

9 November 2021

Ms. Nancy McKenzie,
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Board of Governors Secretariat
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Professor Santa Ono,
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Professor Moura Quayle,
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Professor Vanessa Andreotti,
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SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Ms. McKenzie, President Ono, Professors Quayle and Andreotti,

Re: Report of the Ad Hoc Investigatory Committee (CAUT): Academic Freedom & Collegial Governance at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies

As you know, the CAUT released its Report into governance issues at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies (PWIAS) last month. The Report is detailed and its findings are troubling. It is, moreover, just the latest in a series of documents, including the most recent external review, that point to significant failures of collegial governance and failures to adhere to UBC Policy at the Institute. The CAUT Report ends with a call to action (p 25): “In our view, attention to governance at PWIAS on the part of Senate, the UBC Board of Governors, and the PWIAS itself is urgently required to protect and support principles of academic freedom and collegial governance and to ensure compliance with the policies of UBC itself.” We add our voice, on behalf of our members, to this call.

Many of the problems at the PWIAS have been well-known, if poorly understood, for some time. But there is new information in the CAUT Report also that increases the concerns the UBC academic community has about the academic integrity of the PWIAS. For example, it is hard to imagine how the governance of the PWIAS could ever have gotten so bad that official observers were not invited to meetings, conflict of interest forms were not distributed or lost, minutes were not taken or lost, Trustees’ initiatives could redirect the money away from the academic mission of the Institute (including a member of the donor family receiving a stipend for serving on the Board of Trustees!), or that the University could have thought that “alignment” of the work of the Institute with the cluster program was appropriate. There are failures here at every level—from academic vision to simple record keeping. Our concern regarding the new information in the Report is matched by our concern regarding the message of 8 November 2021 from Professor Andreotti, which indicates both a continuing strong role for the VPRI in PWIAS activities and a continuing diminution of the PWIAS’s independent academic initiatives.

We have spoken to President Ono and read his response to the Report. We recognize that rectifying the situation is not simple, given how long and how deeply the problems have been allowed to develop. But rectifying the situation is enormously important to the academic community at UBC, since these issues go to the heart of questions of research integrity at UBC.

All our members adhere to UBC's scholarly integrity policy—or suffer significant penalties if they fail to do so. We need the University to uphold its part in proper research integrity: allow academics to make academic decisions, do not direct research topics, follow Board and Senate policy, employ best practices of transparency in governance and decision making, and so forth.

There are issues here that are definitely not limited to the PWIAS. Internal UBC granting seems increasingly aligned with the University's goals, not the goals of its researchers. Perhaps the most egregious of these alignments is the increasing use of TLEF funding for what seem to be straight-forward operations of Deans' Offices for projects such as curriculum reform. Such use of TLEF funds significantly diminishes the use of that fund by Educational Leadership faculty for educational leadership projects, which are hard to get funded by other means and are necessary for faculty career advancement. Also troubling is the use of the academic excellence fund for projects such as infrastructure renewal—however much UBC systems need to be renewed, such use clearly stretches the notion of “academic excellence” beyond all meaning.

I would be remiss not to mention two further aspects of the CAUT Report that trouble us. The first is the way that the letter from Andrew Szeri to the CAUT Executive Director notes that CAUT has no statutory standing with respect to UBC and then goes on to decline to participate in the investigation. This sort of legalistic response to CAUT misjudges the importance of non-judicial processes in the regulation of the Canadian academic community and the highly constructive role CAUT plays in that regulation. When UBC treats CAUT, of which the UBC FA is a constituent member, this way, it harms its reputation in the national academic community. The second is the protests noted in the letter from Professor Quayle to the CAUT that President Ono's letter of 16 November 2018 to the then-Director was not directive but was part of a collaborative process. Again and again, we see this sort of response from the administration: the administration was “suggesting” or “recommending” and not “requiring” or “demanding” this or that. We are once again asking for those within the structures of power at UBC to understand how structures of power work—“suggestions” coming from offices that have power over individuals or units are read and must be read as more than suggestions.

The Faculty Association is considering any further actions it might engage in in light of the CAUT Report. Meanwhile, it is clear that the Board, Senate and Institute itself have much that you must do. We wish you the best success in bringing the governance of the PWIAS into alignment with both UBC policy and proper collegial governance. We stand at the ready to collaborate in these necessary activities.

Sincerely,



Dr. Alan Richardson,
President

C Guy Faulkner, Chair of the UBC Vancouver Senate Research Committee
Mark MacLean, Chair, Research and Learning Committee, Board of Governors
Deena Rubuliak, Executive Director, UBC Faculty Association