



**SFUFA**

THE FACULTY ASSOCIATION OF SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

# SFUFA NEWS

October 2009

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## President's Report

**Hilmar Pabel (History)**  
**SFUFA, President**

As the new academic year begins, I think it is appropriate to let you know how the Executive of your Faculty Association has begun work and what some of the major objectives are that it will pursue in the months ahead.



Hilmar Pabel, SFUFA President

But first I would like to introduce the Executive. We are happy to welcome four new Directors: Valorie Crooks (Geography), Suzana Dragicevic (Geography), Karen Kavanagh (Physics), and Russell Day (Psychology), who also serves as the Teaching Appointment Representative. Russell has been appointed by the Executive to serve until August 31, 2010 in place of Monica Escudero who is unable to complete her term. Glenn Chapman, Michael Sjoerdsma, and Steve Whitmore (a trio from Engineering Science) stay on in their posts as Directors,

as does Don Taylor, serving also as Librarian Representative and Treasurer. The Executive will value the energy and wisdom of Past-President Bob Hackett (Communications) and Vice-President Michael Ling (Education), who takes over as President next September. We rely on the invaluable advice and work of Doug Dorward (Executive Director) and Susan Stevenson (Associate Executive Director), who are also members of the Executive, and on the superb efficiency of Jenny (Executive Assistant).

You, of course, are all aware of the Draft Recommendations of the Task Force on Teaching and Learning. I am grateful for your attention to the response to these from SFUFA's Executive (<http://sfufa.ca/SFUFAResponsetoTFTL.pdf>) and for the comments on the response that some of you sent back. I am happy that the response resonated well with you.

SFU's financial situation is surely often on your mind. In accordance with a practice established by Bob Hackett, SFUFA is endeavoring to keep in contact with provincial legislators. On Monday, 28 September I assisted Rob Clift, Executive Director of the Confederation of University of Faculty Associations in BC, in a presentation to the BC legislature's Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. Our point was that flat lining operational grants to universities will hurt universities. Later that day Doug Dorward, Michael Ling, Carl Schwartz (Chair of SFUFA's Bargaining Committee), and I discussed the critical challenges that SFU faces with Dawn Black, Opposition Critic of Advanced Education. Nothing as yet has come of our request for a meeting with Moira Stilwell, Minister of Advanced Education.

Besides the Task Force on Teaching & Learning recommendations and the university budget, several other items are on this year's agenda for SFUFA. These include expressing support for the University Library, which has sustained a 20% cut to its collections budget and anticipates further cuts in the coming fiscal year. We must ask how we can function effectively as teachers and researchers when the Library's ability to maintain subscriptions to serials and expand its collection is seriously compromised. Other topics that demand our attention are SFU's Academic Plan for 2010-2013, improvements to the Professional Development Reimbursement system, and the status of Fraser International College, with a report from the Vice-President Academic due to Senate no later than June 2010.

At our planning session in July, the Executive agreed to pursue three goals for 2009-10: (1) revive its investigation of university governance that began last year, (2) continue the discussion of the pros and cons of certification (i.e. unionization of faculty, librarians, and archivists) initiated by Bob Hackett, and (3) increase the visibility of SFUFA on campus. By means of a survey, we shall analyze your views on governance. We hope to organize an open forum in November where members of SFUFA will have the opportunity of debating the pros and cons of certification.

As for SFUFA's increased visibility we are thinking of enhancing the newsletter by calling for a few volunteers from our membership to form a sort of editorial board. If you would be interested in participating, please contact Susan Stevenson ([stevenson@sfu.ca](mailto:stevenson@sfu.ca)). I am also thinking of holding office hours from time to time to give me an opportunity to meet you individually and to give you an opportunity to bring forward your concerns relating to your work as faculty, librarians, and archivists and your ideas about how SFUFA can work for you.

What encourages me most in my post as President is the prospect of meeting more of the fine faculty, librarians, and archivists at SFU. This is my third year on SFUFA's Executive. For my first several years at SFU, I hardly ventured outside of my academic home, the History Department. Eventually, I began serving on some Senate sub-committees and on SFUFA's Advisory Committee on Mandatory Retirement. These experiences gave me the opportunity to work with colleagues from other Departments and Faculties. The more I became involved with SFUFA, the more I came to see what a fascinating group of people make SFU the great university that it is – from the librarians who assist faculty and students with research and learning to colleagues in Gerontology to Health Sciences and everywhere in between.

Visibility is literally in the eye of the beholder. SFUFA's effectiveness and *éclat* cannot depend on the work of the Executive alone. The membership makes SFUFA; their participation and contributions make it visible. Therefore I hope as many of you as possible will be able to attend the **Fall General Meeting on Friday, 23 October, from 10:00 to 12:00 in Halpern 126.**

Finally, I hope that you all will consider SFUFA as a vital link to your colleagues and a vehicle for representing your interests as dedicated librarians, archivists, teachers, and researchers.

