

Message from the Chair

Have you read the Collective Agreement? If you have not, you should. If you have, you should read it again. The Agreement is unique when compared to other agreements and parts of it have changed very little since it was first written. Not only is collegial decision making a central premise, but the Agreement is framed in a way that recognizes the important role faculty have as employees of the university.

The first three articles of the Agreement are not long. However, they set out fundamental principles for the relationship between the USFA and its members and the employer, and present what is the most unique feature of the Collective Agreement. There are commitments to respect for collegial decision making, cooperation in the successful operation of the university, promotion of harmonious relations between the employer and employees, and facilitation of “the peaceful settlement of all disputes and grievances affecting the terms and conditions of employment.” There is also an agreement that the Joint Committee for the Management of the Agreement will be the vehicle for resolving matters not covered in the Agreement.

In addition, unlike other Collective

Agreements, our employer does not have exclusive rights to manage the affairs of the University. The employer’s decisions must be consistent with provisions of the Agreement and neither the employer nor the USFA has a unilateral or superior right to determine the proper decision or course of action for “disputes over matters that are within the bilateral jurisdiction of the Employer and the Association.”

The challenge facing us in our relationship with the Employer is that each party can choose how to live up to these contractual agreements.

In this issue of *Collectively Speaking*, we have three articles about the Employer’s choices. One article is about ICT and how their choices are impacting faculty. Another article is about the Employer’s choice to amalgamate three departments in the College of Arts and Science. The third article is about the College of Nursing and how faculty are exercising their choices. A common theme in all these examples is the Employer’s choice to not involve faculty in decision-making and problem-solving. A truly insightful administration would engage the collec-

tive knowledge of faculty, unmatched in this province, in active vigorous debate to solve problems and aid in making the best decisions possible to move our university forward.

Before I close, I want to note that the Collective Agreement is not the only thing providing guidance and direction at our university. [The Association has talked about this before](#). Provincial legislation puts academic matters under the auspices of University Council and Council under the auspices of the General Academic Assembly, which is [scheduled to meet April 6](#). Except for a handful of academic administrators, a few representatives from federated or affiliated colleges and student representatives, both bodies are comprised of academic employees of the U of S – you.

It is the role of University Council to make decisions about the academic directions of the U of S. The USFA Executive actively supports members in their role to participate in the dialogue and decision-making associated with the work of Council. We should not be afraid to voice our opinions and express our concerns about our workplace and the academic mission for which we as faculty are responsible. Academic

Freedom is a fundamental principle protected by Article 6 in our Collective Agreement. It states that all USFA members, “whether tenured or not and regardless of prescribed doctrine, are entitled to the exercise of their rights as citizens and to freedom in carrying out research and in publishing its results, freedom of discussion, freedom to teach the subject assigned in classes, freedom to criticize the University and the Association without suffering censorship or discipline.”

It is the role of the USFA to enforce our Collective Agreement and support our members in exercising their academic freedom and collegial responsibility. The USFA Executive is committed to upholding the rights of members to exercise their academic freedom, including their right to participate fully in collegial decision-making.

Faculty must choose to stand up and exercise their collegial governance rights. Become engaged and express your opinions, whatever they happen to be.

It’s about choice.

Geraldine Balzer

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

ICT has been busy stealthily creating new guiding documents and updating existing policy over the last few years, unfortunately, without any meaningful consultation with faculty. The University’s [Data Management Policy](#) from 2005 was amended in 2017, and enriched recently (in July 2021) with other important documents, which are not policies approved by a Governance body, but “Architectures” ([Enterprise Architecture](#)), “Frameworks” ([Data Management Framework](#)) and “Procedures” ([Risk-Management Procedure](#)), all with additional guidelines and classifications ([classification of data types and applications considered “Safe” or “Unsafe”](#)). These documents were probably approved by some internal ICT committees and were likely prepared by external consultants (judging by the language used, e.g. “enterprise,” “stakeholders,” “customers,” “business units”). If one reads these documents and thinks of computing infrastructure handling administrative data (i.e. data about student enrollment, grades, and financial data) and employee data, (i.e. administrative data), the principles and regulations make sense. However, if one attempts to read these documents as regulating research computing and research data, red flags fly and alarms blast at nearly every line.

