OPEN LETTER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO COMMUNITY

March 5, 2015

To the University of Toronto community,

Since the beginning of the strike involving CUPE 3902 Unit 1, there has been some confusion around the key issues and the nature of the tentative agreement that was agreed upon last week. To correct the record and inform the discussion, we want to share the following key facts with you.

The tentative deal reached last week

Late last week, the University of Toronto and CUPE 3902 Unit 1 reached a tentative agreement covering the terms and conditions of teaching assistants as part-time employees. This is separate from the broader issue of graduate student support, where the University of Toronto has some of the highest levels and most broadly distributed support of any university in Canada.

The tentative agreement would raise teaching assistants’ wages to $43.97, one of the highest hourly rates in the country. Other components of the deal include improved health care – one of the most comprehensive health plans for teaching assistants in Canada – and more than $2 million of financial assistance, including partial tuition waivers for senior doctoral students who are beyond the funded cohort. Given these features, it is not surprising that the tentative deal was unanimously endorsed by CUPE’s bargaining committee. More information about the tentative agreement can be found here.

In a meeting attended by roughly 800 members of the bargaining unit – whose total membership approaches 6,000 – a majority of those present voted to reject the tentative settlement and take the members of CUPE 3902 Unit 1 out on strike, without allowing all members of Unit 1 to vote on the deal. This is regrettable. Nevertheless, we continue to do everything we can to minimize the impact of the strike on our students and will continue to keep you apprised of the situation. The University will remain open. Students are able to pursue their courses.

Graduate student support at U of T

The part-time employment income that teaching assistants receive is one portion of the total graduate student support provided by the University of Toronto.

Turning to the wider issue of student support, we are very proud of the consistent and high level of financial support we provide to our graduate students, particularly those in the doctoral stream. As you know, the students who attend the University of Toronto bring quality, diversity, and commitment to their chosen fields. Our students are among the very best and brightest. They deserve to be supported financially as they complete their studies.

Graduate student financial support is crucial to help our Masters and PhD students offset the cost of their education and earn income during their graduate studies. It also serves as an important tool to recruit the best graduate students globally.
The University’s funding commitment to doctoral students ensures a *minimum* level of support of $15,000 per year plus tuition and other incidental fees. The University offers a funding commitment to its PhD students for up to five years of their program.\(^1\)

In fact, recent data for graduate students in the funded cohort confirm that, in 2012-13, the average level of financial support was $35,109. Average levels of support vary by division *from $25,555 per student per year to $41,040 per student per year*. The graph below shows the range of student funding levels.

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**The University of Toronto offers some of the highest levels of graduate support in the country.**

Every PhD student we admit to the University of Toronto receives a guaranteed level of financial support, unlike many of our peer institutions, which do not provide a universal funding commitment. Our student support packages may include U of T fellowships, scholarships, awards, teaching assistantships, and research assistantships. The amount, composition, and duration of a graduate student’s funding package varies by department and program, because of factors such as granting council research funding and support from faculty research grants.

By supporting our students, we continue to build upon the outstanding reputation of our university, ensuring that it remains a great place to study and that it maintains its position as one of the world’s pre-eminent public universities.

Once again, the University of Toronto is committed to reaching a settlement with CUPE 3902 Unit 1, and to restoring normal operations for our students and our community. For more information about the strike, please visit [http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/office/2015strikeupdates.htm](http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/office/2015strikeupdates.htm).

Sincerely,

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Professor Cheryl Regehr
Vice-President and Provost

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Professor Angela Hildyard
Vice-President, Human Resources & Equity

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\(^1\) Doctoral-stream students are guaranteed a minimum of tuition and fees plus $15,000. These students comprise the funded cohort of graduate students at U of T.