



SFUFA

THE FACULTY ASSOCIATION OF SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

SFUFA NEWS

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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Sword of Damocles

Cicero invokes the legend of the man eating a meal while unaware that a sword hangs over his head to illustrate the idea that those in power (tyrants) should live in constant fear, but in our culture most of those in power insulate themselves pretty well. (But you can ask President Stevenson how many of his colleagues across Canada have not been completing their terms.) For the next budget year, beginning in April, the university needs to find substantial savings. The message is that belt-tightening has gone as far as it can; program cuts and layoffs are an option to be considered.

It is the role of the faculty association to challenge some of these assumptions. As the employees of the university who do teaching and research, the place's *raison d'être*, faculty members are the last people who should face layoffs. For the reputation of the university, regardless of the legal niceties, the concept of "tenure" must be respected. In our meetings with the senior administration, we

have emphasized that we shall accept no cuts to faculty positions unless we are satisfied that every other economy has been explored and exhausted.

Units across campus have been going through “modeling” exercises this summer: “if we had to cut X%, where would our priorities be?” These are said not to be formal parts of the budgeting process, but the results are going to Deans and on up the administrative hierarchy. It seems that concrete proposals will come foreword in the fall. They will have to be vetted by the university community, and the Senate in particular.

From an administrative point of view, the proposal to cut entire programs rather than continuing across the board cuts has its advantages. The surviving programs will be left with more resources than they would otherwise have, so the argument goes. (One is reminded about the arguments in favour of tuition fee increases a few years ago, but they don’t seem to have solved problems either.) How would program cuts be made? Would it be some version of a “bums in seats” criterion? Will other, political, considerations play a role in protecting programs? Such a debate could be explosively divisive for our campus community, so I would urge everyone to seek out avenues to avoid the need for it.

Already there have been suggestions that we might open up our current contract. Each \$100 we give up individually would be \$100,000 for the university. But we need to be careful. The province, through the Public Sector Employers Council (PSEC), mandated the contract settlement we have: if it’s opened up, why couldn’t more money be clawed back?” I don’t think that Premier Campbell had in mind when he conceived the province’s \$100 Climate Change Dividend that each of us should give it (and perhaps more) back to keep the university afloat.

Neither faculty terminations nor adjustments to collective agreements are now being contemplated at UBC, UVic, or UNBC. Last year, when faced by a budget crisis because of declining enrollments, UNBC shed 10% of its teaching complement purely through voluntary incentives.

It behooves us to play a responsible role both in contributing to the ongoing budgetary discussions on campus and by promoting the interests of the universities with the provincial government and in the minds of the electorate, especially as we approach the next provincial election. My sense is that the most effective way that we can communicate with the government is when we can report on our own, personal experiences and first-hand knowledge of how their decisions affect us. Write to your MLA. We also need to articulate a clear vision of the role of the research-intensive universities among the public. Look for more on this from CUFA/BC in the fall.

On-going Issues

The university's fiscal situation will be a heavy issue for my successor Bob Hackett and for the incoming SFUFA executive, and I wish him the best of luck. Let me touch on a few other issues that are ongoing:

Transit: There was a capacity crisis last fall, on which we managed to bring media and political attention. Service levels have improved, I believe, but there is also likely to be confusion again this fall. I suggest being prudent and coming to campus before 8:00 AM if you have morning classes. Good luck getting home. Please let TransLink and SFUFA know of any problems immediately: custrel@translink.bc.ca and sfufa@sfu.ca.

Daycare: The strike last fall was caused by the federal government's cuts to daycare budgets the year before. Government policy hasn't changed and the daycare is still facing great challenges.

Copyright: The federal government has brought in new legislation, which is meeting stiff opposition, but the bottom line is that the rules of the game are in play. I urge colleagues to give the issue some thought and to follow their own sense of what is just, including setting up password protected web sites with downloads for the private study use of their students. SFUFA will continue working with CAUT and will set up a committee to make recommendations to the campus community. If you want to give input or to join the committee, email sfufa@sfu.ca.

Forum: we need an effective way to communicate about the various issues that concern us as faculty members. SFUFA hopes to be setting up a web-based issue board so that members can see the latest. If you are interested in advising the Executive on a new way for faculty to discuss current issues, please consider joining the advisory committee that will be formed in the fall.

Task Force on Teaching and Learning: The external review of LIDC last summer was not flattering. Rather than dealing with its future in isolation, however, the VPA's office has set up yet another task force to consider all sorts of issues regarding teaching and learning. What is being contemplated? Academic credit for co-op placements and work experience? A continuing proliferation of distance ed courses? More W, Q, & B? There are some huge issues, especially in light of the fiscal situation, and we should be on top of them. Yet this task force, consisting largely of the same people who've brought us to the current situation, has so far been set up and operated largely in stealth mode. Faculty members are encouraged to join the Faculty Association in insisting on an open process.

Campus 2020: CUFA/BC, our provincial lobbying body, had a great deal of input into this endeavour to shape post-secondary policy, but it has largely been lost from the provincial government's radar screen, aside from its now more promiscuous use of the term "university". Going into the next provincial

election we'll need to articulate a clear vision of the role of the "research-intensive" universities and advocate for it.

