

Check Marks

Newsletter of the Teaching Support Staff Union • Fall 2008

Meet the New Grievance Officer • Sick Pay • Benefits • Labour in the News

Taking Sick Days

CHRISTINA HANSON

You do not need to work when you are sick. The Collective Agreement between the TSSU and SFU provides all members up to one month of sick leave, depending on the employment category, during every semester that you work. We all have times when we are too sick to come in to work, and that is what the sick leave language was bargained for. When you are sick, email or call your departmental manager (DM) and let them know that you will not be able to work and your DM will find a substitute for you.

It is NOT your responsibility to find your own replacement, or “trade” shifts with a fellow TSSU member to cover the times when you are off sick. Because sick pay is a right within our Collective Agreement, no one should lose pay when they are sick and cannot come in to work. The substitute employee is also paid for this time at the normal rate of pay set up in the Collective Agreement.

Your first priority should be taking care of yourself, and coming back in to work when you are recovered and ready to start teaching.

Just Some of Your Rights and Benefits as a TSSU Member

ROBIN JANE ROFF - CHIEF STEWARD

Over the years TSSU members have fought hard to win and protect our rights and benefits as teaching assistants, tutor markers, language instructors, and sessionals at SFU. To find out everything you are entitled to, it is best to read through the Collective Agreement, speak to your department steward or speak to another TSSU representative. However, I would like to take a moment to highlight a few key items:

MSP benefit: SFU will pay 100% of your MSP premiums while you are employed. YOU MUST SIGN UP FOR THE UNIVERSITY PLAN as soon as you receive your contract. Applications are available through Human Resources in Strand Hall or at the benefits sign up sessions hosted by HR towards the beginning of the Fall semester.

Extended Health Plan: If you decide to sign up for SFU's EHP, the University will pay 75% of Pacific Blue Cross EHP. The remaining 25% will be deducted from your paycheck. Again, sign up forms are available through Human Resources. All grad students are automatically enrolled for the GSS extended health plan; this is separate from your employee benefits. You can choose to be enrolled in both, or decide on one of them. For information about opting out of the GSS health plan, visit the GSS office in the Maggie Benson Centre. You should compare the two plans based on your medical needs to decide whether you would like to coordinate coverage between the two plans, to stick with the GSS health plan, or to sign up for your SFU employee extended health plan.

Dental Plan: SFU provides some dental care coverage for TSSU members, in the form of a partial reimbursement of the individual, stand-alone Pacific Blue Cross dental plan premium. You must sign up for a year of coverage, and you cannot opt in and out of this coverage each semester regardless of whether or not you have a TSSU contract during a particular semester. The University will only reimburse a portion of your premium payments during the semesters in which you have had a contract. There is an initial waiting period of 3 months from when you purchase the dental coverage to when you can begin using your dental plan. More information is available from the TSSU office. For reimbursement, submit your receipts to HR before the end of week 12 of the semester you work.

Compassionate Leave: As a TSSU member you are entitled to up to 5 days of paid leave in the case of the death or serious illness of a family member or close friend.

Family Care Leave: You are also entitled to up to 5 days unpaid leave each year to care for children or family members.

Travel Allowance: SFU will reimburse TSSU members for travel costs if your employment contract requires you to travel outside the Lower Mainland. SFU will also reimburse the cost of travel if your course requires you to travel between Burnaby and Harbour Centre. See the University Policy AD 3-2 for rates: <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/admin/ad3-02.htm>

You have many more benefits as a TSSU member. If you are wondering about anything just ask any TSSU representative.

the **TSSU** invites all TAs, TMs, Sessional Instructors & Language Instructors to attend our...

General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, September 30
3:30-5 MBC2296

free food!

www.tssu.ca



Welcome Karen Dean!

