

March 20, 2024 (10 am to 11 am) UTFA Presidential Forum Transcript

Notes:

- **The Association is not responsible for the accuracy of this transcript. This transcript is not verbatim due to technological limitations of the transcript function on Zoom, and is accurate to the best of the Association's ability with corrections for spelling and clarity seeking to reflect what was said at the March 20th Presidential Forum.**
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Moderator's Opening Comments:

Welcome everyone to the second UTFA Presidential Election Forum of this year.

I'm Hamish Russell, I'm the speaker for UTFA Council in which capacity I chair meetings of Council and Membership meetings and so it's in that role that I've been asked to moderate this Forum.

I'm teaching stream faculty in the Department of Philosophy. For full disclosure, my partner is also employed by UTFA. She works on grievances and other member matters.

Um, so we want to use as much of this time as possible so I'm just going to quickly set out the format and then we will begin. So, the formats are going to go like this: there will be opening statements, question and answers, and closing statements. So, the candidates will each have 10 minutes to give their opening statements, then we'll move onto questions. We have some questions that are submitted in advance and we will begin with those. Though, we are hoping to get to at least one question submitted from the attendees present, that will be from the Q&A function in Zoom. I'll remind you of that once we get to that stage.

Okay. Candidates will each have three minutes, up to three minutes to answer the questions and every question is going to be directed at both candidates. Right. So, if you are going to submit a question through the Q&A box, then do make sure that it's a question suitable to be directed towards both candidates rather than for one candidate rather than the other.

Okay, um. I'm not going to do anything to sort of urge the candidates to keep on track or to press them to really answer the question. Rather they are just going to have their time and they can fill that as they choose. If they want to circle back to other topics, um respond to something that the other candidate said, I'm not going to do anything to intervene with that. Their time is theirs to use. Okay. And then after we are going to do questions. Yesterday at the first Forum we got through four. Maybe we will manage five, but I think four is probably realistic. Um, then the candidates will each have up to three minutes for closing statements.

Okay, that's the plan. It's being recorded so that this can be available for all members of the voting UTFa membership after the fact. Um, and I'll just say it now and a reminder at the end that polls open today, that is Wednesday, March 20th from noon. So, also be on the lookout for the first messages coming out from the two candidates. They're each entitled to three emails sent out to the UTFa membership. The first of those are scheduled to go out today, so you'll want to just keep an eye out for that in your inboxes.

Okay, so with that, um, let's begin.

I'm going to go in reverse order from what we did yesterday. So, today, I'm going to ask Professor Levine to begin with his opening statement, and then I will turn to Professor Zorić. So, Professor Levine, you have ten minutes whenever you are ready.

Professor Renan Levine's Opening Comments:

Thank you Professor Russell.

Good morning everyone, thank you for joining this Forum. For those of you who haven't met me, my name is Renan Levine.

I'm an Associate Professor, teaching stream in the department of Political Science at the University of Toronto Scarborough. I served for almost 3 years as a member of UTFA Council and continue to serve on three committees: Apportionment, Bargaining and University and External Affairs. I have experience in other non-profit and political organizations and much of my research involves public opinion surveying. A skill I'd plan to draw upon as UTFA President.

Elections are a time for accountability. This is when members should be looking for transparent answers to the question of whether the association should continue on the present track or choose another.

The key question, echoing Reagan, is whether UTFA as an organization is stronger than we were 4 years ago. Reagan of course said, are you better off than you were four years ago, but 4 years ago, almost to the day, I vividly remember scrambling to figure out what to do with my kids with online schooling.

We are not there, but we need because this is an election, to look at where our association is, where it has been, and ask important questions. Has our association gotten stronger over the last four years? I am here today to say that it has not, and it is time for a change. Not to re-elect the second president in 35 odd years for a third consecutive term.

For many of our members, this will be your only chance to hear from me before voting begins as the UTFA leadership shortened the campaign this year to a mere two days before voting begins. Hardly enough time to reach out to the nearly 4000 members UTFA currently works for.

So one might wonder, why was the campaign this year shortened to only two business days? What does the incumbent not want the membership to hear about before they vote? As we ask this question, is UTFA stronger than it was 4 years ago? One has to wonder if the UTFA leadership is concerned that you will hear about the toxic atmosphere that led to mass staff turnover for the organization? I believe that since 4 years ago, we have gone through three full-time Executive directors, plus at least one held it on an Interim basis.

There has been almost complete mass staff turnover from the organization, including the exit of 7 or 8 attorneys. All of the attorneys with years and years of crucial experience. As well as several others who came to UTFA and appear to have all left the organization in 6 months or less. Perhaps the leadership does not want you to ask how UTFA lacks experienced in-house attorney.

Is affecting how UTFA spends your money. Or how that will affect our ability to negotiate with the administration.

Maybe the leadership doesn't want you to know about how they struggle to differentiate between harassment and academic freedom.

About two separate human rights tribunal cases that have proceeded for months waiting to be heard.

Or questions about undeclared conflicts of interest, including about how the voice of the Vice-President in charge of bargaining is an attorney for a company suing our members over their efforts to copyright their own class materials.

Perhaps they do not want us to talk about how despite talk of diversity, and even though I won nearly 40% of the vote 2 years ago, none of my public supporters even got through the nomination committee in order to have an opportunity to serve on the 14 person Executive Committee.

So I'm here today to tell you that it is possible for UTFA to thrive with new ideas, new energy, and a new approach.

So I'm honored to be part of the conversation this morning about our Faculty Association. Where it has been and where we can take it forward.

Today, you will hear 2 contrasting visions. My vision is one that is shared by faculty from across the 3 campuses, including people who have long been active in UTFA, including some who have served UTFA at its highest levels.

Members who have never been involved in UTFA politics before. My vision for our association will lead us away from divisive conflict. To focus on core issues that matter to our members, and a fresh pragmatic approach to those issues.

What I mean when I say fresh pragmatic is that as president I will change the way UTFA has done business. I will make sure that UTFA continues to stand tough for our members and trust at the negotiating table. I will also work collaboratively on issues that benefit both our members and the university as a whole.

We will avoid unnecessary conflict and controversy, including name-calling of the administration on social media.

Emails to membership complaining about the administration will not follow some obscure news story. But rather deliberate investigations and conversations directly with members affected.

I have been on calls with the Provost and vice presidents at Simcoe. I know that sometimes dealing with them or the university's bureaucracy can be frustrating.

But I also know that they are reasonable people who are trying to do the right thing and would like to find optimal solutions in an often imperfect political and fiscal environment.

Transparency, not secrecy, makes up the stronger. When we are divided? We take time to debate. We look for compromise. And where we are united, we will make that clear. Executives will canvas and conduct town halls to hear what members think before we commence negotiations.

And I will welcome dissent and criticism and we will debate in council before we take major action. I will use a diverse committee structure. That has been neglected over the last few years so that many of the committees where we meet. To say the job of the committees as it has always been in the past at UTFA is to identify both problems and solutions. And discuss what is the best path forward and then those committees can bring those ideas to council, and council can say yes. This is how we are going to go forward.

Authorizing any new grievances, we will focus our advocacy work on matters that affect our members' careers. Success and happiness in the classroom, the library, and the research lab.

I pledge to focus on a few key issues because promising to focus on a dozen things I find is the same as promising to focus on nothing. I will personally focus my energy on housing, and childcare. Other issues that I think are important and what I've heard from the members as I campaign can be found on my website. These include promises to improve PTR process, and to make it more lucrative.

My website includes ways that I think I can defend, not threaten academic freedom. And I will use my skills to gauge opinions to ensure that what is top of mind for our members is always reflected in UTFA's negotiations. I also pledge to not risk our retirees health and travel benefits in arbitration.

I'm proud of the support I've received in formulating a detailed platform, including a number of issues that have not been pushed lately by. I will work with the university when our interests are aligned. I will ensure proper controls are in place to prevent donor interference. And I will support not to undermine advancement efforts, raising money to support our members' teaching and research.

I will advocate for more support for international graduate students that many of our research laboratories depend upon.

Plus, I am confident that under my leadership, UTFA will find common ground on other priorities. Like more responsible investing or increasing equity and diversity.

When I first joined up at UTFA I thought of my experience teaching on all three campuses. My experiences living in a small apartment in faculty housing, and more recently, worrying about rising interest rates and how that could affect my ability to continue to afford my home. To my dismay, in my years on council we spent little or no time on these pressing issues. Committees that could meet to craft policy remedies where we did, and throughout this time negotiations over salary increases dragged on and on and on. My opponent will surely talk about experience. Yeah. Which is a learned ability to do things you've already done. But when we look at what has already been

done, one must ask, can we do better? This election is that opportunity. To ask that question for I think many of our members. Yeah.

We know that in the incumbent case, what she has done has not worked. And it is time to try a new approach.

Thank you for listening.

Moderator:

Okay, thank you. I'll now turn to Professor Zorić for her 10 min.

Professor Terezia Zorić's Opening Comments:

Thanks so much. Good morning. Most of my opening remarks are very similar to yesterday's with some very important questions for the other candidate in the last two minutes.

I'm here today proud to have served two terms as your president and to have led the teams who have accomplished so much in that time.

My campaign is positive and constructive. Like many of you, I came to UofT excited to contribute in important ways to my field of study, and to students in the broader communities we serve. Well, I'm keen to return to my research in teaching.

This moment demands the knowledge, skills, and experience I've cultivated in this role. I'm therefore seeking a final term as your UTFa president.

I didn't start with the goal of deep involvement in a faculty association. I was drawn to UTFa after witnessing troubling institutional policies and practices that were hampering colleagues ability to thrive and do the work we love. Some obstacles like housing and portability are part of wider social trends, whereas others that grow in precarity and ever-expanding workloads are largely resolved from choices made by our administration.

We can take action together to address both kinds of challenges. I came to see that an effective UTFA can reduce obstacles to our thriving and make our university stronger.

I began to devote myself to UTFA for work. Elected first by my peers as a committee chair. Then elected as a vice president and then elected as president for the last 4 years. This ability to pass peer review distinguishes me from the other candidate.

Additionally, I would never have sought the top job before learning the ropes. This election asks you to choose between two candidates. But in fact, you're choosing between two teams. Past presidential leadership matters, but it relies on reciprocity and the cooperation of many colleagues. And the team I've assembled is remarkable. We are more capable and effective than anything I've seen before. In fact, the reason why I'm willing to run for a final term as president. A grilling job is because I don't stand alone but as part of an extraordinary collaborative team. My team is drawn from every corner of our tricampus. Just look at my website or UTFA Council website. We come from STEM, the Humanities, Social Sciences and Professional Fields. We are tenure, teaching stream faculty, librarians, retirees, part-time and full-time members. We're diverse in our perspective, skills, and backgrounds. And we're experienced and effective in getting the job done together with care, pride, and joy.

The promises we kept and the goals we've achieved are your best guides to what we will accomplish next.

Please read both candidates' platforms and websites carefully to see who is offering a constructive vision and plan. The other candidate said yesterday he wants that to become boring again. I heartily disagree. It's too easy to promise, much harder to deliver. So what have we accomplished?

In short, a lot. We bargained for increased compensation and we achieved sector leading success with our 10% salary increase as you surely noticed in your November paycheck. For the current round, we started with the premise that increases must keep pace with inflation.

Last round, the administration's final offer was only 4.7 5%. Less than half of our win in arbitration.

We need a president with negotiating acumen who holds the confidence of a team, skilled at dissecting financial statements so we don't fall prey to dangerous administration myths such as that UofT doesn't have the money to pay fair salaries to active members or any other staff group.

We also effectively defended equal benefits for retirees, a fundamental principle for UTFA and something in everyone's interests because we all hope to be retirees one day. We fought against the administration's attempt to create a two-tier system with lower benefits for retirees and we won and we will fight and win again. And if the administration refuses that in bilaterals, and arbitration is something that the other candidate will do I want to hear what he will do. What will he give up?

Next, we build on recent major gains in mental health and other benefits improvements.

The administration offered far less than what UTFA achieved for you in the last round. This round with improved required disclosure will be able to table more detailed proposals more quickly. And we've already tabled significant improvements in child care benefits. Proposing an increase to the age of eligibility. A doubling up per diems per child maximums and overall investment in the plan to 2 million dollars annually. Significant improvement to the other proposal from the other candidate.

And we've prevented any repeat of the admins withholding PTR increases as a bargaining tactic.

Another historic accomplishment is the policy for librarians. For six years we stood with librarians to achieve a new framework and a new deal.

We're also expanding membership outreach by town halls, campus visits, surveys, focus groups, awards ceremonies, panel discussions, and vibrant AGMs.

It is we who defend strong academic freedom, collegial governance, and non-discrimination as our core values.

We've worked with UTFA's expert Pension Committee to ensure that our pension plan invests ethically and responsibly, especially but not only with the issue of climate change in view, and we've made progress.

For several other priorities, all of which matter, including ongoing expert evidence-based advocacy for safe and healthy workplaces.

Ongoing association grievances on pay equity and salary discrimination. Ongoing work with CAUT and OCUFA, which are federal and provincial advocacy organizations. And with President Gertler, with whom I'm lobbying the federal and provincial governments for more graduate student funding and support for basic research.

After years of persistence, we persuaded the admin to work with us to really address housing. Housing affordability is a top priority that can't be solved in one go, but we're now amid serious collaborative discussions with the administration around this issue. We're optimistic that these will bear more in the year term.

But in contrast, the admin is rebuffing our efforts to negotiate workload relief and transparency. So while we persist, we're defending.

Related rights through grievances. Advising individual members and our members have never gotten better advice than they're receiving now and developing resources for unit workload committees.

We've been outspoken about the need to have full-time faculty positions remain the norm at U of T, and reverse the trend toward their replacement with more precarious part-time positions. However, this is a key area where our memorandum really lets us down making our work that much harder. Expect our part-time and CLTA members deserve better. Real job security. Fair workloads in a path to permanency.

All these achievements are steps forward in an ongoing march rather than an arrival at a final destination.

One important change will greatly smooth our track. Namely finding some way of moving beyond the constraints of our current memorandum of agreement. Given the

MoA legal structure, often the administration faces no enforceable binding obligations to provide UTFA with timely information or to consult with us on matters of fundamental importance, or even to bargain in good faith. Please see last year's AGM newsletter to learn more.

