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Prof. Levine - UTFA Presidential Statement #2

As provided in the UTFA Presidential Guidelines, below is communication #2 from Professor Levine, candidate for UTFA President. The communications of the candidates reflects the views of the candidates rather than the Association.

Dear Colleagues:

I am running for UTFA President because I am committed to working diligently towards improving our faculty association and making it be a more effective advocate for you and your colleagues. Today, I need you to help me out by taking a minute to vote. In your inbox, you will find an email with a link that you simply need to click to shape UTFA's work over the next two years. *Here are **eight reasons** your vote matters:*

1. Your vote is important because after four years of controversy and turmoil, we can make UTFA a more effective advocate for faculty and librarians without being perpetually combative with the administration.

UTFA needs an effective President who the administration will trust when consulting on matters that affect the faculty; a President who listens to members, and communicates to the administration what faculty and librarians need.

"*The essence of any successful professional association - be it a set of professional athletes or professors - is a strong sense of internal communication and trust amongst members. With that foundation, negotiating and bargaining with your employer not only becomes easier but also becomes a relationship that itself is built on trust and respect.*

It's why the field I research, teach and work in, is called 'labour relations' (emphasis on 'relations'). The fostering of trust is crucial in any long-lasting relationship (such as between an employer and employees) or in a repeated bargaining situation. Professional associations that fail to earn trust – either from their own members or bargaining partners – are continually embroiled in costly arbitration or endless grievance proceedings. A new UTFA president is needed in order to earn the trust of members again and

the respect of the administration."
- **Rafael Gomez**, Professor of Employment Relations, Director of the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, U of T Workload Adjudicator (2016-2018), and former member of UTFA Council.

2. Your vote is important because my opponent promised in the first UTFA Presidential forum to formally study certification next year (transcript, p. 20).

As I canvass the corridors of our office buildings, I hear members express concerns about the divisiveness of a certification drive, and fears about how a faculty strike will affect lab scientists. For several years, the incumbent has told us that our Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) holds us back all (while claiming many achievements), but says nothing about the downside risks of certification. Certification will change UTFA's relationship to retirees, since as a union, we will no longer be able to collectively bargain for anyone other than active workers. I am especially concerned about certifying when UTFA's finances are opaque, UTFA hemorrhages staff, the organization offers no protection from harassment and discrimination, and conflicts of interest are undeclared and communications between UTFA and its membership is not always forthright.

3. Your vote is important because elections are a time for members to assess the state of their association and hold their leaders accountable.

My opponent's campaign says nothing about promises made in 2022, that she kept over the past two years, because UTFA has made so little progress. For 17 years, childcare support policies did not change despite soaring costs, a long list of association grievances sits unresolved for many years, and poorly conceived administration initiatives like the carbon tax on travel and the clunky MROL research portal are released without faculty input – because the administration does not trust the current UTFA leadership to work collaboratively with them. If elected, I promise to prioritize issues that matter to many members, like childcare and housing, but also issues that UTFA often neglects that affect lab scientists like support for international graduate students.

4. Your vote is important because there are serious organization issues afflicting UTFA that require greater transparency and more forthright information than our incumbent leadership is providing.

The incumbent claims that my campaign is engaged in mudslinging, but we are presenting facts about serious issues within the organization. My campaign members and I collected first-hand accounts of the toxic environment at UTFA, marked by unchecked harassment and bullying. Contrary to my opponent's claims, no accusation is baseless. We heard from staff members that counted the hours until their time at UTFA end – understandably choosing to just move on with their lives. Consider these letters from the former UTFA Executive Committee Members:

I served as Vice-President, Grievances between July 2020 and January 2023. Between April 2022 and August 2023, every long-serving and experienced UTFA in-house lawyer and three hired to replace them, resigned. This string of resignations represented an enormous loss of institutional knowledge—and it exponentially increased UTFA's reliance on external legal advice.

The loss of UTFA's in-house legal department is a huge problem. Our in-house lawyers were salaried, and they knew the intricacies of U of T policy very well. External legal support was billed hourly. While the external legal support is excellent, it is two or three times the cost of in-house legal counsel.

I am grateful that UTFA has an alternative in the current UTFA election. I am supporting Renan Levine.

