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**Subject:** RE: True Commitment

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President Clancy and Provost Levit,

I was shocked and terribly unsettled to learn late last week about the PPRC's recommendation to slash nearly 40% of the academic programs at TU in what the administration has labeled its "True Commitment" program. Being out of state, I am a bit late to hear the news. It appears that my own undergraduate program, along with many others, has been classified as another "overgrowth of the past 20 years" and is set to be exterminated. For what was supposed to be a data driven process, the publicly released report was suspiciously light on data. I am writing you to add my data point. Let me also be clear that my critique is constrained to the fields that are part of my own background, although I do believe that most of what I am about to say is more generally applicable to the liberal arts as a whole.

I attended TU from 2005 to 2009. Upon graduation, I earned a B.A. in Philosophy and a B.S. in Computer Science with a minor in Mathematics. As both a STEM degree holder and a liberal arts degree holder, I feel uniquely qualified to comment on the issue at hand. I am likely one of just a handful who obtained not just a double major, but two entirely distinct undergraduate degrees in both colleges done in parallel. When I was a 19 year-old undecided major, I gravitated towards my interests and wound up with a strong appetite for the logical and analytical thought I found in philosophy, later picking up the Computer Science major in tandem.

I flourished in my time at TU. In addition to my studies, I spent four grueling but rewarding years on the TU Track and Cross Country teams. I graduated Magna Cum Laude and as a proud member of Phi Beta Kappa, the honor society dedicated to those who have operated across the liberal arts and sciences. While in the philosophy program, my academic teeth were cut on great thinkers like Leibniz, Hume, and Kant. The skills I acquired from my liberal arts education gained me admittance into Harvard Law School, which is consistently ranked as one of the top 3 law schools in the nation. After attending for a short time, I ultimately decided the career path was not for me. I left Harvard and rounded out my education by finishing an M.S. in Computer Science at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

I am currently employed by Amazon as a Software Development Engineer on one of our Alexa teams. It is true that I cannot directly attribute the particular role I have at Amazon to my philosophical education. We do however employ experts in fields like linguistics, speech science, and user experience solely for their non-technical expertise. Amazon is of course not the only major tech company to do this. The sector is slowly coming to terms with the fact that success is largely predicated on how well a human connection can be made at a global scale. In the coming years, as various scientific fields further push the boundaries of human possibility, normative questions will become exceedingly important and we will need educated people with answers. Whether those advancements come from genomics, artificial intelligence, or elsewhere, there will always be a social necessity for the liberal arts. Because science is largely descriptive and rarely prescriptive, we must have individuals that can shape a world that works for the interests of the many, that can operate with a fundamental level of decency, and that can provide clear communication and direction in areas that make us unmistakably human. I adamantly believe a liberal arts education at TU provides this in its current form.

I will not attempt to speculate on the incentives and underlying motivations that gave rise to the “True Commitment” plan. Though clearly ill-conceived, it appears that the decision was likely undertaken with a modicum of forethought. One can imagine that incoming students and parents are increasingly questioning the return on investment that a college degree in the humanities provides, largely because administrators have permitted tuition costs to grow at orders of magnitude higher than inflation rates. The PPRC purports that “The proposed reimagination of the academic structure at TU is bold.” Agreed. The plan is not only bold, but also brazen and reckless. The plan’s publication alone has already begun to tarnish the reputation of a great institution. Of the undergraduate higher education institutions that, like TU, sit on a one billion dollar endowment or greater, a full 99% of these institutions offer undergraduate majors in philosophy\*. If, as the report indicates, cost-cutting is truly a motivation here, then it is apparent that something is amiss at the University of Tulsa. The burden of proof is on the TU administration to fully and transparently provide the rationale for why the status quo is insufficient.

My grandfather once said to me “With your with your computer science degree you will make a living, but with your philosophy degree you will make a life”. I hope you will continue making lives at TU, and I respectfully ask you and the board to hear all stakeholders and reconsider this plan.

**Best,**  
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\* The lone exception to this is Georgia Tech, a school that is notorious for its commitment to engineering, which only offers a philosophy minor.

N.B. These views are my own and not my employer’s.