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January 30, 2012

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

Dear Cheryl:

I am writing with regard to ongoing negotiations between your Administration and CUPE 3902 Unit 1, the union representing teaching assistants, graduate-student instructors, lab demonstrators, invigilators, and writing instructors at the University of Toronto.

I understand that the negotiations have become difficult and that there are a number of important issues that remain unresolved. There is talk of a possible strike or lockout in the near future. In particular, I gather that key areas of remaining disagreement include how to deal with escalating tutorial sizes and related workload and quality of teaching concerns, the somewhat baffling issue of how graduate student funding packages should be configured given different norms and expectations in various academic settings, and recent changes the Administration has introduced to doctoral completion grants.

Certainly it is not the place of UTFA to take a position on or intervene in this dispute nor on the specific matters being negotiated; that is for the parties to resolve. I do believe, however, that the students are raising important and legitimate issues in negotiations, issues that point to widely shared concerns about the quality of teaching at the U of T and about the manner in which our graduate students should be treated as both students and employees. Graduate students, like faculty, are facing increased workloads due to rising enrolments. And as you know, graduate students also make important and growing contributions to research and teaching at the U of T. The mission of the university cannot be met without them. And while faculty act as their mentors and supervisors in teaching, research and professional settings, graduate students are also valued current and future colleagues. It is important that both the specifics as well as the spirit of negotiations reflect these important facts.

I also share with many of my colleagues a concern about the possible disruption caused by any work stoppage should we come to a strike/lock out situation. I am sure you agree that it is in the best interests of the university community that all effort be expended to

avoid a lengthy and divisive strike or lockout and that all effort be made to negotiate in good faith a new collective agreement for CUPE 3902 Unit 1 that is fair to the parties.

I also want to clarify UTFA's position on struck work in the event of a possible work stoppage, namely, that no faculty can be legally required to perform the work of CUPE members (since among other reasons it falls outside of the terms of their appointment and existing workload norms). Moreover, the Administration should not in any way pressure faculty to take up work that would normally be completed by members of CUPE 3902 Unit 1. As a result, UTFA will be advising faculty that in order to avoid being perceived as taking the employer's side in any labour dispute, they do not have to and should not take on additional work. We recognize, of course, that faculty may individually decide to take on such responsibilities voluntarily.

Once again, I urge you to ensure that our graduate students, represented by CUPE, are treated with the fairness and respect that they have earned and that they deserve. I am available should you wish to discuss these matters with me further.

Sincerely,



George Luste  
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c.c. CUPE 3902, Unit 1  
David Naylor, UofT President  
UTFA Council