

Okanagan Bulletin

Happiness: Not Happening at UBCO

MICHAEL PIDWIRNY, FIRST VICE-CHAIR, OKANAGAN FACULTY COMMITTEE

It is well known that workplace happiness strongly influences employee productivity. Happy workers also tend to be physically and mentally more healthy which reduces the number of workdays lost to sickness. Because of these connections, many employers of highly skilled workers invest a lot of time and money into managing employee morale. According to what I have seen and heard, UBC is also well aware of the benefits of happy workers. To this end, our employer has created an initiative called "Focus on People" that has the mandate to improve the morale and welfare of faculty and staff.

In February 2009, UBC surveyed staff and faculty across both campuses to gather information about the state of the workplace environment. Okanagan Campus response rate for faculty was approximately 30%, which is 2.5 times higher than the response rate for Point Grey faculty. The outcomes of this survey were presented in the summer of 2009 at "Focus on People" Town Hall meetings (which were poorly attended by faculty). The remainder of this article will focus only on one obvious outcome of this survey. That being, when compared to Canadian norms, job satisfaction was abysmally low for faculty at the Okanagan Campus. Further, faculty morale is significantly higher (but still

below the norm) at the Vancouver Campus, indicating that Okanagan specific drivers of dissatisfaction are in play. More information about the survey and its results can be found at the following web address:
www.focusonpeople.ubc.ca/sharingconnecting/workplacesurvey.html

Way before this survey, I had the gut feeling that morale at the Okanagan Campus had dropped significantly since the take over in the summer 2005. This feeling was based on numerous one-on-one discussions with UBCO faculty, the proportion of filed grievances coming from the Okanagan Campus, and by the sheer number of faculty medical leaves over the last four and half years. I also believe that I have a good understanding of what factors are responsible for our poor morale. I will identify and explain these factors in detail in the next Okanagan Bulletin. My sense is that the decline in morale has been caused by lack of respect and administrative processes that were unrealistic, chaotic, and inconsistent.

So what is the next step for the "Focus on People" survey initiative at UBC, and in particular for the Okanagan Campus? I think faculty at UBCO would be thrilled to be at the same level of job satisfaction as our Vancouver colleagues even



though their level of satisfaction is below the Canadian norms. Maybe we should aspire to be even more satisfied with our jobs! Considering that the results of the survey have been out for almost six months, I would expect that our senior administrators must have given this issue some thought and are in the process of developing a plan of action. Administrators responsible for drafting this plan should include Doug Owrarn, Alaa Abd-El-Aziz, and Jackie Podger. Further, I would like to invite them to explain this plan to UBCO faculty.

Labour Relations at UBCO

JIM JOHNSON, CHAIR, OKANAGAN FACULTY COMMITTEE

The term “labour relations” refers to the ongoing relationship between the University, as an employer, and the Faculty Association, as a union. Both parties have a statutory obligation to work cooperatively in resolving workplace issues, adapting to changing conditions, developing workforce skills, developing a workforce and a workplace that promotes productivity, and promoting conditions favourable to the orderly, constructive and expeditious settlement of disputes. You would think it would also be in the self-interest of the employer to act this way, and it usually is. Over the years we’ve managed to maintain pretty good labour relations here even during budgetary crises and during times when we had to deal with difficult personalities in senior management positions. Things kind of went pear-shaped in 2005 when we lost a lot of the Human Resources Department and the expertise and experience they embodied. Since then labour relations have been a bit up and down, but over the past year things had gotten progressively worse, to such an extent that the university refused to even discuss disputes with us informally, and insisted that every problem be dealt with formally in writing – a sure fire way to prevent constructive problem solving.

The BC Labour Relations Board offers a very useful program called the Relationship Enhancement Program (REP), which is intended for employers and unions who are experiencing difficulties in their ongoing relationship and who are interested in establishing and maintaining a more productive and positive relationship. We suggested that UBCO and UBCFA sign up for this program and were told, in no uncertain terms, that UBCO was not interested.

Since then we’ve experienced some thawing. I met with DVC Doug Owram and Provost and VP Academic Alaa Abd-El-Aziz to discuss labour relations; I raised it in a meeting between the Faculty Association Executive Committee and UBC President Toope, Vancouver Provost Ferrar, Doug, and Alaa; and a few weeks later Faculty Association President Liz Hodgson and I met again with Doug and Alaa. The upshot of all that discussion is that we now have established regular meetings between our labour relations specialist (Deena Rubuliak) and UBCO labour relations people to deal with specific grievances, and also regular meetings between me and other key elected union officers and key senior UBCO management people like Alaa and AVP Jackie Podger to talk about larger issues.

It looks like things are slowly improving. I’ll keep you apprised.



