

Open Letter on Contracted Services

To Dr. Joy Johnson,
President, Simon Fraser University

Dear Dr. Johnson,

Re: Contracted Cleaning, Food Services and Security at Simon Fraser University

We are writing to you to express our concerns about the circumstances of the contracted workers who provide vital services to SFU's three campuses and to ask you to bring these services back in house. As you know, the food service workers are employed by Compass-Chartwells and have a collective agreement with Unite Here! Local 40 while the cleaners are employed by Best Service Pros Ltd. and have a contract with Unit 4 of CUPE 3338. This workforce is primarily composed of women, people of colour, and immigrants. As a community, we can and must do better by these workers.

The principal rationale for contracting out cleaning and food services is to save the university money. However, these are labour intensive services and wages are the dominant cost. Periodic re-tendering of contracts puts downward pressure on terms and conditions of employment because contractor success in obtaining contracts is dependent on submitting the lowest bid. This system also limits job security. The result is a low wage, insecure, precarious workforce which could not be more different demographically than the university's highest-paid employees.

The way SFU provides these services is different from UBC and UVic. Both these universities operate the services themselves and the workers are their employees. We have reviewed the collective agreements of the cleaners and food service workers and compared their terms and conditions of employment with the contracted workers with CUPE local 116 at UBC and CUPE Local 917 at UVic. While comparing contracts is often challenging, given the different employment systems in place and difference names for classifications of doing the same work, what is clear from this comparison is that the wages of the contract workers at SFU are significantly lower than at UBC or UVic.

We note that the 2019 living wage for Metro Vancouver was \$19.50 per hour. None of the 2021 pay grades for janitorial staff meet this threshold. The closest is \$17.93. Only 1 of the seventeen 2021 pay grades for food service workers is above the 2019 living wage threshold and that position is currently unfilled.

The issue of low pay is only part of the story though. SFU contract workers do not have the same level of job security because contracts are periodically re-tendered, making it impossible for a contractor to guarantee employment beyond the term of the agreement between it and SFU. In 2017, when the contract for food services was re-tendered, it changed hands from Compass-Chartwells to Sodexo, only to change back to the former company in 2019. Before the 2017 change, food service staff organized

protests and visited the President's office asking that their jobs, their collective agreement and their union be continued by the successful bidder. At the time and without any successorship guarantee, the workers feared losing their jobs and their negotiated conditions of employment. In fact, during this change, all the workers were issued termination notices. We understand that the university brokered an arrangement with the successful bidder and those workers were hired back, but the experience was very stressful for the workers affected, underscoring the lack of job security experienced by workers under the contract system in place at SFU. While the government has enacted new successorship legislation, it still does not address the key issue that these employees do not have the same level of job security or benefits that university employees have. Periodic changes in contractors is also very disruptive for workers, creating insecurity about both their job security and the work they perform.

While the CUPE Local 3338 Unit 4 agreement with Best Cleaning Services and the Local 40 food services agreement with Compass Chartwells are different, they share many of the same discrepancies when compared with the agreements covering the same employees at UBC, UVic, and other SFU employees. Cleaners at SFU get only 4 sick days per year. They have no pension, no dental plan, and no extended health plan. There is no group life insurance or long-term disability plan. They receive 2-weeks' vacation for their first 4 years, 3 weeks after 5 years, and 4 after 11. They only qualify for the statutory minimum parental leave under federal EI and provincial Employment Standards with no top up. They have no right to access SFU's library or recreational facilities. There is no tuition waiver for their spouses or children. These conditions contrast sharply with what university employees get at UBC and UVic who perform comparable work.

While the food service workers' contract is slightly better it is still significantly inferior to that of comparable university employees. SFU contract workers start with 2 weeks' vacation and receive 3 weeks after 3 years, 4 after 6 years, and 5 weeks after 11 years of service. They receive only 5 sick days per year. Their pension is a trust agreement managed by the union in which the employer contributes 70 cents per hour or approximately 5% of earnings. They do have group life insurance but the maximum is \$25,000. They also have a basic dental and extended health plan (excluding part time workers), access to SFU's gym facilities but no right to library services or other SFU facilities. Parental leave is the statutory minimum with no top up, and there is no tuition waiver. Again, these conditions are significantly inferior to those at UBC and UVic. They are also inferior to the employment conditions of Unit 1 of CUPE on campus.

These differences have also been underscored by the impact of Covid-19. SFU food service workers have faced layoffs during the past year and the threat of a budget cut to cleaning services (during a pandemic) was floated by the university before being shelved. While both SFU and their respective employers have taken some steps to cushion the impact, contract workers have lost significant amounts of their already low income. In particular, the closure of most food services has meant lay-offs for a significant number of these workers. Meanwhile, at UBC and UVic, the universities have been able to address some of the impact of Covid-19 by re-deploying a portion of their workforce to other jobs within the university, an option not possible under the present arrangements at SFU.

