UTGSU By-Elections: Division One
Candidate Statements

Candidates

Jonah Dunch
Kanika Josephine Lawton

Jonah Dunch

I am an MA student in the Department of Philosophy, where I study ethics, Chinese philosophy, and other areas of the discipline. When I began my graduate studies this fall, I was immediately amazed by the welcoming and vibrant intellectual community of U of T. But a flourishing community like this will fall apart unless sustained by robust institutions led by sincere actors--something that my favourite thinkers of the Chinese intellectual tradition, like Mencius and Xunzi, recognized, in fact. I hope to play some part in sustaining this community by serving on the UTGSU Board of Directors.

Kanika Josephine Lawton

My name is Kanika Lawton. I am a 3rd year PhD student at the Cinema Studies Institute and the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies, and I am pleased to announce my candidacy for Division 1 Director (Humanities) on the UTGSU Board of Directors. If nominated onto the BoD, I assure that my responsibilities will always be to the graduate students I will be privileged to represent, and that the transparent and smooth operations of the Union, the proper allocation of funds, the guarantee existence of the Union despite internal attempts to dissolve and defund it, and the continued struggle for higher wages in line with the exorbitant cost of living in Toronto, especially in the midst of potential strike activity with our comrades in CUPE, will remain my top priorities.

Since I began my PhD in 2021, I have been involved in union activity, most significantly with my own course union, the Cinema Studies Graduate Student Union (CSGSU). From helping co-organize our annual graduate student conference (I have been involved for three years running), which includes such responsibilities as adjudicating abstract submissions, chairing panels, and running our social media accounts, to securing external funds, my experience within CSGSU is well-documented and received. In fact, this past fall I was nominated to be our
UTGSU representative at our own AGM, where my attention to detail, commitment to our responsibilities to the larger Cinema Studies Institute community, and determination to either push through or secure necessary change, were highlighted as reasons behind my nomination. Subsequently, I was encouraged to run for the BoD by the CSGSU Executive Committee after my first UTGSU Assembly Meeting, where again my commitment to not only my course union, but my fellow graduate students at-large, was seen as much-needed change, especially as murmurings of potential bad actors working to undermine the Union began to circulate.

My commitment to my colleagues, my course union and the UTGSU, and U of T graduate students as a whole, which builds off of a political commitment to higher wages, better workplace conditions, freedom of academic expression, and access to robust, subsidized healthcare services, as well as my unwavering belief in a strong, democratic process, where a full Board is elected, who work to serve graduate students (rather than their own interests), and who place the collective well-being and satisfaction of the Union's members above personal pursuits of (perceived) power and authority, is why I am running for the Board of Directors. I am also aware that, as of now, there are no Division 1 Directors on the BoD, and I want to work to ensure humanities students also have a say in Board proceedings and decisions. Regardless, I can assure you that my principles remain unshaken, my politics clear, and my determination unobstructed, no matter how tense Assembly Meetings can become, because my duty to the work at hand, and the people who make it up, creates a clear path forward—one that I will continue to follow.

Ultimately, I am but one member of the Union, but to work to represent the best interests of my fellow members, and to be a platform for their voices, would be a privilege and honour. Thank you for your nomination.