Message from the President: Improved Resources for Members

Since the last Association newsletter was published in 2005, the Association of Academic Staff, University of Alberta (AASUA) has been through some interesting times. Not only has the AASUA grown to become the largest academic staff association in Canada, but we have been functioning with one of the lowest full-time staff complements. In fact, up to the current academic year, a small but dedicated group of four full-time staff have provided service to the AASUA’s roughly 4000 members. Until last year, the AASUA also had one of the lowest mill rates among Canadian universities for member dues (4.86). However, a much-needed increase to a mill rate equaling the average rate of the top five G-13 research-intensive universities (6.11) has placed the AASUA on a sounder financial footing, and enabled us to increase full-time staff numbers. The result: a second Membership Services Officer was hired this year and joined the AASUA staff in October. As membership grows, so does the number and complexity of the issues that confront people, and the amount of time it takes to achieve resolutions. The addition of another staff member will help the AASUA serve you better.

We are also excited about re-launching our Association newsletter, now called The AASUA Compass. This new endeavour marks a first step toward the AASUA’s goal of communicating more frequently and effectively with members on matters related to AASUA activity, our collective agreements, and the workplace environment. Updates will also be made to AASUA’s Web site, making access to information more timely and accessible. To further improve contact with members, AASUA also plans to hire a new communications staff member in the new year who will be responsible for regular newsletter production, as well as updating and maintaining AASUA’s Web site.

Jeremy Richards, AASUA President
AASUA Negotiates Top Salary Increases

On June 18, 2008, AASUA members ratified one of the richest salary settlements this year within the Canadian University sector. The salary agreement gives academic staff members across-the-board salary increases of 4.0%, 4.75%, and 4.75% over a three-year period starting in July 2008. The increase in salaries comes with a number of additional salary-related benefits for our various membership groups. An unintended consequence of a provision in the salary settlement to remove two steps from the bottom of salary scales for academic faculty and FSOs was a delay in promotion. The bottom steps are now retained for a three year period, while a permanent solution is sought by a joint Task Force. This Transitional Agreement was approved by the Academic Faculty Committee, and then by Council.

Council thanks our bargaining team members for doing such an exceptional job over the long negotiating period, and for the highly favourable outcome. Thank you Kathryn Arbuckle (Chair), Gordon Swaters, George Thomlison, Gerhard Lotz, Howard Welch (staff resource), and Bob Campenot (participating ex officio as President last year).

APO Agreement

New Articles 13 (Performance Review) and 14 (Unsatisfactory Performance) were approved by the APO Committee and then by Council, as the first steps in a complete overhaul of the APO Agreement.

Executive Director’s Report

Much has happened in the hiatus since the AASUA’s last newsletter, including the following key events and decisions:

- Mandatory retirement was eliminated.
- Trust Academic Staff concluded a collective agreement that guaranteed trust paid staff a minimum base salary. (This agreement is the first of its kind in the Canadian university system!)
- A hiring surge combined with an inclusive approach to the designation of academic staff by the Board of Governors means we are now the largest academic staff association in Canada, with membership surpassing the 4000 mark.
- Increases in Tri-Council funding and the CRC programme have been driving a research-intensive agenda.
- Delivery of undergraduate courses has increasingly been assigned to contract academic staff (formerly styled as Sessionals), establishing them as a systemic and essential component of the academic staff complement.

- The AASUA and Administration piloted a joint benefit management plan, creating one of the most competitive and responsive benefit plans of any Canadian university. Plan sponsors can predict and control costs and bring in benefit upgrades with the minimum lead time.

So, what lies ahead? The world of the AASUA and our members is always changing, bringing new challenges and opportunities. Of particular concern, we are seeing unprecedented issues about work-load and work-related stress. It is a serious long-term issue with no immediate fixes. As with previous issues, the AASUA will work with and through its members to overcome these challenges at the individual and organizational level. We look forward to the year ahead.

Howard Welch, AASUA Executive Director
Establishing a President’s Review Committee on Tenure and Promotion

During discussion about mandatory retirement, the AASUA and the University recognized a need to address and negotiate the role of the University President in decisions regarding granting of tenure and promotion to Full Professor. Negotiations were delicate, treading on the sensitive ground of Faculty Evaluation Committee (FEC) processes, and were closely scrutinized by Chairs and Deans, as well as faculty members and the University President. However, after several months of negotiations, parties agreed to establish a President’s Review Committee (PRC). The format and function of the PRC was approved for ratification by the Executive Committee and Council, and ratified by Academic Faculty on April 14, 2008. The PRC is now identified and its duties defined in the revised Faculty Agreement (Article 13).