Our leadership will work with the membership, seasoned negotiators from other associations and with scholars and legal experts to explore alternatives to our dysfunctional memorandum. And we cannot exclude certification from thoughtful consideration.

Let me briefly note that the other candidate spends most of his time attacking his colleagues claiming that UTFA is dysfunctional and worthless. Perhaps because he has no active achievements of his own to describe and no record of leading any initiative that benefits this membership.

I won't debate accusations built on half truths and distortions, so I'm happy to answer members genuine questions, and to that end I specifically address his profoundly misleading and irresponsible statements about the staff and UTFA as an employer on my website. There's no point in rolling around in the mud with him. To be clear, I and the entire executive fully reject his premise. And the questions for him in turn. How is it possible I brought together so strong and effective a team of teams, ones with representatives from across the university? How elected executive and negotiating teams achieved historical accomplishments such as sector leading salary benefits increases? Why does a vast and growing majority of 60 elected council representatives from every corner of our campuses actively support my re-election and refuse repeatedly to elect or even endorse him?

Bonus questions. Who among the many people in leadership is baselessly accused of malfeasance? Does he imagine who will work with him? Is his negative campaign what he means by collegiality and civility and unity?

Let me end on a higher note. I'm profoundly grateful for the outpouring of moving testimonials from colleagues. They warm my heart. But more importantly, I'm so happy to have made a difference in the working lives of our members. That is what makes the job worthwhile and what fuels our teamwork. Join with us.

Moderator:

Hey, thank you for, so we'll now move to the question and answer portion of the forum.

We've had some questions received in advance. We'll continue with those. I'll say that we asked some questions yesterday about specific strategies that could be taken to help precariously employed members, some questions about ensuring a collegial and transparent relationship with the diverse faculty that we have, and a question about certification specifically.

We won't return to those questions today. See the recording of the first forum if interested. Instead we'll begin by pulling from other ones we received in advance and also take some questions from the audience. Time permitting, this form of entry to if you have any questions for our candidates, then please put those in question and answer. Put it, please give us your questions. But let me turn to one of the ones we received in advance.

I'm gonna alternate which candidate goes first. So for the first question, Professor Zorić, I'll ask you to answer first and you'll have up to 3 min.

Moderator - Question #1 to Professor Zorić:

And the question is, what do you see as the issues with the current PTR structure and how would you seek to address them?

And I'll just repeat the question. Oh no, go ahead. Yeah.

Professor Zorić's Response to Question #1:

Oh, so, so happy to talk. Oh, sorry. So happy to have that question. So PTR's performance through the ranks and as compared to our ATB increases, it's supposed to be the equivalent of career progress.

Our members have very diverse perspectives on PTR as is evidenced by every form of feedback we've ever sought. Our surveys have always shown mixed feelings about PTR with about a third really liking the merit based system, but a third hating it and thinking it should change to career progress and a middle third, actually a plurality really wanting a hybrid system.

So I could talk about the patterns. Those who teach in areas where there's a really clear consensus as to what constitutes merit tend to have higher support for it and those that come from more diverse interdisciplinary backgrounds, up lower ones.

But in any case, one real problem is our members' diverse perspectives are not represented by the current merit-only based system.

Second major problem is that we fall behind in the investment in PTR. It used to be about 3.1% when it first came into being. Many of our peer institutions and non-peer institutions have more than our 1.7% on PTR.

1.7% of the salary mass they have something more akin to 2.2% of the salary mass even when the salary mass is similar. Put in simple terms, we don't get as much money in PTR as many of our colleagues do.

So one problem, the system doesn't reflect what our members want. Second problem, there's not the investment.

So when we put forward a proposal to move from a 1.7% investment in PTR to a 3% investment, which is to say invest more, we ask that that better reflect our members' views.

And we know that members really want to celebrate super merit to negotiate the terms for the 5%. Super merit pool. The administration told us at the bargaining table that giving people credit for career progress would be akin to giving them money for quote "just breathing." And we fought back hard. Members are expected to be excellent at their work. We have unparalleled professional expectations. The idea that satisfactory progress at the University of Toronto is just breathing is a monumental misunderstanding of the heavy workload burden that we carry.

So the solution to PTR, increase the investment. Bring in a degree of universality to a portion of it as the University of British Columbia faculty association did. Keep a significant portion for merit base, so use a hybrid system. And fix some of the component pieces that include an over reliance on student evaluations of teaching, a lack of transparency, and a lack of an alignment between the score you get and the amount of money.

Yeah. And continue to ask the members whether it's working. When I negotiated, the COVID LoU, people were really grateful for all of those things that we did.

Moderator - Question #1 to Professor Levine:

Very good. So Professor Levine, the question again is what do you see as the issues with the current PTR structure and how would you seek to address them?