There will be a great deal to keep SFUFA's next President and Executive Committee busy. I encourage you to support their efforts by taking the time to let them know your concerns, to share information, and to volunteer for the various advisory committees that will begin work in the fall.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE WORKLOAD SURVEY

**Robert Hackett, SFUFA Vice-President
School of Communication**

Last March, SFUFA conducted a survey on faculty workload and work/life balance, to which no less than 315 members responded. The SFUFA Workload Advisory Committee is co-chaired by Michael Ling and Bob Hackett. The committee is analyzing the data and has conducted follow-up focus group discussions with a broad spectrum of the membership. While the committee's full report is scheduled for release in Fall 2008, we offer a preliminary look at the survey's findings.

Bluntly put, if you are feeling hard-pressed to the point of being overwhelmed, the survey suggests you are not alone. Asked to rate their current workload on a scale from 1 (very manageable) to 5 (not at all manageable), over half of faculty (51.7%) scored 4 or 5. And fully two out of three respondents believe that they could not reduce their workload without serious professional or disciplinary repercussions; fewer than one in six think they could. Nearly four-fifths (78.3%) "always" work evenings or weekends to get work done.

Not only the amount but also the type of work is an issue: 36.3% find themselves often or continually performing repetitive technological tasks that they believe should be easier and/or should be the responsibility of others; an additional 53.5% feel that way at least sometimes. Only 15.9% of faculty feel they "always" have available to them the support staff required to effectively perform their job; by contrast, 37.8% feel that necessary technical help is always available, and only 63.2% report that necessary material resources (such as computers and office supplies) are available.

What are the consequences of heavy workloads for personal well being, and for work/life balance? Over two-thirds of us feel that the amount of work we do does not allow for sufficient time to devote to family, friends, personal interests and home responsibilities; 58.0% feel that way about the scheduling and structure of a typical work week.

Over three-quarters of faculty who completed the survey report frequently or very frequently feeling work-related stress, and an alarmingly 44.5% report psychological health problems in the past 12 months (such as depression or

anxiety) that they believe stem from work-related stress. In a separate question, a similar portion reports physical health problems, and more than one in six have been prescribed medications connected to work-related stress in the past year.

What are the most important sources of work-related stress? Respondents were given a list of 18 possible stressors, many derived from similar surveys elsewhere. From this list of 18, the top four rated as “very important” were work/life imbalance (65.2%), excessive workload (57.4%), excessive bureaucracy (43.6%), and the University’s overall direction or leadership (41.6%). These last two factors relate directly to issues of collegial governance, which is the topic of a separate SFUFA advisory committee.

One potential source of stress concerns whether we feel our individual work at SFU is appropriately valued, recognized and rewarded: 41.1% agree that it is, but 36.5% disagree. More generally, 54.6% think teaching is undervalued at SFU; significant minorities also feel that way about administrative service (46.5%), community service (46.2%), unfunded or internally funded scholarship (43.1%), and interdisciplinarity (38.9%), while a smaller number identify externally funded research (16.8%).

Reported trends are also not encouraging. Of respondents who have worked at SFU for more than five years, a clear majority (54.1%) report that the experience of working here has worsened over that time. Of those who have been here three or more years, two-thirds say that work-related stress has increased. While a majority of respondents find the actual experience of working at SFU about as expected, 28.8% find it worse than their initial expectations, compared to 15.7% who find it better.

Ouch! Are there any bright spots? Fortunately, yes. Notwithstanding all these challenges, 25% report being very satisfied, and 41% somewhat satisfied, with their current job. Particularly important for job satisfaction are the following factors: interesting work (fully 97.1% rated it as “very important”); the chance to develop skills and knowledge (84.7%); autonomy in teaching and research agendas (81%) and in setting work schedules (74.4%); a passion for teaching (72.9%) and mentoring students (71.8%); and a passion for research (70.6%) and academic productivity (69.8%). Of the 15 factors listed, by far the least important was “participation in university governance,” which raises the question of whether the disinterest is in participation *per se* or in participation as it is currently structured – another issue being addressed by SFUFA’s collegial governance committee.

The apparent contradiction between high stress and high job satisfaction is actually consistent with similar surveys elsewhere (e.g. the University of Alberta). Our focus group discussions suggest an explanation: faculty members are engaged and committed to scholarship and teaching, but are often frustrated by the institutional conditions in which we work.

Such stress is a common thread in similar surveys in Canada and elsewhere. Based on a national pilot survey of Canadian university professors, Heather Menzies and Janice Newson reported (in *Academic Matters*, Winter 2006) that academics have “no time to think.” As a consequence of technology and dramatic funding cutbacks, they argue, our time has become compressed to stressful levels, with ominous implications for the future of the university as “a site of creative and critical reflection.”

More immediately, we suggest that as SFU struggles to deal with recent budget challenges, increasing faculty workload is not an option. There’s no more blood in this stone.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Advisory Committee on a New Discussion Platform for SFUFA Members

At the Summer General Meeting, members expressed the need for SFUFA to support dedicated discussion threads on issues of specific interest to faculty and the Association. If you are interested in sitting on the committee that will advise the Executive on developing and managing a new discussion platform, please send a message to sfufa@sfu.ca to volunteer. The committee will meet in the fall.

Departmental Liaisons

One conclusion from the discussion of the continuing budget cuts was the need for faculty to be informed, which led to the suggestion that every academic unit should have a SFUFA liaison who would ensure the unit was represented at general meetings and be a conduit for information between the unit and Association. If you are interested in playing this role for your academic unit, please send a message to sfufa@sfu.ca to volunteer.

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.

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 stevenso@sfu.ca.