



Public Statement

Dear members of the University of Ottawa Community,

The recent controversy involving one of our members at the University of Ottawa has thrown her into the middle of a media storm. As a union, we do not condone or tolerate any form of discrimination or racism whether through hate speech or threats of violence against anyone.

Without the benefit of tenure or any job security at the University of Ottawa, our member is a faculty hired “per course”. Despite her precarious status, she is a committed ally of the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) community where she encourages and participates in numerous initiatives, including last month’s Scholar Strike. She is keenly aware of the impacts of misogyny, discrimination, and oppression within the University of Ottawa. Besides, she immediately apologized for any harm when she was contacted by a student, and she proactively apologized to the entire class.

Across Canada, women and professors from racialized communities make up the majority of this precarious workforce and they painfully remain underrepresented within the university corridors of power. We are not members of the dominant majority as our members have been characterized in certain social media recently; we are underpaid, overworked, and under-resourced as much here at the University of Ottawa as elsewhere in other institutions.

Our status is one of marginalization and exclusion within the University of Ottawa in a variety of overt and subtle ways. While the President made his statement to the Senate on Monday, professors on fixed contracts have no representation. While we teach more than half of the students at the University of Ottawa, we continue to be excluded from the most important body for collegial governance.

We are deeply concerned about the message that the President delivered to the Senate on Monday, as well as to the whole university community at the University of Ottawa via email. While he recognizes the importance of academic freedom, he also sends a stark message that professors are completely on their own to face any public wrath and social media trials in response to their teachings and scholarly work at the University of Ottawa.

In the case of our member and colleague targeted by this controversy, the University’s central administration failed to intervene when her personal contact information, including her address and phone number, was released and shared on the Twitter platform by a student. The



administration took an immediate stand by means of a tweet alleging racism and, subsequently, decided to suspend her without prior investigation into the context and intent of what was said in the classroom. This action stigmatized our colleague as a racist person.

We are also deeply concerned that the President's statement encourages self-censorship and will further compromise the already fragile exercise of academic freedom that our precariously employed members have in practice. Universities are places where over centuries academics have fought to be free from religious interference, from state interference, from corporate interference, and from managerial interference in the exercise of their research, teaching, and service to the community. This contradicts the University of Ottawa's own Policy 121:

As an autonomous, self-governing institution whose most fundamental value is that of academic freedom, the University prizes and protects freedom of inquiry and all forms of freedom of expression. It neither seeks to shield its community from controversial or objectionable views nor permits interference with the free expression of the full spectrum of human thought, within the limits that bind the University under Canadian and Ontario law.

We will have to deal with these issues of discrimination, representation, diversity and inclusion, and we hope that the University of Ottawa will remain the right place to do so. We hope that we will be supported by our institution and not abandoned. It is time to consider the broader implications of what is happening for the University community, and beyond, in order to move forward collectively and make this a better and more equitable place to work and to study.

Association of Part-Time Professors of the University of Ottawa