

How Would You Rate *This*?!

Brenda Peterson
President

UBC has decided to go ahead with implementing a new university-wide protocol for student evaluations of teaching. This involves a new Vancouver Senate policy which was passed in May, a set of University Module questions developed by a committee with students and administrators outnumbering faculty members, and a rushed implementation this term without any opportunities for departments and faculties to review and discuss the new protocol. Unlike other universities embarking on web-based student evaluations, UBC

has declined to consult with faculty members or hold proper pilot projects to test the questions and/or process before deciding upon its implementation.

The Faculty Association has expressed serious concerns with both the protocol itself and the manner of its introduction, and we have called upon UBC to place a moratorium on the new teaching evaluation system until a full campus-wide consultation has taken place, legal questions of privacy and consent for public distribution have been resolved, and a thorough testing

of the proposed changes has been completed.

Discussions with the University

Since our call for a moratorium, the Association has received a tremendous amount of feedback from members on this issue. We have shared the questions and concerns raised by faculty members, whole departments, Heads and Deans with the University in meetings with the President, the Provost and other senior administrators. In all discussions, we have been very clear that the Faculty Association strongly supports teaching evaluations, but that these must be “based on the effectiveness rather than the popularity of the instructor” (CA, Article 4.02, p. 72).

As late as Friday morning November 16th, we were led to believe that some progress toward

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Status of Women Committee

The Faculty Association is very pleased to announce that the Status of Women Committee is active once again. The Committee Chair, Dr Mira Sundara Rajan, holds the Canada Research Chair in Intellectual Property Law at the Faculty of Law, and has been elected to head the Committee for a two-year term.

In the coming months, Dr Sundara Rajan hopes to establish a lively and interesting forum for the discussion of issues affecting UBC women. The aims of the Committee will be two-fold: first, to create an opportunity for

identifying key issues of concern to women faculty with a view to developing a constructive policy that can be communicated to University administration; and, second, to build a network of women faculty across UBC disciplines and departments to promote a sense of intellectual and social community at the University. In this regard, the Status of Women Committee hopes to establish a seminar series, “Celebrating UBC Women,” which will host a monthly event featuring a brief

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a resolution was being made. We had been assured, for example, that the new protocol would be piloted this term, and that no results would be used for employment purposes until after a pilot project and review, and we were awaiting further information on such questions as how exactly the pilot project would be reviewed, who would be consulted to determine success, and what specific mechanisms were planned for broad consultation within each academic unit.

Reversal by University

On Friday afternoon, November 16th, however, we were stunned to receive a letter from the University, acknowledging the commitments it had made but indicating it was reversing those commitments and intended to proceed with implementation despite our objections. Although the results of the new University Module with six core questions

will not be published and consent forms will not be used this term, the University intends to use the results of these untested protocols for employment purposes, including reappointment, tenure, promotion, and merit decisions. What is more, this follows frank discussions in which it was acknowledged that many departments, and indeed entire Faculties, had declined to participate in the new system.

This abrupt reversal in UBC’s approach, and its clear message that collegial decision-making would not extend to the introduction of the new teaching evaluation protocol is deeply disappointing. While we had initiated a formal grievance, we had clearly indicated our preference for resolution through open discussion and had been somewhat encouraged that this would indeed be possible as the extent of faculty concern with the new system became apparent to the central administration.

Next Steps

At this stage, however, UBC has chosen to abandon that approach, and indicated that it will not hold any further discussions with the Faculty Association outside of the legal process. As a result, we have no choice but to move as swiftly and decisively as possible to have the matter heard by a third party. We are consulting with legal counsel, and intend to continue our opposition to the unilateral imposition of the new teaching evaluation protocol upon departments and faculties. We will keep members informed of important developments.

Contact Us

We have heard from many members about the proposed new procedures for evaluating teaching. See page four for a summary of some of the questions members have sent to us. We welcome your

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contributions and questions on this critical academic and employment issue. Please contact the Faculty Association.

Executive Retreat

At this year’s annual retreat on Saturday, November 3rd, your elected representatives on the executive committee and staff of the Association identified three top priorities for the coming year:

- 1) Preparing for the next round of bargaining so that we protect your goals and interests
- 2) Helping you to feel more connected to the Faculty Association
- 3) Fighting the administration’s attempts to treat members of the Association as faceless factory workers (“productivity” measures, standardization, dead-end jobs)

Expect to hear more about these issues in future newsletters. If you have an interest in any of these topics, we would like to hear from you.