In brief, the PRC has the authority to annually review and compare FEC processes across campus, consider contentious cases where tenure or promotion to Full Professor has or has not been granted by FEC, and recommend that the FEC reconsider a case if it disagrees with a decision. The PRC cannot, however, veto an FEC decision.

Although the process poses some small risk of a positive tenure or promotion decision being overturned, there is also opportunity for a faculty member to refer a negative decision to the PRC for review, prior to an FEC reconsideration hearing. On balance, the AASUA felt the PRC would provide value to the membership, particularly in the broad review of FEC processes and standards across campus, which are known to be quite heterogeneous.

For more information on AASUA activities and current issues, visit our Web site at: www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/aasua, or direct inquiries to reception at aasuarec@ualberta.ca.

Membership Services: We Support You

Confidentiality is a cornerstone of our member services. When you contact the AASUA for any reason, we treat communications with the utmost discretion and members can feel confident and secure in bringing their issues and concerns to us.

Our duty of fair representation requires that we fairly represent all employees in good faith and without discrimination towards any member. Our two full-time Membership Services Officers can assist you with any employment concerns about matters related to your collective agreement. We investigate your concerns and complaints, and work together with you to find solutions.

Sometimes matters can be resolved through discussion; other times it is necessary to file a formal grievance. The grievance procedures are set out in the collective agreements and are a mechanism of resolving differences between Association members and University Administration that cannot be resolved informally. Whatever your concern, we will advise you of your rights and your options.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your employment agreement or workplace, contact our office at 780-492-5321 or E-mail us at aasuarec@ualberta.ca with a brief description of your issue. One of our Membership Services Officers (Brygeda Renke or Karyn Popplestone) will be in touch.
The AASUA would like to encourage members to share their concerns and views regarding matters affecting academic staff. Send your ideas or submissions for our consideration to reception at: aasuarerec@ualberta.ca. (The AASUA reserves the right to edit any submissions included.) To get things started in this first edition, I have included a piece on collegiality that I hope will stimulate some discussion and change.

Care to be Collegial?

My Concise Oxford Dictionary defines collegiality as “relating to or involving shared responsibility, as among a group of colleagues.” Dare to Discover describes the University of Alberta as a “dynamic collegial community”, and Dare to Deliver as being “unusually collegial.” However, the recently released Dare to Discover Report does not mention the word, and instead focuses on the University’s standing among its peers (rankings). In the AASUA’s Workload/Work Life Study (2006), only 53% of all academic staff agreed with the statement “There is a high degree of collegiality among my peers”, with the lowest level of agreement coming from Associate Professors (41%) and Sessionals (38%), and the highest level (65%) from Librarians. There thus seems to be something of a disconnect between what the University thinks is happening between its academic staff, and what people are actually experiencing on the ground.

At a recent breakfast meeting with Deans from the SSHRC-funded Faculties, to which I was invited, the topic of civility was brought up in the context of interactions between staff and students, academic staff and non-academic staff, and especially interactions between academic staff. The Deans noted what appeared to be a deterioration in standards of civility, and in particular a perceived increase in the instances of outright rudeness. The discussion led to a broader consideration of the work environment of academic faculty, and especially the stresses placed on faculty by the Faculty Evaluation Committee (FEC) process. It was concluded that what the FEC system asks for, it generally gets, and that is unrelenting performance in research, hopefully also in teaching, and maybe, as a distant third, in service. The Faculty Agreement mentions collegiality in only one place (Article 7: University Responsibilities), but then only rather indirectly:

§7.09: A staff member shall be actively engaged in service to the university and shall participate in the collegial responsibilities of departmental, faculty and university governance.

Thus, in a rewards-based system like FEC, there is no clear advantage to being collegial to one’s peers, beyond attending a few committee meetings (a tick in the box). In particular, key collegial activities such as mentoring and faculty development only merit passing mention in Appendix D (Annual Report) of the Faculty Agreement. Instead, the FEC process pits peer against peer in the competition for increments and the struggle to avoid falling into “the lower quartile” (even if that lower quartile might still be very good). At the extreme, the only clear reason for working with one’s colleagues would be if a joint publication might ensue; short of that, why would you help a colleague who might then get an additional publication and pip you for that extra half increment? This may seem an extreme and mercenary view, but at some level the FEC process forces all of us except the most altruistic to think and make daily decisions in this way.

