OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

March 16, 2016

In the wake of the recent news reports and university announcements concerning a case of sexual harassment, we, the undersigned Brock University faculty members, would like to highlight some pressing problems and propose some courses of action.

We are deeply troubled by the news of this case and wish to express our sympathies with the student complainant, who has seen no prompt action taken by the university in response to the findings of the investigative report, and has felt so discouraged and silenced by the university. It is reprehensible that this student’s trust has been abused, and we salute her courage for speaking out.

This case demonstrates what many faculty and staff have come to recognize: the university’s policies and processes with which to address and resolve complaints of harassment and assault are unclear, ineffective, and unfair. Many of us in recent years have observed how inadequate, contradictory, and often self-defeating the process has proved. This situation cannot stand. The university administration needs to support and preserve the general culture of profound pedagogical commitment and collegial trust at Brock.

Acknowledging the mandate of the sexual violence prevention committee created only last fall, we call for the following:

(1) a significant commitment of resources (funding, staff, and autonomy) to a fully functional Human Rights office;

(2) a considered, clear, and responsible survivor-centred process for handling these and related kinds of complaints, in accord with provincial legislation and the Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA), drafted not solely by administration but with the HRO and in consultation with BUFA and CUPE and all other affected unions (so that unions sign on and are not forced to grieve against an incoherent or unclear process) as well as student counselling services and campus security;

(3) the dissemination of a set of clear instructions and guidelines for faculty, staff, and students, including those concerning the responsibilities of faculty and staff in reporting complaints and the rights of faculty, staff, and students involved in such complaints.

Signed,

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