

February 27, 2023

Dear SFUFA:

We are SFU faculty members who are interested in the promotion of open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement on campus. We are writing because we understand that SFUFA is in the process of negotiating a new collective agreement with SFU's Executive Team and we would like to see some additional protections for academic freedom included in the agreement.

We are concerned about recent incidents in which students, staff, and/or faculty members have attempted to suppress the academic freedom of other members of the SFU community. We are also concerned about the general climate on campus. Based on numerous conversations with colleagues, faculty members with controversial, unpopular, or even just novel opinions feel themselves to be at serious risk of 'cancellation', leading to widespread self-censorship. This climate is unhealthy at the personal level and is contrary to the purpose of SFU as an academic institution. We have raised the problem of the diminution of academic freedom with members of the Executive Team on a number of occasions but have yet to see any steps taken to improve the situation.

We therefore request that you ask the Executive Team to agree to take substantive and concrete actions to protect and foster academic freedom at SFU as part of the new collective agreement. Based on our recent conversations with the Executive Team, we suspect that, if they agree in principle to this request, they will ask SFUFA to propose specific initiatives. Accordingly, we have identified four actions that we think would have a meaningful, positive impact on academic freedom at SFU:

1. Include in the new collective agreement a statement that recognises that SFU must be apolitical according to the [British Columbia's University Act](#) ("[a] university must be non-sectarian and non-political in principle," part 12, 66.1) and that faculty members and prospective faculty members cannot be required to endorse any specific political, religious, or social views—or complete training on such views—unless they are required to do so by law.
2. Establish an Academic Freedom Board. The Board should consist mainly of faculty members who are elected to consult with the Senior Administration on the development and implementation of policies that may impact academic freedom, advise the Senior Administration and SFUFA in cases where academic freedom may have been violated, and develop proposals for policies that enhance academic freedom. The organizational

model we have in mind here is the Research Ethics Board as it operated until this academic year.

3. Create a code of conduct for students, staff, and faculty that places academic freedom at the heart of university life and explains the practical aspects of respecting academic freedom (e.g., tolerating opinions that differ from one's own, not attempting to prevent people from attending or hearing a lecture, etc.). The Academic Freedom Board could be tasked with developing this code of conduct, which would then need to be approved by the Senate.
4. Initiate a consultation process that will enable faculty members to discuss and vote on the adoption of the Chicago Trifecta—the [Chicago principles](#) of free expression, the [Kalven Report](#) on the necessity of institutional neutrality on political and social matters, and the [Shils report](#) on the principle that academic contribution should be the sole basis for hiring and promotion.

These are just some suggestions for steps to bolster academic freedom at SFU. We would be happy to provide more.

Lastly, please find attached feedback on the Equity Compass and a request to revise the description of the Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Learning & Teaching position. This feedback illustrates the concerns that some SFU faculty members have regarding current threats to academic freedom.

Sincerely,



