

May 5, 2025

Dear Megan:

We, members of the SFU Academic Freedom Group and other concerned faculty members, understand that your office is seeking feedback on GP 18 (Human Rights) and GP 47 (Bullying and Harassment), which are currently under revision. We are writing with comments about the revised versions of these policies.

First, we are uncomfortable with the vagueness of the stipulation that the University may proceed without a Complainant “[w]here there is risk to the safety of the University Community” (5.8.1 in GP 18 and 6.12.1 in GP 47). We understand that the conditions under which such action may be taken are intended to be very strict, analogous to the conditions under which a healthcare practitioner should violate patient confidentiality. However, as is, the statement could easily be interpreted much more generally, given the varying definitions of “safety”. For example, in the case of an event featuring speakers with controversial views, some community members might ask the administration to intervene and cancel the event on the grounds that the anticipated content will make their community “unsafe” on campus. However, such events are clearly permitted under Article 12 (Academic Freedom) of the SFU/SFUFA collective agreement. So requests of this sort waste the time of both the Complainant and the University. Given these considerations, would you please add a statement to both policies to explain what type of behaviour risks community safety and would justify University action without a Complainant?

Second, we are concerned about this stipulation that “[a]ll members of the University Community are responsible for establishing and maintaining a respectful working and learning environment” (6.1 in both policies) and that “[a]ll members of the University Community are expected to model respectful behaviour” (6.2 in GP 47). To our knowledge, SFU does not have a respectful workplace policy where “respectful” is carefully defined. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (rightly) opposes such policies, [explaining that](#) “[w]hen institutions elevate politeness to a regulative principle of academic life — codified in respectful workplace policies, enforceable by discipline, and justified by the subjective responses of complainants — they are posing a grave threat to academic freedom and free expression”. The key issue, as with the term “safety”, is that the term “respectful” has widely varying interpretations — and can be weaponized to limit academic freedom. Moreover, referring to a respectful workplace seems unnecessary in these policies; GP 18 and GP 47 should focus on Human Rights and Bullying and Harassment (all of which **are** clearly defined). We therefore request that you remove this language from both policies.

Third, although GP 47 states that “[p]rocedural fairness applies to both the Complainant and the Respondent” (7.7), the policy refers to University support for the safety and well-being of the *Complainant* (with no reference to that of the Respondent) four times. This imbalance could suggest that the University is biased in favour of the Complainant. Accordingly, in the interests of due process and impartiality, we ask that you revise the language throughout the policy to make clear that the University will provide support for both parties. In addition, we ask that you

define “procedural fairness” in this context. “Natural justice” is a related term that is used in other SFU policies (e.g., section 6.5 of S 10.01, the Student Academic Integrity Policy); consistency in terminology may improve the clarity of all policies.

Finally, the statement that “[a]n incident fully investigated under one policy will not be investigated under the other policies” (6.11 in GP 47) is confusing. Do Complainants need to choose one, and only one, policy under which to file their Report at the outset of the investigation process? What would happen if, in the course of the investigation, the investigator finds that a different policy — or more than one policy — may have been violated? We suggest that you clarify this statement to make the process more transparent.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. We look forward to your reply.