



# SFUFA

THE FACULTY ASSOCIATION OF SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

---

AQ 2035, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6

P: 778-782-4676 • F: 778-782-3452

December 8, 2008

Hon. Murray Coell, MLA  
Minister of Advanced Education  
& Labour Market Development  
Room 247, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria BC V3V 1X4

Dear Mr. Coell:

On behalf of the Simon Fraser University Faculty Association, representing over 900 academic staff, I write to ask for your assistance in alleviating the difficulties that SFU is facing as a consequence of the 2.6% reduction of the expected operating grants to BC universities and colleges last March. Of BC's major universities, Simon Fraser University has been hit especially hard, since as you know, it had recently, in accordance with government priorities, expanded capacity to meet expected demand in such key areas as health sciences and environmental studies. SFU is at a vulnerable point in its fiscal history.

I wish to single out several major consequences of concern to the Faculty Association that result from the provincial funding cuts, which jeopardize SFU's excellence in teaching and groundbreaking research.

1. The University administration is currently eliminating 30 faculty and 50 other staff positions for the upcoming fiscal year. This will undoubtedly have an adverse effect on teaching and undermine the quality of education that SFU can deliver. With the loss of permanent and temporary teaching positions, students will experience fewer course offerings, larger classes at all levels, and reduced professor-student contact. Students will be less able to complete their programs in a timely manner. Innovative but labour-intensive teaching techniques appropriate to a creativity-based economy will also be more difficult to implement. The greater workload on the faculty and staff remaining after the 80 positions are terminated – following about 75 eliminated last year – is not compatible with maintaining teaching and research excellence.

2. Graduate Students, who are a precious resource for the province's knowledge economy and the university's research mandate, are under-funded in a number of ways. In a competitive national and international environment, this makes it more difficult to attract and retain talented young researchers to our graduate programs. Graduate fellowship cancellations in some of SFU's departments during this fiscal year were apparently related to the March rollback, and disrupted the progress of graduate students who suddenly lost prospective support. Many departments have had to reduce or eliminate teaching assistant positions or limited-term 'sessional' contract positions, both important sources of financial support and professional training for graduate students. Teaching assistantships are also critical to the University's tutorial, lab and seminar model of effective instruction and learning that directly benefits undergraduate students, which has been a hallmark of SFU's delivery of quality education.

3. Major cuts to the library's acquisitions budget are also under serious consideration. The resulting constraints on the library's ability to provide access in digital or printed formats to current published research and other valuable information resources, will compromise innovative teaching and research, and could put SFU students at a research disadvantage compared to those at other post-secondary institutions in Canada. "

There are many other consequences of the funding shortfalls, including the countless hours that administrators and faculty have spent scrambling to adjust, and the future investment of time in curriculum "rationalization" (essentially, the reduction of course offerings and programs) that will be needed if the funding is not restored.

The final point I'd like to make is that, as you know, the historical evidence indicates that university enrolments increase during economic downturns, as workers seek to upgrade their educational qualifications. Should we not be planning for growth rather than retrenchment?

Accordingly, I request your assistance in addressing these issues by supporting and advocating for these proposals:

1. Restore the operating grant to BC's universities and colleges to the levels expected in December 2007.
2. Index the per-student (FTE) funding to inflation.
3. Provide full funding for each new student space.
4. Supplement the very welcome introduction of funding for new graduate student spaces in 2007, by contributing funding to the 4,400 currently unfunded graduate student spaces in BC.

Your government has made many positive steps in improving post-secondary education in the province, but those achievements are at risk unless they have appropriate financial support.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,



Robert Hackett,  
President, SFU Faculty Association