

Voices from the Classroom

**Brief to the
Members of the
Legislative Assembly**

**from
SIAST Academic Bargaining Unit**

July 11, 2006

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“This is about quality education”

The delivery of quality post-secondary education in Saskatchewan is jeopardized by insufficient action to address the instructor recruitment/retention issues.

The gap between supply and demand for programs is increasing. As a result, wait lists are on the rise. This problem is compounded by the fact that we are experiencing an accelerated loss of professional instructors due to the following:

- excessive hours of work;
- recruitment/retention problems;
- intellectual property concerns;
- evidence of union busing strategies; and
- the reliance solely on student evaluations to assess instructors.

Hours of work – “workload is tied directly to quality!”

- Hours of work” has been a long-standing issue in negotiations at SIAST. The workload formula currently in operation was developed in 1990. When the instructors at SIAST originally agreed to use the Ontario Hours Model to resolve our hours of work problem, we did so out of a desire to guarantee quality programs for our students. A major concern for us was the need to create a system of workload allocation that would guarantee fairness for all instructors in terms of each individual instructor’s time as well as across departments. We had no idea the process would be as long and protracted as it has been, nor did we imagine the result would be so inequitable.
- The program categories and the category cap for assigned student contact hours were developed with very little input from instructors. Initially, the caps were set as a maximum number of student contact hours. As outlined in Article 9.2.7, the caps were not intended to be a goal for assigned hours but to represent a guideline for assigned hours that was not to be exceeded. Paid time for preparation, evaluation and for performing other complementary functions was based on a formula directly proportional to the category cap and was not to be used to determine workload.
- The *Hours of Work Review* conducted in 2001 demonstrated how inadequate the 1990 Hours of Work model has become and how its misuse by SIAST management has created serious workload issues for many instructors. Many instructors are working well over their yearly cap of 1442 hours. SIAST is still not actively addressing this issue!

- To maintain high quality, current programs that will attract students, as well as challenge and meet their needs, instructors must regularly upgrade program content, delivery style, equipment, labs and training aids. To accomplish required program revisions, many instructors must exceed their maximum yearly complementary hours cap. A failure to update programs and technology can result in poor performance evaluations.
- SIAST management has made a number of decisions that negatively affect quality programming and instruction:
 - Management determines the assignments without regard for pedagogical principles or the quality of courses and programs.
 - Management may assign electronically mediated instruction or require the inclusion of electronic application in existing courses. Both the development of electronic modules and the delivery of electronically mediated instruction require vastly increased amounts of time, often without a corresponding decrease in already-assigned instructional student contact hours.
 - The use of electronic media in program development also requires an expertise that must be learned and mastered in a very short time. Many instructors find they have few resources to assist them and no relief from an already over-burdened workload.

All of these increases in workload over an extended period of time have resulted in a decline in program quality and have had a detrimental affect on instructor's health and well being.

- We believe that SIAST has not addressed any of the hours of work concerns we have raised over the past three contracts. Unfortunately, the employer's position did not change during our last round of bargaining. Over the years, they have simply put a few program development dollars in "hot spots" or troubled areas, hoping that will correct any hours of work concerns we have.
- The message from the instructors is clear:
 - Allow clear language in the Collective Bargaining Agreement to capture the actual work done, including on-line work, and allow adequate preparation time for instructors.
 - Create an "hours of work model" that would help make SIAST the courses the program of choice in western Canada. Allow the most up-to-date programs in the classroom, shop, lab or clinic and provide real help to instructors to enable the students to become successful in their field of study.
 - Provide adequate time for instructors to deliver programs and educational services to each and every student at a level to which the students are entitled.

Recruitment and retention – SIAST needs to be in the competitive market!

We are an aging society, and the instructor workforce at SIAST is no exception. SIAST needs to implement effective recruitment and retention strategies that will complement mentorship roles thus creating a continual flow of quality instruction to the students. Presently this is not the case. The number of instructors retiring is on the rise and there are more instructors resigning to take better positions elsewhere.

This sudden departure of professional instructors has caused disruption in the delivery of quality programming for the students. Last bargaining round the SIAST instructors resorted to strike action because SIAST management failed to table an offer that would benefit SIAST students! SIAST management needs to initiate effective means of ensuring adequate recruitment and retention so that professional instructors will be drawn to the institute as the ideal place to teach, thus continuing quality programs.

- **Pensions & Benefits:** An attractive pension and benefit package is often the drawing card that will aid in the recruitment and retention of quality professional instructors and SIAST falls below the mark in this area. Improvements in public sector pensions are commonplace across Canada. Most contract renewals have seen matched pension contribution rates increase gradually for the past six years. Matched contribution rates of an average of 7% are provided by most collective bargaining agreements in Saskatchewan. The 2003 – 2006 round saw many CBAs set pensions at 9% matched by their employer. SIAST only agreed to increase the matched pension contribution rate from 5% to 5.25%. The health care sector has set pension contributions at 7%, while the city of Regina employees and city of Regina police have pension contribution rates of about 10% and 11% respectively. As SIAST employees, our pension contributions are woefully inadequate and significantly below the provincial average.
- **Professional & Program Development Funds:** A quality program must keep pace with rapid changes in teaching strategies and learning processes. SIAST instructors have the ongoing task of maintaining a high quality of instruction by keeping abreast of current trends and knowledge as well as sustaining professional licensure. For a number of years this has been accomplished through accessing an instructor's individual Professional Development funds in the amount of \$400.00 per academic year. This amount is below the average allotment for instructors in comparison to other college systems. As well, the Program Development fund seems to be greatly reduced across the program areas thus preventing instructors from accessing updated and new ideas. This lack of development in the program area is affecting the quality of instruction that students need.
- **Wages:** The results of a study presented by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges which analyzed 48 sample colleges in Canada and made reference to all 150 colleges and institutes in the nation, stated that colleges and institutes are a sound investment from the following perspectives: Canada's colleges and institutes stimulate the national economy. Canada's colleges and institutes leverage taxpayer dollars. Canada's colleges and institutes generate a return on government investment. Canada's colleges and institute increase