The FEC system has many benefits to it, not the least of which is the provision of a reward mechanism for academic success, which many universities in Canada do not have. It is surely also one of the reasons behind the outstanding performance of U of A faculty in recent years. It is therefore unlikely that the FEC system will change fundamentally any time soon. But might there be ways to make the system a little more humane?

Faculties are at liberty to write their own Standards of Performance for their FEC processes (subject to approval by the Provost), and several of the SSHRC-Faculty Deans

---

**WHO WE ARE…**
- The AASUA is the legislated bargaining body for academic staff at the University of Alberta, and the representative of our members in all disputes relating to collective agreements and academic matters.

**Care to be Collegial?**

**Member Views**

**CONGRATULATIONS!**
- Pat Demers, winner of the 2008 Sarah Shorten award, which recognizes outstanding achievements in the promotion of the advancement of women in Canadian universities and colleges.

**WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK**
- The AASUA is interested in hearing from members on a number of issues, including the service we provide. In order to find out what our members are thinking, we will be sending out electronic surveys throughout the year. Please take the time to complete the surveys. Your feedback is important!
were considering including (or have already included) statements about collegiality in their criteria. Interestingly, the Criteria for Merit Increments, Tenure and Promotion in my own Faculty (Science) does not mention collegiality anywhere, and talks of mentoring only in regard to undergraduate and graduate students (not to staff). Measuring collegiality would not be easy, but inclusion of this attribute in the FEC criteria would at least place it on the agenda. Chairs are well aware of those who are unusually collegial in their departments, and could use this in verbal arguments for incrementation; written comments about collegiality from peers could also form a criterion for tenure and especially promotion (to Full Professor).

In addition to these direct incentives, perhaps a subtle change in the optics of the FEC incrementation process might help in relieving the stress and constant pressure that the effectively open-ended (in both directions) system engenders. By this I mean that it is hard to feel “safe” at any time during the year, because one never knows how close one is to the cut for an extra or reduced half increment. Imagine instead that a single increment was guaranteed except in the case of demonstrably poor performance, and extra increments were allocated as a clear reward for outstanding performance in a given year. This might provide a level of comfort for the majority of us who deliver solid (dare I say, excellent) work each year, and remove the fear that we might somehow lose an increment because we happened to fall into some lower part of a relative or statistical distribution, as opposed to just having had a bad year (which we are normally well aware of when it happens). The sense that every second and every minute of every day must be used to fight to keep our place on an invisible scale might be reduced, and we might actually find it fun again to spend time talking with our colleagues about our work, helping with that grant application or manuscript, or maybe just going for a coffee?

This proposed change would require no modification of collective agreements, and probably no modification of Faculty Standards of Performance (although committing the process to writing would be a good idea). It would also considerably reduce the FEC workload by removing the need to examine cases for single increments in detail, with focus instead on only the outstanding and problematic cases. The optic of the 1.2 increment pool (which implies that a single increment is somehow below average) could be changed by referring instead to an outstanding achievement increment pool (for increments above one) that consists of 20% of the overall amount available for increments—that is, it would be the amount left over after allocating everyone an automatic single increment. It would then be up to Chairs to argue for multiple increments for their staff on the basis of unusually meritorious performance (or to argue for a reduced increment on the basis of poor performance). Furthermore, by declaring that the balance of increments less than one does not return to the increment pool, the sense that zero or partial increments are being used to fund multiple increments for others would disappear.

Finally, this discussion of collegiality would not be complete without mention of the physical barriers to collegial interaction. By this I mean the loss or absence of physical space for social interaction amongst staff. The University’s dramatic growth over the last decade has put huge pressure on space, and many former common areas and lunch rooms have been converted to offices and labs. Only in the newest buildings such as the Engineering Teaching and Learning Complex do we see social space being built back into architectural designs. The rest of us have to fight for a table in HUB Mall or SUB to engage in what passes for social interaction. Java Jive is probably the only thing keeping our institution from total social withdrawal!

