

**University of Toronto Students' Union**12 Hart House Circle  
Toronto, ON, M5S 3J9

Wednesday, March 1, 2017

**RE: Student Autonomy and Our SMC**

In December 2016, the council of the St. Michael's College Students' Union voted to suspend operations until the new year. This decision came at the end of a term plagued by scandal. The administration of St. Michael's College spent much of 2016 investigating allegations of financial misconduct against the SMCSU leadership. Over the course of the year, the college took effective control of SMCSU, eliminating much of autonomy to which student societies are accustomed. In November, students associated with SMCSU were implicated in the production and dissemination of an Islamophobic video. The video was widely condemned, including by the UTSU. By the beginning of December, both the President and the Vice-President of SMCSU had resigned.

Three weeks ago, the SMC administration struck a committee that is mandated to oversee the creation of a new student society for SMC students—a replacement for SMCSU. The college administration will oversee the election of the new student representatives, and the new student society will be more closely aligned with the “distinctly Catholic” identity of SMC. As it stands, SMCSU has been functionally dissolved, and the college has not yet provided a written explanation of how it intends to proceed. The UTSU is therefore concerned. We do not mean to suggest that SMCSU is blameless. The actions of misconduct that the SMCSU representatives have partaken in this year are despicable and the individuals and SMCSU should be held accountable. Regardless of SMCSU's status as an institution, the students of St. Michael's college have a right to self-government. A right which has now been abolished by the college.

The SMC administration's blatant attack on student autonomy by attempting to dissolve the student council would allow those most responsible for racism and islamophobia at SMCSU to escape accountability. A “reset” would be a clean solution, but it would not be a just one.

Earlier this year, the UTSU endorsed the creation of the Complaint and Resolution Council for Student Societies. We were the only campus-level student

society to do so. Students should be able to hold their student societies accountable—without going to court. The CRCSS makes this possible while still respecting the principle of autonomous student government. Unfortunately, the student societies of the three federated colleges—Trinity College, Victoria College, and SMC—are beyond the reach of the CRCSS, and we fear that the path being taken at SMC will not strike the correct balance between autonomy and accountability.

The administration must intervene only to the extent necessary to ensure that students have the ability hold their elected leaders accountable. This is true in the case of the UTSU, and it is true in the case of SMCSU

We urge the college administration to allow students to determine the future direction of student government at SMC. In the absence of a functioning student government, we further urge the college administration to work with the Our SMC campaign to achieve this goal.

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Sincerely,

**The UTSU Executive**

**Jasmine Wong Denike**  
President

**Mathias Memmel**  
Vice-President External

**Cassandra Williams**  
Vice-President University Affairs

**Matt Thomas**  
Vice-President External

**Farah Noori**  
Vice-President Equity

**Shahin Imtiaz**  
Vice-President Campus Life

**Ryan Gomes**  
Vice-President Professional Faculties