



SMUFU President's Report Fall 2024
Dr. Cathy Conrad

Dear Colleagues,

As we settle into another academic year, on the heels of years of turmoil at our University, one can only wonder what lies ahead of us. And some of you will be wondering what your Union is doing to address the obvious and no-so-obvious concerns that we have as a collective at SMU. Let me start with a note of positivity. We are a united Faculty Union, comprised of 290 very engaged and active members. We've navigated recent transitions of SMUFU Executive and have committed faculty and librarians filling many vital roles that serve our membership. I am thankful for the labour you undertake on behalf of us all. Remember that YOU are SMUFU, and we need your engagement and participation to ensure that we have a diversity of perspectives to serve your needs to the best of our collective ability. Your SMUFU Executive is working very hard on your behalf, meeting bi-weekly, even through the summer months, and discussing myriad and complex issues. This year marks our fiftieth anniversary as SMUFU. We were the first English-speaking faculty union in Canada and as such, are planning an event for December 5 to mark this important milestone, with both the President and Executive Director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) coming to address our members and acknowledge this anniversary. I hope you will mark your calendars and plan to attend this celebration!

This past spring, with over 85% of members voting overwhelmingly (91.1%) non-confidence in our President and Chair of the Board of Governors (BOG), you may be wondering what has become of our efforts. While the outcome was not the immediate removal of either the President nor Chair, this vote did have an impact. The evidence that we prepared for the BOG substantiated our claims of institutional mismanagement. The Chair of the BOG, at the recent September Annual General Meeting, himself admitted that the external BOG members had been complacent, many relatively unaware of the internal strife at SMU. Our vote was a wake-up-call, leading to more careful scrutiny of operations, and the search for our next President put into high gear. The University Senior Management and BOG are clearly aware that SMUFU is carefully monitoring and stewarding the academic mission of our University.

What has SMUFU been doing since that vote? An academic union serves two primary models; a service model and a collective model. For the former, we have been active serving individual members with a variety of complex issues. As your union, we are here to steward our Collective Agreement and grieve concerns as needed. As for the collective actions, we have spoken out and remain concerned about several matters, including the many critical staff layoffs, expressing concerns to administration about the way this was being done. We submitted our

response to the employer's intentions to reduce faculty allotments, and expect that there will be more to address with respect to this in the coming weeks and months ahead. We have been meeting with the new VP Finance, and have secured updated financial documents which have been shared with the Morrill's who are in the process of updating our academic audit.

We remain dismayed at the lack of movement on Article 10.4.1 (b and c), requiring three new targeted hires, having now sent several memos indicating that actions must be taken to avoid a violation of our CA. We are now assessing our next steps and planning actions.

The most recent AGM and President's Town Hall indicated that the employer's narrative this year will be one of belt tightening, and blame levied on the employee unions, namely SMUFU, for the financial burden of the institution's expenses. This narrative is directed at us, setting the stage for a challenging bargaining year in 2025. This narrative is directed at students as well, implying that their tuition is rising because of us. This narrative is also subliminally directed at staff, implying that some of their wages are frozen and many laid off to pay bloated faculty wages. Don't let this narrative divide and conquer us. As the employer uses language like *the majority of our expenses are tied up in collective agreement-driven wages and wage increases*, understand that 60% of expenses on wages is less than most Universities in Canada. When looking at the data for Canadian University staff salaries and benefits as a percentage of total expenses, the national annual average from 2018-2023 is 61%*. SMU's expenditures in this category are normal. Faculty and staff wages are among the best (and most necessary) investments that our University can make.

The employer will be working hard to divide us along faculty lines in the coming year. My hope is that we can maintain the unity that has been so thoughtfully fostered over the past several years and that we can work together as a collective to confront our workplace challenges for each other. *We* are not the source of any institutional challenges confronted at SMU. *We* are ready to work hard to seek pathways forward regardless.

*Statistics Canada (2024) *Expenditures of universities by type of expenditures and funds* Accessed from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710002701> on October 15, 2024.