all the fantastic work being done by Joint Health & Safety Committees and our Health & Safety Officer, Mark Austin and former Health & Safety Assistant, Corrine Brandon. Their quick intervention when issues arose has meant not a single one escalated to a grievance.

In terms of types of grievances filed and areas, many of the same trends of previous years continued, but with a few notable exceptions. We filed 97 grievances in 2020, slightly down from the last three previous years when we've had just over 100 each year. We also resolved 93 grievances in 2020, up from 2019's 84 grievance resolutions.

Unjust discipline has shot up to representing 25% of all grievances filed. In 2019, unjust discipline was only 19%, and the two years before that it was under 10%. In contrast, in 2020 we didn't file a single improper coaching letter grievance. In 2017, improper coaching was 11% of grievances, and in 2018 and 2019 they were reduced to 5%. The fact they were down to zero in 2020, yet the proportion of

disciplinary grievances are way up, tells me that the University is perhaps relying much more on going straight to discipline. This may be because in 2017 we bargained language in the Staff-Appointed collective agreement that coaching letters would only remain in an employee's personnel file for one year. Now that coaching letters can't stay on an employee's file indefinitely, they seem to be issued less often. It may be that many departments are skipping coaching entirely and going directly to issuing verbal warnings, which is the lowest form of discipline.

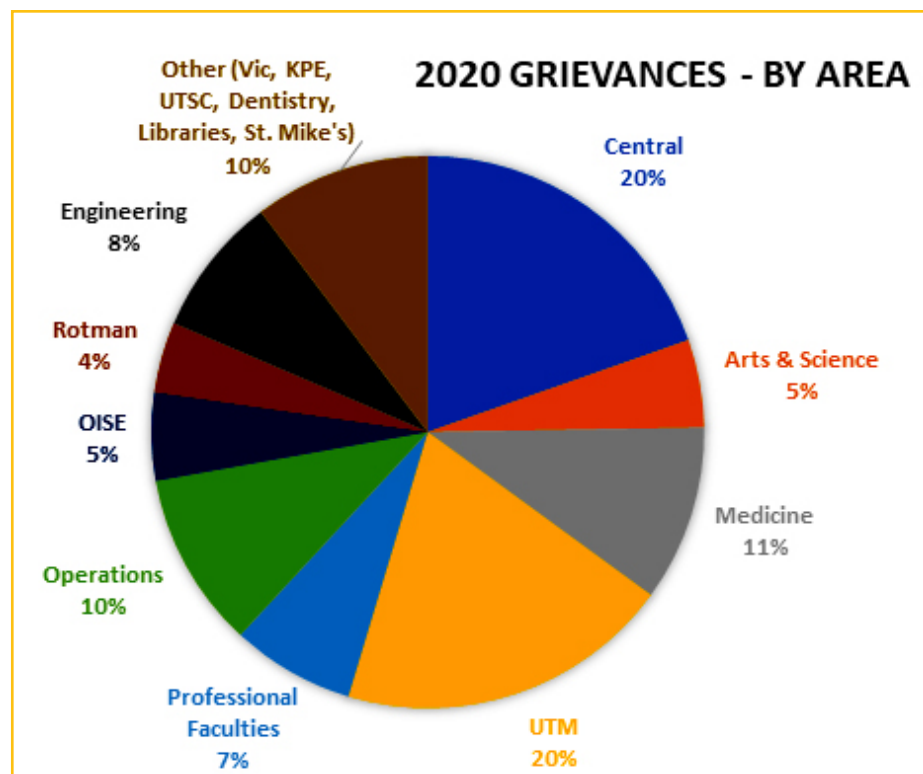
An alarming trend is the fact that termination grievances that were filed was up to 17% in 2020. In 2019, termination grievances represented just 8% of the total number of grievances filed, and that percentage was even less in 2018. Many of these grievances in 2020 were filed by members who were still on probation or by members of the Casual Unit. Although it cannot be stated with certainty that the increase in the number of unjust termination grievances in 2020 indicates an increase in the number of actual

terminations, that does seem to be the case. The number of probationary terminations is perhaps an indication of greater difficulty passing probation during the pandemic, when most on boarding happens remotely.