Some of the principles espoused in

these documents, e.g., “Control Diversity” in the Enterprise Architecture could be justified if they concerned the IT infrastructure of a primary school, bank, or a military unit, but are totally inapplicable and counter-indicated for a large research-oriented university. Some of these policies and related regulations seem to have been updated in response to [Tri-Council requirements](#); however, due to the lack of consultation with faculty, the main intention of these requirements has been twisted. Instead of ensuring FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) research data management, we now have a system that locks away data and the computers needed to produce it.

These guiding documents, procedures, and regulations have been developed out of sight and then aggressively applied by ICT during the emergency of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Faculty have been astounded by the new rules, which are inadequate to meet the needs of—and indeed impede—research, scholarly, and artistic work. Instead, they have resulted in a complicated bureaucratic process of permissions, confusion, waiting, and failure to ensure a robust and open research data environment.

With these policies and related procedures, frameworks and regulations, it impossible for the University

to achieve [University Plan 2025 Commitments](#): “*Courageous curiosity, Boundless collaboration, Inspired Communities.*” How can faculty be courageously curious when our computers are locked down and we are unable to buy a piece of computing equipment or install new software (even renew an existing software license) that meets the requirements of the research and the granting agency, without going through a painfully slow and confusing approval process by ICT “security experts” who do not know the specific needs of our research? The process can take weeks or even months. How can we engage in boundless collaboration, when our data is locked up in OneDrive or DataStore, not easily accessible, even for faculty who created the data, due to constant authentication requests? How can we be inspired or inspire communities that we partner with when instead of exploring new research horizons, we are locked down in a maze of Kafkaesque approval processes, eating our time, energy, and mental health?

A university needs diversity to feed creativity and wide exploration. This is not limited to human resources but applies to IT resources as well. The decision of ICT to limit the entire university to one Windows platform and Lenovo computers may be profitable in the short term (reminiscent of the controversial exclusive contracts with Pepsi and then Coca-Cola in the 1990s) but they are extremely

short-sighted when applied to the core research infrastructure, which relies on computers. Discouraging Mac and Linux as platforms cuts out the most advanced, modern, and forward looking hardware and software, limiting researchers to using a single, closed, enterprise oriented platform that is famous for bugs, security holes, performance issues, and poor documentation and support. [IT Requisitions](#) provides choices of 2 computer configurations, 2 laptops, 1 desktop, and 3 macs (with disclaimer, discouraging their purchase). While the computers are not bad per se, they are overpriced and utterly insufficient to cover all the needs for computing on Campus. Restricting faculty to purchasing these without options of upgrades, reconfigurations, or easily ordering completely different machines limits that diversity feeding creativity and wide exploration, as well as reducing productivity and efficiency, and impeding our ability to do our work.

Instead of facilitating research, these policies and their enforcement through process show clearly that faculty are not trusted by ICT and the University Administration. The response is distrust in return, frustration, lost time and funding. Students and staff wait for equipment and software to be approved and purchased or installed, their research stalled, research funding depleted in paying salaries for months of waiting, research contracts and student graduations delayed, students in desperate economic situations (still having to pay fees, of

course). In this situation, faculty have very few options left to do their jobs:

1) Quit doing research that requires anything more than MS Office on one of the two allowed computers to purchase by ICT; retire or leave the University to continue their research at a more research-welcoming institution.

2) Self-fund their research. They can buy the computers and software needed privately from their own salary. This would enable them to continue their research, but would violate the [Data-Storage and Data-Handling Guideline](#) and make them targets for non-compliance measures: withdrawal of access to University infrastructure and potentially disciplinary measures. In addition, if they do not use their grants according to the purpose for which the funds were allocated, they can be clawed back by the Research Councils for violating Tri-Council policies or for too high residual at year end.

3) Purchase equipment through the ICT process and uninstall the control software ICT has placed on every new purchased computer to lock it up and make it remotely managed. Becoming administrator of the computer purchased with grant funds would allow managing it but software purchase and updates would still require ICT approval. This approach also violates ICT policy.

Unfortunately, the unreasonably rigid policies of ICT raise cynicism and turn many faculty, staff, and stu-

dents on Campus into violators, vulnerable to disciplinary actions. Many faculty, staff, and students are resorting to one of those three options with respect to different research activities, equipment, or software purchases, just to be able to do their research, fearing “crackdown” and penalties.

The effects of these policies, procedures, and measures are demoralizing. Faculty do not feel supported, respected, and trusted, but instead are burdened, prevented from and prosecuted for doing the research for which they wrote successful grant proposals, using facilities they equipped with grant funding they secured, and educating the students they are funding. All of this, because of paranoid ICT safeguarding policies that may be appropriate in a military facility, but are certainly not appropriate in a university that the World Needs...

