

Background

In August 2024, representatives from the University of Vermont (UVM) and Graduate Students United—UAW 2322 (GSU) began working together to establish the inaugural collective bargaining agreement (CBA), which will govern the relationship between UVM and the GSU.

As of July 31, 2025, the bargaining teams have met 18 times to discuss key topics typically addressed in a CBA. Below is an overview of the bargaining process and the progress made by both bargaining teams to date:

FAQs – Negotiation Process and Bargaining Updates

1. What does a bargaining session look like?

UVM and the GSU have each identified representatives to make up their respective “bargaining teams.” These teams agreed to the cadence and format of negotiations. During the academic year, the teams met approximately twice per month, and recently, over the summer, it has been once per month for longer, six-hour sessions, as mutually agreed upon by the parties. The bargaining sessions are in person, and during these sessions, the parties discuss their respective proposals and counterproposals, as well as other open items.

2. Who is on UVM’s bargaining team?

UVM’s bargaining team is comprised of esteemed faculty and staff across various departments and administrative units with critical knowledge and experiences relevant to the subjects of bargaining and graduate education at UVM.

3. What goes into a bargaining proposal?

A bargaining proposal contains UVM’s or the GSU’s proposed CBA language for any given issue, like wages, time off, and benefits. The proposals are typically separated by topic to address matters that are important to each bargaining team.

4. How does each bargaining team respond to the other team’s bargaining proposal?

When UVM or the GSU passes a proposal to the other team, the passing team will go over any necessary context for the proposal and answer questions about the proposed language. **There is no obligation for either bargaining team to accept proposed language as is**, and it is common practice to provide counter proposals and go through several drafts before the parties reach a “Tentative Agreement” on a topic. That is especially true for first contracts like this one where the proposals are being drafted for the first time.

5. Have UVM and the GSU made meaningful progress towards a CBA?

Yes. A lot of effort goes into a first collective bargaining agreement, and both parties have focused on understanding the other’s priorities and key concerns. There have been testimonials

from graduate students and UVM subject matter experts on various issues of key importance to both parties, like health and safety and non-discrimination.

To date, UVM and the GSU have exchanged close to twenty (20) proposals. The parties have reached agreement on ground rules; severability; and union university committee.

Collectively, the parties have discussed the following topics:

- Non-Discrimination;
- Management and Academic Rights;
- No Strike, No Lockout;
- Training;
- Policies and Procedures;
- Recognition;
- Union University Committee;
- Ground Rules;
- Employment Files;
- Severability;
- Union Security;
- Health and Safety;
- Grievance and Arbitration;
- Discipline and Discharge;
- Workload; and
- Academic Freedom.

During the last session, UVM passed a package that included non-discrimination and harassment, grievance and arbitration, management and academic rights, and discipline and discharge. UVM made concessions in the non-discrimination and harassment, discipline and discharge, and grievance and arbitration proposals, all of which provided protections beyond those which bargaining unit members have currently. The Union rejected the package proposal. UVM is waiting on a response from the Union on: Health and Safety; Policies and Procedures; and No Strike No Lockout.

The Union proposed a package covering employment files and union security. The University rejected that proposal, which included the requirement that the University create a mechanism to allow bargaining unit members to have the University allocate part of each paycheck directly to the Union's political action program. UVM is reviewing Union Access and Training for counterproposals to the Union.

6. Why aren't there more tentative agreements?

The language that goes into a first CBA takes a lot of time and attention. The bargaining teams have worked tirelessly to understand each other's positions, to gather additional data about the underlying issues, and to draft language that is mutually agreeable. Both parties have expressed their appreciation for the effort going into trying to come up with a good first contract. To

continue making progress, the bargaining teams scheduled full-day bargaining sessions through the end of the summer.

7. How long does it typically take to bargain a first contract?

In the higher education space, the timeline to a first bargaining contract varies based on the size of the Union, the individual needs of the institutions and bargaining units, and the parties' preparation between bargaining sessions. Typically, we have seen institutions negotiate a first contract in 1-2 years, but there are outliers on both ends of that range.

8. Will there be additional bargaining proposals?

UVM anticipates that its bargaining team will receive additional proposals from the GSU on economic issues. UVM looks forward to continuing constructive dialogue and good faith discussions with the GSU's bargaining team. UVM remains dedicated to working collaboratively toward an agreement that supports its graduate student employees while maintaining UVM's long-term sustainability.

9. Will I need to pay dues?

Bargaining unit members are no longer required to pay union dues or services/agency fees in public institutions, like UVM. Members can certainly choose to join and contribute voluntarily. If a bargaining member opts out, they would still receive contract protections but wouldn't be a dues-paying member, which means they could forfeit their right to member-only benefits. The Union will set the amount of dues owed by each dues-paying member. Typically, graduate student union dues range from 1.5-2.5% of gross pay and are paid on a monthly basis.

10. I hear UVM challenged the composition of the Union and the inclusion of predoctoral fellows and trainees. What is the current status of this action?

On February 21, 2025, the Vermont Supreme Court issued a decision and order, Docket No. 24 AP 129, remanding the case to the Vermont Labor Relations Board to issue a decision that addresses the specific circumstances presented by predoctoral fellows and trainees.