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Cheryl Regehr
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Simcoe Hall
21 King's College Circle
Toronto, Ontario

May 12th, 2014

VUSAC Comments on Recent Events

Dear Provost Regehr,

Firstly, I would like to apologize with landing yet another letter on your desk in what must be undoubtedly a very busy time for you and your office currently; however as an elected representative of Victoria College students, I feel compelled to reach out to you in light of recent events.

A number of letters addressed to your office have recently been made public, written on the topic of the Student Societies Summit Report that was published last month. These letters have a variety of origins, however versions I have seen personally range in signatories from APUS here at U of T, to the Ryerson Students' Union, to Trent University, to Carleton.

I would first like to address the letter that I have seen signed by APUS. To give context, after the Report was published, the U of T Scarborough Campus Students' Union called an emergency meeting with numerous other student society leaders to discuss their concerns around the report. The first meeting was largely unsuccessful, but it led to a second, much more productive meeting. On behalf of VUSAC, I attended both meetings, as did several other College heads. The second meeting (on Friday May 2nd 2014) concluded with many groups offering some limited agreements on the Report possessing some sound principals. It is true that despite this loose consensus, many groups were still uncomfortable with the suggestions in the Report as it stands currently. As such, a solution I supported was to continue to meet to author a letter to your office suggesting either improvements or additions to the ideas brought forward in the Report. All in the meeting agreed that this was a sound course of action to take. On Tuesday May 6th, SCSU circulated a letter written by APUS intended for your office. I, and many other leaders did not feel that the letter was in anyway representative of the discussion and conclusion held on the May 2nd meeting, and as such, myself and the Presidents of the student societies at Trinity College, Engineering, St. Michael's College, Woodsworth College (pending Board approval), University College, and Kinesiology and Physical Education, signed a letter authored by myself

voicing our concerns. Ryan Lamers of Innis College was unable to sign in time, but later voiced his support.

In response, Kriya Siewrattan of APUS responded by saying "if folks don't think the letter captures what we talked about, then let's not send it. Let's work together to draft something that reflects our opinions." However, on May 8th, a letter on APUS letterhead appeared to circulate to specific groups (including the UTSU) retaining the key points from the previously rejected letter. None of the signatories who rejected APUS' original letter were sent this version and were not told of its existence. It appears that this same letter is the one that has been signed and sent by the unions from other universities.

The Colleges involved in the Summit maintained that we would always remain open to a fair and honest dialogue on the issues of student governance and to this day we stand by this promise. However I feel personally betrayed by the actions of these groups, namely APUS and the UTSU for excluding us from their process and going to great lengths to hide the fact that there even existed such a process. Not only is this a betrayal of personal trust, but a betrayal of the trust of all the students I was elected to represent. These recent actions unfortunately do nothing but underline the utter lack of faith we have in the representatives of the UTSU and other organizations to act in a democratic, accessible and transparent fashion. These actions blatantly transgress against these last two ideals.

Furthermore, by welcoming the support of these external groups, the UTSU and APUS are undermining their own position. One of the letters main points addresses the issue of "autonomy" stating that a student union must be able to determine its own affairs internally without meddling from external groups. How can they be so ardently in support of this definition of autonomy when they are soliciting the support of external groups in manipulating the University's affairs? It is hypocritical to claim to be a champion of autonomy with one breath while in the next asking nationwide groups to aid you in manipulating an internal governing body. This lack of a clear message again serves to underline a lack of faith in the UTSU.

It had been my hope that my first correspondence with your office would be to discuss how we could work together in addressing the recommendations found in the Report, however I felt it imperative to raise our very immediate concerns and complaints with external student unions (coordinated by the CFS), APUS, and the UTSU. I shall continue to leave the door of my office open to any student group that wishes to initiate a dialogue about the Report just as was policy in the short lived set of meetings hosted by the SCSU.

Let this also serve as notice of VUSAC's keen interest in maintaining communication with you and your office to further discuss how you are going to be approaching the recommendations in the Report. I look forward to further correspondence. Apologies for the length of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rowan DeBues". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Rowan DeBues