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## **Some Good News about Professional Development Reimbursements**

**Susan Stevenson, SFUFA Associate Executive Director**

The Faculty Association staff has had numerous complaints from members concerning Professional Development Reimbursements (PDR), and I am pleased to inform you that we have made progress in addressing two contentious issues.

We have an agreement with Academic Relations that taxi fares between the airport and home associated with travel for conferences and other professional activities will be accepted on 2009 PDR claims. Also, conference expenses paid for in 2009 for conferences held on or before January 15th, 2010 will be considered eligible expenses for 2009 claims.

We are seeking resolutions to other issues raised by members. To ensure we have identified the full range of concerns, we are preparing a short survey for members that should be ready by the end of October. When you receive the announcement for the survey, please take the time to send us your feedback.

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## **Report from SFUFA's Chief Negotiator: The familiar PSEC is back**

**Carl Schwarz (Statistics and Actuarial Science)  
SFUFA, Chief Negotiator**

*Familiar: noun: a beast that is unusually tough, and serves a sorcerer.*

Like the consorts of lore, the familiar PSEC is back doing the bidding of the Provincial Government.

For those who have joined SFU since the last round of Economic Benefit negotiations, here is a brief summary of the acronym jungle. Negotiations will be starting shortly for our new contract to replace our existing contract that expires on 30 June 2010. There are two parties at the negotiation table (SFUFA and the Administration) and several parties not at the negotiation table but who have ultimate authority over the final contract. Many years ago, the Provincial Government created the Public Sector Employers Council (PSEC, <http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/psec/>) whose purpose is to "coordinate the management of labour relations policies and practices in the public sector to foster an efficient and effective workforce." In practice, the Provincial Government issues a decree to PSEC on the allowable levels of economic benefits that are acceptable in new contracts in the public sector. PSEC

then works with the University Public Sector Employers' Association, (UPSEA <http://www.rucbc.ca/content/view/26/23/>) who co-ordinates the university-sector contract outcomes. PSEC/UPSEA issue "marching orders" to the SFU Board of Governors (BoG, <http://www.sfu.ca/bog/>), who authorizes the Administration to create a negotiation team who actually sits down opposite us. Whew! Once an agreement has been reached between SFU and the Administration team, it has to be approved all the way back to PSEC, who has the power to overturn non-complying contracts.

In the last contract in 2006, faculty in the University sector were awarded yearly general wage increases of 3%, 3%, 3.5%, 3.5%. The outlook for the next contract is bleak.

In the last speech from the Throne (<http://www.leg.bc.ca/39th1st/4-8-39-1.htm>), the Provincial Government has indicated that

"As long as we are mired in deficits, there is simply no money available for public sector wage increases. This government will not contemplate wage rollbacks, as some have suggested. But neither will it finance new wage hikes through higher debt..."

This mandate has been passed on the PSEC.

Normally at this time, SFUFA would be polling our members on priorities for the next round of negotiations. Much of our negotiation work and the survey appears to have been pre-empted.

### **When will negotiations start?**

Article 8.3.3 of our framework agreement

([http://www.sfufa.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=30&Itemid=27](http://www.sfufa.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=30&Itemid=27))

states:

"If either party wishes to negotiate major items such as discontinuation or major revision of a salary scale or substantial restructuring of one or more economic benefits it will provide the other party with details by October 1 so that the implications can be more fully studied before negotiations commence."

"Within twenty-one working days of the receipt of the provincial government allocation letter, the Association and the University shall deliver to each other notice of their positions on the items on which agreement is sought."

Normally this would imply that formal negotiations would not start until after the budget is released in 2010.

However, in light of the PSEC mandate and the current economic climate, SFUFA and the Administration have started (very) informal discussions on what the next contract could look like. SFUFA and the Administration have agreed to delay by one month the 1 October deadline while these informal talks continue.

### **Who directs the SFUFA negotiating team?**

The SFUFA Executive has approved Carl Schwarz (Statistics and Actuarial Science) as Chief Negotiator for SFUFA and Doug Dorward as a member of the bargaining team. Other members of the negotiating team will be appointed at an upcoming Executive meeting. Earlier this year, SFUFA established a Bargaining Advisory Committee (SFUFA-BAC) to provide our negotiating team and the Executive with feedback from our members - please feel free to email the committee with comments/suggestions on the next round of bargaining (see below). The Bargaining Team regularly updates the SFUFA-BAC and the SFUFA

Executive and receives advice from the SFUFA-BAC and the SFUFA Executive. Any agreement will be approved by the SFUFA Executive and will be sent to the membership for a ratification vote.

### **Is there any advantage to settling now or waiting until 2010?**

There seems little likelihood that the 0% mandate will miraculously increase over the next several months.

### **Are increases in benefits allowed even with a 0% general scale increase?**

The PSEC mandate appears to preclude major changes to benefits unless a corresponding saving is found by discontinuing other benefits. In the last round of negotiations, SFUFA membership approved a reduction in the Professional Development Reimbursement (PDR) in order to improve parental leave.

