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Letter to Dean Woodin, Faculty of Arts and Science re COVID-19 preparedness

March 9, 2020

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Professor Melanie Woodin
DeanFaculty of Arts and Science
Sidney Smith Hall
100 St. George Street
University of Toronto

Dear Dean Woodin,

UTFA recognizes that the spread of the COVID-19 virus could have serious consequences for teaching and learning at the University in the coming weeks and months. We hope that the University Administration will work with UTFA to develop strategies that will ensure instructor autonomy and academic freedom in the event of a disruption. UTFA has concerns about the Continuity Policy that we have raised in the past and will bring forward to the Provost once again in the next few days.

Today I am writing to express concerns about the memo to FAS faculty dated March 5, 2020, in which your office lists preparedness measures in the event that the COVID-19 virus necessitates a disruption to course delivery.

I quote from the memo below (bold font added):

"For both faculty and staff, this includes:

- **planning for maintaining access to any physical files you might need from your office in the event you need to work from home**
- **ensuring that you have appropriate IT gear to maintain your engagement with your courses and/or work from home (e.g., camera, mic, VPN, ensuring your shared drives**

are mapped)”

UTFA would like to make several points, numbered only for ease of reference:

1. If the University Administration would like to ask faculty to teach their courses online, then the Administration must plan to make available any technology that faculty might need. To list equipment etc. parenthetically and in a bullet point is clearly inadequate.
2. Rather than convey careful planning, the memo has the opposite effect.
3. The directive tone of the memo seems to suggest that faculty have no choice. Some faculty might well decide that they are prepared to continue teaching online. But others may feel that they cannot offer their courses (or other forms of teaching and interaction) online.
4. Any communication on changes to courses must emphasize the importance of safeguarding academic freedom and of instructor autonomy.
5. If the Administration is planning to implement something such as the Continuity Policy, then it needs to define more carefully the circumstances under which that policy would be triggered.

I and those from the UTFA Executive Committee who represent UTFA at Joint Committee would be pleased to meet with you to discuss these important matters.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Messenger
UTFA President

[See original formatted letter here]

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