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Report of the President, 2014–2015

April 15, 2015

The University of Toronto Faculty Association stands at an important juncture. We are in the final stages of completing something of a makeover of the Association, one that sees our capacity to advocate effectively across a range of monetary and non-monetary issues affecting conditions of work for our members greatly expanded. The Special Joint Advisory Committee (SJAC) process, established via a mediated agreement in April of 2012, has resulted in important changes. These include appointments policy revisions for tenure stream and teaching stream faculty and a new policy prescribing collegial deliberations regarding any proposed academic restructuring initiative (e.g., closing, amalgamating, or moving academic units). Perhaps most far-reaching is a modernized framework for engagement between UTFA and the University administration aimed at ensuring accountability and transparency in negotiating both monetary and non-monetary terms and conditions of academic employment.

With the introduction of a new facilitation and fact-finding process to help resolve matters not eligible for arbitration, UTFA looks forward to more productive and proactive engagements with the Administration on a wider range of issues and an end to ill-advised University-wide policies crafted by less than accountable means (e.g., the Policy on Academic Continuity we have heard so much about in recent months). One year ago, I wrote to members about the wide collegiality gap that existed at U of T. One year later, I am pleased to report that, with your support, in partnership with an Administration willing to embrace change, and guided by the wisdom of SJAC Facilitator the Honourable Frank Iacobucci, we have narrowed that gap considerably.

The changes delivered by the SJAC process are the most far-reaching revisions of the UTFA Memorandum of Agreement since its original crafting in the late 1970s. A new era has begun. I thank all those involved in the SJAC process, and acknowledge the support and patience of the UTFA membership throughout this long reform initiative.

Now – back to work! Institutional capacity is one thing and making productive use of it is quite another. In the near future, our priorities will include negotiating a new appointments and promotion policy for librarians and crafting a policy dealing with privacy and custody provisions pertaining to written and electronic records we generate as academic staff. U of T is decades behind in codifying formal

protections consistent with academic freedom and autonomy, including protections against illegitimate surveillance and use of our records by our own employer. The recent proposal to outsource electronic communications to a third party vendor demonstrated the need for such a policy, but the issue runs deeper. Obviously, we also need to revise the deeply flawed Policy on Academic Continuity to better balance continuity imperatives with academic freedom, and to maintain fair and ethical dealing with students in the context of academic disruptions. In the coming years, these and other issues promise to animate the new facilitator and fact-finder process.

And, of course, we remain in the midst of salary, benefits, pensions, and workload negotiations, led by Vice-President Paul Downes. We are 10 months past the expiry of our last settlement. Paul and his team have been working hard to keep things moving. But one reason for delay, quite simply, is that our system of negotiating, featuring mediation and arbitration as dispute resolution mechanisms, with no prescribed schedule, prevents either side from setting meaningful deadlines. While we make every effort to provide a sense of urgency to the negotiations, in the end we cannot control the pace.

While working to improve compensation and other terms and conditions that shape the context of your work, UTFA's leadership also continues to keep you informed about matters of common concern and to advocate for the well-being of higher education more generally. This year we have continued our partnership with Scientists for the Right to Know, helping to raise awareness about dangerous and misguided policies of the Government of Canada that amount to suppression and muzzling of science in this country. Whether it be the cancellation of the long form census, compromise of the expertise and independence of the funding councils, elimination of environmental science research capacity, or the clampdown on freedom of speech for government scientists, it is clear that U of T and Canadians more generally deserve better from our government.

We have also partnered with Toronto350.org in endorsing a proposal for U of T to divest from direct ownership in fossil fuel companies. While there is some diversity of opinion on this proposal, it has strong support among UTFA's membership and leadership. U of T has a chance to send an important public message that meaningful action on climate change is necessary – now.

UTFA continues to campaign for improved financial and policy support for higher education. Ontario funding for higher education on a per student basis is lower than in any other province. Partly to make up for the funding gap, tuition fees have gone up rapidly in recent years and so have undergraduate and graduate enrolments. The result is that U of T ranks dead last among our US peers and second from last among our Canadian peers in student-faculty ratios. There is no sign that trends are getting any better[1]. No doubt, the comparative data disguise important differences in faculty complement between U of T and other institutions included in the comparisons. Nevertheless, it is clear that at least some of our reputation for excellence comes from being big… and that is not always a good thing, particularly when so many members report the stresses and strains of constantly being asked to do more with less. President Gertler has rightly remarked that U of T "defies gravity," given our institution's exceptional performance while relying on limited resources. But how long can we continue to rely on miracles?

Meanwhile, systemic changes in higher education mean increasing reliance on contingent labour for teaching in our universities and a decoupling of the PhD from sustainable faculty careers in higher education. The recent strike by CUPE 3902 Unit 1 – whatever one thinks of the tactics deployed by either side – served to highlight some of the fractures running through higher education, including the real disparities in graduate funding across the University. Increasing numbers of graduate students eke out a meagre existence in an expensive city with little reason to believe the sacrifice will pay off in the form of

a secure academic position in the long run.