SOIZIC WADGE

The TSSU would like to welcome Karen Dean as our new Grievance Officer. Karen has 25 years experience working as an advocate in the trade union movement. She has worked with the Hospital Employees' Union, the Tenants' Rights Coalition, and the Canadian Farmworkers' Union, just to name a few. Communications Commissioner, Soizic Wadge sat down and asked Karen a few questions about her new role in the TSSU.

Q: What do you think is going to be your greatest challenge at SFU?

A: Working to represent TSSU members in the context of SFU's serious financial situation, precipitated by an abysmal level of support for the needs of post-secondary education by government, is probably the largest challenge facing us all. There is always a danger that short-sighted decisions impacting the quality of SFU's academic life and future, and TSSU members specifically, will be made in the name of fiscal responsibility. Our greatest challenge will be to ensure that our members' rights are not sacrificed in tough financial times.

Q: What do you like most about working in labour unions/movement?

A: Representing working people, and being part of ensuring that we are able to maximize the benefits of being in "union" together, has brought me the greatest sense of satisfaction in my working life. Working to support a sense of a real

movement – a group of people who not only effectively look after their immediate interests, but see that effort as part of contributing to a larger whole, developing a conscious strategy to contribute to bettering workers lives – makes me happy to come to work each day. I view it as a privilege to be able to engage my passion for social justice through my work, and the trade union movement is one of the most effective ways to accomplish that.

Q: What are some things that TSSU has been doing well?

A: TSSU has worked very effectively to animate member participation and ownership over their own organization. This is no small accomplishment given a significantly transient membership, and complex employment relationships defined by short term contracts. A Union with an active and engaged membership is a successful union, and TSSU members have a right to be proud of that history.

Q: What are some goals you have for the union?

A: The goals of TSSU must be set out by its elected leadership, and its members. I hope that my skill and experience can assist TSSU in both ensuring the full enforcement of our collective agreement, and successful bargaining in the future to build on the current agreement where it does not meet the future needs of our members.

Labour in the News

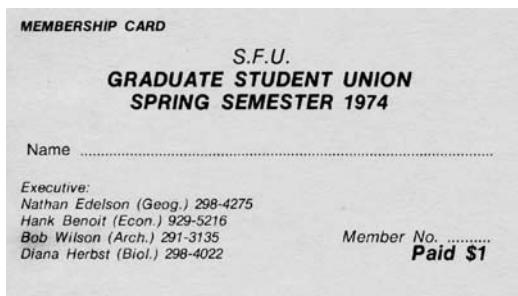
Bogota, Columbia - On August 8th, Lilita Patricia Obando Villota, the international relations commission of FENSUAGRO (Columbia's largest rural-based trade union) was arrested by a special wing of the Anti-Terrorism Unit of the Colombian National Police. Held in a Bogota prison, she is charged with "rebellion" and "managing resources related to terrorist activities." No evidence has been presented to support these charges. This arrest is part of President Alvaro Uribe's increasing repression of community leaders, unionists and oppositional political opponents

Quebec, Canada – On August 15th nine employees working in two of Wal-Mart's tire and lube shops in Gatineau became the only Wal-Mart workers in North America with a union contract. After a three year struggle, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) won a historic battle when an arbitrator imposed the collective agreement on Wal-Mart.

British Columbia, Canada – On September 5th, 14 Mexican farm workers employed by Floralia Plant Growers Ltd at an Abbotsford greenhouse were fired and deported to Mexico days before a union certification vote. The union (UFCW) has filed a complaint with the British Columbia Labour Relations Board and asked the board to order the company to rehire the workers and pay for their flights back to Canada

From our archive . . .

This is an old union card from 1974. Before dues were automatically deducted, members would receive this card once they paid their \$1 fee.



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is put out every two months by the TSSU's Communication's Committee

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Volunteer with the TSSU

The TSSU is looking for new volunteers for our committees. Committees that currently need volunteers are Social Justice Committee, Internal Relations, Communications Committee, and Education Committee.

email: organizer@tssu.ca

www.tssu.ca

