

17 August 2015

Dear Colleagues:

As you may know, last week the UBC Faculty Association presented a request to the Board of Governors asking for more details on the resignation of Professor Gupta as President. We received the Board's response on August 14.

We are disappointed that the Board's response provides no new information. In essence, it asks the university community — and the public at large — to take on faith, the fact that the Board has acted responsibly and in the public interest. While the Board should normally have the trust and confidence of the university community, events surrounding the resignation of Professor Gupta make this increasingly difficult.

The resignation of Professor Gupta as President of UBC is not simply a "personnel matter" for the University, as the Board claims. Rather, there is a high expectation of complete transparency and accountability around the resignation of a President of a public institution as significant and vital as UBC.

This expectation has not been met. The absence of an informed explanation since the August 7th resignation has led to ill-informed speculation taking the place of information. In our opinion, this situation makes any non-disclosure provision in Professor Gupta's exit agreement contrary to the public interest and contrary to the best practices expected of a major public institution.

Furthermore, the handling of Professor Gupta's resignation and its aftermath have exposed serious weaknesses in the governance of the university, due to the apparent failure to manage significant and perceived high-risk personal conflicts of interest involving Mr. Montalbano, the Chair of the Board. The concerns raised in this regard compound those already expressed about the lack of transparency in the processes surrounding the President's resignation. In our opinion, these conflicts of interest should not have existed in the first place and must be remedied immediately.

Specifically, the Chair of the Board also sits on a Faculty Advisory Council, and we are advised has been in communication with a Dean over internal operational and academic issues. This arrangement circumvents the formal organizational bicameral structure of the university, which would require that communication between the Board and the university be routed through the President (or acting President). The role of the Board is to set general policy and to manage, administer, and control the property, revenue, business, and affairs of the University, and not to become involved in academic governance.

The Chair of the Board should not be able to meddle directly in internal academic affairs. Yet, disregard for this organizational structure as well as interference in academic affairs, is precisely what is alleged to have happened this past week in relation to the comments made by a faculty member concerning the President's resignation by the Chair of Board.

We are also concerned — in reference to the same faculty member — about alleged violations of academic freedom and of the university's respectful environment statement committed by a number of individuals, including the Chair of the Board of Governors. While these allegations are still under investigation, there are sufficient facts known to lead us to question how well those involved, including the Chair of the Board himself, understand the principle of academic freedom, and whether they understand their obligations under UBC's public commitment to providing a respectful workplace environment. Each of these principles is a fundamental tenet of a university.

Mr Montalbano's apparent lack of understanding of the principles of academic freedom, and the questionable judgement he is alleged to have exhibited in interfering with internal operations and with university employees, have caused the Faculty Association Executive Committee to lose confidence in Mr. Montalbano as the Chair of the Board of Governors.

Given the conflicts of interest, and the missteps that that have come to light this week, we believe it is even more imperative to have the full story behind the resignation of Professor Gupta as President of UBC. Full disclosure is the only way to restore trust in the governance of the University of British Columbia.

Sincerely,

Mark Mac Lean, President (Mathematics)

Vinayak Vatsal, Vice President (Mathematics)

Hugh Neary, Treasurer (Vancouver School of Economics)

Doris Doudet, Secretary (Neurology)

Lara Boyd, Member-at-Large (Physical Therapy)

Thomas Kemple, Member-at-Large (Sociology)

Deanna Kreisel, Member-at-Large (English)

Nancy Langton, Member-at-Large (Sauder School of Business)

Karen Smith, Member-at-Large (Microbiology and Immunology)

Danny Vickers, Member-at-Large (History)

Kristina McDavid, Chair, Librarians and Archivists Committee (Library)

Sarika Bose, Chair, Contract Faculty Committee (English)

Margaret Wright, Chair, Member Services and Grievance Committee (Social Work)

Jim Johnson, Chair, Okanagan Faculty Committee (Economics)

Margot Young, Chair, Status of Women Committee (Law)