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LFA Board

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- Alison Curtis, Steward
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- Visit the website: <https://www.lfaweb.ca> 

From the President

I want to use this opportunity to formally thank **Cheryl McKeeman** for her enormous contributions to the Langara Faculty Association and to countless faculty members. Cheryl is retiring this fall and I want to acknowledge the significance of her work and how much we will miss her.



Cheryl is by far one of our hardest working faculty members. She is always in her office, available to both students and faculty. Her work ethic is daunting. In addition to being an outstanding instructor, Cheryl has been a dedicated and tireless advocate for faculty members. As our Chief Steward since the late 1990s, she has assisted countless faculty members and trained a number of LFA stewards. Her work in helping individual faculty members with advice, support or representation in their dealings with the College has been remarkable.

It is a challenge to try to convey the breadth and depth of Cheryl’s work on our behalf. She has been appointed by the LFA to numerous important College committees to ensure that faculty interests are well represented and seriously considered in important decisions. Whenever the College has been reluctant to include faculty input, Cheryl has reminded the College how vital it is to consider faculty perspectives. The College has always listened to her. Once they got to know Cheryl, successive senior leaders at the College quickly recognized her wisdom and would often request that she be the LFA appointee to various College committees.

Cheryl has been on every LFA bargaining team since she and I were first appointed bargainers for the LFA in 1998. Her work at the bargaining table has been quite simply, outstanding. It is not by luck that faculty at Langara bargained the 2% “stipend” which only 5 locals in the province were able to bargain several rounds ago. Thanks to her thorough and evidence-based costing exercises at our local table, Langara faculty earn more than many other locals. And our benefits also reflect the improvements that successive bargaining teams, led by Cheryl, were able to achieve.

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From the President *(continued from page 1)*

But probably the most significant labour relations achievement that is directly attributable to Cheryl is the remarkably positive labour relations climate we enjoy at Langara. It has become clear to the wisest of the senior leaders at the College that if a difficult situation arises, their best strategy is to have a quiet conversation with the LFA Chief Steward. She is a brilliant problem-solver whose compassion, integrity and pragmatism is well known and admired by those with whom she has worked. She has always been willing to find solutions that both protect faculty and acknowledge our obligations to the college.

Like many others I have learned a great deal from Cheryl. Having had the privilege of working alongside her, I have enjoyed the teamwork and commitment she always brings to the many challenges we have faced. I know I speak for many of you when I say that we will miss her greatly.

Lynn Carter

Cheryl McKeeman... in her own words

An interview with Alison Curtis

How did you first get involved in with the LFA and unions?

My Dad was management - I still remember his dinner-time rants against the union strikers! Growing up in small-town Quebec, I did not have any contact with unions at all (other than when the teachers went on strike, you can imagine my Dad's comments then!). When I moved to Vancouver, Safeway was on strike and I encountered my first picket line. When I started at Langara, my first office mates were Martin Gerson and George Karas who encouraged me to get involved with the LFA, in order to be more involved with the College and to get out of our shared office a little. My first role was Chair of the Nonregulars.



What was your first impression of the LFA?

I am so non-political, I really had no idea what the LFA was about. I attended the meetings, but really just because everyone else did (yes, those meetings were well attended in the olden days). There seemed to be a lot of old men talking very philosophically; and there seemed to be a lack of expertise on the bargaining team, and a lack of informed faculty in general.

Tell me about someone who has influenced your decision to work with the LFA

I was on a hike at Cypress with Chief Steward Al Cone who asked if I wanted to be Shop Steward. I had no idea what that meant, and his description made it sound pretty tame. So I said yes. The next week, my first case arrived: an accusation of racial discrimination by a faculty member against other faculty members. From the hiking trail right into the fire.

Keith Gilley and Larry Warren were past LFA presidents who really encouraged me a lot. Linda Sperling was our staff rep from CIEA (now FPSE) and I learned so much from her. And our current President Lynn Carter - our best president ever - has been an amazing partner over the past twenty years. We bargained together for several rounds, and we have worked closely together during our LFA time. She brought such an awareness of dealing with people and principles -- we have been so lucky to have Lynn dedicate so much to the LFA.

What do you find most challenging about union work?

A sense of responsibility for the well-being of the members, and the preservation of the Collective Agreement ... sometimes I just want to be a good-time girl!

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Cheryl McKeeman... in her own words *(continued from page 2)*

What do you wish other people knew about the LFA?

That even though we have a fantastic workplace, the union is so very important to ensure that faculty rights are respected and preserved. One of my most defining moments was during an LFA general meeting when a faculty member asked "why are we even talking about strike? We are all professionals, we should just be able to talk this out." I completely agree with that statement: we are professional, and the LFA comports itself in a professional manner. We are honest, we are forthright, we are principled. And our employer respects that we are reasonable and prepared for our meetings, and that we are logical. Sometimes we have to use extreme measures, and the employer understands that too.

