

## **Preamble**

SFU's administration has significantly altered plans for programming and staffing of the School of Medicine. Faculty-Senators have been actively seeking to reassert Senate oversight of the School of Medicine since it became apparent that the plans for curriculum, faculty appointments, and more have been changed drastically from what Senate approved. The two faculty representatives on the Board of Governors have also sought to persuade the University to either revert to the original plan for the SoM or allow Senate to vote on the proposed changes in line with Senate's responsibility for academic governance. The Association shares these concerns, but also notes that the University intends to exclude School of Medicine faculty from SFUFA, creating a two-tier system for terms for appointment, tenure, workload and more.

Members will recall that in the last few years the administration altered its own policies in an attempt to reduce oversight over the Human Rights Office and the Research Ethics Board – both of which were turned back by Senate mobilization and community pushback. Current issues with the School of Medicine follow this pattern in a number of ways but are even more alarming in that they seek to establish a whole new Faculty without appropriate Senate oversight.

The following is lengthy and detailed, but we encourage all members to read through to the end as the implications are significant not only for the School of Medicine but also for the future of collegial governance at SFU.

## **Introduction**

Over the past several years, collegial governance has become a major priority of faculty members at SFU, and on two occasions administrative overstep has resulted in significant resistance among Faculty-Senators and members overall. Members will recall that first the Human Rights Office and later the Research Ethics Board saw the university administration attempt to centralize decision making and reduce or eliminate oversight, and in both cases important provisions for transparency and community consultation were bypassed. In both cases, too, faculty members pushed back, Faculty-Senators demanded answers, and after some months the University was compelled to rescind its plans. Background on these situations is available at:

[Human Rights Office restructuring](#)  
[Research Ethics centralization](#)

A third such situation appears to be emerging, and many Faculty-Senators are already organizing to demand the restoration of faculty oversight where it belongs: the issue today - SFU's new School of Medicine, which is scheduled to welcome its first students in 2026.

## **The *University Act*, Senate, and SFU Medical School**

Issues with community consultation regarding the medical school are not new, as the initially-promised discussions about whether or not to pursue a medical school largely evaporated until the plan was a *fait accompli*. The current issue, however, is critical not only to how the School of Medicine operates but also to the principle—foundational to universities—that academics have responsibility for and oversight over academic decisions from program design to curriculum to hiring and assessment of faculty members and administrators within faculties. This basic underlying principle of collegial governance arises from hundreds of years of academic tradition, is formally vested at SFU in Senate, and is recognized in law in BC's [University Act](#).

For Universities covered by the *Act*, including SFU, provisions for governance are detailed in the legislation. Specifically, the institutions are bi-camerally governed by 1) Boards of Governors, made up of members of the University community and members appointed by the Provincial government, and 2) the Senate, which is entirely made up of members of the University community, at least half of whom must be faculty members. These provisions are designed to ensure that universities are managed responsibly in the public interest as institutions while all academic content—whether related to academic appointments, programs of instruction, or matters of research—remain under collegial academic control and are not conflated with the administration of the institution. The *Act*, then, is quite clear and specific in delineating what aspects of a University's operations are governed by its Board of Governors and what aspects are under the authority of its Senate: the “management, administration and control of the property, revenue, business and affairs of the university are vested in the board” (27.1) while the “academic governance of the University is vested in the Senate,” (37.1). Even more specifically, among Senate's powers and responsibilities are the power “to consider, approve and recommend to the board the revision of courses of study, instruction and education in all faculties and departments of the university” (37.1.f) and the power “to determine the members of the teaching and administrative staffs who are to be members of each faculty” (37.2.k).

Given the above, one would presume that matters related to the instructional programming, curriculum, and academic staffing of a School of Medicine would be squarely within Senate's jurisdiction. Indeed, the School of Medicine's own “SFU School of Medicine Principles and Procedures for Faculty Governance” document, dated April 10th, 2025 explicitly acknowledges that “The governance of the School of Medicine operates under the authority of the Senate of Simon Fraser University.” What has actually transpired, though, has departed sharply from the expectations of the *Act*, the School's own stated principles, and the commitments initially made to Senate, and these contradictions have emerged as a flashpoint over the last three months.