students' earning potential. Altogether, Canada's economy owes approximately \$106.3 billion of its current labor and non-labor income to the past and present efforts of Canada's community colleges and technical institutes. Clearly it is not inaccurate to describe the colleges as engines of economic growth!

In an aggressive market for recruiting and retaining quality professional instructors, one of the necessary components is a competitive wage. Many of the Colleges are competing for instructors who can earn twice the salary in their area of skill outside of the classroom. In the 1980s SIAST instructors were 17% ahead of teachers in the public school system. Today, 26 years later, the wages of SIAST instructors are not only behind the public schoolteachers but also behind instructors in other colleges across Canada! At best we offer \$67,000 and we have to compete with colleges such as Red Deer, NAIT and SAIT. The extremely low wage mandates (0%, .5%, 1%) that were imposed in bargaining in 2004 have not helped in recruiting and retaining quality professional instructors and thus we have been unable to compete with the other colleges.

The following is a comparison of average salaries for SIAST instructors and the teachers in STF at the top of their ranges:

October 1981 – Instructor salaries were 9.9% higher than STF teachers.

October 1989 – STF teacher salaries were 0.2% higher than SIAST instructors.

June 2004 – STF teacher salaries were 7.1% higher than SIAST instructors.

June 2005 – STF teacher salaries were 7.0% higher than SIAST instructors.

June 2006 – STF teacher salaries are 4.6% higher than SIAST instructors.

In the fall of 2006, the salaries of STF teachers (with 15 years or more of service) will be 9.0% higher than SIAST instructors' current salary! Our objective is to restore that balance so that we can retain our quality professional instructors that are left as well as recruit more quality professional instructors. Let's invest in our technical institutes so that we can continue to provide quality programs for our students.

Intellectual property – a way for SIAST to maintain and enhance quality and credibility in the educational field!

- Intellectual property establishes a right and identifies ownership of intellectual creativity. The premise underlying intellectual property throughout its history has been that the recognition and rewards associated with ownership of inventions and creative works stimulate further inventive and creative activity.

- An agreement between the Manitoba Government and General Employees Union and the University College of the North contains the following language: All intellectual property is owned by the member that creates it except in those cases: where there is a written contract to the contrary between a member ... the Employer ... a third party which assigns ownership rights ... to the employer or the third party; or where the employer provides material and significant contribution from the employer's resources, personnel or facilities, a member agrees to share ownership rights.
- Many other colleges and universities have similar language (BCGEU, universities from Alberta, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Ontario), and applies to all materials and resources outside of the course program title and description.
- A number of recommendations in the Training Systems Review state that SIAST is to readily share their resources, curriculum, programs with entities such as the regional college system and that these entities may adjust the programs to meet their individual needs.
- (37) A Partnership Agreement between SIAST and SIIT be developed to share resources, expertise, and effort.
- (85) regional colleges and DTI be entrusted to make adaptations to SIAST curricula, in response to learner and local needs, based on professional judgments made by them.
- (97) SIAST's proprietary interest in its curricula and course materials for such programs be modified to place them in the public domain with respect to the regional colleges, DTI, and SIIT. SIAST no longer retain supervisory authority over the courses offered by the regional colleges and DTI.

We are concerned that any move toward further limiting the intellectual property rights of instructors will have an adverse effect on quality of programming and recruitment and retention of instructors.

Union busting – attacking the rights of unionized workers

- Since the last round of negotiations with SIAST, the labor relations between the Union and SIAST have deteriorated to a point of being dysfunctional. The Academic Bargaining unit as well as the Professional Services Bargaining unit have had to carry more grievances forward to arbitration than any other SGEU bargaining unit. There have been continual attacks on the Academic Bargaining Chair which suggest that SIAST is attempting to force the Chair out of his position. As well, intimidation tactics are evident through the various communication lines. This hostile environment which has been fueled by SIAST has flowed over into the membership causing an unsettled work environment and ultimately affecting instructors' ability to deliver quality programs to the students. This needs to stop! We expect SIAST management to treat all its employees with respect.

We need a fair process to address student concerns

We will always support maintaining high quality programs at SIAST and we believe that feedback from students is key to ensuring that high standards are maintained. As well, student and instructor concerns need to be heard and addressed in a safe environment, following a fair supportive process. We believe that SIAST has a responsibility to help students practice their conflict resolution skills – right here, right now.

They need to develop the ability to problem-solve and manage differences, since they will be required to demonstrate those skills in the workplaces where they will soon be employed.

Over the last few years SIAST has chosen to use student concerns as the sole means of evaluating an instructor's performance which has led to discipline in a number of cases. This is an unfair approach which has caused undue hardship and stress for many instructors, sometimes resulting in sick leave and even resignations.