



university of saskatchewan
faculty association

Collectively Speaking

October 2021

Message from the Chair

I am new to the role of Chair, but not new to the work of the Association. As the former Senior Grievance Officer, I spent most of my time fixing problems. Sometimes, our members were the problem. I was always prepared to have difficult conversations with our members because, despite what the Administration often says, USFA is interested in the well-being of the University of Saskatchewan.

We have bargained for collegial processes in hiring, tenure and promotion, and salary review to ensure that the qualifications and performance of those primarily tasked with delivering the research and teaching mission of the University are peer reviewed based on meaningful criteria. These processes safeguard the integrity and quality of the institution's research and academic programs. We are insistent that these processes are followed because we care about the University of Saskatchewan's well-being.

But instead of relying on these processes, the Administration increasingly views all USFA members with suspicion. They have created policies and procedures

under the guise of streamlining, identifying and promoting efficiencies, and improving and supporting the quality of the work we do that have the opposite effect. Recent changes to the rules around IT purchases, mobile phone use, and booking travel are prime examples. What is more likely the true motivation behind these changes is someone in administration identifying a "potential" for abuse and instead of assessing the actual likelihood of that abuse or dealing with actual abuse when it arises, the Administration promulgates rules and procedures and applies them to everyone.

If the Administration actually viewed us as partners, they would start by inviting the Association to the table to discuss problems and collaboratively identify solutions to those problems. Instead, we are "informed" of decisions that are already made and then must work to address unforeseen consequences of these decisions. We were recently approached to discuss a new policy on sharing intellectual property. The changes the employer proposed would have wide-reaching effect across campus, yet they only spoke to a small subset of our members to whom they felt the changes would

be of relevance. All that work, including the work of our members who participated in the drafting of that policy now must be reconsidered.

Likewise, I am very appreciative that the Pandemic Response Team (PRT) has regularly updated USFA of the decisions it has made. Nonetheless, why isn't USFA at the PRT table? PRT's decisions directly impact the working conditions of faculty and librarians. It is also our members who interact daily with students. USFA can anticipate the challenges of implementing those decisions because we have a deep understanding of the diversity of teaching and research our members do.

Until the Administration wants to treat us as partners, the USFA can continue to play defense and push back all of the Administration's ill-advised decisions that either get in the way or make it harder for our members to do the work they were hired to do. Or, the USFA can go on the offensive. As Chair, I am curious about your thoughts on what path USFA should take.

Patricia Farnese, Chair

Working Safely Together On Campus

On September 29th a student was sexually assaulted in the Arts Building on the main Saskatoon campus. The assailant was not known to the victim-survivor and was not a member of the university community.

Following this disturbing incident, the Office of the Vice Provost Teaching and Learning alerted the university community, recommended that people use staffed spaces at the university for working and studying and that we call Protective Services if we would “like” assistance moving about the campus. In the short term, while the perpetrator was at large, these recommendations seem sound. However, they do not address the broader issue of the safety of personnel inside buildings. The suspect was apprehended several days later based on a university surveillance camera and police investigation. We must thank everyone who helped to respond after the attack. Now that there has been an arrest made, there is time to take a breath, pause and consider what the attack tells us about our campus environment and what we might work to change as we move forward.

First, research shows that women, LGBTQ2 and BIPOC persons alter their behaviour and mobility to reduce the greater volume and risk of violence that they face in society. In other words, “vulnerable peoples,” do a lot of preventative work already to in-

crease safety. This tells us that instructing people to restrict their activity to staffed areas, might be a reasonable short-term reaction, but it is a weak institutional response overall. It perpetuates the offloading of risk management to groups who are already doing what they can to stay safe. Incidents like this serve as a warning to women and other marginalized groups that their rights to work and study in safety are not assured. Thus, a robust institutional and policy response requires measures that mitigate obvious exposure to risk of harm.

