Published on *University of Toronto Faculty Association* (https://www.utfa.org)

Thank you for your support - a statement by Scott Prudham

March 30, 2014

Thank you! On va continuer…

I want to thank UTFA's membership for choosing to return me for a second term (July 1 2014 to June 30 2016) as President of the Association. I am honoured to serve in this capacity and I pledge to continue on the path of reform and renewal by any means that are available to us.

I'm especially grateful to those who nominated me, who signed a petition or wrote messages, or encouraged me personally. I am humbled and honoured by your support. Those who have sent private messages, thank you.

The Office of the President is designed to represent the entire membership. It is my job to represent all UTFA members, whether you support me personally or not, and whether or not you agree with all of my own views, and I with yours. That is one of the unique challenges of this office.

It also bears noting, however, that a decision on whether or not to support a candidate for UTFA President is also a decision about the collective leadership, vision and trajectory of the Association more generally. In that respect, I want to thank and acknowledge those who serve with me on the Executive Committee for their amazing work, individually, and on the many committees they oversee. Thanks also to the members of Council for their contributions to UTFA and to the University, and to the excellent team of staff in the UTFA office whose work too often goes without notice.

What can we look for in the next two years? What is the mandate for this term? Clearly, the answer to these questions is tied to the fate of the ongoing Special Joint Advisory Committee (SJAC) process. This unique process represents an opportunity to examine and modernize both the way UTFA represents the collective interests of faculty and librarians, and the relationship between UTFA and the University Administration. There is a strong appetite for change among the majority of our colleagues. We seek an UTFA that can advocate more effectively on a wider range of issues, many of them non-monetary academic policies that shape the context of the work we do. And yet, to date, we and the Administration

have starkly contrasting views on how to modernize the relationship. We are also having extreme difficulty convincing the Administration that a policy subject to mutual agreement by UTFA and the governing Council on the procedural aspects of academic restructuring is the only way to address the collegiality gap in academic planning. If these problems persist, the SJAC process will fail, and we will be left with a potentially divisive dichotomy: no change, or certify as a union. Time will tell which path we pursue.

Let me step back for a moment from our current engagements with the Administration. Larger issues loom and challenge us. For example, there has been much chatter of late about the call for more teaching from university professors, thanks to an unfortunate intervention by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). This report plays into ill-informed public perceptions of faculty and librarians as lazy and coddled, and undermines the important tradition of university-level teaching defined by its integration with research. Teaching and research are not and must not be an either/or proposition, and certainly not at the U of T. The HEQCO report also sidesteps the *real* problems we are experiencing in the form of rising workloads (ironically, mostly in teaching) as a consequence of the dangerous combination of rapid increases in enrolment (undergraduate and graduate) and the erosion of government funding. These rising workloads threaten the high quality of instruction to which we are all committed and by which the U of T is justifiably known. I know that many colleagues are suffering under the weight of these pressures, even as our Administration implores us to further boost graduate enrolment for largely (entirely?) financial reasons.

The HEQCO report and its cynical uptake by opportunistic populists (hello Margaret Wente) distracts attention from the *real* problems in post-secondary education and research-intensive universities in North America. Those problems include spiralling student debt; chronic underfunding by multiple levels of government; rising enrolment and student:faculty ratios; the erosion of secure, continuing academic appointments; more and more private-sector influence in university decision-making, including in academic planning; corporatization in the guise of growing and unchecked administrative authority within our universities; and fundamental shifts in scholarly publishing that too often promise wider access but deliver more enclosure. Our professional lives are changing in fundamental ways.

Ironically, in so many ways, a better, fairer future for public life – a cleaner planet, a better distribution of life chances – depends on the quality of the work we do now and will do in the future – in laboratories and in classrooms. That is why I refuse to be defensive about the role we all play – here at the U of T, and across Canada.

In fact, if there was ever a time when we needed a strong, collective, and independent advocate, it is now. UTFA is the only form of such representation we have. Who else is there to speak for us on these matters? We need to build from that strength, with confidence.

As far as I am concerned, our efforts to win real reform of our relationship with the Administration will not come to a stop if the SJAC process fails to deliver a genuinely new deal. Securing that change is what I feel I have been elected to facilitate, with your help. And we all know there is more than one way to go about it. We are ready, come what may.

Whatever happens with the SJAC process, we have learned a great deal. We have more informed groups of committee members and Council members than we've ever had. We have a membership far more informed and engaged than ever before. Those alone are a great investment in the future, again, come what may.

We will continue the outreach program, continue organizing, and continue experimenting with new communication vehicles and ways for you to be involved. We will do so in the name of ensuring our voices, the voices of our colleagues, are heard when it comes to crucial decisions where our working conditions, student learning conditions, and the institutional foundations of excellence all intersect. We will be there. You have my word on that.

Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

Scott Prudham
Professor, University of Toronto
President, UTFA.

Source URL (modified on Jan 19 2018):https://www.utfa.org/content/thank-you-your-support-statement-scott-prudham