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Potential CUPE Strike: “Academic Continuity” and the Integrity of our Academic Mission

February 13, 2024

Dear colleagues,

As you likely know, there may be a strike or lockout **involving CUPE 3902 Unit 1** (generally known as the TA unit) and **Unit 4** (St. Michael’s College contract academic instructors) in early March at the University of Toronto. The senior Administration has already been holding meetings with some of our members, and indicating that “**Academic Continuity**” measures should be implemented by faculty and librarians should a labour disruption occur.

Faculty and librarians have been reaching out to us with serious concerns about the communications coming from senior Administration. *The UTFA Executive shares these concerns*.

In the lead-up to or during a strike or lockout, our members (including program directors, coordinators, and chairs) may come under pressure or feel that they have little choice but to reconfigure courses and/or programs to ensure ‘academic continuity.’ **UTFA will not accept pressure by or on behalf of the Administration on UTFA members to reconfigure or otherwise significantly alter their courses (or, in the case of librarians, professional practice) or those of striking instructors in ways that undermine the autonomy of faculty, librarians, and other course instructors or the academic integrity of courses and programs**.

UTFA values student learning and well-being. We believe that changing course structures, goals, and policies under external pressure is not fair to students, nor does it serve the integrity of academic programs or our educational mission. These principles are best served by maintaining the integrity of our course designs and teaching practices.

Some of our members may have a well-intentioned desire to minimize the impact of a work stoppage on students. Others will feel that strikes are a necessary disruption to achieve sustained improvements to conditions of learning and work and that it is our responsibility as faculty and librarians to stand in

solidarity with striking CUPE members. Whatever your perspective on the potential strike or lockout may be, it is important to understand that, for academic freedom to be upheld, the discretion to decide whether and what changes to courses may need to be made during a disruption must remain in the hands of faculty/librarians/other instructors.

We also note that UTFA and the Administration are currently in mediated negotiations seeking to update the Academic Continuity policy, via the weaker "second track" within our **Memorandum of Agreement (MoA)**. (For an explanation of our unwieldy multi-track bargaining system, see **here**.) While we have been pressing for significant changes to the Policy since before the 2015 CUPE strike, the fact that UTFA is uncertified has historically hindered our ability to protect academic freedom and other rights whenever the Administration chooses to declare *or even to merely anticipate* a potential academic disruption.

We will be providing further updates soon and as events unfold. Please do not hesitate to write to us at **faculty@utfa.org** with any questions or concerns.

Best regards,

Terezia Zorić
UTFA President
On behalf of the UTFA Executive

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