Productivity Lump Sum Payments

Members will receive a one-time payment equal to about one percent of your annual pay by the end of the year. The University has informed us that this payment should appear on your November 30, 2007 pay cheque.

In accordance with Article 7 of the *Agreement on Salaries and Economic Benefits*:

- 1% is due to all members if the University raises more than \$100 million in fundraising. The Development Office met this target.
- Another 1% is due if UBCFA members increase their Tri-Council research awards by \$10 million over the previous year. This target was not met, although our overall research awards went up by more than this amount.

The University informed us that the Public Sector Employers’ Council (PSEC) refused to approve any changes to the criteria for these lump-sum payments until 2010, although we made it clear that these

measures clearly don’t reflect UBC faculty’s continuing and growing success in research funding.

Panel Discussion on the Future of University Research Funding

Missed attending our Fall General meeting in October and the panel discussion on the Future of University Research Funding? It’s not too late to listen to the presentations and discussion with moderator Chris Orvig, Chemistry, and panelists:

- Don Brooks, Associate Vice President, Office of the Vice President of Research
- Alison Buchan, Senior Associate Dean, Research, Faculty of Medicine
- Susanna Braund, Canada Research Chair; Classical, Near Eastern & Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts
- Mira Sundara-Rajan, Canada Research Chair, Faculty of Law

The audio file is now available on our website at: www.facultyassociation.ubc.ca/news&events.htm.



(left to right) Susanna Braund, Alison Buchan, Don Brooks and Mira Sundara-Rajan

Some Questions Re: New Procedures for Teaching Evaluations

This is an initial summary of some of the questions and concerns we've heard from members. It is by no means as comprehensive or detailed or scholarly as the responses we've received. What have we missed? Please send us your questions: faculty@interchange.ubc.ca.

The Process:

- How did the Senate policy get passed without wider circulation and consultations?
- Why did the university community first hear about the implementation plans through *UBC Reports*?
- Why were there not consultations as the implementation plan was being developed?
- Why was there not (at the very least) a clear plan for piloting the implementation plan and then community review?
- Why were specific policies and procedures regarding the handling of the data and the membership of the implementation committee not clarified at the time of announcement?
- What are the plans regarding the analysis of the survey results?

The University Module Questions:

- Where do they come from? What data confirms their appropriateness & applicability?
- Why are there questions which assume that students can impute motives to faculty?
- Why is there no "N/A" or "Unknown" or "Insufficient Information" option?
- Why are number-values attached to the evaluative terms (excellent = 5), contrary to recommended practice?
- Why are there no "context" questions about the course itself or about the students as respondents?

The Procedures for Data Collection & Publication:

- What functions will be performed on the data, and by whom? Who will see the raw data?
- We are very concerned that no reliability measures seem to be in place: what percentage participation rates are considered valid and/or publishable? Below which percentages will the evaluation-data not be published and/or captured?
- What safeguards are in place to prevent manipulation or culling of the data?
- Are there any plans to prohibit students from republishing the data in other forms?
- For how long will the data be available on a site, and how secure is that site?
- Many members don't feel free to withhold their consent to the publication of their data, especially given that their employer has already urged them to do so. In what sense can their consent be freely given in this context?

Web platform:

- What kinds of incentives or protocols will be used to guarantee reasonable rates?
- What kinds of systems will guarantee that these are "formal evaluation procedures" (i.e. protected from student-collusion, from outside influence, from inappropriate contexts)?
- What kinds of consent are required for the web-tools? Can individual faculty opt out? If not, why not?

Use of the Data:

- Many of these protocols seem designed to make it easier for the administration and the students to get access to a single metric which has some kind of summative value for individual professors and courses. This applies both to the University Module (which, because it is a standardized set, will be more likely to be treated as an ultimate metric) and to the faculty/departmental questions which are now at least potentially going to be completed and captured electronically, and quite widely available to administrators. What protections do faculty have against the misinterpretation, misunderstanding, contextless assumptions and simplified interpretations of these data in the context of reappointment, renewal, tenure, promotion, dismissal or termination proceedings?
- What plans or protocols will the administration affirm to ensure that peer review, qualitative student responses, self-reporting and descriptive data will be included in any procedures surrounding faculty teaching employment? Will there be a new committee or task group?
- Are there goals and timelines in place, with budgets and financial commitments, for actually improving teaching effectiveness on campus (training, continuing professional development, mentoring, classroom upgrades, increasing numbers of sections, hiring new faculty)?

