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Report of the Vice-President, University and External Affairs, 2014–2015

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Public Policy and External Affairs

As Vice-President, University and External Affairs, I represent UTFA on the Board of OCUFA and in the Ontario caucus of CAUT. Both organizations have vigorously pursued the concerns of faculty and librarians this past year, especially around issues of contingent faculty. These themes were the centerpiece of CAUT's November 2014 Council meeting. The casualization of teaching was also addressed by OCUFA in its annual Queen's Park lobby day (March 11, 2015), along with other key concerns such as a new pension plan model for higher education, faculty representation on the Ontario Online Learning Consortium, and university autonomy and program continuity under a proposed new formula for financing of post-secondary education. Perhaps by coincidence, on the day after OCUFA's lobby day the Ontario government announced a new round of consultations towards a review of the funding formula for universities.

UTFA has also been working closely with Scientists for the Right to Know (SRK). We co-sponsored the well-attended panel discussion held on September 30, 2014, called "Imposed Ignorance: On what evidence does Ottawa base its policies?" SRK is building a coalition of groups to oppose the federal government's muzzling of scientists and the elimination of government research on the environment. Paul Hamel and I represent UTFA on the SRK steering committee, and we've been active as well in the campaign to reinstate the Canada long-form census – an indispensable research tool.

The concerns voiced by many Canadians about the impact of the federal government's so-called "anti-terrorism" law, Bill C-51, are shared by UTFA – a longtime champion of privacy and academic freedom. This will be an escalating front of activity in the days ahead. The proposed bill could profoundly affect the freedom to conduct and report research, and to exercise our rights to organize and protest on any number of issues – from aboriginal rights to Canadian foreign policy, and the growing concerns around fossil fuel industries.

University Affairs

The U&EA Committee has the pleasure of selecting UTFA student award recipients. The Undergraduate Tuition Award will go to two students this year – Seth Ward, a second year student in Neuroscience, and Joshua Cromwell, a third year student in English and Philosophy. Our Al Miller Memorial Award for outstanding contributions to graduate student life as well as academic achievement will be presented to Megan Pratt, a MSc student in Social Work, and Ada Le, a fourth year PhD student in Psychology.

As VP-U&EA, I serve on the Joint Committee that brings together UTFA and senior Administration officials to confer on ongoing operational and policy issues. I have also served on the Tri-Campus Governance Coalition since its inception in 2012, and continue to represent the Teaching Staff of UTM on the Academic Affairs Board of Governing Council.

I also represent UTFA at meetings of the University of Toronto Employee Associations and Unions (UTEAU), which represents virtually every organized employee and student group on the three campuses. Our meetings encourage strategizing on a range of issues – from OISE's restructuring to student finances and much else.

That spirit of constructive collaboration carries over into UTFA's work with CUPE 3902. For example, we set up discussions between UTFA members and CUPE Unit 5 post-doctoral fellows last fall to address questions and concerns of both PDFs and principal investigators (special thanks to David Bailey on UTFA Council). We also invited representatives of CUPE 3902 Units 1 and 3 to address UTFA Council meetings on different occasions, to facilitate understanding among our members of the bargaining situation of internally funded PDFs, sessional instructors, and teaching assistants.

The U&EA Committee collaborates with other UTFA committees. We worked with the Membership Chair, Judith Taylor, in preparing for this year's C. B. Macpherson Lecture, featuring Professor Martha Nussbaum of the University of Chicago. The March 6 event had to be rescheduled due to the CUPE strike and we're looking forward to hosting Professor Nussbaum in early 2016. Details will follow soon.

Last, I thank fellow UTFA Executive members for their support and ideas, with special thanks to the members of the University and External Affairs Committee for their advice and assistance: Reid Locklin, Lino Grima, Kent Weaver, Harriet Sonne de Torrens, Judith Taylor, Victor Ostapchuk, and Michael Attridge.

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