SFUFA
THE FACULTY ASSOCIATION OF SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

October 26, 2026

Dear SFUFA Members,

The following update on collective bargaining also contains important information regarding your individual Professional Development funds. Although lengthy, we encourage you to read it carefully.

Following an intensive three-day bargaining mediation, SFUFA and SFU were unable to reach an agreement. As a result, the SFUFA bargaining team has indicated that it is not prepared to schedule further bargaining or mediation dates unless the University's position changes. While the Association is normally reluctant to discuss bargaining details publicly, we believe members should understand both what was at stake and why the bargaining team was unwilling to accept the University's proposals. As a condition of resolving the pension transition fund shortfall, SFU insisted that SFUFA accept a series of significant concessions, detailed below. SFU's position was straightforward: unless SFUFA agreed to those concessions, the University would not commit identified funds to addressing the shortfall and would instead reduce individual faculty members' PDR allocations.

SFUFA was not prepared to accept permanent concessions in exchange for a solution to a temporary problem. Throughout bargaining, we proposed multiple alternatives that would have addressed the pension transition fund shortfall without reducing members' PDR allocations. Those proposals were not accepted.

Mediation update

As we entered mediation, SFUFA had a few outstanding priorities:

- Provision of at least some study leave options at 100% of salary. The Association was prepared to use available money at the bargaining table to pay for this at the cost identified by SFU

- Tenure and professorial ranks for teaching faculty, and a reconfiguration of existing workloads to allow for an annual non-teaching semester. Core principles were agreed with SFU in 2024, though specific language to capture the workload transition remained at issue. SFU's current bargaining team was unwilling to accept even the pre-agreed principles.

- TTR balance. SFUFA sought to remove the requirements for "balance" in teaching and research semesters, as the current tracking system has resulted in numerous grievances and has negatively impacted a huge number of members. In one case, a research faculty member taught for 5 consecutive semesters and was still deemed by SFU to be "out of balance" and ineligible for study leave. We proposed that it not matter in what order a faculty member completes their duties as long as they do so.

- Collegial governance. Protecting collegial governance has been a top priority for faculty members for the last several years, and SFUFA tabled proposals to strengthen those protections. During mediation, we agreed to withdraw those proposals if SFU would simply confirm that it does not intend to remove faculty members' existing rights to ratification and non-confidence votes involving in senior administrators. SFU refused to provide that assurance. We note that, earlier this year, the administration did in fact strip faculty rights to ratify Associate Deans. Our concern is not unfounded.

- Salary scales. The Association proposed to raise breakpoints and ceilings to address salary compression. This is a zero-cost item, as our system of biennial review and promotion steps is fixed cost, and structural changes do not raise administrative costs.

- Librarian faculty flexible work arrangements. SFUFA members generally do not have set hours of work and enjoy the flexibility to adjust hours and work locations on the condition that all required in-person or -timed duties are fulfilled. We sought to extend this same professional autonomy to Librarian faculty.

SFU had priorities of its own, most significantly:

- Reduced pension contributions. SFU has proposed to reduce pension contributions for members on study leave, modified contracts, or in phased retirement transitions. Though this is a significant concession, SFUFA was prepared to consider this as part of a larger settlement package.

- Market differentials and retention awards. These salary supplements are negotiated in each agreement so that we can ensure that MDs and retention are considered in the context of the existing salary scale, and to ensure, too, that we can address the structural gendered inequities that are produced by improperly managed MDs, as SFU itself recognized in the 2017 gender salary equity report. SFU has proposed both to renew these supplements and have them removed as a bargaining item in perpetuity. The Association did not agree to remove them from bargaining in perpetuity, but did offer to renew them for this Agreement so that SFU continues to have access to supplements.

After three days of mediation, SFUFA had agreed to meet SFU's priorities with one exception; we refused to permanently give up our right to ensure salary supplements are negotiated as part of wider discussions. We had dropped or significantly amended most of our proposals, and had demonstrated that our monetary proposal was fully funded based on SFU's own numbers.