Jeremy Richards, AASUA President
AASUA Council 2008–2009

Agriculture, Life, & Environment:
- Agriculture, Food, & Nutritional Science
  - Vacancy
- Rural Economics, Renewable Resources, Human Ecology
  - Tomas Nilsson (Rural Eco.)

Arts:
- Art & Design, Drama, Music
  - Michael Kennard (Drama)

English
- July Rak (English & Film)

History & Classics, Philosophy
- Jennifer Jay (Hist. & Class.)

Economics, Political Science, Women’s Studies
- Ian Urquhart (Political Sc.)

Sociology, Anthropology, Linguistics
- Kathleen Lowrey (Anth.)

Modern Languages, East Asian Studies
- William Anselmi (Mod. Lang.)

Business:
- Robert Gephart (Strategic Management & Organization)

Campus Saint-Jean:
- Donald Ipperciel

Education:
- Education Policy Studies, Library & Information Studies
  - George Richardson (EDU International Initiatives)
- Educational Psychology
  - Patricia Boechler (Education)
- Elementary, Secondary Education
  - Anna Kirova (Elem. Educ.)

Science:
- Biological Sciences
  - Colleen Cassady St. Clair
- Chemistry
  - Mariusz Klobukowski
- Mathematical Sciences
  - Gordon Swaters
- Physics
  - Jan Jung
- Earth & Atmospheric, Computing Science
  - Ehab Elmallah
- Psychology
  - Donald Heth

Administrative/Professional Officers:
- Tim Busch (Human Resources)
- Lisa Christensen (Human Resources)
- Joe Daniel (Physical Education & Recreation)
- Terra Garneau (Research Services Office)
- Tracy Hetman (Spec. Support & Disability)
- Louise Jenkins (History & Classics)
- Sandra McFadyen (Chemical & Materials Engineering)
- Joanne McKinnon (Anthropology)
- George Thomlison (Facilities Management)

Trust/Research:
- Sandra Petersson (Alberta Law Reform Institute)
- Ricardo Acuna (Parkland Institute)
- Kathy Belton (Public Health Sciences)
- Cameron McGregor (Chem. & Materials Engineering)
- Lisa Tanguay (Alberta Diabetes Institute)

Augustana Faculty:
- Shauna Wilton

Members At Large:
- Simaan AbouRizk (Civil & Environmental Engineering)
- Heidi Julien (Library & Information Studies)
- James Muir (Law/History & Classics)
- Lorenz Sigurdson (Mechanical Engineering)
- Ruby Swanson (Devonian Botanic Garden)

Board of Governors Representative (Non-voting):
- John Hoddinott (Augustana Faculty/Biological Science)
Contract Academic Staff (Teaching): Making a Difference

The Contract Academic Staff (Teaching) (CAS) Committee is a subcommittee of the AASUA, representing all full- and part-time contract academic staff. The committee meets monthly to deal with issues of concern to CAS, and to promote the presence of CAS on campus.

Over the next year, CAS will be revisiting and revising the terms of our collective agreement. This is our members’ opportunity to have their voices heard on matters of importance to CAS employment relationships. CAS has made significant gains over the past year, but there is still much work to be done.

If you have any questions or would like to volunteer, contact CAS through the AASUA at aasua@ualberta.ca or by E-mailing Kelly MacFarlane, the committee Chair, at kelly.macfarlane@ualberta.ca.

AASUA would like to thank the following members and staff for their dedication and determination: Tom Scott, Bob Campenot, Kathryn Arbuckle, and Howard Welch (Negotiations Team) and task force members Chris Cheeseman, Phyllis Clark, Heidi Julien, Rod Wood, Olive Yonge, and Brad Hamdon (General Counsel and task force Co-Chair).

Contract Academic Staff (Teaching): Making a Difference

The Contract Academic Staff (Teaching) (CAS) Committee is a subcommittee of the AASUA, representing all full- and part-time contract academic staff. The committee meets monthly to deal with issues of concern to CAS, and to promote the presence of CAS on campus.

Over the next year, CAS will be revisiting and revising the terms of our collective agreement. This is our members’ opportunity to have their voices heard on matters of importance to CAS employment relationships. CAS has made significant gains over the past year, but there is still much work to be done.

If you have any questions or would like to volunteer, contact CAS through the AASUA at aasua@ualberta.ca or by E-mailing Kelly MacFarlane, the committee Chair, at kelly.macfarlane@ualberta.ca.