What would you tell someone who is thinking about getting involved with the LFA?

Do it!!! The LFA Board is the best example of team work on this campus. Start by becoming the LFA rep to another department's selection/evaluation committee -- you will learn so much and experience a different departmental culture.



But even more importantly, I urge everyone to be fully involved with their department. Langara College is the great institution that it is because of the involvement of faculty. We do not wait for management to tell us what to do with our students; we know what is good and we lobby for it and work for it. Our departments need us to be engaged and actively participating - if we don't, then we will devolve into a corporate model. It is up to all of us to work hard to maintain the collegial model.

What might (someone) be surprised to know about you?

I am a crier. I didn't cry at the bargaining table or in grievance meetings, but in general I am a big crybaby - just try to say goodbye to me and watch the waterworks! So annoying!!!

How would colleagues describe you?

Very pro student. Crazy ridiculous work ethic. No patience for fools. Happy. And really really smart and funny. Ha!



Retirement plans?

Six months in Florida ... then we'll see! The true culture shock will come next spring when I get back from Florida.

The 2016-17 Langara Faculty Association Board



Back row: Janet Douglas, Darrell Kean, Brian Koehler, Alison Curtis, Stephen Phillips
Front row: Scott McLean, Lynn Carter, Jesse Smith. Inset: Noel Currie

Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC (FPSE) AGM and Conference

Report by Stephen Phillips

The LFA sent a full contingent of eleven delegates to this year's FPSE annual general meeting and convention held at Whistler, May 16-19. The conference theme, "educators organizing for change," underscored FPSE's continuing efforts to draw attention to the harm that funding cuts have done to the quality of public post-secondary education. With a BC provincial election due in May of 2017, those efforts will take on a special importance over the next 10 months.



As FPSE president **George Davison** noted in his report to the convention, provincial operating grants to colleges and universities, measured on a per-student basis and adjusted for inflation, have declined by 27% since the BC Liberals took office in 2001. This public de-funding of post-secondary education is slated to continue given that last February's budget provides for no increase in per-student operating grants for the next three years. There was widespread support for a motion to allocate an additional \$2 million from FPSE's defence fund to the "Open the Doors" campaign launched last year. Speaking in favour of the motion, LFA President **Lynn Carter** pointed out that the year ahead represents "a window of opportunity to influence public opinion." Endorsing the view expressed by other locals, Carter said FPSE must wage a hard-hitting campaign in the run-up to the election.



On a positive note, **Kathy Corrigan**, NDP critic for Advanced Education, assured delegates that "education is going to be the centrepiece of our platform." A similar message was conveyed by NDP leader **John Horgan**. In a pre-recorded video address to the convention, Horgan affirmed that post-secondary education would be "a defining issue for me, for the [NDP], and for the province as a whole." Corrigan invited FPSE members to provide input as the party develops specific planks of its election platform.

The convention's keynote speaker was **Dr. Elaine Bernard**, a veteran advocate for workers' rights and currently head of the Trade Union programme at Harvard. In a wide-ranging talk, Bernard surveyed the state of unions in Canada and other countries and explained their continuing importance today. Applying the reasoning of noted economist Albert O. Hirschman, she said that unions give employees a voice in the workplace by enabling them to speak up instead of suffering in silence or choosing to exit; that provides valuable feedback for system improvement. Unions also serve as "schools for democracy" since their legal status as exclusive bargaining agents requires them to build a community of interest among a large and diversified membership. Looking to the future, Bernard contended that while trade unionists have been preoccupied in recent years with putting out fires, "we need to light fires" in order to effect social change. A key challenge is to turn passive dues-paying members into active leaders, both in the union and the wider community. Among other things, that requires unions to educate new members about their local's history and about labour's broader role in securing a host of social rights. Unions must also encourage people to rediscover the purpose and value of the public sector. To that end, we need to "awaken the inner citizen" in order to challenge the neo-liberal narrative of "the taxpayer-consumer."



Among the resolutions up for debate, delegates voted to allocate \$50,000 to a campaign on Decolonisation and Reconciliation; a key aim is to hold the Canadian state accountable for human rights violations against indigenous peoples. A constitutional amendment moved by Okanagan College Faculty Association proposed that a non-regular faculty position be added to the FPSE executive. Delegates voted to refer the motion to Presidents' Council with instructions to explore ways to improve the representation of non-regulars in FPSE's governing bodies.

All four table officers were acclaimed for another one-year term on the FPSE executive: George Davison (President), Terri Van Steinburg (Secretary-Treasurer), Frank Cosco (First Vice President), and Leslie Molnar (Second Vice President). Lynn Carter was also acclaimed as one of two executive members-at-large.

Next year's AGM and conference will be held in Victoria, hosted by North Island College Faculty Association.