The ICT infrastructure is not the sole responsibility of the University’s administration. Since nearly all of faculty’s work is now done on computers, it is our workplace environment. It is the responsibility of the Employer to provide an appropriate workplace that supports the work of faculty, whether teaching, research, and administrative activities. This can not be done without real consultation with faculty (not only with consultants) and considering their needs.

USFA members have been sharing their difficult experiences with administrative processes at the U of S, including experiences with

ICT, through a [Google Doc](#). Following are some of those experiences:

- Removing admin rights and requiring faculty to go through approval process for every software purchase that is not on the pre-approved list, or existing software update, upgrade or extension creates is an extremely time-consuming and frustrating process resulting in unacceptable delays in research (not weeks, but months), and impacting commitments made to research partners and collaborators, progress on funded grants, student completion, and big human and monetary costs.
- Any changes require admin privileges, and many hours spent in calling ICT helpdesk, sending emails and waiting for help. Taking off admin privileges of our computers is a ridiculous idea. We need to install software constantly, update expiring licenses, get new versions or existing software. Doing this requires emailing, scheduling appointments with ICT, sometimes weeks ahead, and waiting.
- The software approval process is slow and cumbersome. It requires filing tickets that often bounce around to different people, every new person uninformed of the history and the problem. Even simple renewal of software licenses can take weeks of expensive faculty time and adds to the already very high workload of faculty.
- The controls on laboratory/research computers causes no end of difficulty. In many labs there are multiple pieces of equipment with

networking capabilities that are operated by computers. None of the systems can be used to full capacity because IT will only allow them on the network if they are set up with their management systems. Most of these machines have been set and calibrated by the manufacturer and there is no guarantee that installing the IT management software won’t interfere or cause functional issues. The software is usually not on the pre-approved IT list, since IT does not understand the specific needs of the research.

- Support for Mac users is non-existent. There are many faculty who use Macs, and they are basically “off the grid”, left on their own. If service is provided (this was earlier in the fall), it consisted of erasing the drive and reinstalling everything, locking it up with no admin rights. As a result research software is gone, needs to be reinstalled, and the computer is unusable, because faculty has no privileges to install it, it has to go through approval process which will take weeks if not months. Many Mac users could more easily repair their own machines, or obtain aid via services such as applecare but this is made difficult for those who do not have administrative access.
- The purchasing of new computers has been limited to 2 Lenovo Windows configurations which may be suitable for administration tasks, but are certainly insufficient for the wide variety of research that con-

ducted on Campus.

- Purchasing software and hardware from IT Requisition requires permission. Even for a mouse. Why? Doesn't Connection Point not trust us to buy even a mouse without a permission from a people leader and a dean anymore?
- If one wants to purchase a different computer for research needs

that have been approved by granting Council, People leader etc. but decides to skip the formal process due to lack of time or patience, one has to pay privately for the equipment and the software. This makes the researcher "rogue" as not compliant to IT policies. The same happens if one deinstalls the

operating system and control software on the newly purchased (following to the process) and installs the software (open source) in order to be able to use it for research. In this way researchers who just want to do their job are forced to violate the policies and regulations.

Nursing Faculty Are Choosing to Take Action

Faculty in the College of Nursing have chosen to take action.

Faculty put forward and passed a motion of no-confidence in the College's Executive Team at the March 4th meeting of the College Council. The motion passed with an overwhelming majority of 51 (67.1%) Faculty Council members in favour, 20 (26.3%) against, and 5 abstentions (6.6%) despite 11 deans and directors, voting members from other colleges, who had never before attended a Council meeting being invited to this meeting.

In addition, a letter has been submitted to the College of Registered Nurses of Saskatchewan (CRNS) expressing concerns of a dangerously depleted clinical teaching environment. Nursing students and faculty both expressed serious concerns about the safety of patients and the quality of their education.

Faculty are frustrated and exhausted. Problems within the College have been raised for years by faculty and by the USFA, yet they

remain unaddressed. Funding and governance issues have exacerbated over the past several years and faculty's attempts to work collaboratively with the college's Executive Team have failed. Deadlines for collegial processes (assignment of duties, tenure and promotion) agreed upon in the Collective Agreement are being missed. Faculty are routinely intimidated and bullied for critiquing the College's Executive Team. The lack of consultation on closing the College's Regina campus and redistributing program seats was the straw that broke the camel's back.