AASUA would like to thank the following members and staff for their dedication and determination: Tom Scott, Bob Campenot, Kathryn Arbuckle, and Howard Welch (Negotiations Team) and task force members Chris Cheeseman, Phyllis Clark, Heidi Julien, Rod Wood, Olive Yonge, and Brad Hamdon (General Counsel and task force Co-Chair).

Fair Employment Week: Celebrating Members

A recent initiative by CAS was Fair Employment Week, during which a reception was held on October 27 at the Faculty Club, to celebrate CAS members recognized as outstanding instructors by their students. It is always a tremendous pleasure to recognize the accomplishments of our members and their contributions to teaching. We congratulate this year's award recipients: Solweig Balzar (Earth & Atmospheric Sciences), Hoyne Santa-Balazs (Art & Design), Michael Polushin (History & Classics), and Mebbie Bell (Women's Studies).
AASUA Committees

Three types of committees are established by AASUA Council and remain responsible to Council:

1. **Constituency Committees** represent academic staff with their own collective agreements; they are authorized by and report to Council. Currently the AASUA has seven constituency groups:
   - Academic Faculty
   - Administrative and Professional Officers (APO)
   - Association of Professional Librarians (APLUA)
   - Contract Academic Staff (Teaching) (CAST)
   - Sessional and Other Temporary Staff (SOTS)
   - Trust/Research Academic Staff (TRAS)
   - Faculty Service Officers (FSO)

   The latter three groups are more recently integrated. As such, these groups do not yet have Constituency Committees, but plans are in the works.

2. **Standing Committees** have long-term roles and are created to fulfill functions that continue from year to year. These are subcommittees of either Council or the Executive Committee. Membership of all Standing Committees is open to any member of AASUA, although the Chairs are drawn from Council and an attempt is made for broad representation of the range of constituency groups. Committee involvement is for a one-year term. There are currently six standing committees:
   - Salary
   - Members’ Advisory
   - Economic Benefits
   - Equity Issues
   - Research and Scholarly Activity
   - Teaching and Learning

3. **Ad hoc (or Working) Committees** are task-specific in their creation and disbanded when that task has been accomplished. Members are normally drawn from the Executive Committee or Council (e.g., Finance Committee and Personnel Committee).

Be Involved!

Do you feel that your voice is being heard? Do you have ideas about improvements to your workplace? Do you want to help development relationships that enhance your work life? The AASUA is always looking for new members for its Committees and for member involvement. Anyone interested in serving on any AASUA committees should contact a Committee Chair or the AASUA President, Jeremy Richards. Better still, stand for election to Council!

For more information about these committees and a listing of current committee chairs and contact information, visit the AASUA Web site at www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/aasua.

Working Together: Recognizing Support Staff

Many of us benefit from the activities of support staff in our research and teaching work, but these contributions are not often formally acknowledged. The AASUA encourages all academic staff to recognize the efforts and value support staff brings to our work. The AASUA maintains close relationships with the Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA), and NASA President, Russ Eccles, asks that researchers, in particular, remember to highlight the contributions of support staff in their publications as formal acknowledgments. In the case of substantive contributions to research, co-authorship is appropriate. It is also good practice to give a copy of the paper to staff members for their own records.

**Robert’s Rules of Order in Council**

Robert’s Rules of Order were first published in 1876 by American Army General Henry Martyn Robert, and have since become one of the most widely used set of rules for parliamentary procedure. They are recommended for any deliberative assembly of more than a dozen or so people, and are designed to facilitate the passage of business to a definitive conclusion.

If you are involved in any committee work of the size or nature of AASUA Council (73 members), meetings can become unwieldy, especially when complicated or contentious issues are being discussed. Although Council and most other boards or committees broadly follow parliamentary rules (e.g., motions are presented, seconded, discussed, and voted upon), procedures are often made up on the fly, and it can become difficult to prevent individuals from dominating the debate, or to bring motions to closure through a vote or other appropriate mechanism (such as tabling the motion or referring it to a committee).

Over the course of this year, AASUA Council will examine the advisability of adopting Robert’s Rules of Order to govern its meetings, as well as the benefits of appointing a Parliamentarian to provide procedural advice during Council meetings (see Bylaw §6.16).

The AASUA is seeking a member with expertise as a Parliamentarian and an interest in serving AASUA in this way. Contact the President, Jeremy Richards (jeremy.richards@ualberta.ca) to express your interest.