Distribution of the 2008-2009 Retention Funds

JIM JOHNSON, CHAIR, OKANAGAN FACULTY COMMITTEE

In the 2006-2007 Collective Agreement the University and the Faculty Association agreed to the creation of a \$3.2 million fund to allow the University to increase salaries of continuing members of the bargaining unit for the purpose of retention. The fund has been somewhat controversial as there is significant doubt about whether such a fund is the most effective way to retain faculty and there is significant concern about the transparency and accountability of the processes used to determine who gets retention awards, and in what amounts.

In 2008-2009 \$1 Million of the \$3.2 Million fund was allocated. \$71,300 was allocated to members at UBCO and \$928,700 was allocated to members at UBCV. At UBCO the average award was \$3,739 and at UBCV the average award was \$8,679. Overall 126 individual awards were made, 48 to Full Professors, 41 to Associate Professors, 36 to Assistant Professors, and 1 to Senior Instructors.

One might have thought that in order for a one-time salary increase to retain members and prevent them from leaving a fairly significant increase would be needed, but 28 of the awards were under \$5,000 and three were \$2,200 or less. At the

top end, five were for \$25,000 or more.

It's hard to assess how effective this fund is vis-à-vis alternative approaches to retention without a fairly extensive analysis, which I have not done. However some features of the data are

interesting. Some people seem to be constant flight risks. One member has had retention awards five times in the past seven years. At least one individual received two retention awards in the same year. Other people need retention money almost immediately after being hired (which suggests to me that perhaps UBC got their starting salaries wrong).

One year, 3 awards went to members in the Instructor I rank, which means they

were just hired and had not yet even finished their Ph.D.

In future issues of the Okanagan Bulletin I'll look at the distribution of the other two discretionary funds, Merit and PSA. Interestingly, in this round of bargaining the university has not proposed the creation of a retention fund at all for the next two years, and has proposed merging the Merit and PSA funds into a single Merit fund. For Faculty Association updates on collective bargaining, tune into our website at: www.facultyassociation.ubc.ca.

There is significant doubt about whether a Retention Fund is the most effective way to retain faculty.

On average, UBCO retention rewards are \$4,490 less than UBCV.

Sick Leave

Faculty members probably make less use of sick leave than any other employee group, but we do get sick, and we are entitled to sick leave. If you are asked to provide information about your medical condition to support a request for sick leave, or you feel uncertain about your privacy rights, please check with our professional Membership Services Officer, Deena Rubuliak (deenar@interchange.ubc.ca). She can advise you on what information the university is entitled to, and when they are entitled to it.

Tenure & Promotion Mentorship Program

The Faculty Association and the Provost's Office are pleased to announce the creation of the Tenure and Promotion Mentorship Program for the Okanagan Campus.

This program is designed to assist UBC O faculty who are coming up for tenure and/or promotion over the next few years. Six tenured UBC Vancouver faculty have volunteered to come to Kelowna for 2-3 day mentoring stints over the 2010 spring term. Any Kelowna faculty members are welcome to sign up to meet with a Vancouver mentor in a related discipline. To sign up, or for more information, click here: <http://web.ubc.ca/okanagan/provost/tenure-mentors.html>

The Great Canadian Smoke Out is underway at UBCO

This year HSE has partnered with Health and Wellness to ensure that the Great Canadian Smoke Out is open to faculty (as well as staff and students). This contest exists to support people who wish to quit smoking and to help people remain smoke free. The contest runs from January 20 to March 24, 2010.

Enter one of three contests and win CASH PRIZES!

Don't Start and Win (For those who are already smoke free)

Party Without the Pack (For those who smoke occasionally)

Quit for Good (For those who are ready to quit!)

For more information go to <http://greatcanadiansmokeout.blogspot.com/>

We have Moved!

The UBC Faculty Association office has been relocated to: Arts 353B. Our telephone number and email remain unchanged.

WHOM TO CONTACT

PRESIDENT

Elizabeth Hodgson, English, 2.2651, fa.pres@ubc.ca

OKANAGAN FACULTY COMMITTEE

CHAIR

Jim Johnson, Economics, 7.9391, ja.johnson@ubc.ca

FIRST VICE-CHAIR

Michael Pidwirny, 7.8758, michael.pidwirny@ubc.ca

SECOND VICE-CHAIR

Laura Hooker, 7.9551, laura.hooker@ubc.ca

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES OFFICER

Deena Rubuliak, 2.3301, deenar@interchange.ubc.ca

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Murray Mollard, 2.6126, murray.mollard@ubc.ca

UBCO OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE

Blythe Nilson, Biology, 7.9555, blythe.nilson@ubc.ca

Linda Allan, Psychology, 7.8729, linda.allan@ubc.ca

Judy Mcaulay, Nursing, 7.9977, judy.mcaulay@ubc.ca

Ruth Frost, History, 7.9407, ruth.frost@ubc.ca

112 - 1924 West Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

T: 604.822.3883 F: 604.222.0174

Arts 353B - 3333 University Way, Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7

T: 250.807.9240

faculty@interchange.ubc.ca

www.facultyassociation.ubc.ca

MAIL TO: