



UTFA Information Report

University of Toronto Faculty Association July 26, 2010

Information Report #14

Faculty of Arts & Science Academic Plan 2010-2015 Association Grievance

In the July 14, 2010, memo that accompanied the formal release of the Faculty of Arts & Science Academic Plan 2010-2015, Dean Gertler announced that “The real work of implementation now begins.” UTFA welcomed the change in tone in the Dean’s July 21 memo, in which he states that “the consultation part of the process is just beginning.” The instant and widespread protests that greeted the Academic Plan no doubt prompted this significant shift in approach.

UTFA believes that “the consultation part of the process” should have occurred long before any dramatic changes were announced. Lawyers at UTFA are drafting an Association grievance by way of protest. UTFA will issue notice to our members when the grievance is filed, in late August or early September. UTFA will ask that the approval process for the Academic Plan be halted until the grievance is settled. The Association grievance will be filed with the Provost’s office. UTFA’s senior officers will meet with the Administration’s senior officers within ten working days of filing or at a mutually agreed-upon time. If the grievance is not resolved over a series of meetings, it may be moved to the Grievance Review Panel and heard there. UTFA will prosecute this grievance firmly, steadily, and fully. The Association grievance is the only mechanism UTFA has available by which to challenge the planning process. The limited means of redress are among the many shortcomings of our antiquated Memorandum of Agreement, or special plan, which structures the relationship between the Administration and U of T’s faculty and librarians. Unlike some other faculty associations, UTFA does not have a negotiated protocol for addressing program closure.

It is UTFA’s position that significant structural changes in the delivery of the University’s academic program, especially because U of T is a public university, require open and extensive discussion among all stakeholders, including librarians who support faculty research, undergraduates, and graduate students. The consultation process is crucial when the proposed changes involve closing centres and programs and revoking departmental status. UTFA is disappointed to see that the Academic Plan appears to rely heavily on the report of the small committee of external reviewers.

From UTFA’s point of view, whenever the elimination or significant restructuring of units is contemplated, the quality of the education faculty deliver and the working conditions and scholarly standing of research-intensive and teaching-intensive faculty are paramount. There is no question that the closing of units adversely affects academic appointments, even if faculty know that they will not be fired. The disruption and pain are sharp for those pre-tenure faculty who have been recently hired, and they are equally so for those faculty and librarians who have worked for many years to build irreplaceable expertise in specific areas of research, whether Romance languages, ethics, or criminology.

No FAS academic program should be closed in order to save overhead costs, especially when we consider that monies generated by FAS enrolments continue to be transferred to other divisions. The Faculty of Arts & Science has sent mixed messages on the reasons for the closures. Many of the reasons provided in the Plan show a disheartening logic. Are we to believe that Comparative Literature was closed because it did its job “too well”? That it was too successful? The only acceptable rationale for forming a School of Languages and Literatures is that doing so would considerably *empower* its members academically. Are the former departments now to be called “programs”? Will independence be maintained? Will graduate students continue to be attracted to the disciplines covered by the School? What research funds and support will be available so that research may thrive? These are questions faculty are asking.

Problems with the FAS planning process were apparent early on. For example, the manner in which breadth requirements and competencies were hastily imposed undermined support for curriculum renewal. UTFA is not in the business of academic planning; on the other hand, we have rarely seen such an outpouring of dismay over a single plan. UTFA has long been worried by a lack of transparency in governance at the University. Weaknesses in planning, especially when they affect the appointments of faculty and librarians, are also weaknesses in governance.

Among the goals of UTFA’s Association grievance are these:

- to substantially improve and widen consultation on the Academic Plan
- to restore collegial relations and trust between our members and the Administration
- to negotiate a protocol for program changes in the future that will better protect the fine reputation of U of T, and, by extension, the scholarly reputations of our members

UTFA will hold town hall meetings in early September (dates TBA) to provide faculty, librarians, and students with the opportunity to discuss how the academic planning process at U of T might be strengthened.

Any and all comments on this Information Report are welcome.

UTFA Information Report is published by:
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