

Executive Committee  
University of Toronto Students' Union

12 Hart House Circle  
Toronto, ON, M5S 3J9

[execs@utsu.ca](mailto:execs@utsu.ca)  
416-978-4911

## STATEMENT

For immediate release  
January 14, 2015

### **RE: Ryerson Students' Union Staff Restructuring and Lay-offs**

Dear UTSU Members,

On December 1, 2015, the Ryerson Students' Union (RSU) eliminated the position of Executive Director of Communications and Outreach, causing the layoff of Giliary Massa (on parental leave) and Dina Skivrsky (on parental leave contract).

It is important for students' unions to demonstrate a commitment to open and equitable hiring as part of our commitment to fighting oppression and promoting equity. It is the UTSU's position that the RSU has acted in violation of the core values of equitable and open hiring in its recent restructuring.

We condemn that the RSU executive has hired a political ally and close friend to fill their new General Manager position. It is always tempting to hire people that you know and that you believe might be easier to work with due to mutual familiarity. However, it is more often in the interest of students to hire people who have different experiences and perspectives. Especially for full-time staff positions, this is important to ensure balanced decision-making from multiple perspectives. To us, the hiring of a close friend in the context of their other actions shows that the RSU does not have a commitment to diverse and equitable hiring.

It is also important to hire staff with experience in social justice and equity work outside of the privileged confines of a University or students' union organizing. Without seeking this experience in our staff, we cannot adequately serve our students, especially those who face the most barriers in entering post-secondary education.

It is especially important that we draw attention to the fact that both the individuals fired are women, and one of the women fired is Black, visibly Muslim,

and a new parent. In a labour market demarcated by race and gender, the firing of these two women effects their further marginalization, especially in the absence of equitable and open hiring practices. Any employer committed to equity and equitable work spaces must take into consideration the disproportionate impact of their decisions on their workers.

We further condemn the use of the phrase “safe space” to criticize students who have come to the RSU offices asking questions and raising criticisms of the RSU executives. As student leaders, we must not only expect to receive criticism of our work, but we should try our best to listen and reflect on what is being said. Safe space, a term that originated in the LGBTQ community, means an environment where individuals who are marginalized can discuss their experiences and opinions without fear of oppression. It does not mean safety for people in positions of power, and should not be used in this way.

In addition, student leaders with privilege cannot just acknowledge their unfair advantages; they must also not use them to defend their actions as leaders. Implying that someone’s complaints or actions are an attempt to ‘play the race card’ and are thus without merit reinforces prejudice in society and is not good allyship.

Like many other students’ unions, we believe that it is important to work with the labour movement on issues of social justice. However, as student leaders, we have a responsibility to place the interests of our students above those of the labour unions that represent our staff, which are often not primarily student organizations. The RSU executives recall being told by their predecessors that “[the executives] work for the staff.” This is cause for concern, and we hope that Ryerson students think critically about how their students’ union is run and come to their own conclusions on how to improve it in an equitable way.

The UTSU condemns the actions of the RSU, and our willingness to engage with them has been severely undermined. We hope that, if the RSU demonstrates an institutional commitment to the principles of equity and good allyship, our two unions will be able to resume working together fully for the benefit of all students.

Sincerely,

**UTSU Executive Committee**