



October 6th, 2016

To the attention of the University of Toronto Administration and UofT Community,

We, the undersigned community members at the University of Toronto, are appalled, concerned, and saddened by recent transphobic, racist and anti-Black comments made by Professor Jordan Peterson in an online lecture series that he published on YouTube on September 27th, 2016 and October 3rd, 2016. Peterson has abused his position of power as a tenured professor and has tried to use his academic freedom to disguise his bigotry and prejudice as an intellectual disagreement. However, to suggest that these comments add value to classroom discussion is absurd.

We would like to bring attention to the University of Toronto's *Statement of Equity, Diversity, and Excellence*, which states that:

“The University of Toronto will proactively seek to increase diversity among our community members, and it is [their] aim to have a student body, teaching and administrative staff that mirror the diversity of the pool of potentially qualified applicants for those positions.”

And that it is [their] responsibility to help in:

“The creation of an equitable community, one that is diverse as well as inclusive and that is respectful and protects the human rights of its members, requires the work of every member of the community, across all of our sites and campuses, including students, teaching staff, administrative staff, visitors, alumni and guests. The University is committed to its internal policies on issues related to equity, and also operates in compliance with all legislation that bears on equity and human rights.”

In a recent two-part lecture given by Jordan Peterson, which was published on YouTube (see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvPgjg201w0> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-7YGGCE9es>), Peterson goes on a 57-minute rant regarding his disapproval of Bill C-16, which proposes to include gender identity and gender expression as prohibited grounds for harassment and discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code. This same Bill is considered by many political scholars and members of trans communities as an advancement of human rights and equal protection under the law. Peterson is also a man who has complained that the Ontario Human Rights Commission's terms and definitions are "over-inclusive and, all-encompassing." Surely, inclusivity is an important factor when discussing human rights protections. In one of his lectures,

Peterson includes various disparaging comments about members of the trans community. He argues that there is no evidence to support the existence of non-binary identities; a statement that is inaccurate. Furthermore, when discussing the use of his student's preferred pronouns, Peterson stated: "I don't recognize another person's right to determine what pronouns I use to address them. I won't do it." Purposely misgendering a trans person is an act of violence.

In his second 57-minute rant video titled "Part 2: Compulsory Political Education: A Real World Case Study at the U of Toronto", Peterson states his disapproval of the mandatory anti-discrimination and anti-bias training that the University of Toronto has mandated for its HR professionals, an opinion that he was not asked for by anyone. The Black Liberation Collective was successful in advocating for this equity training to be done not for the comfort of those who have always been accommodated and welcome within the institution but for those who are made voiceless. It was crafted from a place of wanting better in the environments that we as students daily partake in, keeping in mind the ways in which people in powerful positions of this university are allowed to dehumanize students through microaggressions, gaslighting and blatant disrespect without any accountability or repercussions.

According to the University of Toronto's *Statement of Institutional Purpose*, the University affirms its dedication;

"to fostering an academic community in which the learning and scholarship of every member may flourish, with vigilant protection for individual human rights, and a resolute commitment to the principle of equal opportunity, equity, and justice."

The fact that a tenured professor employed with the University of Toronto refuses to acknowledge the use of personal pronouns, and has the audacity to try to rationalize and quantify racism as something subjective, not only discredits the lived experiences of students who have dealt with this reality, but also silences them. More violence occurs as someone in a position of power who not only has the nerve to say such statements publicly, can still be a respected member of the university community, and not face any formal university backlash and continue to enjoy tenure. We are sick of discriminatory faculty members denying our expertise in our experiences and not respecting who we are, especially when we merely ask for our lived realities to be respected and not disregarded.

We are deeply concerned about the University's lack of action on this situation, especially as Peterson continues to spread his transphobic and racist ideologies through various media outlets. The University has failed to act on this situation and this ultimately showcases that "diversity, inclusion, and equal respect", are simply legalities and are not principles that the University intends on upholding. The University of Toronto has failed at maintaining a positive space and

campuses free of hate. As a result, we the undersigned, are demanding accountability from the University Administration and Governing Council with the following five demands:

1. A public apology from Professor Jordan Peterson and a full retraction of his comments.
2. Removal of his transphobic and racist lectures from YouTube.
3. A town hall with President Meric Gertler, Provost Cheryl Regehr, Vice-President Angela Hildyard, and Professor Jordan Peterson, where community members can explain the issues that he clearly does not comprehend.
4. Mandated anti-oppression training at all levels of the University of Toronto, including faculty and administration, to happen every academic semester.
5. A commitment that the University of Toronto will take action to defend students and University community members in future instances where tenured professors have made prejudiced comments against an individual or group on the basis of race, sexual orientation, ability, sex, religion, gender expression, or gender identity.

We would also like to remind the Administration that the University of Toronto's *Statement on Equity, Diversity, and Excellence* (University of Toronto Governing Council, 2006) states:

“Our support for equity is grounded in an institution-wide commitment to achieving a working, teaching, and learning environment that is free of discrimination and harassment as defined in the Ontario Human Rights Code. In striving to become an equitable community, we will also work to eliminate, reduce or mitigate the adverse effects of any barriers to full participation in University life that we find, including physical, environmental, attitudinal, communication or technological.”

Hateful comments should never be tolerated, especially not from someone who is considered to be an educator. No student should have to endure a two-hour lecture where their gender identity, existence, and realities are being debated and refused. Ultimately, Peterson’s comments erode the safe campus learning environment to which the University states a commitment. We hope that the University will respond to this situation within a reasonable timeframe and in accordance with the policies established by the Governing Council. We also hope that these demands are approved when the Governing Council meets on October 27, 2016.

Regards,

Denio Lourenco, UTMSU LGBTQ Coordinator - lgbtq@utmsu.ca

Marise Hopkins, UTMSU & Black Liberation Collective Organizer- vpexternal@utmsu.ca

Mala Kashyap, President Association of Part-time Undergraduate Students - president@apus.ca

Roya Ghahremani, Executive Director OUT@UTM - out@utmsu.ca

Julian Olivera - LGBTOUT, University of Toronto - lgbtoutexec@gmail.com

Nour Alideeb, UTMSU President - president@utmsu.ca

CC:

President Meric Gertler, University of Toronto - president@utoronto.ca

Vice-President and Provost Cheryl Regehr, University of Toronto - provost@utoronto.ca

Chair of the Governing Council Shirley Hoy, University of Toronto

Vice-President Human Resources & Equity Angela Hildyard, University of Toronto

President Cynthia Messenger, University of Toronto Faculty Association

Professor and Chair Department of Psychology Susanne Ferber, University of Toronto