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UTFA statement regarding threats of violence against feminist scholars at U of T

September 11, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

Most of you by now will have read the Provost's statement regarding recent threats of violence made online and directed toward some members of our faculty and students. And many will have seen or heard media coverage identifying the threats as anonymous blog comments targeting feminist professors at the University of Toronto, along with the students they teach.

We can confirm that we have been in touch with concerned colleagues and with the Administration regarding the posts in question and that we have seen some of them. We are continuing to gather information and we are also communicating with the Administration and various colleagues about appropriate courses of action, including increased security for individuals and around certain buildings. We know that there is an ongoing police investigation.

We are deeply distressed, troubled, and saddened by threats aimed at faculty and students working in the fields of gender and feminist studies. We wish to offer our full support to any and all colleagues affected directly or indirectly. We call upon the University administration to do everything within its power to ensure the safety of all members of the University community and, through direct dialogue with those who feel threatened, to seek ways to make our colleagues and students feel safe.

UTFA condemns in the strongest possible terms any threat of violence made against colleagues in any walk of academic life, including threats to women who do research and teach in ways that draw on and develop the invaluable contributions of feminism to understanding and improving the world in which we live. Many scholars, teachers and students, of all genders, put the various tenets of feminist thought "to work" at the U of T and in their broader academic and civic engagements. UTFA is committed to upholding and defending in the strongest terms their rights to do so freely and without reprisal.

It is also important for all colleagues to take a moment to reflect on the broader significance of these

threats to the academic mission of the University and to demonstrate solidarity with our feminist colleagues. Of course we cannot know how “real” these threats are. But they are certainly a source of great distress for colleagues who feel directly targeted. This has the potential to create a chill on the exercise of free speech on campus and academic freedom in teaching and research. If that happens, we all lose. And so we all share a collective responsibility to resist and to push back.

If you or any of your colleagues are concerned for your safety, we urge you to contact the UTFA office (faculty@utfa.org) for advice on your options. You should also not hesitate to contact the Provost’s Office. You should know that you have the legal right to refuse work (e.g., you may refuse to work in your office or to teach in certain buildings or classrooms) if you have reason to believe you may be endangered by the threat of workplace violence. UTFA will stand with any member who feels the need to exercise this right and will assist members in seeking additional measures to ensure their security.

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President, UTFA

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