

December 10, 2025

Dear Catherine,

We, members of the SFU Academic Freedom Group and other concerned faculty members, are writing with feedback on the [Guidelines for Recruitment of Members of the Faculty Association](#), published in August 2025. This version is a big improvement over the draft version, released in September 2018. We appreciate that the guidelines now align more closely with BC employment law and the Collective Agreement. However, we remain troubled by some aspects of the revised version. We outline our concerns below (using the page numbers associated with the pdf file, not those printed in the document).

1. The new guidelines, like the draft guidelines, provide extensive suggestions for recruiting demographically diverse candidates (e.g., Section 2) but are largely silent on the matter of recruiting *excellent* candidates. This omission is serious, especially in the context of faculty hiring. We therefore urge that the guidelines be updated to include best practices for identifying, assessing, and recruiting excellent candidates.
2. While preferential/limited hiring of certain under-represented groups is allowed under the [BC Human Rights Code](#) (HRC), it is certainly not required — and it is highly contentious. The 2.5 pages dedicated to “Limited, Preferential and Special Programs Hiring” seem to encourage this practice, especially given the political commentary on p. 15 (“The special programs seek to address the systemic underrepresentation of Black and Indigenous faculty, which is a well-documented issue in Canada’s post-secondary landscape. Breaking the cycle of underrepresentation requires proactive steps and the approved special program is one of many steps on this journey.”). We ask that this commentary be removed. We also ask that the first sentence on p. 14 (“The Search Committee should consider whether the search should be conducted under a preferential or limited hiring process or a Special Program, approved by the BC Human Rights Commissioner”), which contains many instances of the word “should”, be replaced with language that makes clear that preferential/limited hiring is optional. For example, the following language could be adopted: “Optionally, the Search Committee may consider conducting the search under a preferential or limited hiring process or a Special Program, approved by the BC Human Rights Commissioner.”
3. The land acknowledgment (p. 4) is not obviously relevant to the purpose or content of this document, which concerns academic hiring and related governance principles. It should therefore be omitted. If retained, it should follow the standard institutional wording — “Simon Fraser University acknowledges...” (as on the [SFU home page](#)) — to clarify that the statement represents the view of the administration.
4. The discussion of academic freedom in item #3 on p. 6 is misplaced. Academic freedom is granted *after* a candidate is hired. So it does not explicitly connect to the recruitment and hiring process. Moreover, the item is supposed to describe one of the guidelines’ intentions,

but it is actually a commentary on the tension between academic freedom and EDI.¹ This commentary does not belong in these guidelines. We therefore ask that it be removed. Instead, we suggest focusing this item on academic excellence. We also suggest adding the following items:

- a. “Ensure that candidates understand their right to academic freedom if hired.”
 - b. “Ensure that the Search Committee, as per [section 13 of the HRC](#), understands that employers may not discriminate against prospective employees on the basis of any protected grounds, including (but not limited to) sex, race, age, place of origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and political belief (including beliefs about equity, diversity, and inclusion that extend beyond the HRC).”
5. On p. 6, one of the stated intentions of the guidelines is to “[e]nsure an employment environment which [sic] upholds... safety for all faculty”. This statement is misplaced; it does not relate to the recruitment or hiring processes. Moreover, “safety” is a rhetorically and politically charged term. Increasingly, it is used in academic contexts to refer not to physical safety but to protection from uncomfortable ideas and speech. Its use in the guidelines could be interpreted as a recommendation that Search Committees avoid hiring candidates whose ideas are controversial and/or different from currently accepted norms. For accuracy and clarity, we request that it be deleted.
 6. In section B on p. 10, the Search Committee should be further advised *not* to discriminate in favour of certain demographic groups (even those identified under section 42(1) of the HRC) unless the job advertisement states explicitly that members of those groups will be hired preferentially. Publicly advertising a position as open to all candidates while privately discriminating in favour of certain groups is unethical, if not unlawful.
 7. The guidelines state that “Faculties may develop supplementary training material independently so long as it is consistent with the University’s equitable-hiring material” (p. 12). Please make clear that “the University’s equitable-hiring material” is the material used for mandatory training of Search Committee members (as per the Collective Agreement). Please also clarify that Search Committee members’ use of any additional material developed by faculties is strictly **optional**.
 8. The guidelines state that the Chair should discuss “[h]ow Search Committee members will provide feedback in a manner that is supportive and considerate of the various ranks on the committee” (p. 13). Please clarify the meaning of this sentence.
 9. On p. 17, the guidelines recommend that, when developing job criteria, Search Committees “[c]onsider recognizing Indigenous and non-Western value systems”. A similar statement appears on p. 24. This recommendation is unduly narrow and prescriptive, implying that certain cultural or philosophical frameworks are institutionally preferred. Such direction may inadvertently advantage or disadvantage candidates on the basis of personal perspectives

¹ As an aside, a University of Alberta legal case is cited instead of the primary source, a 2015 University of Saskatchewan case.

or backgrounds. Recruitment criteria should not be designed to signal endorsement of specific value systems or cultural orientations. Accordingly, the recommendation in question should be revised to “Consider which value systems are used, and why, when developing job criteria”.

