

## Message from the Chair

Colleagues,

We have seen a number of developments since our last issue of *Collectively Speaking*.

We are working with the employer on a Letter of Understanding that will allow the use of sabbatical travel funds for other expenses in support of sabbatical projects or for deferred travel. We are hoping to have details worked out in the coming days.

We have agreed with the employer on eligibility of USFA members to participate in the option to access a one-time taxable allowance from their accountable professional expense fund. This allowance is to defray expenses associated with establishing a home office/remote workspace to conduct teaching, research, and related professional activities. This allocation of up to \$2,200 is without precedent or prejudice to continued use of the APEF in the manner it has always been used. Payments will be processed with the regular payroll and are subject to the same deductions as regular pay. We expect the current application window will be open until May 14, 2021, with a payment date of June 15, 2021, and that another application window will be open in June through to the end of July. This will allow anyone who has used up all of their 2020–21 professional expense allowance to request funds from their 2021–22 allocation. These dates are yet to be confirmed by the employer.

Keep in mind that purchases made with this one-time allowance will be your own property and maintenance will be your responsibility.

In recent weeks, the USFA Member Engagement Committee has met with Department Heads, Faculty Association Representatives, and small groups of members. These meetings have focused on assignment of duties, workload, and tenure and promotion. In terms of workload, USFA has noted an issue emerging that is specifically related to faculty at the ranks of Instructor and Lecturer. Units should keep in mind that, while teaching assignments for faculty at these ranks will not exceed 30 credit units per academic year, that maximum is not necessarily an appropriate teaching assignment in every circumstance. In fact, it should be uncommon, since that was the understanding we had with the Employer when we negotiated reinstatement of the rank of Instructor and clarification of the rank of Lecturer: the maximum was proposed as a limitation and not as an expansion. When compared to every other faculty member in an academic unit, even if an Instructor or Lecturer is assigned nothing else, 30 credit units of teaching is likely inequitable. Equitability is determined by comparison to the assignment of duties of others in an academic unit and, in some cases, by what was considered full-time work during any given term prior to the negotiated maximum.

Finally, we congratulate the members of the RSAW Committee of University Council, whose motion on the “active/inactive researcher” designation passed by a significant margin at Council on March 18. The motion read:

It is recommended that University Council support in principle a) the rejection of the use of “active/inactive” designations for researchers and b) the request that the Integrated Planning and Assessment Office and all other administrative units abandon the concept of and metrics associated with the designation of individual faculty members as “active” or “inactive” researchers for all planning and budgetary allocation purposes.

We have seen at USFA that this designation can be very damaging to individuals, not only because a “non-active researcher” designation is derogatory and insulting, especially when it is mis-applied due to a lack of recognition of what ought to “count” as research. The designation is also damaging in that it can be inherently racist if oral dissemination of knowledge rather than publication in peer-reviewed journals is the primary means of communicating a faculty member’s research

or scholarship—especially if a Dean declines to accept oral dissemination as a justification for designating that person as an “active” researcher. Units have been harmed by this designation as well in some cases where having too many faculty designated “inactive” resulted in a significantly increased teaching load for everyone in the unit, thus diminishing their ability to conduct research or scholarship. We hope Senior Leadership takes note of the strong endorsement by Council of this important motion.



Allison Muri, USFA Chair

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## USFA Opposes IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism

At its February 5 meeting, the USFA Executive Committee passed a motion to join the Academic Alliance Against Anti-Semitism, Racism and Colonialism in Canada initiative in opposing the [International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s \(IHRA\) Working Definition of Antisemitism](#).

The USFA opposes antisemitism and all forms of racism and hatred, and while the IHRA’s short definition itself seems innocuous, some of the examples of antisemitism intended as guidance pose a serious threat to academic freedom by equating criticism of Israel with antisemitism.

The IHRA definition can be used to censor political speech and restrict the academic freedom of teachers and researchers who have developed critical perspectives on the

policies and practices of the State of Israel and who conduct anti-racist and decolonial scholarship. The Canadian Association for University Teachers (CAUT) provides several examples in its [December-January 2021 Bulletin](#) of the IHRA definition being invoked both in Canada and internationally in order to brand support for Palestinian rights and criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic.

Several municipal councils have rejected efforts to implement the definition (including Calgary, Montreal, and Vancouver) and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association has [stated its opposition](#) to the international campaign for its adoption.

While there is pressure on Canadian university administrations to adopt the IHRA definition, to date no university or college in Canada has done so. The Canadian Federation of Students has [stat-](#)

[ed its support](#) for the stance of Independent Jewish Voices against the definition, the Association of Academic Staff University of Alberta has [declared that the IHRA definition poses a serious threat](#) to faculty members’ anti-racist initiatives and work to implement the Truth & Reconciliation Commission calls to action at the University of Alberta and within AASUA, and last October [faculty associations across Ontario passed motions to oppose Bill 168 in Ontario](#), which would enshrine into law the flawed definition of antisemitism and its illustrative examples.

