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Professor Cheryl Misak
Vice-President and Provost
Room 225, Simcoe Hall
27 King's College Circle
University of Toronto

Dear Cheryl,

Re: Public Letter Regarding Academic Planning at the University of Toronto

As you know, since the middle of July, many colleagues and indeed entire departments and programs have been expressing deep concern and even outrage over the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS) planning process. Many have approached UTFA, and we are committed to conveying the character of their legitimate objections. UTFA will protest the planning process through an Association grievance. In the grievance, we will object to the manner in which the planning process has undermined both the tradition of shared governance at U of T and the integrity of individual academic appointments, and we will seek long overdue and lasting remedies in the form of rigorous and clear protocols governing academic planning at the university. The protocols are necessary if we are to avoid in future the kind of breakdown in collegial governance we are now witnessing. I welcome the recent assurances from the Administration that implementation of any FAS plan will follow and not precede adequate consultation, dialogue and formal approval of significant changes to the Faculty.

The concerns of faculty, librarians, students, and staff in the various units of the Faculty of Arts and Science have been shaped to some degree by the radical nature of some of the recommendations of the FAS plan. From UTFA's perspective, however, three main issues have emerged:

(i) The tone of the Dean's responses to units' proposed academic plans was too often disrespectful and showed a disregard for collegial engagement. The nature of the Strategic Planning Committee's appraisals, critiques, and challenges demonstrated, in some cases, only that the Committee appeared not to have the facts in front of it. The Committee, whose members were too few in number, produced analyses of unit plans that were plainly rushed and inadequate. The distinguished faculty members in the various departments and programs in the Faculty of Arts and Science, a high number with international acclaim, should expect that their considerable achievements and the intellectual and personal investments they have made in their research and teaching will be carefully considered and recognized in any planning process. The University of Toronto holds a well-deserved place of honour and pride in the international pantheon of elite institutions of teaching and research. Our members, the faculty and librarians of this institution – and no one else – are responsible for earning us that place. And yet this seems to have escaped recent notice.

(ii) The process by which significant and in some cases radical changes have been proposed displays a lack of regard for any tradition of shared governance and meaningful consultation with

the affected programs. The proposed changes were announced in many cases without warning. This high-handedness shocked the University community and suggests that the Administration has forgotten that it runs a public university, one where shared and collegial governance has become an expected principle in academic planning exercises.

(iii) Soon after the recommendations of the plan were released, significant steps toward implementation were taken or proposed prior to any real dialogue and debate in the appropriate administrative bodies, including the Faculty of Arts and Science Council. The Administration simply presumed that its recommendations would be approved, and in doing so signalled an attitude toward governance that must be challenged.

The deeply disappointing planning process in the Faculty of Arts and Science would seem to be part of a disturbing recent trend at U of T. On a related matter, UTFA remains quite concerned about the process in which faculty members in the Faculty of Forestry are being pressed to accept a new academic home before adequate planning has occurred. Only after significant protest by these faculty members and by UTFA did any semblance of consultation begin. The process continues to be unsatisfactory, however, and UTFA is prepared once again to intervene if necessary.

UTFA is not and should not concern itself with the particular configurations of academic units. That is for established and legitimate academic planning processes to deal with. What is at stake from UTFA's perspective, though, is the character of academic planning processes at U of T, particularly in instances where faculty and librarians will see significant changes in the conditions under which they work. We are pursuing the following general principles in this respect:

(i) The principle of academic freedom creates an obligation on the part of the institution to ensure that working conditions support individuals in meeting their professional and scholarly expectations. Academic freedom demands that due consideration be given to ensuring some reasonable continuity in professional activities, including in teaching and research in the context of any redeployment of faculty and librarians. Academic freedom is a principle that must apply to all faculty and librarians and must be given serious consideration in any conversation regarding the re-configuration of existing appointments. In this regard, we are ready and willing to assist our members collectively and individually.

(ii) Tenure, professional autonomy and academic freedom in teaching and research also demand that the security and integrity of individual appointments must not be undermined by unilateral program changes or closures.

(iii) The collegial character of academia and the University of Toronto requires that a fair, equitable, reasonable, transparent, and otherwise due process be followed in academic planning. This specifically requires that our members be actively and meaningfully involved in all dialogue concerning the future of their programs and any changes to their collective and individual deployments in the institution going forward.

(iv) Adequate and rigorous processes in academic planning demand that clear academic rationale be given for any and all academic program closures or restructuring and must never stem from fiscal considerations alone. In addition, the reasons for proposed changes should be subject to rigorous, meaningful and collegial dialogue and debate, specific alternatives must be considered, and any implementation of proposed changes must strictly follow and never precede clear and widely communicated decisions arrived at by established protocols and procedures.

UTFA acknowledges that the FAS Dean's office has recently signalled a more consultative approach. This is a productive step toward addressing the concerns which have been articulated, including those in an August 5, 2010, letter to Dean Gertler signed by a number of department and program chairs, and individual faculty members and librarians. I am heartened by the protest from both the university community and the wider public, and I hope that it has helped to reverse at least some of the damage to the University's reputation that has resulted from the FAS planning exercise.

At the same time, it is inexcusable that things went so far and wounded so deeply. The episode points to a more disturbing and systematic problem, namely something of a vacuum when it comes to due process in academic planning at this institution. Our members work very hard. They face unparalleled professional expectations. And they are deeply passionate about their work. They also make this institution what it is. They have a right to expect truly shared governance will prevail in shaping the future of the University of Toronto. Academic planning should reflect these basic premises, not trample on them. UTFA is committed to ensuring as much.

I look forward to future engagement with our members and with the Administration on these vital matters so that we can learn from and build on this experience.

Sincerely,

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cc UTFA Members

