

chairs and directors group

Dr. Hilmar Pabel, President
Simon Fraser University Faculty Association
8888 University Drive
Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6

December 1, 2009

Dear Dr. Pabel

Re: Term Limits for Chairs and Directors

The Chairs and Directors group met November 25, 2009, to discuss the SFUFA proposal for term limits. While we agree that turnover of Chair/Directors encourages participation in departmental governance and promotes opportunities to gain administrative experience, our group reached an overwhelming consensus that strict term limits should not be mandated by new policy. This consensus was based on a number of factors, including (but not necessarily limited to) the following:

1. Mandatory term limits undermine the democratic process at the unit level. The Chair/Director serves at the pleasure of the faculty within a unit. The unit should retain the opportunity to decide its own leadership.
2. There are adequate checks and balances in place to ensure an individual does not inappropriately retain the Chair/Director's position. These include the requirement of Departmental/School ratification for each new term, approval by the Dean and the Vice-President Academic, and the opportunity for reconsideration, per Academic Policy A13.02.
3. Small Departments/Schools, and those with predominantly junior faculty, would be disadvantaged by term limits, since the pool of potential leaders may be too small to allow mandatory turnover of the Chair/Director.
4. Departments and Schools in the midst of building and growth would be disadvantaged by mandatory turnover of the Chair/Director if the incumbent's qualifications and connections are required for successful completion of the growth phase.
5. In financially precarious conditions, mandatory term limits may disadvantage an academic unit that wishes its Chair or Director to guide the unit through the turbulence. Mandatory turnover may be more likely to destabilize a unit during periods of fiscal uncertainty.

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6. It is not the norm for individuals to serve beyond two consecutive five-year terms. In those few cases where it does occur, there is more than adequate justification underlying individual Department/Schools' decisions to prolong the Chair/Director's tenure

If SFUFA decides to survey its membership regarding term limits for Chairs and Directors, then the Chairs and Directors Group requests that the above statements outlining our strong reservations about the proposal for term limits be made known to the membership.

Faithfully submitted on behalf of the Chairs and Directors Group,

Peter Ruben, PhD
Chair