

SAFAGRAM

President's Message



by Doug Spurgeon

With Christmas fast approaching, I want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and hope that all of you enjoy the holiday season with friends and family.

Once the New Year starts, the work for a new Collective Agreement will begin. In January, the Association will be filing to start the next round of negotiations. The talks for this next round of bargaining should begin in February. It will be an interesting round this time with the Government once again announcing a **0 percent** funding increase for possibly two years. Does this mean that wages will be frozen? Not necessarily.

The Faculty Association has now implemented a process for any member who needs to deal with return to work, illness/disability, or workplace accommodation. Tracy Fawcett is the SAFA Executive member, who will be in charge of assisting members when concerns arise and will be working with SAIT's Health Services to provide support to Association members. Through the joint efforts, the Association will be able to provide better support for its members. Thanks to Tracy for stepping forward to help in this area.

SAIT's Annual Report is now available for the year ending June 30, 2009. Looking at pp. 59 and 61, it is good to see that SAIT has posted \$21,245,000 excess of revenue over expenses (pg. 59) and \$151,437,000 cash and cash equivalents, end of year (pg. 61). While these amounts are higher than the previous year, given the current economic outlook, it appears at least that SAIT is poised to weather the storm and will be in good standing once things turn around.

There will be some things to look forward to in the upcoming year of 2010.

Hopefully, we will have a new Collective Agreement to be ratified prior to our Annual General Meeting.

The ACIFA conference once again is being held at the Jasper Park Lodge from March 17 - 19, 2010. It's time to start planning for those who would like to attend this conference.

For those who like long range planning, SAFA will be hosting the ACIFA conference

continued on page 2

In this Issue

President's Message	Page 1
Current Issues at SAIT	Page 2
Keep our Students/Keep our Standards	Page 2
Some Interesting Christmas Traditions	Page 3
Editorial Cartoon	Page 4

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1. The Editorial Board has the final say as to what is included or deleted from the newsletter.
2. Editorial Board decisions about newsletter material must be agreed to by consensus.
3. The newsletter will include a disclaimer stating that the views expressed in its content do not necessarily represent the views of the Editorial Board or SAFA.
4. All material included in the newsletter must
 - be signed by the author when submitted to the editors, but anonymity may be requested and granted for printing.
 - be based on "reasoned argument" if personal criticism is used.
 - not involve name-calling.
 - not include sexist, racist, or homophobic comments.
 - be related to SAIT, although this will be interpreted broadly.

The views expressed in SAFAGRAM do not necessarily represent the views of the Editorial Board or SAFA.

Current Issues at SAIT



by Sean O'Flynn

My main concern at SAIT is the “disconnect” between SAIT’s direction and the role of the faculty. SAIT’s business model focuses too much on short-term goals, while it undervalues the important role faculty plays in the long-term success of the school. While it is recognized that SAIT needs to be run in a financially responsible way, it is important not to forget that SAIT’s vision of being a leader in education, training, and innovation can be accomplished only if management is supportive of the faculty, offers reasonable workloads, and truly values faculty’s contribution to SAIT.

If SAIT is going to use a business model, they must learn from the mistakes of companies such as Enron, which had an incentive system that was short-term focused and did not add any real value to their organization. At SAIT the incentive system for both management and faculty has become too short-term focused, primarily using budgets and SIR results to dictate the reward system.

What are the incentives for management?

- to give faculty a reasonable workload;
- to invest in faculty’s professional development; and
- to treat faculty in a fair and respectful way.

What are the incentives for faculty?

- to discipline students who need more direction;
- to provide challenging assignments;
- to uphold a high degree of integrity in their profession or trade; and
- to ensure the reputation of SAIT by holding students to a high standard.

While these are hard to quantify, these are the behaviours that need to be rewarded.

Fee-for-service instructors are being used throughout campus, and this has led to position abolishment for SAFA members.



The mix of fee-for-service instructors on campus has created a great deal of confusion and has resulted in a lower quality of education for the students. Logic would say that fee-for-service instructors are being hired because they are cheaper, but how is that achieving SAIT’s goal of becoming a premier polytechnic? Is management hiring them simply to avoid the Association? Hopefully SAIT is willing to work with the Association to clarify the role of fee-for-service instructors and limit their use to unusual circumstances. This would benefit both management and the faculty as we continue to build a premier polytechnic together.

