



**An Open Letter to Members of the University of Toronto Community from the
Chair of the Governing Council**

October 17, 2008

I am writing, on behalf of the Executive Committee of Governing Council, to members of the University Community who plan to participate in the various meetings of the Governing Council and its Boards and Committees that are scheduled for what appears to be a very busy fall.

The University of Toronto is a large and complex community whose members have many interests united by a common commitment to the University's academic mission. The University's governance process involves multiple boards and committees, as well as the Governing Council itself. I and my fellow governors are committed to ensuring that governance works effectively and in a way that is consistent with important University values.

One of those values, of course, is discourse and decision-making in Governing Council meetings and meetings of its boards and committees that is respectful and civil, that allows differing perspectives to be considered, and that permits necessary business to be accomplished in a productive fashion. Civility is particularly important because governance depends on significant commitments of time by 50 volunteers on the Council itself and many co-opted members who serve on the boards and committees.

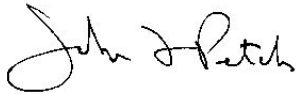
From accounts in one campus newspaper of a recent protest outside Simcoe Hall, there has been an indication that some parties plan on disrupting governance meetings. It is hard to assess the seriousness of these threats, but in light of them I wanted to take this opportunity to emphasize the obligations of those who participate in Governing Council meetings and meetings of Council's boards and committees.

Participating in governance – whether as a governor or as a member of the University community presenting views – carries with it the responsibility of being respectful of the rights of others: the right to be heard, the right to listen, and the right to be treated in a civil and respectful manner as issues are deliberated and important decisions made. Even if one disagrees, fundamentally, with a view that is expressed or an action taken, participation in governance requires that this disagreement be conveyed in a way that respects the rights of others. Obviously, shouting people down, interrupting them, abusing them verbally, and otherwise disrupting the work of committed volunteer governors, runs counter to University values. Further, such disruptive actions may lead to proceedings under various University policies and/or the law.

At times, there is a great deal of business to be accomplished in a relatively short time. The primary purpose of Council meetings is to enable deliberations and decision-making by the governors. We try to hear out representatives of particular constituencies on matters of interest to them at Council meetings, but it must also be understood that there are other points of access to governance deliberations and many opportunities in our environment for members of the community to make their views known. I have attached a summary of some of those points of access.

In short, as we continue through a busy fall governance season, members of our community have choices about how freedom of expression will be exercised – with respect and civility, or in a fashion that interferes with governors’ obligations to conduct University business, potentially alienating these committed volunteers, and that compels changes in the openness of our governance processes. I look forward to working with members of our community to ensure that positive choices are made as regards the conduct of our upcoming governance meetings.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John F. Petch".

John F. (Jack) Petch
Chair of the Governing Council

Points of Access to University Governance

Several opportunities exist for members of the community to make their views known and to inform governance deliberations. The vast majority of matters that come to the Governing Council are considered by other bodies which report to the Council. The bodies include, for example:

Divisional (Faculty or College) Councils

Committees of the Governing Council:

Academic Policy and Programs

Planning and Budget Committee

Boards of the Governing Council:

Academic Board

Business Board

University Affairs Board

The most effective way to communicate with members is in writing and, in the case of the Boards and Committees of the Governing Council, written communications received at least eight days in advance of a meeting are distributed to members along with regular agenda material. Communications received after thereafter are distributed to members at the meeting.

Non-members may also request the opportunity to address these bodies' open meetings. In granting permission, the board or committee chair will consider factors such as relevance to the agenda, the number of speaking requests and the length of the agenda. Representatives of University-wide groups are normally granted speaking privileges for matters on the agenda. These groups include, for example, the Faculty Association, the Steelworkers' Union, the Association of Part-time Undergraduate Students, the Graduate Students' Union and the Students' Administrative Council (operating as the University of Toronto Students' Union). More information can be found in the *Procedures for Non-Members to Address the Governing Council, Its Boards and Committees* (1995) at <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/nonmem.htm>.

It is also important to note that items expected to be considered by governance during the academic year are included on the Governing Council's Consolidated Calendar of Business. The Calendar, which is updated weekly, summarizes items that are planned for each Board and Committee meeting, as well as for the Governing Council. It can be viewed at <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Calendars+of+Business/gccob.pdf>.