When SFU carried out its Diversity Meter Survey in November, 2019, an initiative which we support, unfortunately it did not include the contracted workers, so no data was collected on them. However, this is a workforce which is primarily composed of women, people of colour, and immigrants and they are arguably the most vulnerable employees on our campus. It is regrettable that SFU does not know more about these workers as they are also members of the SFU community who perform work that is essential to all of us. SFU's plans for addressing structural discrimination should include them.

We note that SFU is in the process of appointing a new Vice President who will be responsible for leading the university's equity, diversity and inclusion initiative. We hope that one of the VP's first tasks in promoting SFU's important commitments in this area will be to address our concerns about contract workers.

We believe that as a matter of basic justice and as a way of signalling SFU's commitment to its principles of equity, diversity and inclusion, the university should take steps to bring back the contracted work, including making a commitment that it will employ those currently working for the contractors to ensure that such a decision does not generate insecurity and anxiety in the workforce. The university should then move quickly to improve the pay and benefits of these workers and retain CUPE and Unite Here! as the bargaining agents for these workers. We realize that this will involve advance planning and additional resources on the part of the university. Paying people fairly and including them as full members of the university community may cost a bit more, but it is the right thing to do. If UBC and UVic have been able to manage similar services in house, SFU should be able to do the same.

Thank you for your attention to our letter.

Yours Respectfully,

Initial Faculty Signatories

1. John Calvert, Health Sciences
2. Enda Brophy, Communication
3. Svend Robinson, JS Woodsworth Resident Scholar
4. Daniel Ahadi, Communication
5. Alberto Toscano, Communication
6. Shane Gunster, Communication
7. Adel Iskander, Communication
8. Siyuan Yin, Communication
9. Jody Baker, Communication
10. Jan Marontate, Communication
11. Michael T. Schmitt, Psychology
12. Roxanne Panchasi, History

13. Ronda Arab, English
14. Clint Burnham, English
15. Steve Collis, English
16. El Chenier, History
17. Kendra Strauss, Labour Studies
18. Samir Gandesha, Humanities
19. Malcolm Steinberg, Health Sciences
20. Denise Oleksijczuk, Contemporary Arts
21. Allyson Clay, Contemporary Arts (Emeritus)
22. Gerardo Otero, International Studies
23. Yıldız Atasoy, Sociology
24. Claudette Lauzon, Contemporary Arts
25. Gary McCarron, Communication
26. Carla Graebner, Librarian
27. Julian Christians, Physiology & Genetics
28. Hannah McGregor, Publishing
29. Baharak Yousefi, Librarian
30. Eldritch Priest, Contemporary Arts
31. Kumari Beck, Education
32. Kirsten McAllister, Communication
33. Carolyn Lesjak, Education
34. Laura Marks, Contemporary Arts
35. Genevieve Fuji Johnson, Political Science
36. Habiba Zaman, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
37. Christopher Pavsek, Contemporary Arts
38. Eugene Mcann, Geography
39. Robert Hackett, Communication (Emeritus)
40. Sabine Bitter, Contemporary Arts
41. Lynn Quarmby, Molecular Biology and Biochemistry
42. Nicholas Blomley, Geography
43. Jin-me Yoon, Contemporary Arts
44. Evelyn Encalada Grez, Labour Studies/Sociology & Anthropology
45. Aaron Windell, History
46. Paola Ardiles, Health Sciences
47. Nicole Berry, Health Sciences
48. Susan Erikson, Health Sciences
49. Ruth Lavergne, Health Sciences
50. Bruce Lanphear, Health Sciences
51. Mark Lechner, Health Sciences
52. Cecilia Sierra Heredia Lecturer, Health Sciences
53. Kate Tairyam, Health Sciences
54. Tim Takaro, Health Sciences

55. Rochelle Tucker, Health Sciences
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59. Dara Culhane, Anthropology
60. Peter Dickinson, Contemporary Arts
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64. Jacqueline Levitin, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies (retired)
65. Willeen Keough, History
66. Helen Hok-Sze Leung, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
67. Jen Marchbank, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
68. Arlene McLaren, Sociology and Anthropology
69. Kathy Mezei, Humanities (Emeritus)
70. Hiromi Matsui, Applied Sciences (retired)
71. Tiffany Muller Myrdahl, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
72. Catherine Murray, Professor, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
73. Dr Bidisha Ray, History
74. June Scudeler (Métis), Indigenous Studies
75. Lisa Shapiro, Philosophy
76. Travers, Sociology and Anthropology
77. S. Laurel Weldon, Political Science
78. Coleman Nye, Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
79. Nadine Attewell, Health Sciences
80. Travis Salway, Health Sciences