Management has an important role to play and has made positive contributions to SAIT as demonstrated by a progressive sounding Ethics FIRST document. Creating the document was a good start, but now it is time for management to live up to it. Perhaps this hasn’t happened because of the difficulty in implementing it to SAIT as a whole. The hope is that management will be willing to incorporate the spirit of the Ethics FIRST document into the collective agreement in an effort to hold all members of the SAIT community accountable for living up to what are moral values.

With negotiations about to start, we are hoping that management is ready to focus on the students’ educational experience, which means providing support to instructors. SAIT is at a critical point, where management will either choose to work with faculty to improve the educational experience of students, or they will focus on budgets, bonuses, and marginalizing faculty by using fee-for-service instructors in an attempt to have short-term profits. I look forward to sharing my experiences and providing some insights during this process. ❖

SAFA Scholarship

Congratulations to Geoff Schoenberg, who was recently awarded the SAFA Dependant Scholarship. Geoff is the son of Gregor Schoenberg, who is an instructor in the MacPhail School of Energy. Geoff completed a Bachelor of Applied Business and Entrepreneurship (BBE) from Mount Royal College in 2007. He was the Volunteer Operations Manager for the WorldSkills Calgary 2009 competition. Presently Geoff is enrolled in a Master’s Program in Sport Management at Deakin University in Australia. ❖

*President’s Message
continued from page 1*

for 2011 at the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise. A call for help from the membership to plan this event will be coming in January of the New Year.

Once again, my best wishes to everyone and their families for the season.

Have a safe holiday, and I will see you all in the New Year. ❖

Keep our Students/Keep our Standards

by Student Counselling

Each semester, we lose students. They drop out, fail out, or their performance declines. There are a variety of reasons why we lose them, some of which include the following: lack of a fit with the program, financial problems, personal concerns that interfere with their performance, or feeling overwhelmed and isolated by the whole post-secondary experience.

From the fall of 2007 to the spring of 2009, this group of certificate, diploma, and applied degree students suffered an attrition of nearly 1200 students. That was a loss of 37 percent of the students. The cost to students can be devastating—going from enrolling in a program to better their career and life path to realizing their academic experience is not going in the direction they intended can be a real blow. As well, SAIT loses potential alumni and runs the risk of a negative reputation in the community. The loss of that many students costs SAIT nearly \$6M in tuition and reduced efficiency of our teaching resources, including instructors, support staff, and facilities. In addition, these empty seats cannot be easily filled at mid-semester.

It is essential that as an institution we continue to do all we can to best help and support our students in succeeding in their post-secondary experience.

Each semester, instructors and academic chairs continue to improve curriculum and meet industry and student needs. They spend hours raising the bar of excellence in their instructional and assessment strategies and standards as well as accepting the challenge of creating an engaging content and skill-oriented classroom environment.

Lowering academic standards to retain students is not the solution because employers expect SAIT graduates to have competencies that prepare them for the demands of the workplace. Rather, we are challenged to support students who have the potential to be successful but who face barriers that interfere with that possibility. What can help is to identify these students early and attempt to change the outcome with them. It follows that instructors and staff continue to work on ways of better identifying the early signs that a student may be “at risk” and to be aware of the many resources that SAIT has available to support students.

When a SAIT employee spends time to connect with a student and they have a conversation about what isn't working, the student will become aware of and be able to utilize resources at SAIT that may lead to success. The student may still leave temporarily but return

in a later semester better prepared for that program or another program. We are not just striving to retain students in programs but to retain them at SAIT.

Student retention rates increase when students are engaged in the classroom and in campus activities and have ready access to support resources. The success of SAIT's student retention goals is dependent on all employees focusing on this initiative.

If the annual effect of our retention efforts retains even one or two students in each of SAIT's programs – students who otherwise may have withdrawn – then, the impact will be significant. This is an achievable target for SAIT while still keeping the academic standards at a level needed for graduates to be successful in their employment environment. Your role as faculty is critical in terms of assisting with this process.