10. The guidelines recommend that job advertisements include a land acknowledgment (p. 20) and (in the case of preferential hiring of Indigenous scholars) additional commentary on the impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples on p. 38 (“We understand and acknowledge the deleterious effects of colonial and ongoing systems and structures...”). However, the purpose of these acknowledgments in the faculty recruitment setting is unclear — and risks implying that the academic unit expects alignment with a particular political position. Moreover, given the ongoing legal issues surrounding the recent [Cowichan Tribes decision](#) and its uncertain implications for private landowners in BC, land acknowledgements in job announcements may discourage some applicants — especially those from other provinces or international applicants — from applying to positions at SFU. Accordingly, both recommendations should be removed. Job advertisements should focus on the essential qualifications and scholarly excellence of candidates, consistent with the requirements of non-discriminatory, merit-based hiring as outlined by [SFU’s Human Rights Office](#) and the HRC.
11. On p. 28, the guidelines state that if Indigenous scholars are preferred, then the job advertisement should include the statement “Indigenous persons [sic] to Turtle Island (or global Indigenous persons) who belong to land based, self-determining distinct Indigenous societies and cultures are also encouraged to apply)”. Although the HRC allows discrimination in favour of Indigenous candidates in cases where Indigenous employees are underrepresented, “Indigenous” is defined as Indigenous to *Canada* (as per section 35 of the Constitution Act of 1982). We request that the legality of the preferential hiring of non-Canadian Indigenous candidates be investigated and that the guidelines be updated, if necessary.
12. On p. 29, the guidelines state that “[i]t is best practice during a site visit to provide candidates with the opportunity to speak with a peer... to gain lived experience”. We suggest that lived experience (by implication, of being employed at SFU) is unlikely to be acquired during an interview, and peers’ lived experience at SFU is unlikely to be representative of a candidate’s future experience. We therefore suggest removing the reference to gaining lived experience in this manner and instead focusing on the opportunity to speak with peers.
13. On p. 29, the guidelines recommend that each candidate be asked the same set of questions. While the intention of this practice is to ensure consistency of the interview process and mitigate the effects of hidden biases, an overly rigid process can, in fact, *introduce* bias. For example, on p. 29, the guidelines say, “It is important for an interviewer to be aware of a range of **expected** [emphasis added] answers to each question, which will inform their scoring of a candidate’s answers.” Going into the process with assumptions

about how applicants may answer questions risks formalizing our hidden biases and can have the unintended effect of disadvantaging applicants with non-traditional experiences and skills. Too much flexibility can allow for bias in the hiring process, but too much rigidity shifts the bias from one place (the interview) to another (the questions and rubrics). We therefore ask that the guidelines recommend a process that has the flexibility to allow applicants to share skills and experiences that are relevant to the position but that the committee may not have anticipated. Additionally, the guidelines should recommend that both the follow-up questions and rubric give the committee room to explore and recognize these skills and experiences. More broadly, the guidelines should remind the Search Committee at all stages of the process that the goal is to identify the candidates with skills and experiences relevant to the job.

14. On p. 31, the item “For preferential/limited Indigenous scholar hiring and all Indigenous scholars—a referral to complete the Welcoming Procedure” seems to be wrongly included as an option for proof of degree completion.
15. The guidelines allow academic units to require EDI statements from candidates (see p. 39). However, as explained in #4 above, discrimination against candidates on the basis of their political beliefs (including views on EDI that extend beyond the HRC) is expressly prohibited. The suggested language around these statements (e.g., “We seek a colleague whose professional track record illustrates our shared values” on p. 39) is especially troubling. A candidate cannot be expected to know the “shared values” of an academic unit, and in this context, the phrase may serve as coded language for requiring conformity with the unit’s views on EDI. Such an expectation is incompatible with the principles of academic freedom, intellectual diversity, and fair hiring and risks discouraging qualified applicants whose perspectives or backgrounds differ from prevailing political or institutional norms. Moreover, requiring an EDI statement confers an advantage to candidates who are “in the know” about the current language and viewpoint norms in Canadian academia (and a disadvantage to others, including, presumably, some non-Western and Indigenous candidates). In light of these concerns, the guidelines should be revised to prohibit mandatory EDI statements. Instead, they should note that candidates could submit service statements, in which applicants may *voluntarily* describe any relevant EDI-related experience or contributions. This approach aligns with the standard practice of evaluating current faculty on the three established domains of research, teaching, and service, ensuring consistency, fairness, and compliance with both human-rights protections and academic norms.
16. The guidelines contain many grammatical errors. Especially given that they are publicly available and a reflection on the university, they should be edited carefully.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,