Members should know that if you are caught lying or stealing or breaching confidentiality, there is a good chance you will be immediately terminated – even without any previous discipline on record. Some of these termination grievances involving members of the Casual Unit were the result of said members having their hours cut and contracts not renewed after they were accused of harassment. Through the grievance process, we have raised concern these members were not given the same procedural fairness and due process as staff-appointed employees when they face similar allegations. The investigations for casual employees don't seem as thorough, and there have been instances of casual employees not being informed of their right to union representation.

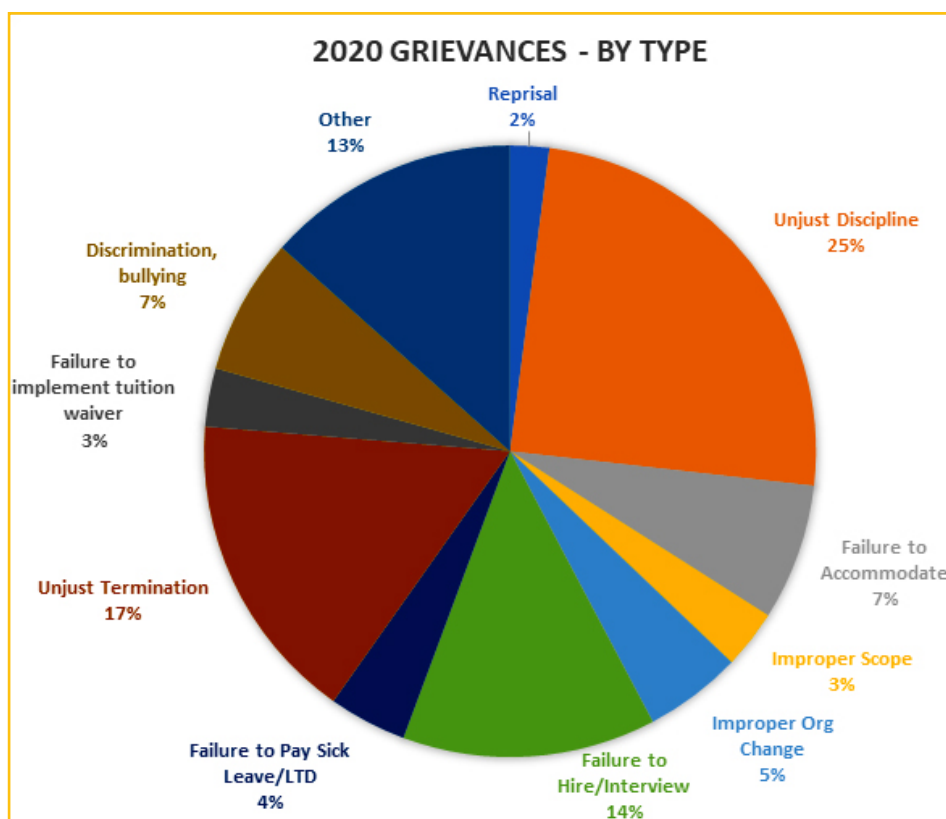
Failure to hire/interview grievances represented 14% of the total grievances filed in 2020, a percentage that has remained relatively consistent over the years. Improper organizational change grievances have continued their steady decline. In 2020, these were only 5% of grievances. This percentage has slowly declined every year since 2017 when improper organizational change grievances were 13%. This doesn't mean the prevalence of organizational changes have seen the same steady decline. In 2017 and 2018 there were around 20 organizational changes each year across the University. In 2019 and 2020 this number shot up to 39 organizational changes each year. While the number of organizational changes in 2020 was the same as in 2019, in 2020 we also saw 118 members impacted by temporary layoffs as a direct result of the University's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Even though the number of organizational changes has increased since 2018, as has the number of termination grievances, overall the Staff Appointed Unit grew 7.7% in two years, increasing from 4,638 members in 2018 to 5,029 by the end of 2020.

UTM is back where they were in 2017, dominating the grievances filed by area. In 2020, UTM grievances were 20% of all grievances filed. Back in 2017, that percentage was 26%, and then had a lull for two years in 2018-19 when they were around 10% of grievances filed. Given UTM



only represents 9.6% of Staff Appointed Unit members, this is a large percentage of the total grievances filed. Central Administration HR Services (CAHRS) is also 20% of grievances filed, but this is consistent across years and CAHRS contains far more members than UTM does. A while back, management made changes to the UTM Human Resources department that the union was told were meant to improve the workplace culture and address other problems. Given the high number of grievances filed in 2020, it is clear UTM needs to refocus their efforts in order to bring about positive change.