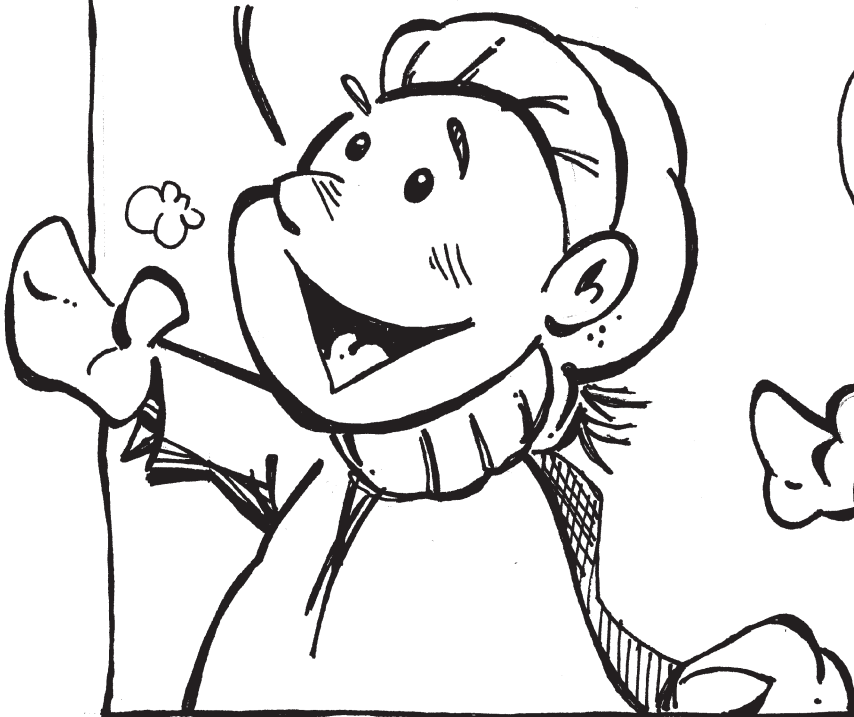
If you would like more detailed information on the strategies of the student retention initiative, please contact Stephen Case, Academic Chair, Student Retention stephen.case@sait.ca or 8299.

Also, please look for future information sessions, in January 2010, on “How to Identify and Support At-Risk Students,” presented by Lois Hayward, Supervisor of Student Counselling. ♦

Some Interesting Christmas Traditions

1. In the Ukraine, if you find a spider web in the house on Christmas morning, it is believed to be a harbinger of good luck! There once lived a woman so poor, says a Ukrainian folk tale, that she could not afford Christmas decorations for her family. One Christmas morning, she awoke to find that spiders had trimmed her children's tree with their webs. When the morning sun shone on them, the webs turned to silver and gold. An artificial spider and web are often included in the decorations on Ukrainian Christmas trees.
2. At Christmas, it is traditional to exchange kisses beneath the mistletoe tree. In ancient Scandinavia, mistletoe was associated with peace and friendship. That may account for the custom of “kissing beneath the mistletoe.”
3. In many households, part of the fun of eating Christmas pudding is finding a trinket that predicts your fortune for the coming year. For instance, finding a coin means you will become wealthy. A ring means you will get married; while a button predicts bachelorhood. The idea of hiding something in the pudding comes from the tradition in the Middle Ages of hiding a bean in a cake that was served on Twelfth Night. Whoever found the bean became “king” for the rest of the night.
4. In Greek legend, malicious creatures called Kallikantzaroi sometimes play troublesome pranks at Christmas time. In order to get rid of them, salt or an old shoe is burnt. The pungent burning stench drives off, or at least helps discourage, the Kallikantzaroi. Other techniques include hanging a pig's jawbone by the door and keeping a large fire so they can't sneak down the chimney.
5. The poinsettia is a traditional Christmas flower. In Mexico (its original birthplace), the poinsettia is known as the “Flower of the Holy Night.”
6. The “Urn of Fate” is part of the Christmas celebrations in many Italian households. The Urn of Fate is brought out on Christmas Eve. It holds a wrapped present for everyone. The mother tries her luck first, then the others in turn. If you get a present with your name on it, you keep it; otherwise, you put it back and try again.
7. In Sweden, a common Christmas decoration is the Julbukk, a small figurine of a goat. It is usually made of straw. Scandinavian Christmas festivities feature a variety of straw decorations in the form of stars, angels, hearts and other shapes, as well as the Julbukk. ♦

You know why I like snow in December?
Everything familiar gets covered up - the world looks brand new!



It's a fresh start
to the New Year,
one full of possibilities ...



Truly, this is
a wondrous time we live in ...



I can't wait to go exploring!



HAPPY HOLIDAYS ...
SEE YOU IN 2010!

BT HAMILTON