The funding issues in the College stem from Board of Governor's choice of budgeting system, the "Transparent, Activity-Based Budget System" (TABBS), which does not serve the college well. Since introduced in 2014, the college has had its budget cut severely, multiple millions of dollars per year. The most recent budget cuts will have serious long-term consequences for patient

safety and health outcomes in Saskatchewan.

The College has lost faculty. Teaching loads have increased substantially, class/group sizes have ballooned, clinical placement time has decreased, and further workload increases are proposed for the upcoming academic year. Faculty cannot rise through the academic ranks because they are too busy teaching to engage properly in the required research and publication activities expected of them. The deteriorating working conditions in Nursing that are well-known across the country have resulted in serious faculty retention and recruitment issues.

The College has had five deans in the last six years and, while the current dean has only been in the position for seven months, other members of the College's Executive Team have been in their roles for several years. The announcement to close the Regina Campus was made by the current dean. However, it is doubtful that the choice to close the campus

was made in the last seven months.

Administration has chosen to not be transparent. Decisions have been made without discussion or consultation with college faculty. There has been no opportunity for faculty to work collaboratively with administration or explore alternatives to lessen the impacts of recent decisions, particularly those related to the rural and remote distributed “Learn where you Live” model of education used by the College or the teaching and learning needs of nursing students and nursing educators. If a plan for the implementation of decisions to close the Regina campus and redistribute seats exists, it has not been shared with the Association.

This unprecedented vote and letter to CRNS may well have been avoided if administration had chosen to be transparent and include faculty in their decision-making process. Despite U of S administrators regularly stating consultation will be a step in their decision-making processes, that is often not the case. Meetings are held, reports and updates are provided. However, there is no effort to seek input from university employees about their view of situations, or their suggestions for problem solving or options. Town hall meetings take place with no opportunity for questions or discussion. There are, however, efforts to silence and bully those who offer dissenting perspectives or ask questions in an attempt to understand

the reasoning behind decisions made without transparency.

We will never know what could have happened if university and college administration had been transparent and engaged in consultation with faculty, students and employees in the College of Nursing. However, university and college administrators could make different choices. Rather than making a decision and reporting it, they can choose to truly consult. They can choose to create and support an environment where it is safe to express dissenting perspectives. They can choose to be more transparent in decision-making processes, and they can choose a different budgeting system.

It’s about choice.

Amalgamation of Academic Units

Recently USFA met with faculty from the Departments of Art and Art History, Drama, and Music who have been advised that their three departments are going to be amalgamated into one. A former U of S senior administrator has been hired to lead the amalgamation process and apparently there are already funds earmarked to recruit a faculty member to be the first Head of the combined unit.

The characterization of this decision as one that has already been made by Senior Administration is unacceptable. The Collective Agreement requires University

Council to decide to establish or disestablish departments, schools, colleges, and similar academic structures. This includes an amalgamation of departments as that requires a decision to establish a new department and to disestablish existing departments (see Definition of “Academic Unit,” p. 2, and Article 28.3).

Amalgamating the Departments of Art and Art History, Drama and Music is a choice that should be made by Council, and driven by clear need. The choice announced to Department Heads is not predicated on

need, or if it is, that need has yet to be clearly articulated.

Reasons for amalgamating these departments is unclear, except faculty have been told the impetus is not financial. Reasons given include enrolment, low departmental profile, lack of connection to institutional priorities, and small departmental sizes. However, available data shows enrollment has been stable. The belief that these departments and their faculty have a low profile, and that what they do is not connected to institutional priorities has been pointed out to be false. The U of S is the only

U15 institution without the arts represented in its signature areas and the Senior Administration could have chosen to include the fine and performing arts as an institutional priority. Similarly, the justification that amalgamation is needed because these are small departments is weak: other departments in the College of Arts and Science are smaller.

This is a troubling development. Not because departments are being amalgamated, which has happened here before, but because the choice to amalgamate was made by administration without consultation with Department Heads or department faculty. Even faculty who can see great things happening from these three departments joining feel personally hurt and betrayed by the

way this is happening: “Why couldn’t they be honest and transparent about it, so we could get behind it?” one said.

Our colleagues are in the best situation to determine what is best for them and their academic programs. We need to listen to them and support them in their efforts to do what they believe is best.

It’s about choice.