## **Senate Developments**

In May, 2024, SFU's Board of Governors and Senate approved the establishment of a new School of Medicine, as required to enact both the administrative infrastructure and academic content of the School. Both the Board and Senate had been presented with a business plan that centred research-led teaching and indicated that the lion's share of the non-clinical instruction would be undertaken by regular tenure-track professors (i.e., faculty members with a 40-40-20 split for research, teaching, and service) – a plan reiterated in the report of a joint Senate-BOG working group. Both the business case and the working group report indicated that, at steady state, the School of Medicine would have 35-40 regular tenure-track professors, 35-40 faculty with leadership responsibilities, and 1000-1500 part-time clinical faculty (i.e., doctors and other healthcare professionals responsible for mentoring students in their clinics).

Following that approval, however, the University entirely revamped the programing and staffing plans for the School of Medicine, presenting for accreditation and hiring a medical program that is not in line with the one that Senate approved. Importantly, neither Senate nor the full Board were consulted when plans for the School of Medicine took this new direction. Senate has yet to be offered an opportunity to approve the revised curriculum, and the new staffing policies were developed and approved by a Board sub-committee alone, the Executive Committee. Significantly, the Executive Board does not have any faculty representatives among its members, which means that the changes to the plan for the School of Medicine have been made without any oversight by faculty members at all.

In July 2025, it came to the attention of Faculty-Senators that SFU had posted medical school faculty positions that seemed to have no teaching responsibilities, and different terms and conditions than other faculty members. As they began to ask questions of the University, it became clear that the academic model that Senate had approved was not, in fact, the model SFU was pursuing. Instead of the research-based teaching model that was presented to the Board and to Senate, SFU was implementing a new model that largely divorced teaching and research and relied heavily on micro-teaching appointments. This led to further disclosure that the academic model for students had also been redeveloped without oversight by Senate: issues related to admission standards, program pre-requisites and lab and course structure all were altered after and away from Senate oversight.

While all of the above impact the university community broadly, they fall most directly under the purview of Senate. In one aspect, however, the University's approach directly impacts SFUFA. While Senate simply heard that the School of Medicine would be populated by SFU faculty members, the administration communicated to SFUFA that it intended to exclude any School of Medicine appointments from SFUFA membership. This is, as you might expect, a matter we will be addressing legally, but what is notable is that the misleading of Senate continues even in this regard. When challenged by Faculty-Senators about this issue, President Johnson went on the record at the September 8<sup>th</sup> Senate meeting saying: "there is a real desire to move what's now being referred to as research faculty into the collective agreement with the Faculty Association, but we're not there yet. That's my desire. It's certainly the desire of the

Board.” Three days later, however, on September 11, SFU’s legal position was presented to the Association in writing: that “all employees hired into the School of Medicine are outside the scope of the SFUFA bargaining unit.” While legally the University continues to press forward with the model it developed outside of Senate oversight, comments to Senate are framed so as to suggest that there is in fact no substantive issue.

What all of the above demonstrate is that the University has developed a plan for the Medical School that involves no regular professors, differential terms for those who are appointed, a separation of teaching and research, and no Senate approval of the program of instruction, academic governance, or staffing, all of which fall under Senate’s authority in the *University Act*. (It is worth noting that currently the School of Medicine has 88 staff people, nine associate or assistant Deans, and zero faculty members.)

As Faculty-Senators have challenged the University on its change of course and its failure to engage Senate, the University’s response has been—as with the HRO and REB a few years ago—to rely on a number of new policy changes that it made for itself, to legitimize its decisions.

### **“Administrative Matters” and The Board of Governors**

In Spring, 2025, the University adopted Academic Policies A10.07 (Clinical Faculty Appointments in the School of Medicine) and A10.08 (Medical Research Faculty Appointments in the School of Medicine) without engaging in community consultation or seeking the approval of Senate.

Though these policies are housed in the Academic Policies section of the Policy Gazette and under the authority of the Vice-President Academic, the University’s position is that both policies should be deemed “administrative” because they are related to employment. What they cover, though, goes far beyond administrative matters. Policy A10.07, for example, embeds as “criteria for appointment” the substantive academic expectations of the program itself: skills-based instruction and case-based learning, service and leadership, scholarly activity, and clinical competence. Similarly, A10.08, which relates to Research Faculty, develops standards and processes for evaluation, tenure and promotion that are outside the Collective Agreement and so different from all other faculty members.

