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Report of the Interim Vice-President, University and External Affairs, 2025–2026

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In my role as VP-UEA, I have engaged with labour organizations such as the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), and have served as an UTFA representative on various committees. This work is often characterized by sectoral trends and emerging issues faced by Faculty Associations. This year, this has included CAUT and OCUFA meetings discussing post-secondary education funding, academic freedom and academic restructuring, efficiency surveys (in 2025 five Ontario Universities undertook these surveys), and discussions of the impact of AI use in universities, classrooms, libraries, and research. In addition, the UEA Committee selected three successful candidates for the UTFA Tuition and the Al Miller Memorial Awards, to be announced at the AGM.

University Post-Secondary Funding in Ontario

An ongoing and central conversation in the university sector is the underfunding of universities and colleges by the Ontario provincial government. Despite Ontario's universities playing a central role in educating the province's workforce, advancing research and innovation, and driving regional and provincial economic growth, Ontario's universities continue to have the lowest provincial funding in the country. The recent funding announcement of an increase of 6% is welcome, but does not address the long-standing underfunding of Ontario's post-secondary institutions. Without a clear, multi-year plan to reach the Canadian average, Ontario's universities will remain structurally underfunded and increasingly constrained in their ability to meet student demand and sustain the quality of education and research our communities rely upon.

Concerningly, these announcements came with announced increases to tuition and a shifting of OSAP funding from grants to loans. Note that seventy-five percent of support will now be in the form of payable loans with interest. These changes further increase systemic barriers to post-secondary education for low-income students in Ontario who already pay approximately $1,100 more than the national average for this education. In response to underfunding, some Universities and Colleges have initiated hiring

freezes, taken efforts to reduce academic staff including by not renewing contracts and offering early retirement packages, and engaged in academic restructuring efforts.

As VP-UEA, I have attended relevant conferences and reported to UTFA Council on these trends and the strategies being used by other Faculty Associations to push back. One such strategy is negotiating for more paths to permanency for precarious workers, but continued advocacy for public funding of post-secondary education remains at the forefront.

University of St. Michael's College Negotiating Team

University of St. Michael's College's faculty, librarians and archivists are unionized with UTFA as their representative. These negotiations occur every three years and I have previously been a member of the St. Michael's negotiating team (2019-2020, 2023) and have been nominated to continue this work as VP-UEA. This work will focus on improvements to the working conditions of union members at St. Michael's informed by member feedback on priorities. As this work continues, I will update UTFA Council on progress towards an agreement.

AI Developments at the University of Toronto

The University of Toronto is integrating AI at all levels of the institution. U of T received 42.5 million dollars from the Federal Government for AI compute infrastructure in November 2025 following the June 2025 release of the Provost's AI Task Force report, "Toward an AI-Ready University." UTFA is reviewing the impact of AI integration on faculty and librarians' terms of employment, academic freedom, professional autonomy, human expertise, workload and academic integrity. These concerns are not restricted to UTFA; many Faculty Associations have concerns regarding the use of AI and its potential impact on working conditions. Trent University recently negotiated the inclusion of high-level language regarding AI into their collective agreement, and a trend in the post-secondary sector is increased discussion of both proactive strategies to address the use of AI, and the need to use existing agreement language to protect workload, privacy, and intellectual property.

The U of T individual task force reports concerning AI are:

- Teaching & Learning Working Group
- Research Working Group
- Student Services Working Group
- Operations & Planning Working Group
- People Strategy & Administration Working Group
- Technology, Data Governance & Digital Trust Working Group
- Graduate Education
- Libraries

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