SFU's response to our proposal was to insist that faculty members pay twice the actual cost for an adjustment to study leaves. Though it acknowledged the real cost to be $1.7 million, SFU demanded we pay $3.3 million, which would allow the administration to meet its own objective of reducing study leave options; should we not agree, they would not allow any change to take place. The University further insisted that workloads for teaching faculty be increased in any transition to professorial ranks and tenure, and that we abandon any proposals related to collegial governance with no assurance that these would not be actively stripped in the coming years. Finally, SFU said that no deal would be made unless we gave up in perpetuity our role in bargaining salary supplements.

It was not a deal we could accept. But SFU was not done. Another part of SFU's approach was to take PDR from each and every one of you, individually.

Reduction of Individual Faculty Members' PDR entitlement

This is important. But some context is necessary.

In 2021, faculty members voted in favour of a defined benefit pension plan. Our move to the BC College Pension Plan had costs, which were to be amortized over 20 years (ending in 2041). Our negotiations at the time made provisions to fund that amortization for some years, but included a safety-net for SFU: in the event that it became not possible to fully fund future payments, faculty could potentially face temporary levies on PDR or even salary.

Earlier this year, Faculty Relations informed SFUFA that the existing fund has an anticipated shortfall. SFUFA indicated that this round of bargaining includes ample money to restore the fund, and that we are prepared to prioritize this in our bargaining. We further indicated that if bargaining is not fully complete, we are prepared to sign an agreement committing dollars from the negotiating table to this purpose, so as to ensure that the pension transition is fully paid and no individual member faces any harm.

Our proposals in mediation reiterated this commitment, and we found money in the Agreement that would likely cover all pension transition costs for the next 5 or 6 years. SFU has indicated that it would be prepared to agree only on the condition that a deal is fully signed and executed.

In the absence of that, the University says it will require individual faculty members to give up over $900 each in PDR. This was the administration's position – if a deal is not signed in the next few weeks that provides SFU everything it demands in bargaining, the University will not permit committed dollars from the negotiating table to pay these costs, but will instead strip benefits from each of you. This is entirely unnecessary, but has been deployed as a threat: drop your bargaining proposals, accept ours, or we will punish individual faculty members.

We will be very clear: the Faculty Association will not be pressured into accepting the unacceptable. We will not pay double for study leave improvements, allow SFU to remove your ability to ensure confidence in academic leaders, increase workloads, and permanently give up bargaining rights just because the University has threatened a temporary reduction in PDR.

In the coming days, you may receive a message from Faculty Relations regarding the pension transition fund, indicating that the fund has been depleted and that your PDR will be temporarily reduced for 2027. We will continue to do what we can to reach agreement and avoid that step, but we cannot do so without SFU's active cooperation.

This fund is entirely managed by SFU, and the Association has no access to information about it except at SFU's discretion. The Association was only informed of any possible fiscal shortfall after we had been in bargaining for over a year. We have identified available monies to replenish the fund, and have agreed to commit in writing to this expenditure even if bargaining of non-monetary issues continues. We have stressed, not only to Faculty Relations but directly to Provost Dilson Rassier and Associate VPA Peter Hall, that we are committed to this, and that we believe it entirely counterproductive – let alone unnecessary – to harm individual faculty members.

Nonetheless, and though in the recent mediation the Association presented several monetary packages that would allow the pension transition to be fully funded for years to come, SFU continues to indicate it will take PDR money from all of you if we do not sign the agreement they want us to sign – an agreement that reduces pension contributions, increases workloads, and gives up bargaining rights.

We will not give away your rights or benefits. We know these costs will be paid, and the only barrier is SFU's apparent belief that we will cave under the pressure of a possible PDR reduction.

The SFUFA bargaining team spent three days in mediation and found a way to address the University's priorities, even when these involve concessions we would prefer not to make. We invited senior academic leaders to talk. We are open, available anytime, and ready to talk – actually talk – about what we can do to achieve a fair and respectful Collective Agreement.

In the meantime, a final note if SFU acts to takeaway your PDR funds: should any SFUFA member face the loss of an important professional development opportunity, please contact the Association directly, and we will do what we can to assist.

Bertille Antoine

SFUFA Acting President