### **What about our broken salary scale – can anything be done about it?**

There is no doubt, that our current salary scale is broken. Over half of new hires require market differentials in order to be competitive with other institutions; retention awards are skewing wages in certain groups; and our career progress and hard ceilings are leading to salaries falling further and further behind our Canadian counterparts (<http://www.stat.sfu.ca/~cschwarz/SFUFA/>). The negotiating team is well aware of these defects and will continue to press for changes.

### **What about negotiations on other policies?**

Unlike other associations, our framework agreement has very narrowly defined the areas to be discussed under Economic Benefit negotiations to salary and benefits. However, SFUFA and the Administration are continually involved in negotiations in other policy matters on a year round basis – this will continue regardless of the next contract.

### **How can I keep informed about the state of negotiations?**

Details on the state of negotiations will be provided to our members via email updates, newsletter articles (such as this one), open discussion at our General Meetings (next one is the Fall General Meeting on Friday, 23 October, from 10:00 to 12:00 in Halpern 126), or by “buttonholing” members of the advisory committee or negotiating team.

### **Where can I send my feedback?**

The SFUFA Bargaining Advisory Committee ([bargaining-advisory@sfu.ca](mailto:bargaining-advisory@sfu.ca)), will be pleased to received feedback from our members.

## **Employees, Employers and PSEC: An Awkward Threesome**

**Dr. Paul Bowles, President**

**Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC**

Although you may not think about it very often, faculty members at BC's public universities are public sector employees. As a consequence, when a university faculty association sits down with the university administration to negotiate wages, benefits and working conditions, the whole process takes place under the umbrella of the Public Sector Employers' Council (PSEC).

Established in 1993 by the NDP government, the legislated purposes of PSEC are to ensure coordination of human resource policies and collective bargaining activities amongst public

sector employers and to improve communication and coordination between public sector employers and employee groups. In recent years, however, its practice has gone far beyond simple coordination to include explicit limits on free collective bargaining.

PSEC is comprised of two components, the Council itself and the Secretariat. The Council includes representatives from each of the seven public sector employers' associations, seven cabinet ministers or deputy ministers and the Minister of Finance as the chairperson. The Council is responsible for setting high-level policy. The Secretariat is responsible for implementing Council policies and for dealing directly with public sector employers.

From its inception, the Council's mandate has included a form of wage controls, which is currently known as the "bargaining mandate." The bargaining mandates given to public sector employers include a general limit on growth in wages and sometimes include more specific directives. Over time, the range of items covered by PSEC's bargaining mandate has expanded unevenly; sometimes including virtually everything that has a cost implication, and sometimes setting rules for non-monetary issues. The wage controls can likewise be rather unevenly distributed. In 2006, the general wage increases allowed for university faculty were a little larger than those for most other public sector employees. In 2009, nurses were given more than the general mandate as well.

A big part of the problem with PSEC is the extent to which it allows for direct governmental management of our bargaining. Although bargaining mandates are discussed between PSEC and the public sector employers' associations, the final decision on the mandates is made, effectively, by the Minister of Finance. Because of this political dimension, many have asked if BC public sector employees really have access to free collective bargaining. A 2007 Supreme Court of Canada ruling on government interference in collective bargaining has raised further questions about PSEC's role in constraining bargaining.

It's certainly true that anyone from a union or employee association who has been at the bargaining table since the creation of PSEC would be hard pressed to say that it is a textbook example of free collective bargaining. What is also clear is that – in the short term – PSEC is unlikely to go away. CUFA BC and its member associations seek to effectively represent the interests of our members in the shadow of PSEC, and we continue to closely monitor PSEC's impact on our ability to bargain freely with our employer universities.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### ACADEMIC MATTERS SUBSCRIPTIONS

Since February 2007, *Academic Matters* has been distributed to readers in British Columbia free of charge. Since then, the journal has covered a large range of themed issues of interest to the university community. The journal is now moving to a subscription basis. If you want to continue receiving *Academic Matters*, you have the opportunity to subscribe for \$9.95 per year plus GST. The subscription includes two hardcopy issues plus unlimited access to an expanded website: <http://www.academicmatters.ca> that includes new features as well as bi-weekly notification updates. To subscribe to *Academic Matters*, please go to: <http://www.academicmatters.ca/subscribe.gk>

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## **INVITE SFUFA TO A FACULTY MEETING?**

Do faculty in your academic unit know what services the Faculty Association provides members? Are there questions of general interest relating to the Association you would like answered? Members of the SFUFA Executive and Association staff would be pleased to attend a faculty meeting to outline services, answer questions, and hear concerns. For more information or to arrange a visit, please contact [sfufa@sfu.ca](mailto:sfufa@sfu.ca).

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## **NOTE FROM THE EDITOR**

Have a topic you'd like discussed, a question you'd like answered, or a contribution you'd like to make to the next newsletter? Please send me a message at [stevens@sfu.ca](mailto:stevens@sfu.ca).