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April 10, 2017

This has been a year of renewal and outreach for the Membership portfolio. The Membership Committee initiated an UTFA speakers series, focusing on the topic of intellectual freedom and academic rights, and is engaging with the membership on the vital topic of pension reform.

Speakers Series

A notable event was the February 3, 2017, panel discussion *Defending Intellectual Freedom: An International Perspective*. Featuring Professors Homa Hoodfar of Concordia University, recently released from imprisonment in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Payam Akhavan of McGill University, an international lawyer and member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague, the panel discussed academic freedom in an international atmosphere of growing repression, including the curtailment of civil rights and freedoms for scholars, artists, journalists, and students. With this panel the Membership Committee hoped to reach out to new members and to stimulate discussion on issues that go to the heart of our work as scholars and teachers. Held in the Earth Sciences Auditorium, the panel and the reception that followed were well attended, with approximately 200 faculty, students, and members of the wider university community present.

The speakers series will move forward with a future event on academic and intellectual rights in the context of pressures on the monetization of research. It will feature speakers on copyright issues and on the ownership of teaching materials on university electronic platforms. Further ideas for the series include a panel on governance, focusing on the forthcoming report from OCUFA on best practices across the university sector in Ontario.

Pension Reform

In the spring term plans for the speakers series were overtaken by the pressing issue of pension reform, with the possibility of a multi-employer Jointly Sponsored Pension Plan (JSPP) being presented to UTFA members for ratification as early as the fall term 2017. Special Council meetings were held throughout

March to educate Council members on the details of both U of T's existing pension plan and the possible changes that would come with a JSPP. The hope is for Council members to engage their constituents and colleagues in discussion in their departments, on the pros and cons of a JSPP and the workings of pension plans in general. Pension literacy, in other words, is at the forefront of the current work of the Membership Committee.

Pension town halls are being planned for the three campuses in the spring and fall of 2017, and there will be multiple ways for all UTFA members to engage on this issue, including discussion groups in departments and the distribution of educational materials.

The importance of the pension issue cannot be overemphasized. Engagement with this process is vital. In light of such a potentially significant change to the U of T pension plan, all members need to be aware of developments and their implications. Please come to a town hall, read the posted materials, follow developments on our website, and set up a department/unit discussion group with your colleagues. The membership committee is there to help you with all of the above.

If you and your colleagues wish to set up a focus group in your department on any of these issues, contact me at jl.jenkins@utoronto.ca. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jennifer Jenkins
Chair, Membership Committee

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