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Dear Colleagues,

Given our familiarity with the aptitude, initiative, and mettle of TU students, we are not surprised by their recent accomplishment – the 802–264 vote of no confidence in Provost and Interim President Janet Levit. The lopsided outcome and the enormous effort required to execute the vote obligate all of us to reflect on the event’s significance for the health of this institution. The tenacity of the vote’s organizers in overcoming the numerous obstacles thrown in their path is a testament to the students’ devotion to this university. It also highlights the depth of their concern regarding TU’s direction under a Board of Trustees that has refused to fulfill its most basic responsibility: installing leaders who can earn the confidence of students and faculty alike.

Our students modeled the appropriate level of concern and commitment this moment requires from all persons concerned about the future of this institution. In response to the inaction of the Student Association (SA) following the faculty’s November vote of no confidence in the university’s leadership, TU Students for Responsible Change (SRC) sponsored a petition that garnered almost 400 verified signatures, far surpassing the number required to hold an online referendum. SRC then successfully defended the vote against a last-minute constitutional challenge before SA’s Judicial Council. Although SRC had no access to a student email list – and despite the efforts of certain administrators and faculty members to suppress the vote – the student response rate marked the highest turnout percentage for any student election on record.

The administration’s refusal to even acknowledge the students’ vote is appalling but not surprising. It is also profoundly ironic, given the administration’s continued insistence that all of their efforts at “reform” are focused on making the university more “student-centered.” In fact, the university’s leadership seems no more interested in the views of students than it is in the views of faculty members. The Faculty Senate concluded that the creation of True Commitment violated the university’s own shared governance rules; the administration and the board press ahead with the plan. Individual faculty members turned out in droves to vote no confidence in then-Provost Levit; the board responded with a promotion. The students overwhelmingly voiced their dissatisfaction with the university’s leadership; that leadership ignores them.

The university’s board and administration exist to support faculty in educating students. Everything else the university does is ancillary to this mission. If neither the students nor their instructors believe the university is on the right track, precisely whose interests are being served by this institution?

By definition, leadership that does not inspire trust and confidence is failed leadership. In light of this, the board’s announcement that it will begin to search for a new president only after the university’s financial situation has stabilized is both perplexing and alarming. We can think of no time in which trusted administrative leadership is more necessary than our current, precarious financial circumstances. Along with the faculty, TU students have insisted, quite rightly, on being included in the decisions that will determine the future direction of this institution. We implore the TU Board of Trustees to share our pride in our students – to respect the civic-mindedness they demonstrated by promptly initiating a nationwide search for leadership that can earn the confidence of the university community.

Respectfully,

Concerned Faculty of TU