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CUPE Strike Update

March 3, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, there is a strike by CUPE 3902 Unit 1 ("the TAs") underway on all three campuses. There has been lots of confusion associated with the strike and we are receiving many questions about what faculty and librarians can and should be doing, including how to show support for the striking teaching assistants.

It is very important for UTFA, as an organization, to remain formally neutral with regard to the dispute and to respect the collective bargaining process and relationship between CUPE 3902 and the University Administration. Since we too seek to keep pace with the cost of living in Toronto and with sectoral compensation norms, and since we want the graduate students we work with to be able to afford to come to Toronto to study and teach here, we have considerable common cause. But we assume that the same common cause is held by the University administration. Hopefully the parties will be able to negotiate a fair settlement soon and the disruption can end.

Many colleagues have asked about appropriate conduct and reactions to the strike. I want to remind you of our February 24th letter of advice to members and to encourage you to keep it handy. That letter should answer most of your questions. In general terms, please note:

- You must not express your views about the strike or the issues remaining unresolved in a manner that could be perceived as coercive to graduate students and teaching assistants. That could take the form of encouraging graduate student colleagues to support the strike or to continue working, depending on the context. It could even take the form of asking TAs if they are on strike. Such requests in general are inappropriate if you are in a supervisory position vis-à-vis the student(s) in question. It is best not to ask. We believe our advice is consistent with the Administration's on this point. We have had numerous reports that students are being asked to report if they are on strike. You do not need to collect this information. The request is not appropriate.
- You must not be pressured into taking on struck work or altering courses to adjust to the disruption. If you wish to volunteer to do so, that is your right, though it is taking sides against the

union and will be seen as such. But if you feel pressured to do anything other than your usual job, contact us and we will defend your right to resist taking on extraordinary duties or altering your courses or programs in ways that compromise academic freedom. We have been given firm assurances by the Administration that academic freedom will be upheld. Let's make sure that happens.
- You may have to cross picket lines to teach since the University remains open. CUPE understands that, though it is asking people to stay off campus whenever possible. We are under a formal obligation to continue to do our jobs as faculty and librarians. Our advice, simply, is to do so, but if you cross picket lines, do so respectfully. Please remember, we are all colleagues. We are all the University of Toronto.

Many faculty and librarians are asking how they can show support for the striking TAs. Again, UTFA, as such, must remain neutral and our advice to members is to avoid saying or doing anything that could be construed as coercive. That in mind, CUPE has provided some suggestions for supportive faculty and librarians. Please have a look if you are interested.

You should also bookmark the Provost's information page concerning the strike. There is important information there, including an FAQ for faculty and librarians. Unfortunately, some of the instructions and advice circulating at the unit level is inconsistent with instructions and advice coming from the Provost's Office. If you are concerned about a discrepancy, the better bet is the language on the Provost's website, but by all means contact us if you have questions or concerns.

I wish you all the best during this difficult time and, above all, I hope we can each find a way to make sure the graduate students with whom we work have our respect no matter what choices they make in terms of supporting the strike. They are current and future colleagues and valuable members of the University community. We ought to treat them as such.

All best,

Scott Prudham
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President, UTFA

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