Professor Levine's Response to Question #1:

Thank you. That's a great question, but first I do want to address what was just spoken.

Raising the question of how come many members of the executive committee in council don't seem to think that the problems that I'm highlighting within this organization are a big problem. And my question is, do council members even know about some of these issues? On my website, I will encourage people to go to it to see that I have receipts and documentation. I have documentation that raises concerns about conflicts of interest that were never disclosed. And so how could council members even know? I show reports of staff attorneys leaving en masse that the president initially refused to bring to council. And then when she did it was marked by not fully revealing the depth of the issue.

To go back to the PTR question because I think it's a very important one. When I talk to members, frustration with unfair PTR processes and outcomes are one of the biggest sources of grief. Among the biggest sources of tension within departments that often leads to frustration, and it often involves questions of equity.

PTR is important. PTR is also a challenge. It's a challenge within departments, and this is especially true when work by teaching stream has to be balanced by research stream. When article based publications have to be balanced with work by other colleagues who publish books. When assessing collaborative co-authored works versus single authored works. It often can be messy. Some departments do a better job of being transparent, and, I think, plays a very important and necessary role. Then it should continue to play to make sure that where departments are not being transparent that they are forced to do so. I will absolutely credit the last round of the negotiators gave us a win that I think on transparency in this regard that I thought was very important and absolutely due credit. That for leadership for having pushed for that. And I hope that we'll be able to build from that and as a result there will be fewer tensions but obviously there will be challenges, and I think that it is important that we do preserve as much of this PTR process as we can because whether we like to admit it or not, many of our colleagues do.

Respond to the incentives provided by PTR to continue. To produce the excellent work that gives all of us the stellar reputation of being at the University of Toronto.

Moderator - Question #2 to Professor Levine:

Okay, very good. So next question that we received in advance. And Professor Levine, I'll ask you to go first on this one.

The question is what are your strategies for building and maintaining a collegial relationship with librarians keeping in mind the various roles that librarians play at the university?

Professor Levine's Response to Question #2:

Thank you. That is a great question. It is also something that I've had to think a lot about because it's true. I haven't served on any librarian associated committee. My main contact with librarians has been because I have needed to work with many of the librarians on a couple of different campuses.

So in many ways. The best answer, I'll bet one that's somewhat unfulfilling, is to be able to say, from what I've gauged from my time and up for council, that often the best thing to do among people like me is to be able to sit down with librarians, hear what they have to say. Understand how the librarian system is often very different than the one for faculty members and encourage them and support them in their efforts.

The last few years have led to tremendous gains and what was remarkable was that those tremendous gains were carried out by some really hard-working members who operated largely independently of council and so absolutely applauded their efforts and hoped that kind of structure can persist moving forward.

Moderator - Question #2 to Professor Zorić:

The question again is what are your strategies for building and maintaining a collegial relationship with librarians.

Professor Zorić's Response to Question #2:

Keeping in mind the various roles that librarians play at the university, and librarians do play a whole variety of roles. A key role that they are extremely eager to play is to be seen as equal partners in the academic mission of the university. Something they struggled with. Not in all cases, but the senior administration hasn't always been willing to recognize that.

That's why it's critical that the leadership see them as equal partners on council and among our members.

I'm disappointed to hear from the other candidate that after 3 years on UTFa Council, and what must have been a dozen reports set up at council on progress on the policy for librarians negotiations, he doesn't have something more meaningful to say. I've been working with librarians since I first served on a joint management librarian committee some dozen years ago, and I came to do a number of leadership roles.

I helped librarians gain a 3.9% salary adjustment for women librarians. Played a critical role in the establishment of a librarian systemic bias working group that stalled somewhat.

Along with my colleague Ariel Katz supported librarians as one is expected to do as a senior leader not just sit back and listen but actively support librarians to strengthen language around job security in the policy for like.

And finally, no. That librarians would not, should not have spent 6 years to negotiate an agreement after 25 years of waiting. Why did it take 6 years? Because we have a memorandum of agreement that has no enforceable binding timelines and no access to neutral dispute resolution.

There's much more, there's much more on that. I hope the librarians will forgive me for stealing a little at the end of the question, not at the beginning.

Let me be clear, the other candidate is spreading this information as relates to UTFA. As president, it would be grossly irresponsible for me to be using staff whether current or departed as political footballs. And he knows it. Furthermore, I ask him to reveal with transparency while he hasn't been busy working with UTFA librarians, and as I take it none to reveal as his supporters. Who are his supporters? When he talks about human rights complaints. It's our belief that they are friends of his campaign, and how many of the HRTTO complainants are friends of his campaign.

How will he deliver on his promises? And most perplexing of all who are the members of his team?

Librarians are at the heart of my team. I am so proud that faculty and librarians stand together, and that we've advanced their role. But I can point to a diverse team with full transparency.

