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UTFA Statement on York University Program Closures

March 6, 2025

The University of Toronto Faculty Association (UTFA) calls on York University to reverse its plans to suspend enrolments in 19 academic programs at its Keele and Glendon campuses. UTFA stands in solidarity with our colleagues in the York University Faculty Association (YUFA) and their efforts to stop these planned suspensions.

Programs impacted by this decision include Indigenous Studies, Gender and Women's Studies, a wide range of language, culture, and area-studies programs, two specialized science programs, as well as a masters-level program in the Faculty of Education premised on community engagement. Alarmingly, York administrators circumvented collegial governance in reaching their decision. YUFA was not consulted at any step in the process. As well, this decision contradicts what senior administrators have promised faculty members in other public fora and in written memoranda, specifically that academic restructuring would be led by those who teach the affected programs and not imposed from above by senior administrators. We note that York's Academic Senate passed a resolution last week seeking an abeyance of the decisions to suspend enrolments. We call on the Administration to honour that resolution and engage in a genuine, collegial process.

As well, the decision to suspend enrolments directly undermines whatever previous commitments the University has expressed regarding decolonization, equity, and inclusion. For example, the Indigenous Studies program is only a few years old and is the result of extraordinary efforts by Indigenous colleagues and their allies to initiate such a program in the first place. Now, future enrolments are being suspended before the program has had a chance to establish itself. Moreover, by including several programs at its French-language Glendon campus, the University is choosing to follow a dangerous precedent set by Laurentian University in 2021 when it closed almost one-third of its academic programs, many of them designed to support Indigenous and Francophone students.

The challenges of academic restructuring are not limited to just York or Laurentian but are present at the University of Toronto, as well. The newly re-elected Ford government has demonstrated over the past seven years it holds little regard for the university sector. The financial precarity the government has imposed on Ontario universities is only exacerbated by the heightened economic uncertainty brought

about by the Trump administration in the United States. Despite the strong financial position U of T enjoys, we are not immune to these dynamics which lead to unilateral cuts across programs and notably animate the devaluing of the humanities, social sciences, and social justice within the life of the university.

We take this opportunity to remind UTFA members of the University of Toronto's Policy and Procedures for Faculty and Librarians on Academic Restructuring. This policy states that any question of restructuring "include the opportunity for the meaningful involvement of faculty members and librarians," where said involvement "requires that [faculty and librarians] bring their academic expertise to bear on shaping the conditions under which they perform their activities and duties." The policy also stipulates that faculty and librarians in any potentially affected unit "must have had a reasonable opportunity to participate in a collegial, inclusive and deliberative process." UTFA will strenuously defend a robust reading of our members' rights under this policy.

If any University of Toronto faculty members or librarians are facing difficulties related to academic restructuring at U of T, please share your concerns via faculty@utfa.org or reach out to advice@utfa.org for confidential support.

Given the current political and economic context, we should expect more university administrations to pursue academic restructuring as an austerity strategy to relieve the financial pressures they face. Solidarity among faculty associations will be more important than ever to defend the integrity of academic programs. We stand with our colleagues in YUFA in their efforts to reverse the decision to suspend enrolments and to ensure that the humanities, social sciences, and social justice remain central to the university.

Sincerely,
UTFA Executive

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