

SMUFU Spring Meeting  
Friday, April 28, 2023

President's Report  
Prepared by Cathy Conrad, in-coming SMUFU President

My term as SMUFU President officially began on April 1, 2023, although there was certainly a running start to this position. Prior to becoming President, I had been in the role of Acting President, VP of SMUFU, SMUFU Liaison Committee Chair and Strike preparations organizer. This has meant a relatively seamless transition into this new role.

The most significant event of the past several months has undoubtedly been the planning, preparation and eventual aversion of strike action. Never in the history of our Union have we come so close to a strike situation, and we were fully prepared to go to the line. Thanks to the hard work of all of you, we were able to avert work stoppage and secure a reasonable and fair outcome, one which was comparable to other unions in the region who had to go on strike to secure similar deals. The planning and preparation that was deployed stemmed from significant consultation with CAUT, and then with those of you who were willing to drop everything you were doing and put in the time to do the hard work that was needed. This included the members of the Bargaining Team, the Strike Support Services Committee, the Picket Line Committee and the Communications Committee. This work was unbelievably effective and caught the attention of Unions across the region, many of whom reached out and congratulated us on our work.

At the same time, many of the underlying frustrations with the employer remain. The concerns of incompetence and negligence on the part of some senior administrators, the concerns of lack of collegiality and movement towards a more corporate mentality, and concerns of over-reach, lack of meaningful consultation and questions related to the fiscal management (or lack thereof) remain. We have a lot of work to do in terms of holding our University responsible and ensuring that the Collective Agreement is adhered to and that our primary mandates as an educational and research institution are preserved to the highest levels of integrity.

SMUFU signed our new Collective Agreement this past Monday, April 24, 2023 after long delays and frustrations. Many of the delays and problems are a result of underlying systemic concerns in our University. I am committed to work to improve our workplace and see changes implemented to the best of my ability. How can we change the culture of our institution and return it to a semblance of what it used to be? Ensuring that we have representation on search committees for senior management positions and a presence at the Board are places to start.

I have also quickly learned that many of you have been confronting a variety of unfair and inappropriate situations in our work place. I have already started the work of advocating and working to resolve as many of these situations to our members' satisfaction and with increasing communication with the VPAR and President's office.

Together with the Executive, we have also been working to ensure that all matters of the CA are adhered to. You will recall that recently, a violation of Article 10.4 of the CA resulted in no report being made with regards to the employer's positive actions to improve the employment of women, Indigenous Peoples, visible minorities and people with disabilities. I wrote a piece that outlines some of the egregious actions of our employer with respect to EDI that can be read here: <https://www.smufu.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SMU-EDI-FINAL.pdf> As a result, the SMUFU Executive will be meeting in May with members of senior administration to discuss matters of employment equity. Our University is so far behind in meaningful work on EDI, and our union has a role to play in holding our administration to account on this.

I attended the CAUT caucuses in both the Fall of 2022 and again this past weekend in Ottawa, ensuring that SMUFU is represented on a national front. These are forums to meet with faculty union leaders from across the country, learn and share experiences as well as have a vote on matters that are important to all unions of faculty and librarians across Canada. I have also been learning about ways that our national organization can continue to assist us in matters related to bargaining, communication, and with legal support and expertise when needed.

As I move forward, I am working to establish new committees of SMUFU as well as re-establish those that have become inactive. This includes the creation of a new SMUFU Communications Committee and the re-establishment of the Equity and Diversity Committee. The strike preparations of this past winter illustrated how effective we can be as a collective. Let's keep this momentum going as we presently work on improving the workplace, with an eye towards our next round of bargaining that will once again begin in spring, 2025.