-**Brian McDonagh**, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Faculty of Music, University of Toronto

In or around February of 2020, I was Treasurer of UTFA, working under then-President Cynthia Messenger, and was trying to decide whether to continue as Treasurer until my second term ended on June 30 2021. Terezia Zoric and I had worked together on the UTFA Executive for close to three years, and had what I thought of as a pleasant, cordial working relationship, and I expected her to lead the association as president that summer. One day I witnessed an interaction between Professor Zoric, and a member of the UTFA staff, in which Professor Zoric was so rude and cruel that I decided then and there that I would not continue in the role after June 30, 2020. I wanted no part of what I thought might come. I know many people who continued on UTFA Council and the Executive Committee, and remained in touch with some staff members, so I am well aware of some of the dysfunction, abuse and harassment that a number of people have experienced over the last three plus years.

-**Louis Florence**, Associate Professor, Teaching (Retired), Department of Management, UTM

5. Your vote is important because it is important that UTFA has zero-tolerance for harassment and discrimination, especially since UTFA is responsible for ensuring that our workplaces are free of harassment and discrimination.

There is an ongoing Ontario Human Rights Tribunal (OHRT) complaint against Terezia Zoric, and an unrelated complaint against UTFA itself alleging unaddressed discrimination and bias (download details here). My campaign has collected eyewitness reports of the President being rude or bullying of UTFA members and association staff. As reports mount, your vote will send a message that the UTFA Executive must investigate, rather than dismiss the complaints as motivated by partisanship or by impugning the integrity of complainants.

6. Your vote is important because honesty matters.

UTFA claims the university is flush with funds, citing a $551 million dollars in net revenue last year, but neglects to clarify that more than 97% of that money are funds dedicated to capital improvements. Government funders paid money dedicated to the construction of new buildings in 2022-2023, and the result is the construction of new research labs, classrooms and offices this year. The provincial government continues to freeze in-province tuition rates without allocating more funds Ontario's university's needs for operations, and research funding from the federal government is at risk of cuts. Ask your department chair about what they have been told about the state of the university's finances, and about hiring freezes that are already affecting some departments. UTFA needs to be more honest about the state of our employer's finances.

7. Your vote is important because while my opponent claims she is backed by a team, it is more of a narrow clique that values ideology and personal loyalty.

Two years ago, I won about 40% of the vote, but the UTFA leadership refused to recommend a single one of my public supporters to serve on UTFA's Executive Committee. Half of the executive is made up of professors from OISE and the humanity and social science departments within the downtown faculty of Arts & Sciences. Most Executive Committee members are serving terms that will take them to 2025 regardless of who is the president, and I look forward to working with many of them. This election is only about who will serve as President.

8. Your vote is important because the UTFA President affects you and how you are valued by the university.

The UTFA President fights for fairness, for respect, and for the rights and resources that allow our members to achieve continued excellence in teaching and research recognized around the world. You are important. Your voice is important. Your vote matters, even when it is just one voice supporting a better UTFA.

What I will do as President
As President, I will fight for fairness, respect, and for the rights and resources that allow our members to achieve continued excellence in teaching and research that is recognized around the world. I will work with able colleagues who volunteer their time to work with UTFA to focus on identifying the issues that are most important to our members. UTFA members will work together, bridging across ideological divisions rather than as part of partisan teams, to find creative solutions to the many challenges facing faculty and librarians in the coming years. We will:

- Re-establish trust with the administration to advocate and negotiate effectively for UTFA members.
- Help with housing costs in – and out- of the GTA.
- Expand access to childcare subsidies, including aftercare programs, to help our members achieve a better work-life balance.
- Protect every individual's academic freedom and work to improve civility on campus.
- Encourage, not fight, university advancement efforts that benefit our research, and our students.
- Ensure that PTR in every department fairly rewards merit and diligence.
- Strive for more consistency across departments in what items can be billed to PERA accounts and enable parents to reimburse plane tickets for children accompanying them on conference trips.

On my website, you can read more about me, my vision for UTFA, my platform, and some of my policy proposals. You can also email me if you have any questions.

Please vote for a more pragmatic UTFA that seeks to avoid unnecessary divisions and conflict to make our collective bargaining more effective, and, in doing so, enables us to better shape policies that will make our university a better place to work.

Thank you for your support!

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