

Dear SFUFA Members:

The following bulletin contains information on:

- Research Ethics Board
- Human Rights Office
- Asbestos in the workplace
- Indigenous faculty outreach
- Alternate contacts

Research Ethics Board

In our last bulletin we provided details regarding administrative interference with the Research Ethics Board (REB). Background information can be found on our website, [here](#).

The university's actions usurped the authority of Senate, and have meant the ORE is unable to review any above-minimal risk studies or biomedical studies, and may interrupt funding to many active research programs. Although the university's recent bulletin states "there is no disruption to the current process, and ethics approvals continue as usual," current members of the REB strongly disagree with that assessment, as is clear from recent discussions on our academic-discussion mail-list.

In the weeks since, the inappropriately-removed members of the REB have not been reinstated, and the Vice President Research has continued to assert his authority to directly influence the structure and composition of the REB. SFU's actions have generated significant opposition and attracted national attention – the Canadian Association of University Teachers wrote to the President expressing its concerns, the Centre for Free Expression at Toronto Metropolitan University published a post about the issue (available [here](#)) and nearly 300 SFU community members signed a petition protesting the opposed changes to the REB and calling on the University to restore the full membership of the REB.

The last Senate meeting (February 6) saw significant and animated discussion when the Vice President Research and International (VPRI) brought forward his proposed changes to the governance and procedures of the REB. Senators challenged the administration on its lack of authority and violation of process, ultimately expanding to a discussion of broader concerns regarding challenges to collegial governance and inadequate consultation on a number of important issues. The end result was a vote by Senate to return the matter of the REB to the Senate Committee on Agenda and Rules (SCAR).

The latest developments indicate that Senators are indeed concerned about inappropriate interference in the REB and incursions of the VPRI into matters of Senate's authority. The fundamental issue, however, has been only deferred rather than decided. Not only the status of the VPRI's proposed changes, but also the composition of the REB and the integrity of current and future SFU research projects remain uncertain.

Human Rights Office

Members may recall our discussion of the Human Rights and Bullying and Harassment Offices from previous bulletins – for a refresher, please see [here](#).

As a result of an active campaign by a wide range of community members, the University finally opened the matter to consultation, and has now acknowledged that the concerns we and others brought forward do indeed represent widespread feelings in the community.

SFU has now announced that the Human Rights Office (HRO) will be returned to its previous place in the University structure, reporting to the Secretary once that now-vacant position is filled. When exactly this will occur and what SFU plans for the interim are as yet unclear, but we will continue to work with our community partners to monitor this issue.

While we are pleased that SFU has reconsidered this decision, we are disappointed that it took so long to do so. Thanks to all of you who added your voices to the opposition to SFU'S changes to the HRO, which undermined the independence of that office and community confidence in its ability to do its important work.

Asbestos in the Workplace

In November of 2022, the Bennett Library at the Burnaby campus was evacuated after asbestos-containing debris was found in a Librarian's office on the 5th floor. The ceiling's texture coat had failed. Further inspections showed debris in other locations on the 5th floor, and smaller amounts of debris and failing ceiling texture on other floors. Faculty, staff, and students working in the area were likely exposed, and as of now some 600,000 books, 55 computer stations, 124 study carrels, and dozens of offices remain closed.

This is not SFU's first asbestos exposure – similar events have occurred at least three times in recent years, and WorkSafe BC has formally called on the University to take the appropriate steps to protect workers and community members and to report openly on risks and on the steps being taken to address shortcomings.

Librarians and others affected by the asbestos exposure, however, have experienced a number of roadblocks in their search for information as to what transpired, what the levels of exposure have been, and what concretely is being done to prevent further exposures. Attempts to raise the matter in Senate have been deemed out of order. We are also concerned that SFU's Central Health and Safety Committee has failed to have a full discussion of these concerns, and will be looking further into why this is the case.

Indigenous Faculty Outreach

SFUFA is working to identify ways that we can better and more proactively ensure that the voices of Indigenous faculty are heard and reflected in the full range of our work, from day to day advocacy to collective bargaining to the full scope of Executive and membership discussion and debate. Both in our internal workings and in our relations with the University, we need to do more and do better to ensure that we are attentive to the challenges involved in decolonization and Indigenization, and to ensure that space is made in the Association for the full range of Indigenous voices.

As a first step in this work, we have begun to develop a mail-list for Indigenous faculty to assist us in communicating directly with Indigenous members of SFUFA. Given that the list we currently have is incomplete, we invite Indigenous faculty members to contact SFUFA's Executive Director, Brian Green (bsgreen@sfu.ca) to be added to the mail-list.

Alternate Contacts:

Finally, a reminder that SFUFA is collecting alternate contact info – email or phone numbers – for members. Given some of the issues we have faced with periodic unstable University communications, we are hoping to maintain alternate ways of reaching you in the event that SFU's systems are not available and we need to communicate with members. Emails and/ or phone numbers provided will not be used for regular business, but would only be relied upon in the event that SFU's systems are not functioning securely. To provide us with an alternate means of reaching you, please contact Executive Director Brian Green at bsgreen@sfu.ca