

Wednesday, October 24, 2019

The Executive Committee
University of Toronto Students' Union
12 Hart House Circle
Toronto, ON M5S 3J9

RE: Ombudsperson's Comments at Governing Council 24 October 2019

At the 24 October 2019 meeting of the University of Toronto's Governing Council, student groups were given the opportunity to speak on issues pertaining to student mental health across all three campuses.

Student groups such as the Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students (APUS), University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union (UTMSU), University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union (UTGSU), University of Toronto Mental Health Policy Council (MHPC) and the University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU) gave statements pertaining to issues ranging from the lack of access and capacity for mental health counselling services at Health and Wellness, to calls for increased academic forgiveness. Each of these groups touched on the detrimental effects of the University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy (UMLAP).

After students gave their statements, the meeting moved into the item concerning the Report of the University Ombudsperson. The Ombudsperson, Dr. Ellen Hodnett, thanked students for their remarks but stated she disagreed on the broad consensus regarding UMLAP.

What followed was a diatribe condemning student activism regarding mental health on campus. Dr. Hodnett accused students of using on campus deaths as a way to critique UMLAP. These comments are not only offensive and wrong, but serve as a way of belittling students and further emphasizes the ongoing issue of the administration not listening to its students throughout the entire policy-making process.

Dr. Hodnett, we address this next section to you. We, the Executive Committee of the University of Toronto Students' Union, representing 38,000+ students at the St. George campus, call on you to issue a formal apology for your damaging and insensitive comments at today's Governing Council meeting. The fact that you told those at this meeting that you are "proud" to be part of a policy that has been criticized by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, and has served as an active detriment to students seeking mental health support on this campus, speaks volumes about your views on listening to us. We look forward to your apology shortly.

Yours in service,

The University of Toronto Students' Union