

MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SIAST offers mediation options

SIAST agrees to SGEU request for voluntary mediation

November 18, 2010 – SIAST reacted with surprise and disappointment today to the refusal by the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees Union (SGEU) to have the Ministry of Labour and Workplace Safety coordinate mediation between the two parties. SIAST made the request in an attempt to restart collective agreement negotiations and in response to the mediation request contained in the union strike notice. SIAST has agreed, however, to the union's request for voluntary mediation and has suggested three possible mediators.

"We are concerned about the impact of job action – and even of the uncertainty of the current situation – on students," says Gary Earles, SIAST's associate vice president, human resources. "With their interests in mind, we have also proposed to the union that both parties abstain from job action while we plan and implement a mediation process."

Should either union job action or an employer lockout occur, SIAST will attempt to keep campuses open for students and will provide study space. Depending on the nature of job action, it is possible that only some programs and services would be affected.

"It's important to keep in mind that, at the end of the day, collective agreements will be signed," Earles says. "SIAST believes that both parties must continue the bargaining process in an attempt to reach agreements without impacting the communities we serve and the students on our campuses."

SIAST's unionized employees are represented by two bargaining units – Academic and Professional Services – of the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees Union (SGEU). Last week, following four days of conciliation, the two bargaining units submitted what they termed final offers. When SIAST turned down the offers, the bargaining units notified the conciliator that talks had ended.

The bargaining units subsequently served SIAST with strike notice, and SIAST served the union with a lockout notice. SIAST may consider a lockout in response to union job action that had a significant detrimental impact on students.

SIAST is providing bargaining updates and information about its response to job action on www.campusupdate.ca. SIAST will also record updates on its emergency message toll-free number – 1-866-878-8913 (Regina – 798-4500).

Last week, SIAST's bargaining units submitted unreasonably high final demands, says Earles, adding that SIAST had no option but to turn these down. The settlements proposed by the Academic and Professional Services bargaining units would result in increased costs to SIAST of approximately 17% and 15% respectively. SIAST's initial offer was 4.0%.

"We can't get closer if the union doesn't come back to the table," Earles says.

SIAST is Saskatchewan's primary public institution for post-secondary technical education and skills training, recognized nationally and internationally for its expertise and innovation. More than 14,000 students were enrolled in SIAST programs in the most recent academic year; additionally, the organization drew almost 30,000 individual course registrations. Through program and course registrations, SIAST served almost 26,000 distinct students with programs that touch every sector of the economy. SIAST operates campuses in Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, Regina and Saskatoon, and provides a number of courses and programs through distance education.

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