

Platform statement, Renan Levine.

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I am running for UTFA President because I believe in UTFA. Having proudly served on UTFA Council and the University and External Affairs Committee, I yearn for a democratic faculty association that respects and represents all members and effectively advocates for one of the most talented and hardest working groups of faculty and librarians in the world. Having taught at all three campuses, I have seen how UTFA has helped people at every rank in my department and across the university.

As UTFA President I will use my skills, training and experience to forge a fresh, pragmatic approach that will strengthen our association. I will focus on the core issues and priorities that our members care about, especially

- Ensuring that members' compensation keeps up with inflation, as it always has—until 2020;
- Addressing housing costs through larger subsidies and more faculty housing;
- Increasing childcare assistance and simplifying the application process;
- Re-establishing an UTFA governance structure in which all members are consulted, heard, and respected.

I am grateful for my supporters from the sciences, social sciences, humanities, multiple professional schools, and the library, on all three campuses. Many of them have years of UTFA experience at the highest levels of our association, experience I will draw on in negotiation with Simcoe Hall. My supporters are confident that I have the leadership skills and vision to strengthen UTFA. They see the value in having as president a political scientist who understands how process shapes outcomes: process *matters* for whether committees gather the best information, whether UTFA Council can debate alternatives and point out proposals' potential flaws, and whether UTFA's Executive Committee represents a variety of perspectives.

In these challenging times, I am committed to working with expert colleagues in a range of fields, such as labour relations, public health, management, economics, psychology, facility ventilation, responsible investing, accessibility, and pedagogy.

If elected, I will bargain hard for faculty. I will demand that Simcoe Hall cut administrative bloat before asking our members to accept salary and benefit packages that fail—as they have in the recent agreement—to keep up with inflation. I will, however, work alongside the administration as a partner when doing so is in our members' interests: on effective fundraising with robust donor guidelines; on faculty recruitment and retention; on increasing U of T's profile and prestige; and on achieving net-zero carbon emissions.

UTFA cannot effectively advocate for its members, however, without changing the way it now operates.

UTFA today: Division, Exclusion, Missed Opportunities.

To most members who don't pay much attention to UTFA, or who would normally take at face value UTFA's official announcements of wide consultation and impressive achievements, it may appear that everything is OK. My view from my Council seat: it is not.

Our membership waited months for a new deal, largely because the incumbent and her negotiating team made demands that the administration was never at all likely to accept. Most were pushed into arbitration. In an era where an Ontario law (Bill 124) limits across-the-board salary and benefits increases to 1 percent a year, the incumbent has shown little initiative and even less success in seeking other ways of broadly compensating members through avenues not capped by Bill 124. These include expanding availability for childcare subsidies and faculty housing supplies.

Based on feedback I have received from UTFA members, I feel that the incumbent's approach to governance has insulated her from feedback on those issues and many others.

- Surveys of members have taken place only *after* the Executive has set policy (e.g. on covid-19 policy).
- Council meetings are often taken up with Presidential and Executive statements and announcements, leaving little room for discussion. The incumbent and her allies dismiss tough questions and difficult conversations by attributing malicious motives to Council members.
- The incumbent has undermined the UTFA committee system; committees rarely meet, and the incumbent insists on attending all meetings that do occur.
- The Executive Committee is not representative. Of fourteen members, three are from OISE, including the president; only 36% are research stream (compared to 76% of the membership), with only one (from engineering) representing the Science and Engineering disciplines.

This is not how to run a democratic organization. And the results affect all of us.

Under the incumbent, UTFA has taken symbolic positions reflecting narrow priorities rather than forging policy to address members' practical needs. Over the last two years, UTFA has taken an unremittingly aggressive and distrustful attitude towards the U of T administration and the provincial government, going beyond legitimately tough criticism and using social media to retweet [crude insults](#) (e.g. [#GaslightingGertler](#)).

