

Letter to the Provost

September 19, 2011

Dear VP and Provost,

As a tenured Associate Professor in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, I am writing in response to your invitation to submit some thoughts on what UTFA is currently trying to do at the U of T. I wholly support UTFA's efforts to make "all terms and conditions" negotiable by arbitration, and would like to convey to you my reasoning. "My" reasoning, however, is already a reasoning beyond my individuality, and is a common sentiment shared by countless faculty and librarians on campus.

What has become clear to faculty, librarians, and staff at the U of T is that the top administrators and CEOs of our university are doing what many public institutions of higher learning around the world are doing—namely, looking for quick fixes to compensate for fiscal debacles stemming from irresponsible financial investments made by top university and state brass since the 2000s. Here at the U of T, there are many forms of these quick fixes that the university administration wants to bulldoze through, but all have provoked a deep sense of outrage, helplessness, and precariousness by faculty, staff, librarians, and students. Tuition hikes for domestic students; extreme zealotry to recruit foreign undergraduate students for their foreign tuition monies; limited hiring (unless it's for adjunct positions); and a naked promotion of highly profitable and entrepreneurial academic programs and departments (in medicine, business, law, engineering, etc.) over less profitable but no less important ones in the Humanities; all of these phenomena are signs of the U of T administration's rushed efforts to cover its past financial mistakes, but to make faculty, librarians, students, and staff pay for them in a multiplicity of ways.

UTFA's proposal to negotiate all terms and conditions of employment for faculty and librarians is not as an extreme demand as the Provost would have us believe. It is rather a logical outcome of inflexible, top-down decision making processes that infuse the existing bureaucratic structures of the U of T.

The FAS Academic Plan for a "School of Languages and Literatures", which was dropped on our heads as if from out of the blue last fall, revealed serious flaws in the existing governing and bureaucratic structures. We haven't forgotten that struggle, or the problems of the administration's decision-making processes that led to that struggle. As a faculty member of one of the departments that was under question (EAS), it's hard to forget how shocked and outraged faculty, librarians, staff and students were by the extent to which the existing bureaucratic channels and offices of the highest levels of the university governing structure were broken or breaking down, ill-informed about on-the-

ground working conditions, or just plain ignorant of what entire departments actually do at our university. What was clear was that the CEOs and top admin brass were desperate for a quick fix (especially from millionaire donors such as Munk). And yet how obstinate and selectively blind have the top administrators been towards critical faculty, librarians, staff, and students.

So when the Provost writes that UTFA's proposal to negotiate all terms and conditions will lead to "inflexible bureaucracy and more rules"—which she implies is morally wrong, playing upon and referring to run-of-the-mill (neo)liberal bromides of individual autonomy, etc.—to this we can only say: How apropos that the very source of so much actually existing bureaucratic obstinacy, rigidity and inflexibility (i.e., witness the 2011 FAS Academic Plan) is now claiming that UTFA members are the ones promoting inflexibility. We don't have to be certified Freudians to see the work of disavowal in action here. Moreover, if the currently existing bureaucracy can ever be said to be "flexible", then this flexibility should be called for what it is: a broken form of flexibility that has only allowed top administrators to hurt, harm, and hinder the real academic work of our university's faculty, librarians, staff, and students with unilateral forms of power and decision-making. The top administrators must face up to this fact with fundamental changes, not with more quick fixes and palliative stop-gap measures (e.g., the Provostial advisory committee) that will further reinforce the existing "flexibility" of the bureaucracy. The truth is that this flexibility has only led to forms of marginalization of different groups on campus, to the further exploitation of precarious labor, to real divides (e.g., massive salary disparity) between administrators and "the coalface", and to the arrogation of power of corporate interests on campus.

It's also important to recall what happened in the wake of the failures of the 2011 FAS Academic Plan. Faculty and librarians later learned that, even while protests against the Plan were ongoing, the Governing Council passed a motion that would arrogate power to the GC's Executive Board to act "on behalf of the Governing Council", and to have "final decision making authority" regarding hiring and employment of faculty and librarians. What an arrogation of power! How can we faculty and librarians not feel that power has *already* become "externalized"?

Thus, when the Provost writes disparagingly (i.e., ideologically) that UTFA's current proposal to negotiate all terms and conditions through an external arbitrator will lead, in her view, to "a betrayal of our core values"; well, to this, we can only suggest that the Provost and company reexamine their understanding of the word "external", and of the idea of a "betrayal of core values". For, if faculty and librarians have learned anything from last year's failed FAS Academic plan, it's that institutional and institutionalized phenomena such as the Executive Board's arrogation of power are already concrete expressions of how administrative and corporate power at the U of T has itself become externalized, detached, and separated beyond recognition. It is *this* externalization of power that is the true "betrayal of core values" of our university. Who has initiated—and

even already institutionalized—a betrayal of core values? It is not the membership of UTFA. We reject all of this sand thrown in our eyes.

Support for UTFA's efforts to negotiate all terms and conditions through an external arbitrator is simply a countering effect of what the top administrators at the U of T have already initiated in such brazen, top-down ways. The power to negotiate all terms and conditions is a minimal and necessary form of attaining real equality on campus, real shared governance, and transparent modes of decision-making on campus.

It is wrong and misleading for the Provost to suggest that UTFA's proposal will lead to non-collegiality. Non-collegiality is already an expression of the administration's governing rationality. Witness the 2011 FAS Academic Plan. Who has been adversarial? It is the administration's top brass, not the on the ground members of UTFA. UTFA's proposal to negotiate all terms and conditions is a logical and rationale response to—and a minimal form of security in the face of—the administration's top-down mode of governing in the neoliberal era of austerity, cut-backs, the squeezing of labor, and the desperate quest for liquidity at all cost.

Yours truly,

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