You do? If he answers one question today, I think it needs to be who is his team, who's endorsing him, and how is that team going to help him get things done? After he's accused all the rest of us on a 60 person council. Okay. Of basically being complicit to maleficence.

Moderator - Question #3 to Professor Zorić:

Okay, so, 2 things where we could continue. One, I realize I misspoke earlier.

I said that the first messages from the candidates would come out today expect those to arrive in your mailboxes tomorrow. So the voting opens today, and the message will come tomorrow. You can make calls as to whether you want to hold out for those messages before you cast your ballots.

Then for questions, we've had some questions come in. We won't be able to get to all of them.

So apologies, we don't. And just as a reminder that, I would ask that your questions be phrased towards both candidates and be sort of short enough for me to make a statement, right? So at this stage, I think I'm gonna turn to a question from the audience that we have adapted to make it a little bit more general and directed to both candidates.

This let's see to continue with my alternating. I could ask you to go first on this so the question is if as president you are asked to make statements on the divisive issues such as conflicts in the Middle East, what approach will you take?

And the question again is as president you are asked to make statements on divisive issues, what approach will you take?

Professor Zorić's Response to Question #3:

Thanks. So this is, this is obviously a highly pertinent question, but I want to make sure I set the stage appropriately. To begin the kinds of the kinds of things you have to say about the making of divisive issues. What you have to say about statements on these issues is what you have to say about academic freedom in general. We're in a particularly difficult time. But we should not be narrowing or reducing our commitment to academic freedom because it's a difficult time.

Instead, we should be embracing and holding firm the centrality of academic freedom, collegial governance, and non-discrimination as core values.

So what's my approach? I think my record speaks for itself. When UTFA started noting that both the government of Ontario in the legislature and various senior administrators were calling people out for exercising their academic freedom, including one of our colleagues in the law school was called out, we worked with other campus organizations to issue a statement embracing academic freedom - without necessarily agreeing with everything people said in those statements.

You'll note that I have not put out a statement about my feelings about Israel Palestine. That's not because I don't have strongly held beliefs. Of course I do. But my central responsibility as president of UTFA, my central goal is to hold space for the membership to be able to exercise its academic freedom. And I've been restrained in that regard because that is my central responsibility to the wellbeing of the membership and frankly to the academic mission of the university.

You won't hear from me that I think academic freedom is solely an individual right. It is both an individual and the collective right as is made clear in the University of Toronto statement on free speech.

The other candidate has said it's not a collective right, that it's only an individual right. And I strongly encourage him to clarify why his position on academic freedom is significantly narrower than University of Toronto policy itself is.

You know, I've been accused of not working well with the administration by the other candidate again and again. I've spoken on 3 occasions with President Gertler to praise him for the strong stand he's taken on academic freedom, telling him again I might not have, you know, written word for word as he did, but his leadership on this issue in the public domain has been exemplary. And he has said he is facing enormous pressure from outside forces, including private donors, and we agree that this is important work for the association and the university administration to do together.

So when you think about casting your vote. Think about whether you want a president who preserves, protects, and works with the other president to preserve and protect

academic freedom or who goes out on a limb saying the University of Toronto policy is too robust on academic freedom and ought to be narrower.

I know where the members are.

Moderator - Question #3 to Professor Levine:

Okay, Professor, I'll repeat the question. If as president you are asked to make statements on divisive issues, such as conflicts in the Middle East, what approach will you take?

Professor Levine's Response to Question #3:

Thank you. The UTFA constitution makes it clear that only the UTFA president can speak for the association.

So the first most important thing that the UTFA president has to consider and remember is that they can speak for everyone. And so any statements on any issue have to be done with great deliberate care and sensitivity.

It is my opinion that the president really needs to primarily focus on issues that directly affect the members. When it comes to academic freedom, I want to encourage people to look at what I've written on my website.

The Chicago principles are the law of the province. The Calvin report coming out of Chicago is crucial. And that as well as the report of our colleagues on antisemitism working group that UTFA and the administration accepted. Spells it out very clearly that academic freedom is an individual right, and when the university or university unit speak out that violates individual rights. Individual leaders can speak out as individuals. But departments, units, the university have to avoid saying this is our official position. When there are departments that say a particular approach to examining conflict in the Middle East is essential, and attacks alternative approaches to studying that conflict, whether one agrees with that statement or not. That violates academic freedom. And UTFA needs to make sure that it doesn't wait for people to complain. Because just because a department may have decided with a majority vote or even a unanimous vote as I spell

out in great detail on my website those actions violate university rules. Quite explicitly I have told the administration that they need to be more active at making it clear that such statements should not stand. Because with those statements out there, academic freedom is curtailed. Individual rights of academic freedom. That's how it always has been understood. That is what is very clear in both. Older university policies and recent university policies including statements by the university president.