In comparison, UTSC, which has roughly the same number of members as UTM, had only three grievances in 2020. UTSC hasn't exceeded 8% of total grievances filed since 2017. In 2020, they had so few that they don't even merit a whole section of the pie chart (see below). Instead, they are clumped together with all the other



“What isn’t captured by these statistics is all the work Grievance Officers and Stewards do to resolve member issues informally, without having to ever resort to the Grievance process.”

low-grievance areas: OISE, Victoria University, St. Mike’s, Dentistry, U of T Libraries and KPE. Operations saw a spike in 2020 over 2019, shooting up to 10% from only 2% in 2019. Medicine, Engineering and Professional Faculties are fairly consistent year over year. Rotman reduced their grievance count by half in 2020, and Arts & Science is at its lowest point since 2017 with only 5% of total grievances filed.

What isn’t captured by these statistics is all the work Grievance Officers and Stewards do to resolve member issues informally, without ever having to resort to the grievance process. In some cases, a lower number of grievances could indicate our success in sorting things out early on, or the reality that even though there are serious violations that should be grieved, for various reasons some members are reluctant to do so.

– **Kristy Bard**, Grievance Officer

VICTORIA UNIT REPORT *continued*

2020 and to pay staff who retired after July 1, 2020 a one-time-only lump sum equal to 1% of the wages they earned from July 1 to when they retired. Because of the Ontario Conservative government's Bill 124 (Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019), all compensation increases in the provincial public sector are limited to a maximum of 1% for three years.



The Victoria University administration agreed to implement the same provisions for Vic USW members. Retroactive payments are expected to be made in May.

Grievance Update: VC 21-1 (policy - improper hiring of a casual employee instead of a term employee) & VC 21-2 (policy - improper hiring of a casual employee instead of a term employee)

These two grievances were filed when the University hired casual employees instead of term employees. In 2011, the University made a collective bargaining proposal that would have the concept of a casual employee introduced into the collective agreement. The Union was concerned that if casual employees were introduced into the collective agreement, the University would start hiring fewer term employees and instead hire casuals. To address that concern, we were able to negotiate language that was intended to limit the University's use of casuals. It states that it is not the University's intention or expectation to use casuals to circumvent the collective agreement posting provisions and the filling of part-time and full-time bargaining unit positions. Earlier in the collective agreement there is language that clearly indicates that part-time and full-time jobs are continuing and terms jobs.

Compared to casuals, term employees have higher vacation pay. Also, term employees have internal job posting status and access to health care benefits. Casual employees do not have access to those collective agreement provisions.

Not long ago, the Union noted an alarming rise in the University's use of casuals and filed policy grievances VC 21-1 and VC 21-2. The University dismissed the grievances at step 2 of the grievance procedure and the Union advanced them to arbitration with the possibility of mediation. On May 6, the Union and the University reached a mediated settlement for both grievances.

— **John Ankenman**, President, Victoria University Unit

MARGARET JENKINS SPEAKS

on MURDER OF UofT STUDENT & ACTIVIST

On **March 12**, the USW Local 1998 Human Rights Committee welcomed Canadian researcher Margaret Jenkins to speak about an article she had written in the *Globe and Mail* about the death of a University of Toronto student.

Karima Mehrab, also known as Karima Baloch. Mehrab was from the province of Balochistan in Pakistan. She was the first female leader of the Baloch Students Organization and was a strong advocate for the rights of the Baloch people – so much so that she was named on the BBC’s Annual List of 100 Inspirational and Influential Women. Threats and harassment were a regular part of her life. Mehrab and her husband worried they were being watched. According to the BBC, one caller told her to return to Pakistan and when she refused, the caller described, in detail, a visit Mehrab had made to a Toronto park earlier that day.

There has been a pattern of enforced disappearances among the Baloch people. On December 22, 2020, the *Toronto Star* reported: “In May, exiled Baloch journalist



Sajid Hussain was pulled from a river in Sweden, weeks after he disappeared. Police at the time were reported as saying his death could have been an accident or suicide, though they could not definitively rule out foul play.”

Just one day after Mehrab’s body was recovered from Lake Ontario, the Toronto Police Service said that they did not suspect foul play in her death. However, the similarity between her death and the death of Hussain, who was also an outspoken Baloch activist, cannot be denied.

