

February 14, 2023

Dear Dr. Parkhouse:

We understand that you are currently reviewing the description of the Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-President, Learning & Teaching (AVPLT) position and the associated candidate profile. We, a group of SFU faculty members who are interested in promoting open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement at SFU, would like to request some changes to this document.

First, we are concerned that the document is silent on academic freedom. As specified in the SFU/SFUFA and SFU/TSSU Collective Agreements, academic freedom provides the foundation for realizing the university's mission: the generation and transmission of knowledge. The chosen candidate should have a deep understanding of academic freedom, both in theory and in practice. We believe that the responsibilities of the AVPLT should include educating the SFU community, especially students, about academic freedom and fostering a culture of respectful, open dialogue both inside and outside of the classroom. Moreover, the AVPLT should be prepared to support instructors and students whose academic freedom has been violated or is under threat of violation—even if the AVPLT is in disagreement with the view expressed. Amending the description of the AVPLT position to include a short statement on the centrality of academic freedom to learning and teaching at SFU would be helpful, we think.

Second, one requirement for the AVPLT role is a “commitment to inclusiveness, equity, and diversity”. We ask that definitions of these terms be provided. Importantly, does “inclusiveness” apply to individuals who express controversial or unpopular opinions? And does “diversity” include diversity of perspective, political opinion, and religious affiliation? In general, how do these terms relate to academic freedom?

We ask that you provide a response to our above points. Thank you very much.