

Minutes of the SFUFA Executive Meeting

Held Thursday, December 7, 2023

In AQ2035

9.30 – noon

In attendance:

Lyn Bartram (SIAT) via zoom
Kumari Beck (Education) Chair
Ronda Arab (English)
Adena Brons (Library)
David Broun (Physics)
Janice Regan (Computing Science)
Mike Sjoerdsma (Engineering Science)

Brian Green (Executive Director)
Melanie Lam (Executive Assistant, Minutes)
Jennifer Scott (Member Services)

Kumari Beck called the meeting to order at 9:40 am.

Regrets:

Bertille Antoine (Economics)
Tim Beischlag (Health Sciences)
Rochelle Tucker (Health Sciences)
Ljiljana Trajkovic (Engineering Science)

1. **Approval of Agenda**

Approved with the following additions: (a) Conference co-sponsoring request from SFUFA member (b) Letter to Joy Johnson from two SFUFA members (c) Academic Discussion List (d) Structuring Consult meetings.

Moved: Mike Sjoerdsma/Adena Brons

Carried.

2. **Approval of the November 16, Minutes.**

Approved as circulated.

Moved: Ronda Arab/Lyn Bartram

Carried.

3. **Business arising** – none to report.

4. **Presidents Report**

- The war in Gaza has sparked debate and discussion among faculty members and there has been a lot of talk about threats to free speech and academic freedom.
- The Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Selena Robinson, is planning on visiting BC universities but is not scheduled to meet with unions. CUFA BC is trying to advocate for this.
- PSEC is meeting with BCGEU and some public sector unions but CUFA BC members are not on the list.
- Amendments are being considered to SFU's Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy GP44.
- This is Lyn's last meeting as an executive committee member and the committee would like to thank Lyn for sharing her valuable insights, for her time and commitment to SFUFA.
- The Vancouver Sun published a report about SFU's budget cuts on December 6th and SFUFA will be raising this and expanding the conversation on budget cuts at the next consult meeting next Thursday.

5. Executive Director report

- Brian has been approached by many members about public comments being made about the Israel/Hamas war in Gaza, and issues related to academic freedom.
- CEE members who applied to join SFUFA have now officially joined and SFUFA will be welcoming them soon.
- CUFA is sponsoring a national conference on Governance on January 18th and 19th in Vancouver and SFUFA reps will be attending.

6. Member Services report

- There are many human rights related advocacy issues being dealt with currently.
- Jennifer has met with the new Director of Human Rights, who has mentioned a number of issues she is working on, but it doesn't appear SFU has taken any action on them yet.

7. a) Committee Reports: It was reported that the following topics were discussed at the recent BOG & Senate meetings: Proposed changes to the Research Ethics Policy R20.01; SFU budget cuts; Funding for grad studies; SFU Medical School. Ljiljana was absent and there was no Equity Committee report.

b) Request to co-sponsor academic freedom conference: A request to co-sponsor an academic freedom conference has been brought forward to the executive by a SFUFA member. After reviewing the request and some discussion the executive recommended not moving forward with the request as it has generally been our policy not to co-sponsor initiatives of members since we receive and would receive too many to fairly assess or support.

c) Letter from Jewish faculty concerned about antisemitism : A letter was written to the SFU President and copied to the BOG and SFUFA requesting the following: Ceasing communications from senior administrators on political issues and off campus incidents that have no direct relevance to the teaching and research mission at SFU; To evaluate credible threats to the physical safety of specified members of the SFU community; Publish a definition of antisemitism; Change the hostile climate towards Jews on campus; Promote the understanding of academic freedom on campus.

After much discussion the executive noted the following: That a response is not required from SFUFA at this time since the letter was addressed to SFU; SFUFA agrees that promoting the understanding of academic freedom for members is important and will continue its work in this area; The CAUT Legal team has noted that the IHRA definition of antisemitism is problematic and may infringe on academic freedom. Brian and Kumari will be drafting a response to Jonathan.

d) Complaint re Academic Discussion Mail List: In light of recent discussions and public comments directed towards some members on the SFUFA Academic Discussion List, members have questioned whether this forum should be moderated. The executive noted the following: The List is provided as a service to SFUFA members; The List/Forum was established in 2012 and is intended to be a self-moderating community discussion; The List is not moderated by SFUFA, nor does SFUFA deal with disputes arising from the List; Members are asked to review the Terms of Usage before signing on to the List and the Terms are posted on the SFUFA website; Members can ask to be removed from the List at any time, it is an opt-in List; The executive committee notes that discussions on the list have at times been heated, but the discussion has not reached the level at which intervention seems warranted;

Acceptable use of SFU's electronic systems are laid out in Policy GP 24 and members can always file a complaint with SFU.

Kumari and Brian noted they would draft a response to the member.

e) Restructure/prep for better Consult meetings: Moving forward, the executive committee discussed ways in which consult items at the meetings with senior admin could be framed better, with less distractions and a better focus on the agenda item being discussed.

9. Items for Consultation – December 4th @ 10.30 in SH 3101

- i. Budget cuts/ hiring freeze: distinction between staff providing direct service to students or academic units and other administrative staff; what of staff roles filled by students that are an important source of student support; indicate a 5-8% cut, but no indication of whether SFU intends to this to be shared equally across the university - specifically, are cuts being imposed on academic units, or are units exempt? if academic units are impacted, what is being done to ensure that no decisions on cuts are made without the active participation of the faculty in the unit; we also recall that last meeting we heard that the University is hiring continuing staff for an as-yet-unapproved medical school and continues to add new administrators - how are these impacted by the hiring freeze?
- ii. Related to the above, SFU had engaged Cubane Consulting to do conduct an efficiency study; we haven't seen the results of that, but would be interested. However, we would also like to know exactly how much was spent on this study. More broadly, we note that the hiring of external consultants has become a more regular feature of SFU's approach in recent years. Are such contracts also being frozen?
- iii. Non-disclosure agreements: left over from last consult. Faculty members serving on various university committees are being asked to sign confidentiality/ non-disclosure agreements. Faculty already undertake to maintain appropriate confidentiality in accordance with university policy, and we have received complaints about the implied assumption of mistrust in requiring anything further. We understand that there are situations in which confidentiality is appropriate, but the university's practice should be to tend towards more transparency, not less. A related issue relates to lack of clarity regarding the ability of members to consult with SFUFA. While many internal committee discussions are confidential, this should not impact the ability of faculty to seek advice regarding procedural concerns with either the Association or with their Deans. SFUFA would like to see this made clear in any communications and guidelines related to confidentiality.

10. Other business – none to report.

11. Adjournment: There was no other business and the meeting was adjourned at 11.38 am.