

University of Toronto Students' Union's Revised Response to "A Framework for a New Relationship between the Engineering Society and the University of Toronto Students' Union"

Introduction

On behalf of the University of Toronto Students' Union, I would like to acknowledge receipt of the report from the Engineering Society and the issues highlighted therein. It is my sincere belief that the response given at the time by the Union was not one that productively addressed and took into consideration the concerns of the Engineering Society. As a body which has overlapping membership in the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering with the Engineering Society, it is imperative that our organizations work together productively. As such, I am issuing a revised response with the hope that it will act as a first step in repairing the relationship between our organizations, as well as provide a framework through which other dissatisfied colleges and faculties may have their concerns addressed.

A Note on Fee Diversion

Although the Engineering Society's report was created before the multiple fee diversion referenda held in 2013, it contains a specific section regarding the refunding of fees where duplicated services exist. The UTSU's previous position was that these fee referenda were held in contravention of its Charter of Referenda. It is unfortunate that the organization took this stance, as the Charter did not provide an avenue for members to hold constituency-specific referenda. It is the current position of the UTSU that while these referenda were held outside the scope of the Charter, they are legitimate expressions of not only frustration, but also a desire to change the structure under which the UTSU operates and delivers services.

As such, while the current UTSU structure does not allow for divisions to unilaterally separate, the Union needs to define a set of criteria under which some sort of fee agreement can be reached that at least partially addresses concerns regarding duplicated services and issues of representation. Such an agreement is already in place with the UTMSU (albeit with the caveat of being an entirely separate campus), and colleges and faculties who can satisfy these criteria should be entitled to a negotiated agreement of their own.

For a college or faculty to enter such an agreement with the UTSU, the following criteria must be met:

- 1) The division must demonstrate a particular need for such an agreement. This could include demonstrating that a high number of duplicated

- services exist, as well as proving that representation of student concerns is done much more efficiently at the college or faculty.
- 2) The division must be able to provide services of a similar nature to the UTSU. This includes providing sales to students for various services/products and
 - 3) The division must have passed a quorate referendum with a clear majority of students in favor of such an agreement. For the purposes of this item, the referenda held in 2013 that were quorate would satisfy this requirement.
 - 4) The division must have a similar mandate to the UTSU, which includes representing students, safeguarding the individual rights of students regardless of identity, providing services, and engaging in discussion with external organizations.

The rest of this report will focus on responding to the specific concerns brought up in the Engineering Society report.

Governance

In this section, the Engineering Society highlights a multitude of governance issues that warrant further discussion. In the section *Voting System (§2.1.1)*, the report brings up an important point regarding first-past-the-post as a voting system. It is absolutely true that it is an anti-proportional system that marginalizes minority views and penalizes independent candidates. It's important to keep this in mind, as this system has allowed for complete landslides for the past decade of UTSU elections (with the exception of a split board merely one or two times). With this in mind, the UTSU would like to accept the Engineering Society's recommendation regarding the implementation of proportional representation. The Elections and Referenda Committee has been tasked with investigating a means by which the UTSU can move to proportional representation, whether it be through preferential voting, STV, or some other representative system. The UTSU will keep in mind the Engineering Society's specific endorsement of STV.

The following section of the 2010 report, *Election Procedures (§2.1.2)*, touches on the high thresholds that were required to run for UTSU executive and Board positions at the time. Since then, the threshold to run for a UTSU executive positions has been reduced to 100 signatures. The thresholds in place are now similar to the examples cited in the report; however, more work can be done. It is the UTSU's position that the current 100 signature requirement for executives is a fair requirement. To represent a membership of over 45,000 students, larger than the electoral populations of some ridings in the province and Canada, it is fair to ask interested students to obtain at least 100 signatures, and this is much fairer than the 200 signatures required in the past. That said, the UTSU agrees

that the 25 signature requirement to run for a faculty or college is prohibitively high. As such, the UTSU will recommend the Elections and Referendum Committee to reduce the requirement to 10 signatures. While this is higher than the 5 signature requirement suggested in the report, it is the same number that the Engineering Society currently requires from its students to run for discipline seats on its own Board of Directors (which is a much smaller constituency that is directly comparable to the UTSU's divisional and college seats).

The third section of the report, *Levy Renewal* (§2.1.3), discusses the nature of levies collected by the UTSU. The Engineering Society rightfully points out that groups should justify why they are collecting fees to the students paying those fees, rather than collecting in perpetuity long after an initial referendum. The Elections and Referenda Committee has been tasked with investigating the feasibility of doing so moving forward. The time frame for holding these referenda will also be examined, whether it be the three years suggested by the Engineering Society or another that would work best for the Union.