The USFA is united with academic unions and other organizations across Canada in protecting the rights of our members to pursue and disseminate their research free from institutional censorship.

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## News and Information from CAUT

With the *CAUT Bulletin* currently not being delivered to campus mailboxes, you can [access the current issue](#), as well as past issues, on the CAUT website.

You can also subscribe to the *CAUT Newswire* to receive news and information via email. Scroll down on [CAUT’s homepage](#) to enter your contact information.

## External Relations: Meetings with USSU and GSA

Members of the USFA External Relations Committee have been meeting with representatives of the GSA and USSU regularly for several months now. These meetings have been informative for all of our organizations.

Both GSA and USSU report that, while some students are doing well, many are struggling in the pandemic environment due to financial challenges and poor mental health. The GSA is again offering *Empower Me*, a free 24/7 counselling service and is asking faculty to let students know this service is available. There is a prominent

link on the [GSA website's homepage](#) and the service is available to any U of S student.

Tuition increases have outraged many students, particularly because there is no real consultation with students in advance, despite that being a stated part of the process for setting tuition. Students are questioning the quality of their education and see no clear reason to increase tuition this year. Students feel frustrated and powerless. Increases to Graduate tuition is a major concern for faculty.

Communication with professors is still

a concern being voiced by students, though there has been some improvement in recent months. It was noted that with communication primarily by email right now and professors receiving upwards of a hundred emails daily, students are unlikely to get a fast response. It was also noted that many opportunities to interact with professors or to get help with course material has very low uptake by students.

These meetings will be continuing and we will continue to pass along information.

## Education for All

The [Education for All](#) campaign is a joint initiative of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, the Canadian Federation of Students, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the National Union of Public General and Public Employees. Their combined memberships of more than one million students and workers are putting forward a vision of a more affordable, accessible, high quality, publicly-funded post-secondary education system in Canada; a system that is ready to take on the challenges of today and tomorrow.

The coalition released a report on February 16, highlighting the struggling education sector, and making an urgent call for a national strategy.

From the report's executive summary:

Participating in high-quality PSE not only helps individuals to achieve higher earnings and a

longer, better quality of life; our universities, colleges, and polytechnics make many important social, cultural, and economic contributions, raising the quality of life for all. High-quality post-secondary education is also essential to a robust democracy and to the research and civic engagement that are necessary to address some of our most challenging social, economic, and environmental problems today and tomorrow.

Yet access to PSE is increasingly a challenge for many low- and middle-income Canadians and residents. Some are unable to attend at all due to cost; but the economic importance of post-secondary education means that many more are attending even though they cannot afford to do so, leaving them burdened with significant debt.

Meanwhile, post-secondary education workers are being forced into increasingly precarious employment or seeing their positions contracted out to private, for-profit employers,

while also being expected to deliver the highest-quality education and to engage in the foundational research necessary to unlock the best potential of our citizens and our country.

Our system is surviving on the exploitation of international students and a highly precarious workforce, while many students - especially low-income students, Indigenous, Black, and racialized students, and persons living with disabilities - are either excluded or marginalized. Embracing Education for All would have many benefits for our country and our communities, for research and policy, and for students, graduates, and workers at our post-secondary institutions. It would help to promote equity, reconciliation and social inclusion. It is an essential element of any post-COVID just recovery plan.

Read the full report here: <https://www.educationforall.ca/resources>.

## What are your thoughts about returning to campus?

The *Saskatchewan Employment Act* provides workers with the right to refuse work if they

reasonably believe they are being asked to engage in work that is “unusually dangerous” to their health or safety. The legislation does not define what unusually dangerous means. Instead, employers are expected to either take sufficient steps to satisfy workers that they are not at risk or have the occupational health committee investigate and determine whether the workers’ concerns are founded.

The Administration has expressed a desire to have faculty resume teaching, research and service from campus as soon as it is safe to do so. While

the Administration has obligations to accommodate specific individuals with underlying health concerns and caregiving responsibilities, the majority of faculty will be expected to return to campus under whatever business-as-usual looks like.

The USFA wants to ensure that faculty voices are heard and are considered before the Administration decides what steps are sufficient to address the risk of COVID infections on campus. Please respond to this email to share your views on what steps need to be in place to ensure you are safe working on campus. The questions below are provided to get the conversation started.

- Should vaccination be a pre-

requisite to returning to campus for anyone eligible to be vaccinated? If yes, what should be done for international students who may be coming from jurisdictions where vaccines are not available?