And his predecessor that rejects official stances. Favoring things like boycott and divestment.

Individual faculty can certainly say, look. I don't want to take my research to Israel. I don't want to engage in that. Okay, that's fine.

Yeah. But it can't be an official stance, and I will continue to raise concerns when UTFA leaders attack and criticize, especially junior scholars who decide that because it's very clear in our MoA, publicizing our research is part of our academic freedom.

Moderator:

You're over time.

Professor Levine's Response to Question #3:

And when an UTFA leader on the executive committee attacks that person, that is wrong and needs to be called out.

Moderator - Question #4 to Professor Levine:

Great. Thank you. So we got time for one more question. Look, few questions related to EDI things. I hope people will forgive us if we put that together and in a single question. This is what's being suggested to me by my helpful staff in the background.

So I'm gonna ask Professor Levine, I'll get you to go first on this one.

As president, what would be your strategy to advance equity, diversity and inclusion for marginalized UTFA members?

Professor Levine's Response to Question #4:

Thank you. I think that's a great and important question. I think one of the things that we really need is to make sure that UTFA has access to good data about how equity and inclusivity plays out when it comes to salaries and benefits across the university. So that way if we do build cases with the university that we make sure that our arguments our cases are very much rooted in clear documentation that will win us. Arbitration awards, not. Cause far to lose or delay. These types of grievance cases that are so important there are also other equity and inclusion issues, some of which again, I wanna highlight that I'm including on my website because I think it's really important.

Right now we are dealing with a crisis of civility. We are dealing with many issues within departments. Faculty members are criticizing other faculty members for their desire to exercise their academic freedom and ask and answer what they see as important research questions. We have an issue where faculty members and students and especially student organizations go on social media or put up posters that others take offense too, and feel hurt by until we have to continue to work to find a balance where free speech is respected, but at the same time we recognize that this is a workplace and this is a place of learning, and that we as instructors may want to challenge. Our students have difficult questions in the classroom. But we also want to make sure that those same students feel comfortable when they come to campus. Thank you.

Moderator - Question #4 to Professor Zorić:

Okay, and the question again, for Mrs. Zorić, as president what would be your strategy to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion for UTFA members?

Professor Zorić's Response to Question #4:

So, I want to point both to what I've done and some of the things that are yet to be done.

When the other candidate says that UTFA is worse off today than it was 4 years ago. I guess he also is speaking about council. So that's more multiracial, multi ethnic and diverse than ever before. And then actually the executive that's more representative and diverse.

When I first came to UTFA Council some 15 years ago, there was hardly much representation of the demographics that we see and to the university's credit there has been some significant shift in hiring, particularly around black and indigenous colleagues.

So 2 things I've done that were a beginning was that I held focus groups with black colleagues and indigenous colleagues to look both at what the university was failing to do to support them or put more positively what we could do together. To provide them with better support because although we recruit black and indigenous faculty reasonably well or somewhat well, the retention is really poor.

So the next step is that the equity committee has been in conversation about the setting up of an indigenous caucus and potentially black caucus or possibly black and indigenous caucus.

The first rule of equity diversity inclusion is that you let folks speak for themselves. An additional area is around our disabled faculty. UTFA is working with a group of disabled scholars and we're putting out a broad survey that we hope in short order the teaching stream, which has been championing for 15 years, is disproportionately made up of women and other equity seeking groups. It's disproportionately racialized. Our part-timers who I've made a centerpiece of our campaign, are disproportionately racialized. These. Big salary discrimination, and pay equity. Complaints are also places where UTFA puts its money where its mouth is.

To be clear, external counsel leads on all of our grievances. And I'll say a bit more in my closing comments about the balance between internal and external counsel.

But I just really want to focus on the need for equity, diversity, and inclusion. I don't want any member listening to think that just because I've invested time into this the work is done. I think we're part way there and we've got a long way to go to ensure that everyone sees that it is there.

I'm committed to a big tent with a clear understanding that underrepresented groups need to feel like their issues are also at the center of our work.

I believe I've done more than any previous president has, and that I need to bring more people to the conversation. I'm so proud to have, and to have recruited other folks but this can't be just a project for racialized, disabled. It's not.

Part time or other faculty. Part of what I'm really proud of in this campaign is that I've made the concerns of equity seeking groups the concerns of all UTFa members with team Teresa.

Moderator - Closing Comments:

Okay, so it's now time for closing statements, right? 6 min left, 6 min, but closing statements. So I will ask both candidates to really do they best to try to keep their closing statements to 3 min. Today I'm gonna ask Professor Zorić to kick us off. Whenever you're ready.

Professor Zorić's Closing Comments:

Alright. Okay, so I was really hoping that there was going to be a question on retirees and how to protect retirees benefits.