The final section of the Governance portion of the report, *Board of Directors Proxy Procedures* (§2.1.4), refers to the proxy restrictions that were in place at the time of the report. The Union no longer allows proxying at the Board level due to federal law, but the UTSU appreciates that this issue was highlighted.

Transparency & Accountability

The first portion of this section, *Publication of Documents* (§2.2.1), touches on the multitude of issues members have had in the past accessing documents from the Union. The UTSU, as an organization committed to transparency, absolutely needs to be proactive in publishing documents online. To that end, agendas are now posted on the website within 24 hours of being released to the Board of Directors. The Policy Manual and Minutes, as well as the Elections Procedure Code, are now permanently posted to the website. The Union will endeavor to get its Letters Patent posted soon as well.

The next section, Disclosure of Information (§2.2.2), details the Engineering Society's issues with the non-disclosure of salaries for unionized staff members. Unfortunately, this is one portion of the original response that still mostly stands. The Union has an obligation to protect the income of its employees, which also relates to the Collective Agreement in place between the UTSU and CUPE 1281 (which represents the unionized employees). However, when positions are opened, the UTSU will always publish the criteria for said position, and the hiring procedure will always involve an interview process overseen by executives and the Executive Director. The UTSU is also investigating how to ensure that board

members are aware of the broad contractual obligations we have with staff while ensuring that we uphold our responsibility to protect our staff and their privacy.

The final section in this portion of the report, *Advertising and Scheduling of Meetings* (§2.2.3), details the Engineering Society's concerns regarding the scheduling of Board, Commission and Committee meetings, as well as the advertising of those meetings and the Annual General Meeting (AGM). While deliberately provocative in its language, I can understand where this frustration is coming from. Professional Faculty students are historically underserved by the UTSU, and part of this is reflected in meetings being scheduled at inaccessible times. As such, the UTSU is committed to ensuring that at least half of its board meetings are scheduled outside of regular working hours. Already, two board meetings out of three have been scheduled on weekends in order to promote Professional Faculty attendance. In addition, the UTSU remains committed to ensuring the AGM is accessible and will endeavor to ensure it is promoted extensively through physical and online materials.

Organizational Structure

This portion of the report deals specifically with the structural barriers that have historically prevented Professional Faculty students from participating in the UTSU's Executive Committee. The section *Executive Committee Representation* (§2.3.1), spends a lot of time detailing how part time requirements prohibit professional faculty students from participating as an executive. Indeed, before last year (Pierre Harfouche/Riley McCullough), there had not been a single Professional Faculty student on the Executive Committee for multiple years, and serving as an executive imposed severe burdens on those individuals. As such, the UTSU has proposed to remove the part-time requirement/restriction for members of Professional Faculties, and the Policy & Procedures Committee and Board will vote on such a change. The Policy & Procedures Committee will also investigate the creation of a "VP Professional Faculties" similar to the UTMSU designate or "VP UTM" position. In this position, an individual from a Professional Faculty executive could be nominated collectively by the Professional Faculties to serve on the Executive Committee and represent the interests of their students. Similar to the VP UTM position, the VP ProFac would be a member of the Executive and Board of Directors, and like the VP UTM, compensation would be up to the appointing body (in this case, the Professional Faculties). In addition, we will attempt to see where faculties can offer greater flexibility for student leaders wishing to serve in roles that require a large time commitment.

The other section, *Professional Faculties Commission* (§2.3.2), details concerns from the Engineering Society regarding the ineffectiveness of the Professional Faculties Committee. The UTSU is committed to ensuring the committee meets

with regularity this year, however this proposal will also be investigated with consultation with various Professional Faculties.

Duplication of Services

The final portion of this report is devoted exclusively to the Engineering Society's request for a return of fees for duplicated services. These concerns fall under the umbrella of a 'fee agreement' described in the 'A Note on Fee Diversion' section of this response. The Engineering Society has demonstrated through this section that it meets all of the requirements detailed in that section and, as such, the UTSU will enter into discussions with the Engineering Society regarding some sort of fee agreement. It may not be of the form that this report requests, but I anticipate that both parties will come to a satisfactory agreement that benefits both the membership and the two organizations.

Conclusion

I would again like to express my appreciation for the report sent by the Engineering Society in 2010. The Union is deeply committed to constructively addressing the concerns of our members in the Faculty of Engineering. By continuing to meet with the executives of the Engineering Society, the Union hopes to change what has been a previously neglected relationship into a productive one.

Many of the concerns in the Engineering Society's report will be responded to either by the Executive, the Board or Committees in the near future. The Union looks forward to improving its operations to benefit all of its members; we remain committed to forging closer relationships between all colleges, faculties and campuses.

Respectfully,

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