Statement on the University of Toronto's COVID Response, Student Supports, and Fall 2020 Semester Plans

October 6th, 2020

Definitions

"COVID": the COVID-19 pandemic
"Faculty, FAS": the Faculty of Arts and Science
"Provost": the Office of the Provost and Vice President, University of Toronto
"Statement, Document": the entirety of this document and its demands
"(FAS) Student Group": a student group (regardless of U-life recognition) whose primary constituency and mandate serves students in the Faculty of Arts and Science; for the purposes of this document the University of Toronto Students' Union will be considered within this category
"University of Toronto, University, U of T": the Governing Council and Executive Committee of the University of Toronto, the Offices of the Vice Provost, Students and the Vice Provost, Academic Programming, and the Offices of the Provost and the President; those agents which direct, administer, and control the processes and objects described in this statement.

Statement of Intent, Complaint, and Demand

As we start the Fall semester at the University of Toronto, student groups in the Faculty of Arts and Science have been able to work with and identify students from all corners of our Faculty who have raised concerns about the University's response to COVID-19. For many, our financial situations have changed drastically. As we navigate employment, housing, tuition, ancillary fees, and the many other costs of a post-secondary education amidst such uncertainty, we need the University to provide financial support and relief in ways that it may not have historically. The 2020-2021 academic year will also be the first in U of T's history to be conducted almost entirely online, in order to ensure the safety of faculty, staff, and students. This too, has presented challenges, as students face barriers to accessibility in online learning environments, along with a lack of adequate accommodation and communication that ought to be expected during such a crisis.

While the University has taken a number of positive actions in its pandemic response, there are many more areas where it has fallen short in supporting its students. We have raised many of these concerns through various channels over the last few weeks and months, however little action has been taken to address major areas of student concern, including tuition fees and

academic accommodations. In order to ensure that U of T students are supported in their pursuit of a high-quality education, we, the undersigned student organizations, have decided to release this statement outlining our demands, in the hopes that our united voice will be heard and addressed by the University of Toronto.

This document acknowledges that personal and professional barriers to administrative efficiency, as expected during a global health crisis and pandemic, are shared between members of administration, staff, and students alike, and has contributed to delays of information. It also further acknowledges the time necessary to craft administrative responses on the University's scale. It is nevertheless the position of this document and its cosignatories that the information released previously by the University has insufficiently explained the policies and guidelines undertaken concerning its response to COVID, and has done so in a manner untimely enough that it negatively impacts the student experience.

This document acknowledges that the recently-published procedures by the Provost concerning the University's action plan with respect to COVID case incidents do provide some necessary information to students about the actions which will be undertaken by the institution in these cases. However, these procedures do not adequately address accessibility issues nor the resources available to students outside of the University's response to their health and infection. They also do not provide enough information and or educational initiatives for students concerning the appropriate use of their non-PPE masks. The procedures do not further address transparency or lay out a clear policy for the communication of information in a due or timely manner. Finally, these procedures do not explicitly outline policies which would provide regular and pre-emptive COVID testing for students, staff, or faculty: a preventative measure undertaken by many other institutions of higher learning across the continent.

This document acknowledges that these Provostial procedures were not written to be a sole resource of COVID-related guidelines, especially for students (and that they accompany various policies, including those concerning masks and PPE, as well as the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) guidelines). Nevertheless, support, information, and policy about the student experience in general has been either vague or absent, especially in methods of delivery, information concerning third-party platforms for student engagement (incl. those which contain microtransactions and digital learning services (e.g. WileyPlus) and private proctoring services (e.g. ProctorU)), and policies concerning academic leniency in relation to Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS) curricula and teaching teams (i.e. difficulties in access to technology, digital literacy, and assumption of resources).

This document acknowledges that the current 'raise' in non-domestic fee structures in fact maintains a scheduled raise determined in previous academic and fiscal years. This document

opposes the notion entirely that the academic and student experience is undiminished by digital learning methods, and further maintains that there is little ground for the University to put undue burden on one particular income unit to bear the costs associated with maintaining normal-adjacent operations, namely that of non-domestic fee, levy, and tuition payers. Forgiving a margin of error, it is the expectation of this document and its cosignatories that given the resources of the University of Toronto, the University ought to adequately acknowledge, identify, and provide solutions for these and other deficiencies within the student and academic experience caused by COVID.