And I and my team have obviously delivered on the protection of retiree benefits and I'm going to pose to Professor Levine to say clearly if the administration repeats as it has so far a refusal to give up in bilateral two-tiered health benefits for retirees. And he's unwilling to bring that in front of a neutral arbitrator. What is the third route? Exactly. How is he going to solve it in bilaterals? So I think a crucial issue is that during this campaign, the other candidate actually has no concrete plan. No concrete or transparent team and only a lot of mud slinging. I've gotten worried messages this morning because he's obviously trying to ferment descent.

On the question of bilateral negotiations and being asked to say that's face to face negotiations, I don't just sit in meetings with senior administrators. I actually represent UTFa's positions and have done so from a leadership role for about 6 years. It takes a long time to develop that skill. You need to know what to say and what not to say.

So let me be clear about UTFA lawyers since it seems to be a mainstay of the other candidate's position. There seem to be 3 relevant questions. How have we hurt association finances with the staff turnover that admittedly has happened? No, in fact, we saved about \$250,000 of our budget. Because we've always used a blend of external counsel and internal counsel and we diversified our external counsel.

Are we unfair employers? Did we mistreat anyone? Unequivocally, no. Is it mistreating someone if they don't pass their probationary review? It is not. Most importantly. Are our members getting the legal advice and support they deserve? When people are in vulnerable positions, do they come to UTFA and get the same or better legal advice than they did before?

Spending \$250,000 a year less today than we did 3 years ago. Members get superb top rate advice either from the vice president grievances, Sherri Helwig, from our internal. Staff Representative who's a CUPE person - which is what many faculty associations use and from our senior legal counsel or our executive director or from me the president. If it's a complicated case as it always was, they go to one of the 2 firms with whom we're working, one is significantly less expensive than the other and that's an innovation at Brock. Is any of this disrespectful? No. Will I talk about who got a promotion, who left to work for themselves?

Moderator:

3 min.

Professor Zorić's Closing Comments:

Who didn't pass their probationary review. I will not. Instead I will close and forgive me, Hamish, I would close by saying a negative campaign leads to these kinds of conversations, whereas the conversation we ought to be having is who do we stand with? Please look at my website. Team Teresa. We invite you to join us, and to move away from these politics of divisiveness and towards unity in a constructive approach.

Thank you.

Moderator:

Okay, thank you. Renan, and for your closing comments and I'll say you have about 3 min and 30 seconds to keep it even.

Professor Levine's Closing Comments:

Thank you.

I really appreciated being able to be part of this important conversation about accountability because this is an election, and I am a challenger and I am going to raise tough questions the same way that I can ask tough questions of the administration because I'm asking questions today about UTFA because this is an election. That is about whether or not UTFA has gotten stronger in the past 4 years, and whether it will continue to get stronger in the next 2 years.

I heard the recent comments about diversity, and at the first executive committee perhaps I can be corrected if I'm wrong, but it seems that 13 out of 14 of the executive committee members are all white. One black executive committee member was pushed out a few years ago. Two LGBTQ identifying vice presidents also left. For those who are especially concerned about certification, or just wanna make sure that the UTFA workplace reflects the values that we think are as important for us to fight for with our employer at the university, it sounds like there's quite a few union roles represented by CUPE that have been replaced with outside contractors and external attorneys.

If the finances have not been adversely affected, then those finances need to be replaced. It really astounds me that we will get financial reports at the annual general meeting a month after the presidential election. If the finances are in great shape then I would encourage the current leadership to release those finances before most members start to vote so they can look and see what the budget looks like and compare it to past years. And compare it to 4 or 5 years ago where the budget disclosures were much more detailed. I think there are some big issues, big issues involving not just finances, principal agent problems, right?

Where there is work that we have to decide, are we going to represent a member with a grievance or how far are we going to take this grievance process?

The advice that we received from an internal counsel who is not paid on the basis of the number of hours that they're working and their pay will not increase by whether or not they say yes. That seems to be really important, and that's an important conversation that we need to continue to have, and needs to take place at council.

We need to be able to continue to defend academic freedom. We need to rise to the challenges of today to say are we enjoying working here or are there ways that things are happening that are making it less desirable?

Thank you.

Less relaxing, less of an opportunity to thrive, and for that, I am confident that I'll be able to work with volunteers from across many different divisions to be able to find ways where we can find good constructive solutions.

Thank you so much for listening to this important conversation today.

Moderator's Closing Comments:

Okay, that's all the time that we have. Thank you to our candidates. Thank you to everyone and, thanks to the staff for organizing this in the background.

Remember polls open today. Expect an email from Simply Voting in your inbox, but they do remain open. For Simply Voting in your inbox, but they do remain open for a number of days, and you'll see further, correspondence from the candidate is coming to your inbox sometime.

Okay, so with that. Let's call that a forum. Thank you all.

Thanks so much.

Have a wonderful day everyone. Don't forget to vote.