Let's make Reading Week a Reading Week – In March

Fred Cutler, Political Science

Reading week is held at the wrong time. Both faculty and students would be better served by a reading week held in mid-March, coinciding with the March Break in most BC schools.

For readers of this newsletter, the change would improve working conditions. An increasing proportion of faculty and staff have school-age children. Almost none have a spouse who stays at home and can care for children when they are out of school. This makes the March school break a challenge. Most families find some kind of camp for their children. Often this involves complicated family logistics, with multiple children being driven to these activities, making it a difficult work week for faculty and staff. One political science colleague reports seeing other UBC faculty working on laptops at the Grouse Mountain base lodge!

Faculty, in particular, are unable to use the school break to take a family holiday, as so many families do. And this is particularly galling, because we have the flexibility to take a family holiday in May and June when children are in school. My senior colleagues say their children went on spring break holidays with other families, year after year. Others describe all kinds of clever ways to reschedule lectures or make deals with colleagues to cover their classes. At some comparable institutions, like the University of Illinois, all this

is unnecessary because local school boards time their break to coincide with the university break in mid-March.

Bill Mohn, of the microbiology department, says “Teaching in spring term caused a real dilemma, pitting against one another my commitments to my family and my teaching. It caused me to miss or curtail family vacations. And, this was doubly frustrating in the knowledge that a later spring break would be better for academics at UBC.”

Moving reading week would, quite simply, make life better for UBC employees and their families. This is what UBC's existing family-friendly policies and the goals of Trek 2010 are all about. And the change is costless.

The second reason to make this change – no less important – is pedagogical. The February reading week, after only six weeks of classes, is simply too early. Many of my colleagues in the Faculty of Arts tell me that they consider it too early to schedule a midterm examination before reading week after so little course material has been covered. Few students use the break in the middle of February for term projects due at the end of March or early April. To some extent they are justified in doing so, since they have had only five real weeks of course material. Instead, many students use it as a holiday week a mere six weeks after the two-week December break.

If the break were in the middle

of March, looming deadlines would mean students would use it for term papers and projects. At present, we ask students to do this work while continuing with normal class reading and attendance. With students taking a full load, something has to give, and instructors notice a serious drop in attendance in mid-March. A March break would be more of a “reading week” than a spring break, but it's called reading week for a good reason.

One account of the origin of the February break is that winter sees the highest incidence of depression, so students need stress relief at that time. (The jury is still out on this in the psychology literature). But surely the real academic stress is in March, when work piles up and exams loom. A March reading week would do as much or more than the February one to reduce student stress.

Put these two arguments -- working and teaching -- together and it is hard to imagine much resistance to this change.

Please add your point of view to discussion of this proposal by emailing to both faculty@interchange.ubc.ca and cutler@politics.ubc.ca. ❖❖❖

Office Closure

The UBC Faculty Association will close for the Holiday Season Friday, December 21, 2007 & will re-open on Monday, January 7, 2008. Staff will continue to monitor voice mail & email.

Update: Supreme Court Decision

Previous issues of the *Faculty Focus* have reported that the Faculty Association has sought leave from the Supreme Court of Canada to appeal a majority decision of the British Columbia Court of Appeal interpreting our Framework Agreement language with the University. The Association received word on October 25, 2007 that the Supreme Court of Canada has denied our request for leave to appeal the BC Court of Appeal decision. The issue in dispute was the interpretation of the Framework Agreement language that defines the power of an arbitrator when, pursuant to the grievance procedure, the President's decision on a promotion and/or tenure application has been found to be unreasonable. The Framework Agreement states that in such cases,

an arbitrator can "reverse" the decision. The effect of the Court decision restricts the meaning of the word reverse to only allow the matter to be returned to the President of the University to reconsider the original decision.

This case arose from two arbitrations dating back over five years in which two different members of the Faculty Association were denied promotion. Subsequently, arbitrators "reversed" those decisions deeming the President's decisions to recommend promotion. Since then, there have been two levels of review of these decisions through the Labour Relations Board and two Court hearings. The Faculty Association was successful at all levels up to the last one before the British Columbia Court of Appeal.