Second, the attack makes clear that the security supports that we do have are primarily reactive. In this tragic incident, the assailant was caught on a university surveillance camera, which was critical to discerning their identity *following* the attack. Cuts to Protective Services have reduced staffing to three officers and one dispatcher per night for the entire campus, with implications to response times and presence inside buildings. Low staffing levels indicate that Protective Services is not equipped to function as a large-scale escort service, even if people wanted them to. Although surveillance cameras and security personnel help respond to events that have already taken place, it is unlikely that they prevent attacks at the current staffing level. Further, while the university provides an emergency app for smart phones, how does one realistically call for help when struggling with a physical attack?

Third, the attack tells us that there are insufficient restrictions to public access inside buildings during routine working hours. With some classes running until 10 pm, some research activities continuing through the night, and many tasks occurring outside of “staffed” areas inside offices, lab spaces, or study spaces, it is unrealistic to close off staffed spaces. However, many university buildings, including those with laboratory spaces and housing expensive instruments, remain open late without any restricted access. Some buildings with around the clock service units are completely unsecured and unrestricted, including rooms containing controlled substances and upper floors where faculty and staff offices are located.

Finally, the paucity of security measures within the built environment of our campus contributes to creating vulnerable spaces and risk to the campus community. Many offices and rooms are shuttered by solid wood doors where it is not possible to see inside or outside to make an informed judgment about whether to open a door. In some buildings hallways are automated to darken before sundown, which may contribute to both perceptual and actual risk. Many rooms are set back from hallways and many halls and doors are narrow, limiting lines of sight and escape. More thought is needed in balancing the need for access to quiet work and study spaces with safety and security.

These issues highlight some obvious risks that could easily be mitigated.

U of S Works Because We do

The installation of windows or peek holes in doors, and lighting with extended hours of operation or which is more responsive to movement, would go a long way to improving safety. Restricting or regulating access to side doors and sequestered areas when in-person activity is lower, are also important considerations for some units. Using keypads with codes or cards especially for laboratory spaces, as is done at other campuses, would provide more security. Faculty must play a central role in determining whether and how such protocols should work and where and when they are appropriate. Faculty supervisors also have a role to play in advising and empowering their students and mentees about safety procedures in labs and offices. If you have noticed insecurities in your work environment that concern you, please raise it with your USFA representative, department head or Dean.

The USFA is in regular communication with the other unions representing U of S employees. Campus union representatives meet almost monthly to hear about labour relations experiences, and to discuss differences and commonalities.

At the most recent meeting much of the discussion centered on experiences union members are having during this pandemic-related “transitional term.” All campus unions are receiving pandemic updates from the Employer. Every union reported that members are relieved that immunization and testing requirements have been implemented to increase workplace safety. For many members of CUPE 1975, who cannot work remotely and have been off work since the university closed in March of 2020, hearing

that vaccinations or testing were going to be required on U of S campuses was welcome news.

Mental health and increasing mental illness among university employees was also discussed. Questions were asked about the level of service possible through the U of S EFAP. CUPE 1975 is considering ways to raise awareness among its members, and generally on campus, and invited the other unions to partner in these efforts.

Both CUPE 1975 and CUPE 3287 are at the bargaining table and ASPA, whose collective agreement with the university expires in the spring, has commenced preparations for its next round of bargaining.

We will continue to meet with other campus unions and keep you informed.

Meetings With Students Continuing

USFA representatives will again be meeting regularly with representatives from USSU and GSA during the upcoming academic year.

Earlier this month members of the USFA External Relations Committee met with representatives from USSU. A good deal of discussion at the meeting related to course delivery. We heard some students are expressing concern that faculty are unresponsive to alternatives when missing classes due to illness.

We expressed the hope that the USSU and USFA can work together

on issues such as this that are impacting both faculty and students. Remote and hybrid course delivery has increased the work of faculty without a corresponding decrease in other areas of work. We are teaching more students, there are less faculty, and all other work-related commitments remain. A push for faculty to do more with less, which began before the pandemic, continues and a result is the impact it has on students.

USSU representatives also told us that mental health is still an issue for many students. Available services are

stretched, and some non-urgent cases may wait weeks for help. As Professors, we are an important point of contact for students. [Information about resources for students is available online](#). In addition, there are a variety of workshops available for students, faculty and staff. Learn more about them at: <https://students.usask.ca/health/centres/student-affairs-and-outreach.php#WellnessWorkshops>.