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UTFA letter to President Gertler regarding demonstrations

April 30, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

On April 30, UTFA wrote to the Administration to raise the Association's concerns with the "Message about freedom of expression and protest" that was sent by the Administration to all students on April 28, 2024.

Academic freedom cannot flourish when freedom of expression is curtailed. Accordingly, UTFA has a duty to dispassionately assess and respond to any position taken by the Administration that compromises either of these fundamental freedoms.

UTFA's letter highlights three main areas of concern with the Administration's comments on freedom of expression.

First, the Administration's message is an unreasonable, disproportionate, and premature attempt to limit the lawful and peaceful exercise of free expression. Without supporting evidence or consultation with stakeholders, the Administration prohibits peaceful methods of protest and dissent by invoking property rights. The weaponizing of property rights to prohibit free speech on campus is unprecedented at the University and is of grave concern to the Association.

Second, the Administration's message misrepresents University policies that are intended, in actuality, to protect freedom of expression. The Administration reads into these policies prohibitions on free speech and peaceful assembly that simply do not exist. UTFA must challenge these misrepresentations by the Administration in real time. If false claims by the Administration about its policies go unchallenged in the short term, such claims may seriously and irreversibly undermine the academic freedom of UTFA members in the long-term.

Third, the Administration's message pre-emptively characterizes certain modes of free expression, and those who participate in it, as disruptive and a safety risk. The chilling effects of such pronouncements cannot be overstated. All students who engage in free and peaceful expression, and by extension all

members of the University community, belong on campus. Hate does not belong on campus. Combating hate includes challenging preconceptions about entire groups of people that inhibit legitimate and lawful expression.

Sincerely,

The UTFA Executive Committee

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