The Faculty Association does

not dispute the role of a President under the Framework Agreement to make decisions. However, it believes that our members should be able to rely on the contractual language agreed to by both the University and Association where it provides that a neutral third party can review those decisions and provide a remedy when they are found on the evidence to be "unreasonable". The Faculty Association's concern is that with this final Court decision, an unreasonable decision can only be referred back to the President for reconsideration. Given the Court of Appeal's ruling, and having regard for the provisions of the University Act, the word "reverse" is not given its normal and usual meaning.



"Women"

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research presentation by one of our women faculty members, followed by an informal discussion session. The Committee also plans to create a Web page, including a Weblog for the open and informal discussion of issues of concern to women faculty.

The Committee is actively in search of members of the University community who would like to be involved in our activities. Please contact us if:

- You are interested in joining the Committee.
- You would like to draw our attention to an important issue affecting women faculty that we should include on our agenda for the year.

- You are able to assist with the creation and maintenance of our Website or blog.
- You have another contribution in mind!

The Committee hopes to make an outstanding contribution to the UBC community by establishing a framework for the discussion of areas of special interest to women that will continue to be helpful in years to come. As the Committee Chair, I welcome your involvement, and hope you will help the Committee to carry out your mandate to the very best of our ability!

If you are interested, please

email the Faculty Association at faculty@interchange.ubc.ca.



Mira Sundara-Rajan

“Stronger Together”

Fair Employment Week 2007 at UBC

Petra Ganzenmueller
Chair, Sessional Faculty Committee

Fair Employment Week (FEW) 2007 ran from 22 to 26 October at universities and colleges all across Canada with its counterpart in the US and Mexico called Campus Equity Week being held from 29 October to 2 November. During this week of concerted national efforts, the Sessional Faculty Committee has organized the following activities:

Monday, 22 October: Communique to UBC Faculty

FEW officially began with our communique entitled A Fair Deal for Sessional Faculty outlining major inequities that sessional academics are faced with while working and teaching at UBC. It was sent to the units with the greatest number of sessional faculty employed, i.e. all faculty in Arts and Education at UBCV; all faculty at the Barber School of Arts and Sciences and in the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies at UBCO. Sessional faculty in all disciplines and at both campuses were included in our information campaign.

Tuesday, 23 October: Letter to the UBC Administration

This letter was sent by the President of the Faculty Association, Brenda Peterson, to UBC President Stephen Toope. It calls upon UBC to adopt in-principle a charter guaranteeing educational and employment equity to all faculty, staff and students. To read this letter please go to www.facultyassociation.ubc.ca. The President’s Office referred the letter to the Provost. No reply from the Provost’s Office was received to date.

Wednesday, 24 October: Sessional Faculty Get-Together

Our special get-together celebrating FEW was held at its usual location, i.e. Koerner’s Pub at UBCV. With a record turnout, this monthly event has gained steady momentum with sessional faculty increasingly taking advantage of this opportunity for networking and exchange. A similar social was arranged for sessional faculty at UBCO.

Friday, 26 October: Meet and Greet at the SUB

Our traditional Meet and Greet marked the end of FEW and was held inside the Student Union Building. This public outreach event aimed at educating the UBC community on sessional faculty issues through personal dialogue and a range of information literature. Faculty Association representatives were available to discuss employment questions and to listen to our members’ concerns. Our initiative was met with great interest, sympathy and appreciation by students, staff and faculty alike.

This year’s FEW yet again served to highlight the importance of sessional academics and their contributions and to promote the principle of equity in the public domain. Also this year, our campaign was among the most extensive and diverse nationwide. I would like to thank all those whose commitment has been instrumental in making this week of collective action another success. This includes members of the Sessional Faculty Committee, the Faculty Association Executive and the staff of the Faculty Association office. My special thanks go to YOU, the faculty at UBC, for your continued support, express solidarity and encouraging feedback. ❖❖❖



(left) Petra Ganzenmueller with a student

The UBC Faculty Association invites you to join us for our

End of Term Celebration

UBC Vancouver

Date: Friday, November 30, 2007

Time: 3:00pm - 5:30pm

Place: Sage Bistro

6331 Crescent Road, Vancouver BC

UBC Okanagan

Date: Tuesday, December 4, 2007

Time: 3:30pm - 6:00pm

Place: Okanagan Room, Student Services Centre

3333 University Way, Kelowna, BC

RSVP to: faculty@interchange.ubc.ca or 604.822.3883.



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