

Platform statement, Renan Levine

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I am running for UTFA President because I believe in UTFA. I have seen how UTFA has helped people at every rank, and how much of an important role the UTFA President plays. An effective President ensures that the association has the resources to support our colleagues who have been treated unfairly, communicates to the administration what faculty and librarians need to thrive, and ensures that when challenges arise, the administration consults the faculty on the best way forward. Each of us pays a significant amount of money every year in dues to UTFA, and it is up to the President to make sure that our association is strong and our members are sufficiently satisfied that they do not ask HR to direct our dues to the United Way instead. This means that the UTFA President fights for fairness, for respect, and for the rights and resources that allow our members to achieve excellence in teaching and research that is recognized around the world.

Past UTFA Presidents made tremendous strides in ensuring that our pensions were on solid foundations and could grow without excessive management fees holding it back, in fighting for the right to go to binding arbitration on salaries and benefits, secured health and dental coverage for both part-time and retired faculty and librarians, and worked collaboratively with the administration by establishing a working group that eliminated mandatory retirement. From modest beginnings where the first negotiation allegedly took place on the sidewalk as part of a causal encounter between the UTFA President and a top administrator, UTFA is now an organization with over \$5 million in assets and annual revenue that is approaching \$5 million.

As UTFA President I will use my skills, training and experience to forge a fresh, pragmatic approach that will strengthen our association. I will focus on the core issues and priorities that our members care about, especially:

- Addressing housing costs through larger subsidies and more faculty housing;
- Increasing childcare assistance and simplifying the application process;
- Ensuring a fair PTR process that rewards merit and diligence
- Protecting retiree benefits

If elected, I will bargain hard for faculty and ensure that our interests are understood. I will, however, work alongside the administration as a partner when doing so is in our members' interests: on effective fundraising with robust donor guidelines; on faculty recruitment and retention; on increasing U of T's profile and prestige; and on achieving net-zero carbon emissions.

With a mandate from the UTFA membership, and especially with the help of former UTFA executives, I am confident that I will have the ear of an administration eager to start a new chapter of governance at the university. However, UTFA cannot effectively advocate for its members, however, without changing the way it now operates. Re-invigorating an UTFA

governance structure in which UTFA is transparent in its inner workings and budgets, uses its committee structure to empower our colleagues to find solutions to even the stickiest problems, UTFA can be an effective force without unnecessary drama or divisions. Unfortunately, UTFA much change for this to happen.

UTFA today: Division, Exclusion, Missed Opportunities.

To most members who don't pay much attention to UTFA, or who would normally take at face value UTFA's official announcements of wide consultation and impressive achievements, it may appear that everything is OK. I regret to inform you that it is not.

The last few years was marked by unprecedented drama and strife. Our membership waited months for a new deal, largely because the incumbent and her negotiating team made demands that the administration was never likely to accept. Eventually, all but some benefit adjustments that were subject to Bill 124's 1% limits were pushed into arbitration. Throughout that era of unconstitutional limits, the incumbent showed little initiative and even less success in seeking other ways of broadly compensating members through avenues not capped by Bill 124. These include expanding availability for childcare subsidies and faculty housing supplies. Eventually, Bill 124 was declared by a judge to be unconstitutional. At the time, UTFA fortuitously was still in arbitration with the administration and was in position to ask the arbitrator to reopen and revisit previous levels of pay. UTFA's negotiating team insisted that they included language to reopen their previous agreements in their submission to the arbitrator at a time when most every faculty association in OCUFA included explicit clauses enabling agreements to be revisited if Bill 124 was defeated in court. The arbitrator for U of T ruled in favour of the administration and argued that UTFA did not. Perhaps it did not matter much, because even though the arbitrator rejected most of UTFA's arguments, he awarded our faculty and librarians a substantial pay raise to compensate us for inflation that diminished our buying power in the previous year and allowed us to continue to earn more than our colleagues elsewhere in Ontario.

My experience on Council during these years revealed that the incumbent's approach to governance insulated her from feedback on a range of issues.

- Surveys of members took place only *after* the Executive issued demands (e.g. on covid-19 policy).
- In a dynamic policy environment, UTFA rarely updated its stances. The university might still be all teaching remotely since even months after almost all faculty and students returned to the classroom, UTFA still told everyone that reopening was unsafe and attacked public health officials for re-opening the province!
- Council meetings are often taken up with Presidential and Executive statements and announcements, leaving little room for discussion. The incumbent dismisses tough questions and difficult conversations by attributing malicious motives to Council members, and moved important and potentially contentious decisions to the end of meetings when attention spans are short and many members had little interest in a

discussion. For one important decision, the only time for debate and feedback only came after a vote was taken.

- The incumbent has undermined the UTFA committee system; committees rarely meet, and the incumbent insists on attending all meetings that do occur. The incumbent monitors all communications between elected Council members and their constituents, sends directives insisting that every representative send out specific talking points about Council, and even has intervened in some constituencies by emailing criticism to constituents.
- Executives are chosen – and retained – based on their perceived personal loyalty to the president. In 2022, I won about 40% of the vote, yet I nor any of my public supporters ever cleared the nominating committee for consideration to join the Executive Committee.
- Conflicts of interest were hidden, not disclosed.
- The incumbent tolerated antagonist and intemperate language directed by fellow Executives at members and Council representatives.

This is not how to run a democratic organization. And the results affect all of us.

