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## A Message to UBC's Faculty of Arts Community

Recently many members of the UBC community received material, distributed by a UBC student, related to free speech and academic freedom, referencing the Heterodox Academy; this material was distributed as an email and as flyers left in offices. The messages contain an invitation to report "truth or social justice type" issues [italization mine] to the President, Santa Ono, and to the Senior Advisor on Academic Freedom, Neil Guppy. Some colleagues have found the messaging to be disturbing, evoking memories of campuses with blacklists and a climate of intimidation.

Colleagues need to know that UBC works to promote an effective and open community for discussing complex, difficult, and contentious issues. The student's actions fall within free expression, but the invitation to report on what others are doing and saying could be interpreted as an effort to stifle the expression of ideas.

UBC's commitment to academic freedom appears in both our Academic Calendar and in the Collective Agreement with members of faculty and librarians. The full statement reads as follows:

The members of the University enjoy certain rights and privileges essential to the fulfilment of its primary functions: instruction and the pursuit of knowledge. Central among these rights is the freedom, within the law, to pursue what seem to them fruitful avenues of inquiry, to teach and to learn unhindered by external or non-academic constraints, to engage in full and unrestricted consideration of any opinion. This freedom extends not only to the regular members of the University but to all who are invited to participate in its forum. Suppression of this freedom, whether by institutions of the state, the officers of the University or the actions of private individuals, would prevent the University carrying out its primary functions. All members of the University must recognize this fundamental principle and must share responsibility for supporting, safeguarding and preserving this central freedom. Behaviour which obstructs free and full discussion, not only of ideas which are safe and accepted but of those which may be unpopular or even abhorrent, vitally threatens the integrity of the University's forum. Such behaviour cannot be tolerated. [Approved by Senate in December, 1976]

As the Dean of the Faculty of Arts I want all colleagues – faculty, staff, students, and visitors – to know that we fully support responsible, constructive debate and discussion. Speaking out publicly and forcefully about important issues is imperative and colleagues should not feel intimidated in doing so. The President has heard me on this, as has Professor Guppy. They assure me that they will not be party to any campaigns to thwart free and open dialogue on campus.

Some of the messaging from this student, as quoted in a Ubysey story and within the web links provided in the distributed material, targets specific groups of people and they may, understandably, feel threatened by this. In a climate in which social divisiveness is on the rise, the University will not tolerate threats to safety and security. Should any member of this community experience such threats, I encourage you to alert Campus Security and the RCMP.

Sincerely,

Gage Averill  
Dean of the Faculty of Arts, UBC - Vancouver

Cc: Professor Santa J. Ono, Vice-Chancellor and President  
Professor Neil Guppy, Senior Advisor to the Provosts, Academic Freedom  
UBC Vice-Presidents  
UBC-Vancouver Deans

[August 21, 2017]