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Report of the Chair of the Appointments Committee, 2019–2020

July 2, 2020

A central concern for the Appointments Committee is the administrative use of Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) in reviews for tenure, continuing status, and promotion (in both the tenure and teaching streams) and in the assessment of PTR. Through these processes, student evaluations can have a significant impact on a faculty member's career, including annual increases in salary. Recent institutional research has demonstrated that students can report on their experience in a course, but that such evaluations do not offer a reliable measure of the quality of instruction. Research has also shown that members of minority groups tend to receive lower results on numerical indicators and to receive a higher number of critical comments from students. The practice of aggregating numerical responses and calculating averages to measure the teaching effectiveness of an individual instructor or an academic unit increases the impact of these disadvantageous factors. In contrast, best practices indicate that SETs should be used not to compare instructors with one another but to provide information about the student experience that will assist individual instructors in planning and delivering their courses. In the institutional context of the University of Toronto, the administration and interpretation of SETs involve both central policies and divisional guidelines. Initiatives to advocate for faculty in this area require collaboration within UTFA, particularly between the Appointments Committee and the grievance portfolio.

The measures taken to maintain teaching and supervision under the public health conditions of COVID-19 have affected the appointments of faculty members and academic librarians. The working conditions of our members have changed and will continue to shift during the coming academic year, with the move to online and hybrid modes of teaching. Members made rapid changes in the delivery of their courses in mid-March so that students could complete the term. It is clear, however, that these changes increased the workload of our members, particularly instructors of high-enrolment undergraduate courses. Issues have also arisen in relation to research, such as the loss of access to resources and laboratory space and restrictions on off-campus field work. As indicated in the report for the grievance portfolio, UTFA has drafted a grievance on course delivery in the context of COVID-19.

On May 6 UTFA held a virtual workshop for tenure stream faculty, centred on the policies and procedures

for the mid-term review and the review for tenure and promotion. The principal presenter was Emma Phillips from Goldblatt Partners; Stephen Rupp and Helen Nowak were present to respond to questions and concerns. This workshop was well attended. Several of the questions spoke to members' concerns related to the impact of COVID-19 on their teaching and research.

I am grateful to Cynthia Messenger, Terezia Zoric, and Helen Nowak for their support and assistance.

Stephen Rupp
Chair, Appointments Committee

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