The truth is that more and more distance separates the haves and the have-nots. That includes within our own membership. For example, average starting salaries for faculty (entirely unregulated or influenced by any UTFA input or negotiation) in some academic units of the University are now routinely in excess of $200,000 (see Figure 1), more than twice the average in most of the humanities and social sciences. Meanwhile, UTFA struggles just to secure across-the-board salary increases that can protect against the erosion of salaries due to cost of living increases for those not among the chosen few. All the while, teaching and administrative workloads soar upwards in high-enrolment parts of the University, including in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, at UTSC, and at UTM. Yet, incredibly, some members of our Administration continue to blame UTFA and faculty compensation more generally for U of T's budgetary pressures. The facts are rather plain in this regard. Faculty compensation, as a percentage of the operating budget, has been falling steadily for years (down from 47 per cent of the operating budget in 1997–98 to 27 per cent in 2012–13).

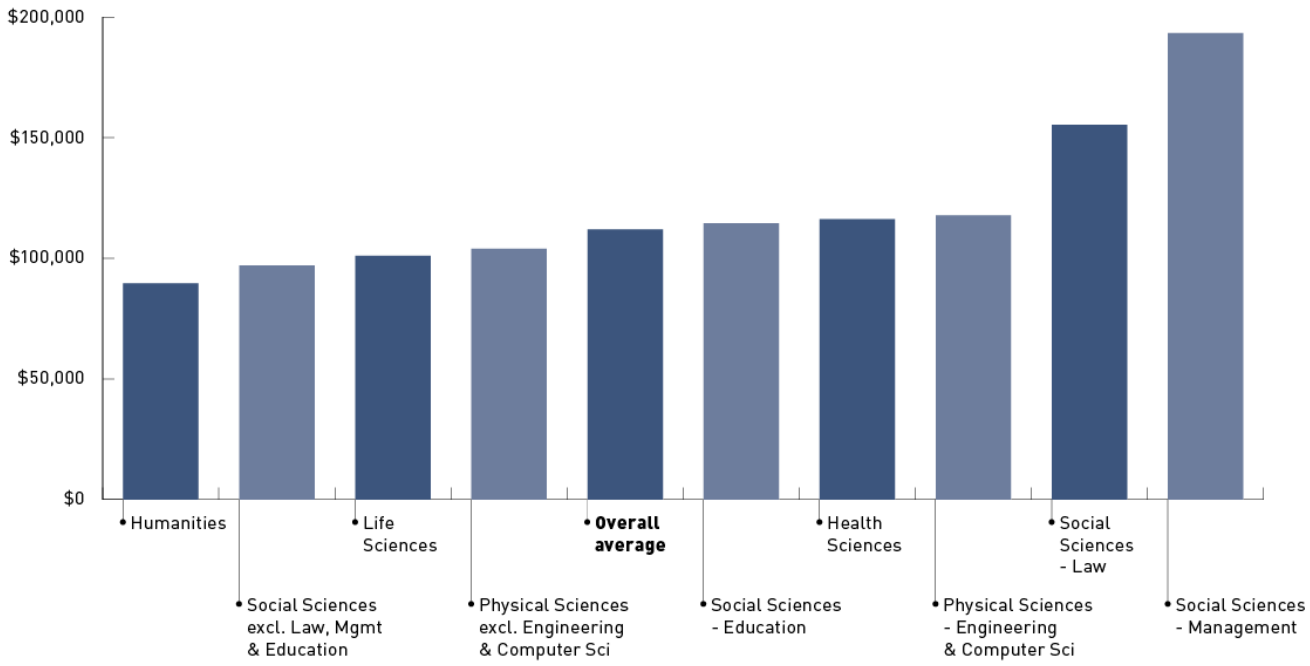


Figure 1. Average salary in 1st year of hire into tenure stream, 2008–13, by division.

Does our University enjoy a world-class reputation, standing for academic excellence across a wide range of disciplines? Without question it does, thanks in large part to the achievements of those UTFA represents. Have those achievements been secured partly on the basis of inequities propagated by systemic, unregulated, and unaccountable reward systems? Some would have us believe that. If so, that is an uncomfortable truth we may all need to live with. But it may also be that the foundations of our excellence are not, in fact, sustainable, and if that is the case, it is cause for worry. More and more research across a range of social settings shows that inequity breeds disharmony – ***for all***. These are difficult issues. We at UTFA are committed to facilitating frank and honest dialogue and to looking for answers together.

Thanks to the members of the UTFA Executive and Council for their important contributions to the Association and to the University this year. We have very strong collective leadership in UTFA and I feel

privileged to work with these exemplary people. Also, a heartfelt thank you to the excellent staff in our office, who too often go unrecognized.

Finally, I want to close by noting, with sadness, the passing of an UTFA great, Professor and Past-President George Luste. Many will recall George's remarkable decade as the president of UTFA. We are all in his debt for his tireless advocacy on behalf of UTFA over many years. Numerous members of UTFA's current leadership, including me, relied on his leadership in mentoring us and helping us to understand the challenges and responsibilities associated with representing UTFA's extraordinary and diverse membership. He will be missed.

I wish you all the best for the summer of 2015 and look forward to seeing you again in the fall.

Scott Prudham
President

[1] See the most recent (2014) Performance Indicators for Governance published by the Office of the Provost and note in particular Figures B-3-b and B-3-d.

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