

A message from our President

Greetings All:

Well, where has the time gone? By now, most of you have settled back into teaching at Open Learning plus any other assignments you might have. I hope you can still remember that vacation you enjoyed! Many things have happened since my May 8th newsletter; I will hit the highlights.

The most significant event is a call we received regarding bargaining. There may be an appetite by management to roll over the current agreement with an increase into a two-year contract. Further information is needed to determine exactly what is being offered. The bargaining team (myself, Mary Kruger, Juan Caldera, and Sean Hillman from the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators (FPSE)) will assess this development in relation to what has transpired or might transpire in terms of bargaining in the British Columbia college and university sector in general, and with TRUFA (our counterpart at TRU), CUPE, and BCGEU members at TRU.

We typically survey members to determine which items are most significant for our members. Often this includes a wage increase, improved benefits and pension, job security, and other issues. We plan to send an electronic survey to you by the end of October 2012. Please respond to it quickly as we value your input!

As you may be aware, CUPE Local 4879 has reached an agreement subject to ratification by the parties. The settlement includes a 2% increase for 2012/2013 and 2% for 2013/2014, which follows a pattern seen at Post Secondary Institutions. The Public Sector Employers Council (PSEC) has indicated that the current bargaining mandate, imposed on the university, may be revised by the end of November due to the deteriorating provincial economy. For this reason, we have served notice to begin bargaining.

You may recall the May 2012 reorganization of Open Learning changed the reporting structure from Judith Murray, to Dr. Uli Scheck, Vice-President Academic and Provost, and Dr. Gordon Tarzwell, Vice-Provost Open Learning. I have sensed that Gordon Tarzwell has more responsibility than when reporting to Judith Murray. Mary Kruger and I met with Uli Scheck to discuss the future direction of Open Learning. He stated that blended learning is a priority for TRU. Uli stressed the importance for TRU to obtain accreditation from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) for its MBA program, which he thought would happen in the New Year. In addition, Uli discussed the need for TRU and TRU-OL to have a cadre of faculty with PhDs and terminal degrees for the majority of the faculty so that TRU can secure AUCC accreditation necessary for TRU to expand its graduate education programs and offerings. I reminded Uli that we have 200 talented and committed Open Learning faculty supporting 10,000 registrants but as OLFMs, we are invisible. We stressed the need for TRU to treat TRUOLFA members with respect as we have contributed a great deal to building Open Learning in British Columbia.

We informed Uli that our major concern is job security. We provided him examples how our members were not being valued. Specifically, we shared with Uli examples where our members were not awarded contracts that they should have been awarded for curriculum writer and consultant positions for courses that they were currently teaching, and were the course writer or reviewer for the current versions of the advertised courses. The reason provided to these OLFMs as to why they did not qualify was that they did not have a PhD or did not meet the stated qualification criteria for the specified terminal degree in a particular discipline.

As your representatives, we stressed the need for TRU to treat us as their employees. We also brought to Uli's attention that through changes in the course outcomes in subsequent versions of these courses we should qualify to have the rights to teach these courses and participate in course writing and revision processes. We continue to pursue the above issues using political, organizational, policy and individual grievance, as well as labour/management processes.

Uli indicated that as the Provost, he would commit to looking into ways to meet more of TRUOLFA members. To this end, the December voluntary social in Vancouver will be the first event where several of the Deans and the Provost are expected to attend. If you live in the Lower Mainland, when we get the invitation for the social, we encourage you to come out and meet with Uli and the Deans. We want Uli and the Deans to view us as their employees not only with responsibilities but also with rights and the need for respect and fair treatment.

We learned that TRU is moving ahead with blended learning. In the literature, blended learning refers to the mode of education/learning where face-to-face instruction is combined with online and digital learning to enhance student learning while meeting the contexts of adult learners.

Some of us who are teaching online cohort-based paced courses are also using blended teaching/learning. Like the blended learning models of instruction in traditional universities and colleges, where blending might include 1-2 hours of face-to-face instruction and 1-2 hours of online learning, the online digital component of blended learning can also provide face-to-face learning, using Elluminate or Skype. Using strategically placed real-time technologically mediated face-to-face instruction and discussion we can simulate the classroom learning experience of learners in a format that best suits their contexts and learning needs. I would like to share with you that some of our colleagues are using Elluminate to teach groups of students in their online modality courses. We can deliver blended Open Learning courses/programs by providing the opportunity to learn from peers through not only online discussions via Learning Management Systems such as Blackboard and Desire2Learn, but also using Elluminate Alive and Skype for digital face-to-face learning with faculty and peers. .

The fast-paced changes in social media, the publication of digital textbooks, laboratory set-ups, and student and faculty resources that are being marketed by textbook publishing companies provide both

TRU face-to-face as well as TRU-OL distance learners the opportunity to explore blended learning modes for both undergraduate and graduate education. For our students, the blended courses learning would be achieved by real time online discussions via Elluminate Alive and Skype while for the TRU face-to-face students blended would mean using online systems for independent study work using various e-learning computer facilitated learning systems and tools.

For your information, at TRU, a small committee was set up to recommend a definition for blended learning. Gordon Tarzwell had appointed one OLFM to sit on this committee. We do not know how this is going to turn out in terms of how the definition of blended might affect Open Learning. We are keeping a close eye on the definition of blended learning and will keep you informed on developments on the topic. Here are two sources on blended learning that you might wish to read:

<http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erb0407.pdf> and http://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no2/lloyd-smith_0610.html

The Arbitration Award, which totaled over \$50,000, for payment of Online Modality was paid out this summer. All courses should now be paid at the rate of \$250 for 100% completion of the course assignments. There were a few errors in the payment; one executive member strongly suggests you confirm your retroactive is correct. In some cases, there is a need to run Online Modality courses with less than five registrations. Sarah Langlois and Mary Kruger are looking into a fair way to pay faculty when the course runs with less than the minimum number of students.

The streamlining project has resulted in finalizing the payment of the Annual Technology Fee. The fee will be paid each payroll with a one-time payment from the start of the year. We are talking about about 1% of your gross pay. This is not a new payment, however, the timing is being changed from once a year to every pay. I understand from Sarah that Payroll is doing a test run shortly before making the actual payment.

The Exam Marking Fee project has had comments from the faculty. When I reviewed the feedback, 83% of the faculty agreed with the allowed time. A further 11% of the courses have no students yet. In addition, 4% of the students have yet to complete their exam. With 98% of the folks on the same page, we would like to move this forward. Once approved, payment is based on entering the exam mark. Invoices would not be needed for courses that have an agreed exam or final project marking time. This will streamline our work as well as enable us to be paid on a timely basis and without the hassle of filling in and mailing out exam marking invoices.

I would like to bring to your attention that three times a year we can nominate individuals for recognition. Please look for opportunities to recognize the contribution that your peers are making. The deadlines are Feb 28, 2013, June 30, 2013, and October 31, 2013. Contact me if you have a nomination or need any help!

We are planning the Annual General Meeting to be held at the FPSE office on Sunday, January 27th 2013. If you have any motions that need to be voted on, please get them to me by Monday, December 10, 2012 for circulation to our members well before the Christmas and New Year holidays. Election for officers are scheduled during the AGM. **Please consider this information on TRUOLFA Annual General Meeting as advance notice to the AGM.** We will send an email about the AGM on December 14, 2012.

If you have any questions or comments please pick up the phone and call or send an email.

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