

# Rank and Advancement

Kwantlen Polytechnic University Senate has recently struck a Task Force on Academic Rank and Advancement.

Institution-wide discussion of this issue is necessary and appropriate. However, the timing is puzzling considering that the Faculty Association and Employer are preparing for contract negotiations.

Everyone must recognize that faculty members are legally and democratically represented by the KFA. Decisions about our employment conditions will be made only through collective bargaining, and we will resist any efforts outside of bargaining with the KFA to alter our collective agreement.

We are concerned with the agenda of this Task Force, given the minority support for rank that was clearly registered in the recent KFA bargaining survey. Faculty members also made it very clear they wished to maintain an equitable salary structure.

## What is Rank and Advancement?

**Rank** is a hierarchical system in many universities in Canada, with designated titles for each of the ranks: (from bottom to top) lecturer, instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, full professor. The ascendancy up the hierarchical ladder depends upon the practice of promotion or **advancement**, a decision making process usually involving one's peers or colleagues at the first level, with their recommendations going forward to Deans and possibly the President of the institution. One's rank is usually tied to salary, so that one's salary goes up as one ascends the ladder. In many cases, it takes decades to progress through the ranks, and only a select few attain

the highest level. This hierarchical system is unique to academia, as is the long progress through salary steps or scales to achieve maximum earning power.

## Inequities and Conflict

The system of rank has led to major inequities within the faculty component of most Canadian universities. Women and visible minorities are under-represented in most categories of rank; they are more often in insecure, contract positions; and their salaries lag behind those of white males—as the latest CAUT Education Review (<http://www.caut.ca/uploads/EducationReview12-1-en.pdf>) indicates.

The rank system also leads to widespread stress and conflict within academic departments, as peers are put in the uncomfortable position of having to judge their colleagues—with their decisions having life-long consequences. In addition, promotion and tenure committees have been known to raise the criteria bar year by year so that the criteria becomes impossible to meet.

## Our System

Our single rank system avoids many of the inequities that most faculty face at other Canadian universities.

In our system, everyone has an equal opportunity to progress up to the top of scale. That is not the case at “traditional” universities such as SFU or UBC, where a decided minority of faculty members ever reach full

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professor—again, according to the latest CAUT Education Review.

### Implications of Rank

There are very significant workload implications of rank should the system be implemented at Kwantlen:

- Would the monies required to fund these new positions come from larger class sizes—taught by the “lesser” ranks?
- Would professors teach only fourth level courses—removing this work from existing instructors?
- Would faculty be compensated differently to instruct the same course?
- How would a rank system work in all areas of Kwantlen Polytechnic University?

These are questions about which KFA members are very concerned.

### Timely, Orderly, Democratic Resolution of Transition Issues

This transition to a polytechnic university is an opportunity to make our jobs and our institution better. However, if the legal rights and majority opinions of faculty are not respected, the opposite could occur. We are concerned that discussions on rank outside of collective bargaining can be both confusing and counter-productive.

KFA members need to be active in the discussions underway in various arenas on transition issues. We don't all share the same positions on the various

issues. However—especially in this bargaining year—we need to be mindful of the risk of the voice of faculty becoming divided, diluted, and defeated.

When our new polytechnic university status was announced, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) advised the KFA to keep what other CAUT members are working towards (more rights and equity for all in job security and salary scale), but gain what other CAUT members generally enjoy (academic freedom language in the collective agreement).

Reflecting the experience of university faculty across Canada, CAUT also makes clear that the best way to improve conditions is through a good collective agreement.

See the web page that has been set up to share relevant information and resources at

[http://www.kfa.bc.ca/transition\\_issues](http://www.kfa.bc.ca/transition_issues)

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### Questions?

Contact the KFA at (604) 599-2200, drop by our office in room B201 on Surrey Campus or email us at [sharemyviews@kfa.bc.ca](mailto:sharemyviews@kfa.bc.ca)

