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Report of the Vice-President, University and External Affairs, 2019–2020

July 2, 2020

Among my many roles and activities as Vice-President, University and External Affairs, I represent UTFA on the Board of Directors of both the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT). These organizations are dedicated to advancing the interests of faculty and librarians across the province and country, respectively.

Educating and Organizing Against Anti-Black Racism and Other Forms of Oppression
CAUT and OCUFA have been offering a number of resources and webinars to educate faculty and librarians about the prevalence and systemic impact of anti-Black racism and other forms of oppression and violence against marginalized communities (see here, for example). I have sent out emails and UTFA has sent out several tweets about these initiatives. I urge you to consider participating in these webinars.

Update on the Coalition Court Case Against Bill 124: Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act
OCUFA recently provided an update about the legal challenge by a consortium of Ontario unions to Bill 124, the Ford government's Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, which became law on November 7, 2019. It reported that, due to the current restrictions on court proceedings caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the court challenge will be further delayed and might not be heard for a further nine months. However, a recent ruling by the Manitoba Supreme Court on a similar case, Manitoba Federation of Labour et al v. The Government of Manitoba, largely appears to support the arguments of Ontario's case.

Engagement with Other University Faculty, Instructor, Staff, and Student Groups at the University of Toronto
I have also acted as the liaison between UTFA and the following campus groups: the University of Toronto Employee Associations and Unions (UTEAU) and student groups such as the Association of Part-time Undergraduate Students, the Graduate Students' Union, and the Canadian Federation of Students. I am proud to engage actively with these groups of university stakeholders whose work is focused on ensuring

an equitable and sustainable university sector for the staff and student members of the U of T community. UTEAU has also been organizing panels highlighting concerns over student mental health concerns and plans to conduct a survey among U of T students to assess the impacts of the financial and pandemic crises affecting our community.

David Suzuki Climate Change Event at the University of Toronto
I was pleased to play an important role, along with other members of the UTFA Executive, in organizing, supporting, and participating in this important climate change forum and workshops held at U of T in September 2019. It was a particularly well-attended and influential forum in a series of others held across Canada. Attendees nearly filled Convocation Hall. I was especially pleased to be able to help facilitate the appropriate recognition and participation of Indigenous members of the U of T community in this important event.

Continued and New Challenges to Funding in Higher Education
The UTFA President, Executive, and your VP, U&EA have been working to resist reductions in funding for post-secondary education across Ontario and particularly at U of T. With your continued support, we will continue to oppose cutbacks to staffing, academic programming and student funding and to stand in solidarity with other employees of U of T.

Mental Health and Well-Being Services
Through my work at UTEAU and through UTFA social media outlets, I have advocated for continued support and increases in funding for important improvements in mental health and other well-being benefits for UTFA members. In particular, while serving as Chair of the Joint Benefits Committee I have pushed for improvements in our Long Term Disability benefits.

UTFA Al Miller Memorial Award and UTFA Undergraduate Tuition Award Recipients
A highlight of service in this role is the opportunity to oversee selection of the recipients of UTFA's student awards. There were many extensively qualified applicants this year. Congratulations to the four recipients! You can read about them here.

J. Roy Gillis
Vice-President, University and External Affairs

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