

SMUFU Annual General Meeting, October 2023

President's Report

Prepared by Cathy Conrad, SMUFU President (April through September 2023)

My term as SMUFU President officially began on April 1, 2023, and I have remained in this role through to September 27, 2023. I am currently on a 4-month research leave as part of my full year 2023-24 sabbatical to undertake research overseas. It has been a pleasure to serve as SMUFU President and I look forward to returning in February 2024. While we had wrapped up a hectic winter of negotiations and work to prepare for (and ultimately avoid) labour action, our work remains incredibly busy. The work of our Union involves working with individual members with concerns related to everything from negotiating contracts, issues associated with tenure and promotion, violations of our Collective Agreement, through the spectrum of myriad work-related issues through to parking concerns and concerns about multi-factor authentication. Regardless of the issue, I have been here to listen and to advocate for you. Concerns that have warranted further action or that could not be resolved with consultation and mediation were referred to the Grievance and Arbitration Co-Chairs and/or to our Labour Relations Officer, Zach Wells.

I have been active in communications with the Employer with regards to on-going concerns related to the handling of the Indigenous Student Advisor position and the Black Student Advisor Position. Most recently, I have issued communications related to concerns as to how Peaceful Schools International was shut down by the Senior Administration. I have been advocating for improvements to the safety and well-being of our campus, both in terms of air quality as well as physical safety, and the need for much more comprehensive planning to be undertaken. There is no shortage of advocacy work to be done around here.

I am pleased to report that I was able to get the SMUFU EDIA Committee organized and working, now under the leadership of Co-Chairs Jacob Hanley and Emma McClure. The SMUFU Liaison Committee, which I used to Chair, will now be co-chaired by Ariel Watson (Interim SMUFU President), Mary Hale and Jessica Ticar. I have worked to create a new SMUFU Communications Committee and am thankful for the on-going dialogue with Scott Edgar on this front. Many of you are stepping up to volunteer in various union capacities and I am grateful for this. This is our collective union, and the more engaged and committed to improvements at our university we are, the more improvements we can hope to see.

The SMUFU Executive continued to meet bi-weekly and through the summer months. As you have seen in union email correspondence, one of our larger concerns has been related to the financial situation at SMU. We invoked Article 4.5 of the CA early in the summer, received financial documentation from the Employer and have subsequently been working closely with CAUT and their external accountants to assess SMU finances. We are still working on this and strategizing, with the aim to direct our advocacy and our attention to identifying where the primary deficits are and how our university might strategically address these areas.

Wishing you all the best this academic year.

Addendum to the President's Report

Prepared by Ariel Watson, Vice President (2023-2024) and Interim President (late September 2023-early February 2024)

When Cathy Conrad departed for her research leave at the end of September, she left us very well prepared for me to take on the duties of Interim President, according to the requirements of our union's Constitution. My many thanks for her preparations and the endless support of our Executive, our union committees, and SMUFU's staff for smoothing the transition and ensuring that the many projects Cathy initiated before her leave could proceed without a hiccup.

Among the projects that we've initiated in the last month I'll highlight important conversations with the SMUFU EDIA committee (including the approval of their proposal of a new SMUFU EDIA lecture series, and a program that will allow members to access high-quality respirator (n95 and kf94) masks, a CR air purifier, and air-quality monitors from the union's office). My thanks to the committee for their nuanced, thoughtful and ethically informed advice about some of the most vital issues we face in the workplace.

We continue our efforts to build solidarity with our sibling unions at this university and others, as well as with SMUSA. Student representatives have particularly highlighted several equity and inclusion concerns that we've leant our advocacy to in recent months. We are also embarking on an effort to raise awareness among all our members of the work and processes of the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC), which is a cooperative effort with the Employer to maintain the safety of our workplace under federal and provincial laws and guidelines. If you become aware of a violation or potential violation of health and safety, you can bring it to any member of the JOHSC. Our SMUFU representative to the committee is Arla Day, and our alternate is Luke MacDonald, and we are very appreciative of their labour and consultation with the Executive.

I'd also like to acknowledge the work of the Liaison Committee, which had a meeting last week that provided a crucial listening opportunity for the Executive about currently arising issues, and the Grievance and Arbitration Committee, which does some of the union's most important work year-round. We'd like to ensure that each department and program has a representative to the Liaison Committee, so if there is not currently one for yours, please be in touch with me.

Most importantly, I want to provide a brief update on the matter of the University's financial situation, which the Executive (under Cathy's leadership and in cooperation with CAUT) continues to investigate and verify. At our request, CAUT commissioned an independent review of Saint Mary's financial statements from the last five years by leading academic/university accountancy experts, Cameron and Janet Morrill, who prepared a reassuring report: they did not identify significant cause for alarm in the university's finances in the years preceding 2022 (despite the reality of the COVID pandemic that has had broad effects on our sector), although they did note a pronounced rise in reliance on debt that could prove problematic. They note that the university was profitable until 2022, when it experienced a small deficit due to increasing expenses and highlight that "While SMU's overall salary costs have increased, they have mostly been in areas other than academic salaries." After the Employer published their 2023 audited financial statements a few weeks ago, Morrill and Morrill updated their report to incorporate information about the \$6.9 million loss in the General Fund the university has incurred in the last year. This unanticipated deficit leads them to add that some of the Employer's concerns about finances have substance, "to a certain extent at least," although the report does not support many of the administration's explanations about what produced the problems. In our everyday encounters in the workplace, it seems clear to many of our members that the financial priorities of our institution are privileging new building, endowment (externally restricted) fundraising, and upper administration expenditures over the core educational and research functions of the university. We have provided the entire Morrill and Morrill report to SMUFU, with CAUT's permission, in the materials for this year's AGM.