

Dear SFUFA Members:

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General Meeting, Social, and Elections

The Association's next General Meeting will be held on **Tuesday, April 28th at 2:00 pm.** The meeting will be held on zoom, and it is anticipated we will have discussion on the Association's budget, legal expenses, and dues rate. Please watch your emails for a meeting package.

There will be a member social at Biercraft on the Burnaby campus following the meeting.

Executive Elections are held in the Spring for terms beginning in September of this year. Voting will open on Monday, April 20th and close at 12:00 on the 28th.

Motion on Member Dues

As discussed in our previous bulletin, at the Spring General Meeting Members will be asked to support a motion to submit a proposed dues increase to an electronic vote of members. This will NOT be a vote on a dues increase, but only a motion regarding whether to prepare a vote on a dues increase. The Executive will be recommending a dues rate of 1.15% - a rate that is close to the national average and provides enough to rebuild our reserves.

We intend to include with any motion a separate provision to revisit the dues rate once reserves have been restored. That is, if the proposed increase accomplishes what is intended – a restoration of our reserves and a budget that meets the needs of member representation – it will trigger an automatic return to members to determine whether dues should be maintained at that level or lowered.

An info session to discuss the dues question will be held on zoom on Tuesday, April 14 at 10:00 am. The link will be sent separately.

Collective Bargaining

SFUFA and SFU continue to negotiate a new collective agreement. The status of any provincial norm for the public sector remains uncertain, and has impacted our ability to speak directly about a specific monetary package. We are, however, continuing to work on a few remaining non-monetary priorities and to explore issues such as benefits that have a monetary component.

Discussions have become increasingly challenging as the simpler proposals are addressed. SFU has a few issues that are unacceptable to the Association, including a proposal to allow certain faculty searches to be run by senior administration rather than academic departments, and a proposal to reduce pension benefits during study leaves and periods of reduced work. They are also opposed to what we thought was a straightforward, mutually beneficial proposal to encourage local resolution of disputes through informal discussion at the Dean's level, and to encourage more expedited and cheaper legal proceedings when issues do need to be arbitrated. We have been surprised at the response, but remain committed to finding ways to facilitate informal, non-legalistic resolutions wherever possible.

Major issues still under discussion include provisions for tenure and promotion for Teaching Faculty, issues related to TTR balance, and operation of the salary system, including what if any provisions are made for market differentials and how these interact with the operation of the salary system, including making sure that market pressures experienced during recruiting and retention apply to the salary scale as a whole.

Grievance and Arbitration Overview

Members have asked for a general overview of the numbers of grievances and arbitrations the Association deals with, and how these are resolved. While we have not had an opportunity to do a detailed review, the following provides a general picture.

Prior to 2022, formal grievances were extremely rare. Indeed, between 2010 and 2012 the Association faced fewer than 5 formal processes in total – grievances and investigations combined. Issues certainly arose, but were most often addressed at the local level (Departmental and Decanal), and almost always resulted in informal and non-precedent setting resolutions.

After 2021, turnover and instability at both senior administrative and Faculty Relations levels had a serious impact on the continuity of our professional relationships and of issue-specific discussions. Between 2020 and 2024 we saw 4 transitions at the level of the VPA and 9 transitions in leadership at Faculty Relations. Unsurprisingly, this disruption both damaged our ability to maintain open and informal lines of communication and resulted in many faculty issues lingering far too long without attention.

The result, as we have discussed multiple times over the past few years, has been a more formal, legalistic relationship in which local resolutions are few and far between. And that impacts numbers of issues as well – as faculty matters become more and more centralized and Deans have less ability to resolve matters informally, members find themselves needing the Association to intervene in a range of issues that previously might have been addressed locally and with minimal or no Association assistance.

So what does our work currently look like?

Already in 2026 our office has worked with over 125 faculty members on specific issues; this is entirely in keeping with recent trends in which 300-400 cases per year is now the norm (some 25-30% of all members).

The vast majority of these issues do still get resolved. We file 30-something formal grievances per year, so about 90% of member issues do get resolved without a legal dispute. But of those that do become formal grievances, over 75% require us to file for third party arbitration to find resolution. Settlements happen, but they tend to happen only once an arbitrator is involved to encourage resolution.

The Association's record in grievance-arbitration is strong. Leaving aside minor procedural matters, in the last 3 years we have had 23 arbitration proceedings. 11 of those resulted in settlements - settlements that could have been achieved without legal cost if we had a better functioning informal resolution system, but did ultimately get settled. Of the remaining 12 cases that required an order from an arbitrator, 7 cases we won, 3 we lost, and 2 gave mixed results - SFU and we each won portions of the dispute.

The Association, then, continues to resolve some 90% of member issues without needing to resort to a formal process. But there remains a significant and ongoing increase in the number of formal disputes – from 1 every few years before 2022 to 30-40 each year since. And when issues become formal, they more often than not require the engagement of a third party arbitrator to see them addressed.

As noted in the collective bargaining update above, we did propose language to encourage a return to less legalistic processes – specifically, we proposed that Deans and individual members be encouraged to meet directly, with neither the Association nor Faculty Relations involved, to address issues; we proposed then a second step in which the Association and the Dean might meet informally in search of without prejudice solutions; and we proposed that where arbitration proceedings are necessary, we attempt to use expedited processes designed to focus on core issues rather than technical legal proceedings to reduce costs and delays. The University's negotiating team has refused all of the above, and offered no counter proposals in this area.

We continue to believe that the best resolutions are local, informal, and rooted in discussion directly with those most sensitive to local departmental and Faculty cultures. And we will continue to press for these approaches wherever possible. Where we need to engage more formal legal processes, however, we will continue to do so, and where that has been necessary, our record of success is strong.

While discussions at the bargaining table have not led to any agreement, in recent weeks SFUFA representatives have been working directly with the senior administration to discuss possible ways of encouraging more settlements and less formal grievances. We are hopeful that we may be able to identify shared interests and paths forward, and are committed continuing those conversations.

Reminder – Alternate Contacts

Given periodic disruption of SFU's internet and email systems, the Association is collecting alternate contacts (email or phone) for members, to be used only in the event that we need to reach you during a time that the University's communications systems are not functioning. Members can send alternate email addresses and/ or phone numbers to SFUFA Executive Director, Brian Green, at <mailto:bsgreen@sfu.ca>