Our Local’s Human Rights Committee has been focusing on a campaign to encourage a full and independent investigation into Mehrab’s death and has sent letters to Chrystia Freeland, Member of Parliament for University-Rosedale; Bob Rae, Ambassador & Permanent Representative-Designate of Canada to the United Nations; Dr. Agnès

Callamard, Secretary General, Amnesty International; and Dr. Morris Tidball-Binz, Special Rapporteur, United Nations High Commission for Human Rights.

To find out more about our campaign or to join our committee, please contact info@usw1998.ca.

– **Liza Cole**, USW Local 1998 Human Rights Committee Co-Chair

“Our members reflect the diversity of Canada. We celebrate differences and believe that everyone is entitled to a workplace that is free from discrimination, regardless of race, religion, gender, age, status or sexual orientation. Our Human Rights Committee organizes speakers, events and supports campaigns related to human rights issues both in our workplaces and in the community.”

– *Statement from USW Local 1998 Human Rights Committee*

ACCLAMATIONS GALORE *continued*

All Chief Stewards in Staff Appointed Unit Acclaimed or Appointed

The following were acclaimed as Chief Stewards in their respective departments:

Applied Science & Engineering: Donna Liu

Arts & Science: Jessica Finlayson

Central Admin & HR: Cheryl Davison

English Language Program: Bill Mboutsiadis

Kinesiology & Physical Education: Connor Oswald

Medicine: Fatima Ijaz

Professional Faculties: Mary-Marta Briones-Bird

Rotman: Analise Anderson Ma

University Operations: Duc Goi

UTM: Andrea Burton

UTSC: Clara Mitchell

The following were appointed by the USW Local 1998 Executive because there were no nominations:

Dentistry: Jennifer Lanteigne

OISE: Anil Purandare

U of T Libraries: David Eden

Since the initial nominations, Fatima Ijaz and Duc Goi have stepped off the committee because they have moved to other departments in the University. The Executive will seek to fill the vacancies.

– **Margaret Bucknam & P.C. Choo**
Co-Chair, Communications Committee



UTM BIOLOGY STAFF WIN PRINCIPAL'S STAFF AWARD

The UTM Biology Department Staff has won the Principal's Staff Award
– the Karen Thiffault Award – for Enhancing the UTM Experience.

It quickly became apparent after speaking to the women of UTM Biology that I had come across a very special team. Staff members Cindy Short, Diane Matias, Mariana Ostache, Stephanie do Rego and Susan Dixon were selected to receive a 2020-2021 Principal's Staff Award – the Karen Thiffault Award for Enhancing the UTM Experience.

I was lucky to have the opportunity to meet with the award winners to learn a bit more about the Biology department, teamwork, and how our staff are finding creative ways to stay connected and support each other through remote work and the COVID-19 pandemic – even in a sector like biology, where so much of the work typically relies on being physically present in a lab. They painted a picture of a connected workplace and special comradery that was truly enviable. I left the interviews (a little bit jealous!) with a few big takeaways. Here are four lessons I think we can all learn from the staff at UTM Biology:

- **Showing Gratitude.** The Biology dept. team made it clear that winning the Principal's Award was truly an honour – not just because the team

got to have their moment in the sun, but because it showed them that their work matters. "The fact that [Biology Chair Joel Levine] would take time to help with that, when he was dealing with faculty teaching online for the first time... I keep the Chair's schedule, so I know how busy he is" said do Rego. This sentiment was echoed by all the women. Dixon agreed that being selected in the middle of the pandemic and knowing the nomination process was quite involved "makes it a little bit more special." While it might not seem like a big deal, going out of your way to show a colleague that you see the effort that they are putting in, and you are grateful for them, can really make a difference. "Blessed and honoured," as

Ostache put it. While we can't all win awards, we do have the power to send a card or email to say: I see you. You are appreciated. I think we could all do that a little more often!

