



May 16, 2018

RE: University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy

Dear Office of the Vice-Provost Students,

The Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students (APUS) represents 6,000 fall/winter students and 14,000 summer part-time students across all three campuses of the University of Toronto. We are fundamentally committed to access to quality post-secondary education for all. APUS has been actively engaged in discussions with our members, other student groups, members of the University administration and community members regarding the University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy over the past academic year. We are writing today to voice our significant concerns with the proposed “University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy”, released on the Student Consultation website in late April.

APUS joins with many other student groups to call on the Office of the Vice Provost Students (OVPS) to extend the consultation period beyond May 16, 2018. While the proposed policy was released on April 26, technical difficulties meant that most students were not able to access the policy until the following week. APUS contends that a consultation period of less than three weeks is insufficient for meaningful consultation with students. We find this timeline to be particularly concerning when the consultation period includes a final exam period and the beginning of a summer term in which many students may not be actively engaged on campus. We also note that the lack of in-person consultations during the stated consultation period, the lack of visibility of the consultation web page, and the lack of direct communication to individual students by the OVPS regarding the draft policy all contribute to an insufficient consultation process. Similarly, the time period between the end of the consultation period and Cycle 6 of Governing Council is insufficient for the OVPS to meaningfully engage with and incorporate feedback provided by students. We therefore call on the OVPS to extend the consultation period to Fall 2018 in order to ensure meaningful consultation with students and sincere engagement with our feedback.

While acknowledging the changes and clarifications that have been made to the current proposed policy, APUS continues to have significant concerns with the policy itself. The scope of the policy and the threshold for invoking the policy remain broad and unclear to many students. The policy does not properly account for the reality of the inaccessibility of accommodations and support services experienced by many students. We support the comments made by other student groups on the inequitable impact of the policy on marginalized students, including students with mental health disabilities. For example, the potential to remove students from their existing health, residence, financial, social and other supports remains a significant concern in this policy. The policy continues to give disproportionate power to University officials throughout the process, most notably in the return to studies process as well as the procedure to be followed in urgent situations.

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We therefore call on the OVPS to meaningfully engage with the feedback given by APUS, other student groups, faculty, the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the broader campus community, rather than putting this policy forward for approval at this time. We join our fellow students and student groups in calling for a change in approach that moves away from the current policy and re-focuses the OVPS efforts on increasing accommodations and support services for all students.

APUS is committed to building a more inclusive campus for all students. We welcome further engagement and discussion on this policy from students, the OVPS and all members of the campus community. Please do not hesitate to contact APUS Vice-President Equity, Jennifer Coggon, at vpequity@apus.ca with any questions or concerns.

In Solidarity,

Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students