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Letter to ‘The Varsity’ in response to "Meet the man who keeps the University running"

November 24, 2014

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to your interview with Professor Scott Mabury, the University’s Vice-president of university operations (“Meet the man who keeps the University running” November 10, 2014). Asked about the “biggest operational challenge facing the university today,” Professor Mabury refers to the fact that “revenues lag expenses” before going on to add that “Expenses, primarily, at the University of Toronto are salaries and benefits.” It shouldn’t really be surprising to anyone that compensation makes up the bulk of expenses at an institution whose core mission is teaching and research. But Professor Mabury’s remarks might lead some readers to conclude that faculty compensation comprises the biggest budget challenge facing the administration of our university. In fact, total faculty compensation as a percentage of the University’s overall operating expense has fallen dramatically and consistently for many years. In 1997-98, faculty salaries and benefits made up 47% of the total operating budget. In 2012-13 this figure had dropped to 27%. Measured in relationship to the number of FTE’s (i.e. in relationship to the number of students taught at the University), faculty compensation has remained virtually unchanged (in constant dollar terms) over the same period. In other words, if the University of Toronto faces ongoing budget challenges, it is for reasons other than that of faculty compensation. All members of the University of Toronto community might want to hear Professor Mabury explain why the operating budget, expressed in relation to FTE’s, has grown by over 30% while the relative cost of faculty compensation has remained static.

Sincerely,

Paul Downes
Vice-President – Salary, Benefits, Pensions University of Toronto Faculty Association

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