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Concerning Changes to Graduate Student Supervision

October 5, 2023

Dear UTFA colleagues,

After sharing this information with UTFA Council representatives last week, we are writing to alert the full membership about significant – and worrisome – changes the Administration is proposing with respect to graduate student supervision. Also worrisome is the fact that there has been virtually no collegial dialogue, or even meaningful consultation, with faculty members prior to this major re-write of our obligations as faculty members to our graduate students.

Many of the specific changes in the proposed Graduate Supervision Guidelines are ill-defined and problematic and, overall, represent a significant downloading of responsibilities from the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) and departments/units onto individual faculty members. This is happening without any additional accounting of, or compensation for, the increased workload. UTFA is also concerned about the Guidelines being used within assessment processes for PTR (merit pay), promotion, tenure, continuing status, and continuing appointment, and the potential of our members being subjected to investigation and discipline when the guidelines are not followed to the Administration's satisfaction – as, notably, there are no meaningful procedural fairness (due process) protections in the current or proposed Guidelines. Also concerning is the Administration's unwillingness to negotiate these Guidelines with UTFA despite the fact that implementing them would have the effect of unilaterally modifying a section of our negotiated **Memorandum of Agreement (MoA)**.

UTFA underscores its commitment as a faculty association to ensuring graduate students receive faculty supervision that is effective, caring, equitable, and supportive. Indeed, we could support the co-creation (with faculty and their elected representatives) of **best practices** that could be used by graduate supervisors for formative purposes. Our objection is to the Administration's unilateral process of imposing new Guidelines, particularly after the **current Guidelines**, which were adopted only five years ago and whose stated purpose is only "to assist you in creating a rewarding graduate experience for both your students and yourself," already appear to be evolving into formal expectations and responsibilities of UTFA members with disciplinary consequences.

Background

The Administration has created a new document, called "Guidelines for Graduate Student Supervision and Mentoring" to replace the current "**Supervision Guidelines for Faculty**." The intent of the new proposed Guidelines is stated this way in the introduction:

[...] they operationalize the responsibility of faculty members to have 'fair and ethical dealings with students,' as set out in [Article 5] section 2(a) of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the University of Toronto and the University of Toronto Faculty Association.

This statement not only mischaracterizes what the MoA actually says, but it also demonstrates that these proposed Guidelines are intended to supplant negotiated MOA wording (that was intentionally broad, general, and non-operationalized) with a detailed set of newly assigned responsibilities.

The Administration also does not intend to negotiate these new responsibilities with UTFA: they sent the proposed Guidelines to UTFA for "review and feedback" as the last stage in their process, and gave UTFA a short, two-week window to review, discuss, consult, and respond before they intended to implement them. This is not the same as full, collegial governance. Indeed, UTFA will continue to challenge the senior Administration's apparent belief that "collegial governance" means that they do the governance while we accept it collegially. Ultimately, UTFA was able to engage the Administration in discussion and to delay implementation, for now, as discussions continue. UTFA is committed to ensuring that whatever changes may be implemented best support graduate students and are properly negotiated between us and the Administration.

These proposed Guidelines are a serious, consequential matter for us as faculty members. Please feel free to write to **faculty@utfa.org** if you wish to share your feedback with us about the current Guidelines (or the imposition of new Guidelines), including any concerns you may wish to raise with UTFA about the reasonableness of expectations or of the workload implications.

Sincerely,

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Vice-President, Salary, Benefits, Pensions, and Workload (SBPW)

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