

SEPTEMBER 17, 2021
NEWS ARTICLE

CAUT calling for ‘pause’ on U of T censure after U of T reverses course on Dr. Azarova case

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(Ottawa, September 17, 2021)

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) today is calling for its members and allies within the University of Toronto, across the country and the world to suspend actions related to the censure against the U of T.

This decision is in response to the U of T’s decision to reverse course and re-offer Dr. Valentina Azarova the position of Director of the International Human Rights Program in the Faculty of Law.

CAUT’s Executive Committee considers U of T decision to be a “victory for academic freedom”. However, CAUT has notified the U of T administration that the full censure will not be formally lifted until the University resolve all the issues in the case, including explicitly extending academic freedom protections to academic managerial positions and developing policies that prohibit donor interference in internal academic affairs.

CAUT’s full statement is below.

Statement on the Censure of the Administration of the University of Toronto

On April 22, the Council of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) took the unusual measure of censuring the Administration of the University of Toronto over a hiring scandal in the Faculty of Law. Upon reviewing the matter extensively, Council delegates concluded that the decision not to proceed with the hiring of Dr. Valentina Azarova as Director of the International Human Rights Program, following an intervention by a prominent donor and sitting judge, violated widely recognized principles of academic freedom. Unless universities and colleges are actively protected from outside interference and intrusion, their integrity and mission are imperiled.

In discussions and correspondence with the University Administration, CAUT has conveyed that the principal condition for the lifting of censure would be for the University to re-offer the position to Dr. Azarova. It is our understanding that this key condition has now been met.

The University presented Dr. Azarova with an offer of employment. After careful consideration, however, Dr. Azarova has declined the offer. Her decision, while unfortunate, is understandable given the University's initial reaction to the unfounded and scurrilous attacks on her reputation and her research.

Considering this development, the CAUT Executive Committee is advising that the censure of the Administration of the University of Toronto be suspended pending a final decision by CAUT Council at its meeting of November 25 and 26. Until then, the Executive Committee is calling for a pause in all actions related to censure.

The unprecedented efforts and solidarity of CAUT members and allies within the University of Toronto, across the country, and around the world have forced the University to reverse course and reinstate Dr. Azarova's offer of employment. This is a significant victory for academic freedom, and CAUT extends its deep gratitude to all those who supported and campaigned around the censure.

There remain other measures that the University will need to take to fully resolve the issues leading to censure. These include explicitly extending academic freedom protections to academic managerial positions such as the IHRP Director, and developing policy that prohibits the University's Advancement office and donors from interfering in internal academic affairs, including personnel decisions. CAUT has communicated to University of Toronto President Meric Gertler that it is willing to discuss how his Administration may satisfy all conditions for the formal lifting of censure by Council in November.

CAUT is also urging the University leadership to begin repairing the reputational damage caused by this affair by renewing its commitment to academic freedom, collegial governance, and institutional accountability.