



University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union
16 Bancroft Avenue
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May 23 2018

RE: Proposed University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy

Dear Vice-President and Provost Cheryl Regehr and Vice-Provost, Students Sandy Welsh,

We write to you after learning that the proposed University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy has been added to the agenda of the University Affairs Board meeting set for tomorrow, Thursday May 24th. We join our fellow student unions in expressing deep concern regarding both the consultation process, as well as the spirit and language of this proposed Policy. While we thank you for your efforts in consulting with students, we would like to highlight the fact that concerns surrounding this Policy have not subsided but rather have escalated. As such, we are disappointed to learn that it will be considered by the University Affairs Board tomorrow.

As per our previous correspondence, we request that the period of time allotted for feedback be re-opened to allow members of the University community and other stakeholders to provide more meaningful feedback. The University is less active at this time of year as we are between the Winter and Summer term, a time when students are more removed from University politics due to summer obligations (i.e., field work, summer jobs). Many groups and individuals have been unable to provide comprehensive feedback on this proposed Policy. We urge you to consider this oversight in the consultation process and extend the allotted time for feedback until the end of October 2018, as requested by Students for Barrier-Free Access (SBA). Furthermore, we request more accessible feedback forums that facilitate two-way dialogues (i.e., townhalls) and that the Ontario Human Rights Commission be invited to review the proposed Policy in its current form, as the previous draft was withdrawn following their intervention.

We would also like to reiterate some of the many concerns surrounding this proposed Policy, all of which have been expressed throughout the consultation period. In its current form, the proposed Policy allows for students on mandated leave to be excluded from the campus community, eliminating access to extracurricular activities and University-related events. More alarming is the potential for students to be removed from their housing and lose access to funding sources, health services and visa status. We see all of these outcomes as barriers to students pursuing their educational goals, directly contradicting the intent of this proposed Policy.

While we appreciate that this proposed Policy is intended as an alternative to the *Code of Student Conduct* in situations where mental health issues are factors, we urge you to consider how it may be used on a discriminatory basis. The actors/offices designated to decide whether a student should be placed on mandated leave (i.e., Division Heads, Vice-Provost, Students) are not formally trained to diagnose mental health issues. As such, we see this as a dangerous policy that has the potential to target students based on stereotypes of mental health. Thus, despite



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reassurances that the proposed Policy is intended for a select few students as a compassionate alternative to the *Code of Student Conduct*, we worry that the potential risks far exceed the suggested benefits.

The University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union is committed to advocating for the rights of over 18,000 graduate students. As such, we are in strong opposition to the proposed University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy. We would like to end by highlighting that many of the concerns regarding this proposed Policy have been voiced by individuals from marginalized communities with intersecting factors including but not limited to disability, race, gender identity, class, migration status). As an institution committed to equity, diversity and inclusion, we urge the University to take seriously these concerns and to consider the potential consequences that this proposed Policy may have for these groups and individuals.

Sincerely,

Sam Stead, University Governance Commissioner
Lynne Alexandrova, Internal Commissioner
Christopher Ball, Academics and Funding Commissioner, Divisions 1&2
Branden Rizzuto, Funding Commissioner
Cristina Jaimungal, External Commissioner
Sophie McGibbon-Gardner, Academics and Funding Commissioner, Divisions 3&4
Leonardo Jose Uribe Castaño, Civics and Environment Commissioner

CC: Meric S. Gertler, President, University of Toronto
Claire M.C. Kennedy, Chair, University of Toronto Governing Council
Renu Mandhane, Chief Commissioner, Ontario Human Rights Commission
Ellen D. Hodnett, Ombudsperson, University of Toronto
Accessibility Services, University of Toronto
Students for Barrier-Free Access, University of Toronto