On one of the incumbent's most controversial policies, with one of the broadest effects on the university—the CAUT censure—no survey was taken at all, no opposing or cautionary views were considered, and no Council vote was called before the incumbent endorsed the censure in her own name and threw the prestige of her office behind it. The incumbent decided on a course of action and then scheduled several “educative” sessions to promote the decision. That is not how a democratic leader should operate. It is not how I will operate.

In the course of this controversy the incumbent continued to display poor judgment and discipline in public communications. Failing to represent the diversity of UTFA members, she [publicly attacked](#) a group of UTFA members based on their political beliefs and group identity, using language widely considered to be bigoted. Despite a belated apology that followed months of repeated pleas, the incumbent's re-election webpage currently includes an [endorsement](#) denying that criticism of her remarks has "substance" and attacking members who feel that it did (please find more details on [renanlevine.com](#)).

As UTFA president I promise to consult widely, listen to a range of voices, advocate for those whom I may personally disagree with, and encourage those with complaints and concerns to highlight any issues we might be neglecting.

A Better Path Forward

As president, I will re-establish what should be *regular, routine* democratic governance, where decision making is not monopolized by the executive and dissent is respected and encouraged. I shall pursue policies informed by input from the membership and its representatives; I will canvas views by polling the membership and convening town halls *before* decisions are made on the most controversial, potentially divisive matters. Concerns will percolate upwards from the membership to their representatives. On a Council vote, they will be referred to committees for data gathering and discussion, culminating in a written report. That report will be sent to Council at least a week in advance of regular meetings so that Council members can read it. Council will debate policy. The Executive will then implement the policy thus enacted—as required by UTFA's Constitution and Bylaws.

Policies

To quote Karen Martin, "when everything is a priority, nothing is a priority." **Whoever has a thousand priorities, has no priorities.** The incumbent's statement on her [website](#), as of this writing, that her thirteen policy positions are "not listed in rank order of priority", is actually a big problem: the incumbent regularly fails to complete initiatives because there are too many. Several of these priorities promise to continue addressing matters unsolved after years of her leadership. In contrast, I pledge to make several core issues central to my presidency:

1. Housing

Housing prices in the GTA continue to rise, imperiling U of T's ability to attract and maintain talent. Faculty housing is mostly small apartments in older buildings, unsuited to families, and is only available to new members who have relocated. Librarians and term appointees (CLTAs) are excluded, though they are among our lowest paid members. Few if any units are accessible to people with limited mobility.

UTFA must advocate boldly on this issue. This has been particularly urgent, but unaddressed, since 2019, after benefit and salary increases were limited by Bill 124. When COVID caused a

dip in the high-rise condo market in the GTA, UTFA could have bargained for commitments from the university to buy units near each campus. It did not. Nor did the UTFA leadership make housing a priority when housing prices soared later in the pandemic. An UTFA-U of T administration working group on housing convened in 2018 seems never to have reported any results to UTFA Council, dropping the matter as housing prices climbed.

As housing prices rise in the GTA, many faculty live elsewhere and commute. Accordingly, home purchase assistance must be extended to home purchases outside the GTA.

Rising interest rates combined with inflation affecting childcare, food and other essentials may even make it difficult for members who own their homes to afford their mortgage payments. I will call for the university to commit to subsidizing the rent or mortgage for faculty and librarians who earn less than \$150,000, but pay more than 40 percent of their after-tax income in rent or mortgage.

2. Childcare

I know a pre-tenure colleague who decided not to pay for after-school care this year for her child to save costs: at TDSB, the extended day program costs \$34.75 a day. Result: she will forego two of her most productive working hours each afternoon.

Crucial issues here include:

- U of T's childcare subsidy, negotiated fifteen years ago and unchanged since, does not cover any after- or before- school care, nor morning-only day care. The maximum subsidy of \$20 a day requires that the child receive care for at least six hours.
- That \$20/day rate was negotiated in 2007 and draws from a fund capped at \$1 million (in 2007 dollars!), even though childcare costs have soared since then.
- U of T's own childcare facilities now charge about \$90 a day for toddlers—not really a subsidized rate, in fact in line with many other providers who charge \$2,000 a month or more.