- **Staying Connected.** I was surprised to hear that all the staff cited their daily administrative meetings as the secret sauce that helped get them through the sudden online shift so successfully. Daily meetings sound like a lot to me, but again and again I heard that this check-in has really meant a lot to the team. Matias explained: "...even if we don't really have anything work-related, we sort of just all pop in to say: 'Hi how's everybody doing?'" Do Rego added: "If you're available, you join. We get to see what's on everybody's plate for the day, and I think that's really helped a lot." Ostache explained that it has kept the team connected and provided everything from mental health support to a sounding board for new ideas, and a source of joy. It got me thinking about how my team has connected, both before and during COVID-19, and made me wonder if the sentiment 'this meeting could have been an email' is missing the mark a little. When the small interactions on the way to the bathroom or kitchen have been lost, true connection becomes even more meaningful.
- **Trust.** How does a team work remotely for a full year and find ways to creatively overcome barriers? With trust. As Ostache put it: "There is a complete trust on our ability to do our jobs." It is clear that this trust was not misplaced, as the capable team met every challenge without cancelling a course while providing care for the living elements in the now-closed labs. Dixon agreed that "everyone knows their role, and they're all very talented," so the move to remote work has really been one of supporting each other. With full trust in your colleagues and

their commitment, the focus can be on making sure everyone is feeling ok and has what they need to be successful!

- **Our Staff Really Care.** I mean, I already knew this, but wow our staff really do care. The biggest challenge and number one concern on the mind of the Biology staff was making sure the students were taken care of. Although they were incredibly busy and facing major challenges, the student experience was still always top of mind. Dixon said: "You just want to make sure you're providing students with a good experience; make sure that they're getting what they need." For example, Ostache credited technician Lisa Cheung who worked around the clock to create "labs in a bag" for students. These kits allowed students to experience hands-on learning from home in a miniaturized version of the Plant Hormone Labs. This is just one example of how passionate our staff are about the impact they make.

The Biology team was especially proud to have won the Karen Thiffault award specifically. Matias said of Karen: "Everybody knew her, she was great to work with, she always went out of her way to help people. Having won the award in her namesake I think is special for admin staff." Having met the Biology team, I don't think it could have gone to a better group!

A big congratulations to the entire Biology department, including all the staff, technicians and nominators. As the award winners noted, it wouldn't be possible without the whole team working together!

— **Kasey Dunn**, ICUBE, UTM

PHOTO: (l to r): Cindy Short, Diane Matias, Mariana Ostache, Stephanie do Rego and Susan Dixon (Photo credit: UTM HR)



In Memoriam: Michael Arlt 1959 – 2021

Michael provided 32 years of dependable and dedicated support and service to thousands of students, staff, and faculty in biology at U of T, and also beyond.

Michael was hired as a teaching lab technician in the Botany dept. in 1988 and moved to the Ecology & Evolutionary Biology dept. after the reorganization in 2005. Michael's duties were varied and many, and included prepping teaching labs, maintaining teaching and departmental supplies and teaching lab equipment, and providing health and safety training and audio-visual (AV) support for classes and seminars. All of these activities he did with a smile and his "can-do" attitude, with reliability and ingenuity to solve unexpected problems.

Michael grew up and attended high school in North Toronto, and was an

undergraduate in botany at U of T, where he also obtained his MSc (1987) and was a teaching assistant for BIO110. For his MSc thesis, he studied induced resistance to the tomato leaf mould fungus in tomato plants.

Michael's helping others extended to many. Twice each week during the fall and winter terms for the past 15 years Michael attended lectures in BIO150, and then BIO120 and BIO220, to assist the lecturers with AV setup and to record lectures for students. It is also greatly appreciated that he conscientiously participated in departmental seminars and colloquia to assist with AV needs. For the past 10 years, Michael coordinated all of the administrative activities for the U of T National Biology Competition, including online registration and sending exam packages to

hundreds of schools each year. Teachers regularly commented on how helpful Michael was, and during his time with the competition over 44,000 high school students participated in this annual event.

