

*The St. George Round Table  
Monday 26<sup>th</sup> of May 2014*

Cheryl Regehr  
Vice-President and Provost  
Simcoe Hall  
21 King's College Circle  
Toronto, Ontario



**SGRT Thoughts on the Student Societies Report and Summit**

Dear Provost Regehr,

We the undersigned are writing to your office to express our concern with the recent events pertaining to student governance at the University of Toronto. It is common knowledge that the colleges and faculties that constitute the St. George Round Table (SGRT) have for many years been strained in their relationship with the Students' Administrative Council operating under the name of University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU). This letter seeks to inform you of our grievances, the detrimental impact of the UTSU and its actions, and our hopes moving forward. We hope to bring forward a fair representation of circumstances, and a reasonable exploration of solutions.

Our dissatisfactions regarding the UTSU are far reaching and varied. Most worrying of these is the UTSU's inability to deliver transparent, democratic, and accessible elections practices. The UTSU has broken its own bylaws in extending voting hours at the University of Toronto Mississauga without consulting their Board of Directors - the effect of which may have potentially altered the results of our elections. There is no way to truly determine the impact however because, contrary to the urgings of many campus groups as well the Vice-Provost, the ballots have been destroyed. The ability to collaborate effectively relies on mutual trust, and we feel this behaviour is damaging to the trust set between our respective organizations and the UTSU. As student leaders, it is of the utmost importance that we govern in a manner that is fair to the students we represent; this, however, is difficult to achieve when the Incumbents have the ability to select their Chief Returning Officer (CRO), and summarily dismiss grievances. In sum, the whole process lacks the oversight of an independent judicial body.

The lack of separation of powers in the electoral process is distressing. The CRO is hired by the executive team, which has been in recent years almost exclusively made up of incumbents. Such hiring serves to deepen the lack of trust of the student body in the UTSU as a functioning democratic institution by hampering the ability of students to receive full representation. This trust is further strained by the recently proposed changes to the Board of Directors. Simply put, student representation is being weakened in lieu of equitable policies, policies which are effective in their ability to increase representation of minorities, but are not catered toward the whole of the student body. It is clear, that despite the best efforts of the student societies and councils of the St. George campus, we cannot successfully enact change under the system as it exists. Therefore, we turn to the administration for help in this process.

Fair representation is not the only immediate issue; these recent proposals have put the University in a media spotlight we feel is a disservice to the institution. Articles in the National Post and Maclean's magazine have garnered the Union - and by extension the University of Toronto - significant unfavourable attention. Furthermore, recent union controversies have even come to the attention of the world's largest online news aggregator and have been widely disseminated over online social media. We

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are concerned with the potential ramifications of this bad press. As a small (but not isolated) example, individuals at the SGRT have been contacted by prospective students who have turned down U of T acceptances as a consequence of these articles. This behaviour is not reflective of our world-class rankings, and as one of the largest student unions in the world, we do not want to set a bad precedent for other unions that seek guidance in governance. We at the SGRT have remained open to a dialogue of reform and progress with student groups on campus. Both past and recent attempts have unfortunately halted with disappointing results. Efforts in April to reach out and connect, whilst initially positive, ultimately ended with other groups circumventing our representatives. We see no clear path to making it truly transparent, accessible, and democratic by our own means. As such, we ask that governing council to consider the following aspects of the Student Societies Summit Report.

For the members of the SGRT, the issue of electoral neutrality is of utmost importance. The Report suggests the creation of an independent elections and appeals board which would serve to give legitimacy to the elections processes. We the collective members of the SGRT would enjoy the opportunity to liaise with the Provost's Office and Governing Council to discuss details of such a plan. Furthermore, the establishment of an arm's length CRO for mandatory fee drawing societies would also continue to improve the legitimacy of student organizations as well as enhancing their democratic natures by separating the powers of governance.

Of equal importance in our eyes is the need for not just fair, but logical representation. It is confusing to us why the Scarborough Campus has their own Union (SCSU), Mississauga Campus has their own Union (UTMSU), and yet the St. George Campus does not benefit from the same representation. It should be remembered in this situation that St. George is the largest of the three campuses, a fact that adds to the frustration of students as to why they cannot have their own representation. The addition of a centralized St. George union would be beneficial in its ability to cater specifically toward the St. George student body.

The question of student autonomy should also be considered. In the Governing Council *Policy for Compulsory Non-Academic Incidental Fees*, it is stated that if the Office of the Vice-President and Provost has reason to believe that a student society is not operating in an open, accessible, and democratic fashion, then it may withhold fees from that society. There is currently no explanation as to what constitutes "open, accessible, and transparent". "We believe it is clear that the UTSU has not been behaving in a manner consistent with these outlined expectations. Greater definitional clarity and reinforcement from administration would be welcome."

The societies that comprise our organization are by Canadian standards rather ancient; numbering among the oldest student societies in the country. For over a century we have not just survived; we have flourished, and it would not be arrogant to suggest that our societies are stronger today than they have ever have been before. We have faith that working diligently and transparently with other student societies and with administration on what we have discussed in this letter will allow us to grow and thrive, particularly against the backdrop of a strong and autonomous St. George Campus Union.

Yours sincerely,

The St. George Round Table (full list of signatories on next page)

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Teresa Nguyen Diem Trinh – President of the Engineering Society

Ryan Lamers – President of the Innis College Students` Society

Ernest Manalo – President of the Kinesiology and Physical Education Undergraduate Association

Narayan Chattergoon – President of the Medical Society

Victor Valentina Baciu – President of the St. Michael`s College Student Union

Connor Anear – Male Head at the Trinity College Meeting

Kaleem Hawa – Chair at the Trinity College Meeting

Tina Šaban – Female Head at the Trinity College Meeting

Leo Chen – President of the University College Literary and Athletic Society

Rowan DeBues – President of the Victoria University Students` Administrative Council

Mohammed Younus – President of the Woodsworth College Students` Association