- How frequently should public spaces be cleaned?
- Should access to buildings be limited to those with offices, labs, or classes in those buildings?
- Where should students go between classes?
- How should the Administration handle a positive COVID case in a classroom in the middle of the term or in a shared departmental office?

What do you think? [Let us know by email.](#)

## USFA Executive Committee Elections

Nominations for USFA Executive Committee elections close at 11:59 p.m. on March 24. While not the only way to be involved in the work of the Association, being elected to the Executive is one of the most in depth ways to be involved. There are approximately two Executive meetings per month and, depending on the particular interests of those elected to the Executive, the opportunity to be on various Association Committees.

This is a very unusual year in that there are 9 vacancies to be filled:

- two vacancies (one is a 1 year term, one is a 2 year term) from among those members holding the rank of Instructor, Lecturer, Special Lecturer, Assistant Librarian or Assistant Professor
- two vacancies (one is a 1 year term, one is a 2 year term) from among those holding the rank of

Associate Professor or Associate Librarian

- one vacancy (2 year term) from among those holding the rank of Professor or Librarian
- one vacancy (2 year term) for an equity officer
- three vacancies (one is a 1 year term, two are a 2 year term) from the membership at large.

In 2019 the USFA Constitution was amended to create two Equity Officer positions on the Executive Committee. Last year the first Equity Officer was elected to a two-year term. This year there is a vacancy for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Equity Officer. Equity Officers may be from among the membership at large.

Section 8(e) of the USFA Constitution states:

The Equity Officers shall:  
 Co-chair, where appropriate, equity committees of the Association.

Identify ways that the Association can improve equity within the Association.

Advocate for equity issues on behalf of our members.

Possible equity areas include but are not limited to the following groups: Women, LGBTQ2S, BIPOC. Equity officers have the opportunity to create social connections within the USFA community and to develop special interest caucuses to provide information to the executive that can be used in collective bargaining and the development of collegial standards. Individuals nominated for an equity officer position are asked to identify the equity area of interest and consider how they will advance the concerns of the identified group through their role on USFA executive.

[Nomination forms are available by contacting the USFA Office.](#)

## USFA Scholarship: Apply Online, Deadline June 1, 2021

**Online applications for the USFA Scholarship will be accepted until 11:59 p.m. Tuesday, June 1, 2021.**

The USFA Scholarship Program is open to students who are immediate family members of USFA members. Immediate family includes spouse/partner, sons, daughters or children whom USFA members have served as legal guardians.

The **application form** for the 2020-2021 USFA Scholarship Fund Program is **now available exclusively online** at: [paws.usask.ca/go/awards](https://paws.usask.ca/go/awards). Students can apply online through their PAWS account as follows:

Log into the **Scholarships and Bursaries** channel in PAWS: [paws.usask.ca/go/awards](https://paws.usask.ca/go/awards)

Click on the green **“Apply for awards”** button

Click on the **“Select Application Form”** scroll-down menu under **“Current Students”**

Select the **“2020-2021 USFA Tuition Scholarship Fund Application”**; click **“Apply”**

Once the student has completed the application, an automated email will be sent to the Faculty member’s University of Saskatchewan email address prompting them to go into the ASPA/USFA Award Relationship Verification channel in PAWS and confirm the relationship with the applicant. **Both the student and the faculty member will get a confirmation email that the application has been successfully submitted. If you do not get the confirmation email please contact student awards immediately at 306-966-2897.**

Each year \$250,000 is contributed to the USFA Scholarship Fund. The \$250,000 is divided by the number of credit units eligible applicants have successfully completed for credit courses taken in the 2020-2021 academic year (May 1, 2020-April 30, 2021). Eligible students graduating in 2021 can still receive the award for courses taken in the 2020-2021 academic year, even if they are not taking any further courses at the University. **Credits completed after April 30 2021 will not be counted for this year’s application, as per the scholarship terms of reference, so 3<sup>rd</sup> year medical students who complete their credit units after April 30 2021 even though they start their studies during the 2020-2021 academic year can apply for next year’s scholarship.** Recipients will be emailed in late July 2021 with the results of their application.

Scholarship money will be applied directly to the recipient’s student account. Any balance of account, after outstanding tuition and fees are paid, will be refunded by cheque and will be mailed to the student’s address listed on PAWS. Please note that if the scholarship is awarded to a non-eligible applicant steps will be taken to recover the amount awarded.

For further information contact Awards and Financial Aid at [awards@usask.ca](mailto:awards@usask.ca) or 306-966-2897 or the Faculty Association Office at [usfa@usaskfaculty.ca](mailto:usfa@usaskfaculty.ca) or 966-5611.