Regardless of what the UTFA membership desired, UTFA took an unremittingly aggressive and distrustful attitude towards the U of T administration and the provincial government, going beyond legitimately tough criticism and using social media to retweet [crude insults](#) (e.g. [#GaslightingGertler](#)).

On one of the incumbent's most controversial policies, with one of the broadest effects on the university—the CAUT censure—no survey was taken at all, no opposing or cautionary views were considered, and no Council vote was called before the incumbent endorsed the censure in her own name and threw the prestige of her office behind it. The incumbent decided on a course of action and then scheduled several “educative” sessions to promote the decision. That is not how a democratic leader should operate. It is not how I will operate.

In the course of this controversy the incumbent continued to display poor judgment and discipline in public communications. Failing to represent the diversity of UTFA members, she [publicly attacked](#) a group of UTFA members based on their political beliefs and group identity, using language widely considered to be bigoted. Despite a belated apology that followed months of repeated pleas, when the incumbent first ran for re-election she included a letter from members denying that criticism of her remarks had “substance.” Despite such pronouncements, a complaint against her is still sitting in front of the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal.

As UTFA president I promise to consult widely, listen to a range of voices, advocate for those whom I may personally disagree with, and encourage those with complaints and concerns to highlight any issues we might be neglecting.

A Better Path Forward

As president, I will re-establish what should be *regular, routine* democratic governance, where decision making is not monopolized by the executive and dissent is respected and encouraged. I shall pursue policies informed by input from the membership and its representatives; I will canvas views by polling the membership and convening town halls *before* decisions are made on the most controversial, potentially divisive matters. Concerns will percolate upwards from the membership to their representatives. On a Council vote, they will be referred to committees for data gathering and discussion, culminating in a written report. That report will be sent to Council at least a week in advance of regular meetings along with all other agenda items so that Council members can read it. Council will debate policy. The Executive will then implement the policy thus enacted—as required by UTFA’s Constitution and Bylaws. Instead of ginning up controversy and distrust, UTFA business will become boring again.

Policies

To quote Karen Martin, “when everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.” **Whoever has a thousand priorities, has no priorities.** In 2022, her website proclaimed that her thirteen policy positions were “not listed in rank order of priority”. In 2024, there are twelve policy areas. This is actually a big problem: the incumbent regularly fails to complete initiatives because there are too many. In contrast, I pledge to make several core issues central to my presidency. Here are details about two of the issues that continue to rank as the most important for me and for many of the UTFA members I speak to:

1. Housing

Housing prices in the GTA continue to rise, imperiling U of T’s ability to attract and maintain talent. Faculty housing is mostly small apartments in older buildings, unsuited to families, and is only available to new members who have relocated from outside of the GTA. Librarians and term appointees (CLTAs) are excluded, though they are among our lowest paid members. Few, if any, units are accessible to people with limited mobility.

UTFA must advocate boldly on this issue. This has been particularly urgent, but unaddressed, since 2019, after benefit and salary increases were limited by Bill 124. When COVID caused a dip in the high-rise condo market in the GTA, UTFA could have bargained for commitments from the university to buy units near each campus. It did not. Nor did the UTFA leadership make housing a priority when housing prices soared later in the pandemic. An UTFA-U of T administration working group on housing established in 2018 seems never to have reported any deliberations to UTFA Council, causing the incumbent who was either the VP in charge of bargaining or the president every year since that group was supposed to be established. But that initiative was started by someone else. After neglecting the issue for a half-dozen years, her website tries to take credit for promises from the administration to have “some meaningful consultation on housing.” But UTFA has already had that promise for years, what was missing was implementation and follow-up under her leadership.

I will push for commitments that the university and the province to use land they already own to construct new housing, and to extend home purchase assistance beyond the GTA. I recognize that rising interest rates combined with inflation affecting childcare, food and other essentials may even make it difficult for members who own their homes to afford their mortgage payments. I will call for the university to commit to subsidizing the rent or mortgage for faculty and librarians who earn less than \$150,000, but pay more than 40 percent of their after-tax and income in rent or mortgage.

2. Childcare

I know a pre-tenure colleague who decided not to pay for after-school care this year for her child to save costs: at TDSB, the extended day program costs \$37.73 a day. A full day of child care reimbursement is only \$20, but the afterschool program is not even covered. With expenses tight, the result is that faculty like her will have to forego two of her most productive working hours each afternoon.

Crucial issues here include:

- U of T's childcare subsidy, negotiated in 2007 and unchanged since, does not cover any after- or before- school care, nor morning-only day care. The maximum subsidy of \$20 a day requires that the child receive care for at least six hours.
- That \$20/day rate was negotiated in 2007 and draws from a fund capped at \$1 million (in 2007 dollars!), even though childcare costs have soared since then.
- In addition to the low costs, families must grapple with the uncertainty of whether they will even receive the subsidy and an onerous application process that excludes child care provided by family members, so when the kid is sick and grandma, or a university-age sibling takes care of the little one, there is no payout.

We need to expand the university's childcare programs. I will press the administration to

- increase the subsidy from \$1 million to \$1.5 million a year
- commit to raising the subsidy every other year by \$100,000
- expand eligibility to after-care and part-day programs for children up to age 10
- simplify an application process that is currently perplexing and takes far too long.

CONCLUSION

UTFA's members work in a university of international standing. When UTFA once again includes and represents all of them, and UTFA's Council and Executive draw on their talents and expertise, there is nothing we cannot accomplish for our members and the larger university community. As UTFA's president, I will make this happen.