The very idea of what a School of Medicine faculty member looks like, then, is defined as purely administrative, and of no academic consequence whatsoever. It is an administrative sleight of hand, re-defining what a faculty member is behind closed doors while using the administrative hiring component as justification for bypassing Senate. What is to be taught and how and by whom: these substantive academic questions are subsumed in the appointment so that Senate itself never actually has to approve the vision that the University has developed.

The central role of Senate and the importance of robust community consultation at SFU have long been recognized in the University's policies. Indeed, when both the HRO and the REB faced (unsuccessful) attempts at administrative centralization, it was careful reading of SFU's policies and how they had been breached that ultimately allowed Senate to reassert collegial decision-making. This case is the same, though with one additional factor of concern: the University appears to have actively and consciously attempted to create policy loopholes to minimize the chances of community pushback.

SFU's Policy on Policies (B10.00) governs policy development and revision in general, and requires transparency, widespread community consultation, and robust reporting mechanisms. The University attempted to change this policy in Spring 2022. At that time, when the proposed changes went to Senate for information, Senators raised significant questions about administrative overreach and the potential for abuse. The University withdrew the proposed changes at that time. In Fall 2024, however, they brought similar changes back – though this time they did not report to Senate in advance at all but simply moved the changes directly through the Board. SFUFA's October, 2024, message to members about the potential threats to collegial governance embedded in those proposed changes can be found at <https://www.sfufa.ca/2024/10/09/comments-on-policy-b10-00/>

The current issues with the School of Medicine arise directly from the changes to B10.00, and only confirm that the University has done exactly what we feared. In November 2024, they passed a carve-out from the Policy for the Board itself. In other words, the new policy would not apply to policies about how the Board governed itself, or to any policies the Board delegated to one of its standing committees, provided the policy subject to review or change fell within the terms of reference of that standing committee. What is more, a Board-designated “lead” was given authority to decide whether to follow the general rules about consultation at all—at any time the “lead” could decide that no consultation was required and thereby bypass the terms of the policy entirely. The Board then made a further change to the terms of reference of its Executive Committee: where previously the Executive could review and approve agreements with employee groups and then share the information with the Board, it now gave itself the right to approve terms of appointment without reference to employee groups—that is, to approve entirely new terms for entirely new groups of employees without any discussion beyond the Executive Committee. The faculty model in the School of Medicine was developed through this loophole: with no community consultation, no Senate oversight, no presentation even to the full Board of Governors.

### **What's Next?**

We have seen this movie before. The restructuring of the Human Rights Office against all advice and over widespread community objection—ultimately Senate forced reversal of the move. The Research Ethics Board—dismissal of the duly constituted Board and centralization blurring administrative and academic roles: SFU argued the changes were purely administrative, and fully supported by policy, but was then forced, again, to reverse its decisions some months later. And here we see the same, as the University

relies on technicalities and loopholes to avoid submitting matters of academic substance to Senate, instead allowing the small Executive Committee of the Board of Governors to unilaterally determine the policies and procedures that will underlie academic appointments at the School of Medicine.

Faculty-Senators are talking. Faculty-Senators are organizing. Faculty-Senators are making noise. There was sufficient pushback at the September Senate meeting that the President has agreed to bring more information back to the Senate for information. But providing information is not enough—any matters of substantive academic content, including decisions on staffing and administration, are directly matters of Senate authority under the *University Act*. SFU must make its documents widely available and provide Senate with the opportunity to fully review, consider, and discuss the proposed models for academic staffing, governance, admissions, program delivery, and academic assessment. That is what bicameral governance demands. And it is what a university's reputation is built on.

One final note: any member of the campus community can request that a policy be changed or appealed by filling out a Policy Development Questionnaire ([https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/policies/files/resources/Policy\\_Development\\_Questionnaire-Fillable.pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/policies/files/resources/Policy_Development_Questionnaire-Fillable.pdf)) that is submitted to the Policy Sponsor. The Vice-President, Academic, is the Policy Sponsor for Policies A10.07 and A10.08; the General Counsel of the University is the Policy Sponsor for Policy B10.00. We would encourage any SFUFA members who feel so inclined to submit a questionnaire.