We need to expand the university's childcare programs. I will press the administration to

- increase the subsidy from \$1 million to \$1.5 million a year
- commit to raising the subsidy every other year by \$100,000
- expand eligibility to after-care and part-day programs for children up to age 10
- reduce fees, on a sliding-scale basis, at university-run childcare centers
- simplify an application process that is currently perplexing and takes far too long.

3. International graduate student support

Under the incumbent's leadership UTFA has been unaware of, or indifferent to, one of the biggest problems facing our faculty: insufficient funding for graduate students from outside Canada. An inability to recruit these students affects everything our members do: research, teaching, external grant support. However, funding for international graduate students is severely limited and subject to harsh quotas.

As President, I will make this an UTFA priority and will creatively seek funding from multiple sources: cutting the number and compensation of administrators, lobbying to change Provincial policy (as I'll point out, many US state universities *do* allow funding for international grad students), and partnering with Advancement to raise donations for a substantial, dedicated scholarship fund with ironclad guarantees against donors having any influence on which students are recruited. Here again, the administration might recognize its enlightened self-interest: U of T simply cannot lag behind other top research universities in this area and hope to maintain its research excellence.

4. Advancement

U of T is the leading research university in Canada and one of the top ones in the world. What keeps it that way is the talent and dedication of our faculty, librarians, staff, and students. Attracting and retaining them, however, takes resources: for well-equipped labs, generous research, proper facilities, and one of the world's great library systems. Whole U of T schools, employing a substantial proportion UTFA members, would not be possible without donor generosity.

UTFA members benefit greatly from the University's advancement efforts and should support them. The current president has repeatedly used her social media account to [mock university fundraising efforts](#). I will change that, recognizing that effective fundraising *benefits our members*.

As for the much-discussed issue of donor influence on hiring: The law school controversy was a reminder that even though it is proper to cultivate donors, we need very real and clear prohibitions of donor influence on teaching and research. The university has a new donations policy, but experts in the Department of Arts Management have raised concerns about unclear language about how donor feedback could be used as part of "normal hiring and procedures". UTFA leadership needs to bring this expertise to bear to demand clarifications in the policy.

All that said: It is highly irresponsible to let one prominent case distort UTFA's attitude towards advancement generally and its contribution to our welfare—as the current leadership has done.

5. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

We all cherish the notion that Toronto is a diverse city, where the Indigenous and people from all national origins, races, ethnicities, and religions live and work. One of U of T's central values is equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). UTFA must, in every negotiation, ask whether EDI is being honoured and advanced.

We must confront racism in its various forms, including but not limited to anti-Black racism, anti-Asian racism, antisemitism, and racism against Indigenous peoples.

When it comes to its mandate to negotiate on behalf of members, how can UTFA take pragmatic steps to protect and enhance human rights, such as those based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and religion (to name several)? And how can these human rights be reflected in labour gains?

- I support long-term UTFA efforts to battle discrimination with respect to salaries—and not only on the grounds of gender. UTFA is currently grieving the salary increase the University Administration unilaterally awarded women in the tenure stream.
- Working with the best specialists in discrimination in an array of disciplines from U of T and beyond, I will return to the issue of salary discrimination in all of our streams and on a range of grounds, including race.
- Negotiations based on race, for example, cannot proceed without adequate data. I would work to ensure that the appropriate data are collected going forward.
- I will consult with members on what UTFA might do to enable units to succeed in more diverse hiring.
- I will take steps to encourage a more diverse representation of our members on both UTFA Council and the UTFA Executive.
- UTFA's own governance must reflect the values it brings to the bargaining table. My colleagues and I have repeatedly, over the last few years, noted the urgent need for an UTFA to have a discrimination and harassment policy (which it currently lacks) and one that allows for independent, third-party adjudication of disputes among members.

CONCLUSION

UTFA's members work in a university of international standing. When UTFA once again includes and represents all of them, and UTFA's Council and Executive draw on their talents and expertise, there is nothing we cannot accomplish for our members and the larger university community. As UTFA's president, I will make this happen.