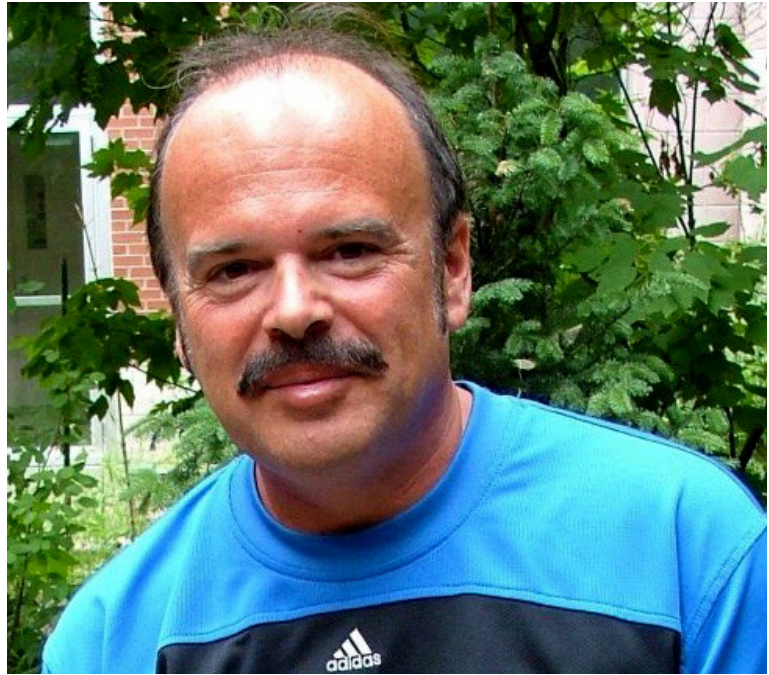
Michael was an avid theatre-goer, often seeing the same musical many times. His fellow lab technicians fondly remember their weekly chats over the lunch hour

about entertainment, such as past and present television, streaming, and his favourite "Coronation Street." He enjoyed travelling to Disney World in Florida, Hawaii, and Australia, and spending weekends in the sun in the Beach or at the Toronto Islands, and was a keen photographer.

Michael was a knowledgeable collector of aviation and streetcar memorabilia, pewter, and Hawaiian shirts. Visitors to his office will remember his collection of cacti and succulents. Michael was also active in the "What's On" scene in and around Toronto, where he'd meet people who had a common interest and some who he would meet up with every year. You'd find him most weekends

where the action was, watching wakeboarding or beach volleyball, attending specialty days at Black Creek Pioneer Village or food truck festivals, and, definitely, the CNE.

Michael is survived by his mother, Ruth Arlt-Chanter.



"Michael's helping others extended to many. Twice each week during the fall and winter terms for the past 15 years Michael attended lectures to assist lecturers with AV setup and to record lectures for students. It is also greatly appreciated that he conscientiously participated in departmental seminars and colloquia to assist."

— **Prof. Emeritus Corey Goldman**, with contributions from **Nancy Dengler, Dominic Fenech** and **Verna Higgins**, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology



In Memoriam: Amalia Veneziano

1953 — 2020

It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of former steward and union activist, Amalia Veneziano, on August 27, 2020.

Amalia worked many years at the Faculty of Forestry. Former Executive member Lillian Lanca remembers Amalia fondly: "I knew her from her activism, particularly in the early years of USW Local 1998. She was a kind and helpful mentor with a great amount of patience. When I assumed the position of Co-Chair of our local's Grievance Committee, I relied heavily on Amalia's expertise, learning from her not only the mechanics of filing grievances, but also the nuances of interpreting our collective agreement.

She was also a good friend. I will forever remember our stay in Washington, D.C. for the International Women's Conference. She would share a room with me only if I would watch the final episode of 'Friends' with her! Dropping by her office always meant good conversation and an even

better laugh."

According to Marcella Bollers, another former Executive member, Amalia was no shrinking violet. "I remember we were at a meeting when the Staff Rep at that time, Phil Falbo, butchered her name. An Italian like Phil, Amalia openly mocked him because she thought he should have been able to pronounce her Italian name properly."

Former Financial Secretary, Marjorie Bhola-Swami, recalled the time she went to Washington, D.C. with Amalia. "When we were there, Amalia spoke passionately in defence of the Canadian health care system and of her mother's experience with breast cancer."

Another close friend, Ana Rivero, said that Amalia's activism revolved around women's

PHOTOS:

Amalia
Veneziano
(centre) with
Marjorie
Bhola-Swami
(left) and
Josephine
Domingo
at a
Steelworker
event in
Washington,
D.C.



issues and political action. "She was very well-liked and because she cared about people, she got along well with everybody."

Former Vice President and Governor P. C. Choo said that Amalia used to take him around the Environmental Science Building and introduce him to her colleagues when he was campaigning for Governor. "She was instrumental to my success in winning election after election," he said. "Besides me, Amalia also helped to elect Catherine Riddell to Governing Council."

Amalia leaves behind husband Mario and son Angelo and countless friends and colleagues to mourn her passing.

Rest in power, Amalia!

– **Lillian Lança & P.C. Choo**

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