As such, the cosignatories of this statement demand that there be:

1. A significant reduction of tuition for online classes and of ancillary fees for all upcoming terms which will be delivered primarily online, and where tuition is permissible to change, as those described in "Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines for Publicly-Assisted Universities 2019-20 and 2020-21" (Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, Ontario, 2019);
2. A reduction of the minimum to register fee;
3. A waiver of tuition service fees (currently 19.56% compounded p.a.);
4. An full extension of the academic year's deadline to pay (Fall 2020 and Winter 2021) to August 2021;
5. Reasonable and due accommodations for students, and support for professors to offer various options that allow for accessible learning, including addressing privacy concerns;
6. Mandates and support for each division's registrarial services and for the Faculty's professors to the end of more leniency for course and academic deadlines, owing to different time zones;
7. Support and preference for the recording of lectures for accessibility purposes, even for courses with sections offering in-person and synchronous delivery methods;
8. Syllabi containing accurate and specific information about the method of delivery that will remain consistent through the course and be most accessible to its students;
9. Mandated proof of necessity and transparency of use for all teaching teams using third-party digital learning services, while encouraging the use of Quercus, and that;
    a. The University shall provide third-party subscriptions itself to offload the cost for individual students, especially for students who take required courses and must purchase third-party software without warning, and that;
    b. The University shall provide an alternative method of grading for students who cannot subscribe to a digital learning service.
11. Increased transparency for the use and allocation of tuition, including at least a more detailed invoice on ACORN; and

12. Timely and clear communication of updates and decisions on University-wide decisions which includes reports upon the impact on future academic consequences from the decisions being made.

As representatives of students in various constituencies across the University, we are wholly committed to advocating for students during the pandemic and beyond. We urge the University to heed these demands, and work to accommodate them into the University's pandemic response. We will continue to meet with the University, collectively, and in our organizations' individual capacities, to advocate for the students we represent. We encourage all students to reach out to your elected student leaders if you have questions or concerns, or are in need of support. To this end, we have attached a list of contacts and resources for the benefit of our student community which can be found in the appendix (Appx. A) to this document.

Signed,

The Arts and Science Students' Union (ASSU)
The New College Student Council (NCSC)
Rotman Commerce Students' Association (RCSA)
The Trinity College Meeting (TCM)
The University College Literary and Athletic Society (UCLIT)
University of Toronto's International Students' Advocacy Network (ISAN)
University of Toronto Students' Union Executive Committee (UTSU)
Victoria University Students' Administrative Council (VUSAC)
Woodsworth College Students' Association (WCSA)

Appendix

Faculty of Arts & Science (Academics)

- Arts & Science Students' Union (ASSU)
    - Website: www.assu.ca
    - Ikran Jama, President: ikran.jama@mail.utoronto.ca
- Divisional Registrars: future.utoronto.ca/current-students/registrars/

General University Inquiries (Academics)

- University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU)
    - Website: www.utsu.ca
    - Tyler Riches, Vice-President Public & University Affairs: vppua@utsu.ca

University of Toronto (Finances)

- COVID-19 Emergency Undergraduate Grant
    - future.utoronto.ca/finances/financial-aid/emergency-assistance-grants/
- Undergraduate Grant (application)
    - www3.adm.utoronto.ca/php/website_files/files/fa/undergraduategrantapp.pdf
- Awards Explorer
    - awardexplorer.utoronto.ca/
- Financial Counselling Directory
    - future.utoronto.ca/finances/financial-aid/financial-counselling-directory/

University of Toronto Students' Union (Finances)

- Student Aid Program
    - www.utsu.ca/financial-assistance/

General Faculty and University FAQs

- University of Toronto #UTogether2020 FAQ: www.utoronto.ca/utogether2020/faqs
- Office of the Vice-Provost, Students FAQ: www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/covid-19/
- Faculty of Arts & Science FAQ: www.artsci.utoronto.ca/covid19-artsci-student-faqs

Addendum

This addendum offers insight from student groups about the concerns specific to their organization, as well as comments they would like to be taken into context when reading this document.

Rotman Commerce Students' Association

The RCSA believes that the chronic communication issues present between student groups and administration are salient enough that Item 12 should be the primary demand of the document, and wishes that to be taken into consideration.

"Demand Item 12: 'Timely and clear communication of updates and decisions on University-wide decisions which includes reports upon the impact on future academic consequences from the decisions being made', should be the first demand.

[We] believe that from [the University's] admin[istrative] pattern... [that] the core issue would be communication and transparency from their end (before even going into 'specific' problems - i.e. tuition fees increase)

[...] we would rather tend towards highlighting their lack of communication first.

This... is an immediate request that would bring us one step closer to our longer-term goal: UofT students gradually becoming valued in the admin's decision-making process."