



Representing Faculty, Librarians,  
Veterinarians & College Professors

# News & Views

August 26, 2021



Dear UGFA Member:

We continue to meet regularly with the Provost's Office and we continue to be thwarted in our attempts to get firm answers to the questions that become more and more urgent with each passing day. We also continue to meet regularly with our legal counsel. In these unprecedented times, much continues to be unknown. Below you will find some of the questions we have been asking, together with the answers we have received so far.

*What assurances will the Administration provide that their vaccine mandate, whenever the details are developed, will protect the health and safety of UGFA members and others in the University community during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Details of the Administration's vaccine mandate are slowly emerging, with proof of vaccination now being required. We still do not know how the Administration intends to gather proof of vaccination. The University's COVID-19 information page states, "Requiring faculty, staff, students and visitors to submit their proof of vaccination helps us ensure we are providing safe working and learning spaces for everyone." We think we can all agree that this measure alone will not keep us "safe." As the CBC reports, "Highly contagious and likely capable of producing staggering virus levels inside the human body, the fourth major variant [Delta] is driving Canada's fourth wave. It's also increasing the odds that more Canadians — whether vaccinated or not — will face the virus in the weeks and months ahead." (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/covid19-coronavirus-vaccinated-1.6143572>)

*What options will the Administration provide for those who continue to have concerns about their health and safety or the health and safety of those with whom they live? Will UGFA members with children at home who are not eligible for the vaccine be permitted to teach remotely?*

If your teaching assignments require your presence on campus, the Administration expects that you will be on campus. At the Senate meeting on August 25, the Provost, when pressed, reiterated that this is her expectation, even for faculty members with young children who cannot be vaccinated. Our legal counsel has told us that the Ministry of Labour has denied almost every, if not every, claim of unsafe working conditions brought before it on the grounds of COVID-19. While such

harsh legal precedent in no way prevents a compassionate employer from acting in the interests of the health and safety of its employees, the Administration is no doubt aware of this precedent and is creating its policies accordingly. The UGFA has asked on every possible occasion for all UGFA members to be allowed to choose whether to deliver their classes face to face (public health guidelines permitting) or remotely. On every possible occasion, we have been told that individual members may ask their Deans to be allowed to teach remotely, but that they may be expected to teach on campus. If you have asked your Dean to teach remotely and your request has been denied, please contact the UGFA.

*What will the Administration require of those who are not vaccinated for medical reasons or on human rights grounds?*

Documentation will be required.

*Or of those who decline the vaccine for other reasons?*

We don't know yet. The Administration continues to say that they are working on the details. Regular and frequent COVID-19 tests may be required, but the Administration has not yet finalized their position. We have consulted with our legal counsel on this matter and have been told that the case law is evolving. If you require further information on this matter, please contact the UGFA.

*Will rapid testing be available on campus?*

Yes, although the Administration has not yet worked out the details of how rapid testing will be provided.

*When will the Administration provide transparent information on how physical distancing requirements, occupancy limits, cleaning schedules, and appropriate traffic flow on campus will be upheld? How will the Administration enforce a mask mandate, or any other public safety hygiene requirements that may be in place?*

We have been told that student monitors will be reminding students in class during the first week of class of the Administration's mask policy, should the class instructor so desire. These student monitors will be available to return to class in at least the second week of classes if requested by the instructor. We have been told that, should a student fail to comply with the Administration's mask policy, the instructor may leave the classroom. When we have asked about traffic management in hallways and stairwells, the Administration has suggested that the student monitors could also remind students about expected behaviour outside of class. There is some information available on the University's COVID-19 information page, and we have been told that this information will be updated regularly.

*When will the Administration make public an assessment of each building on campus (including offices, classrooms, stairwells, building entries and exits, corridors, washrooms, elevator lobbies and cabinets, study areas, labs, libraries, and any areas in which people congregate)?*

There is some information available on the University's COVID-19 information page. All we have been told is that this information will be updated regularly.

*How will the Administration notify UGFA members of outbreaks and positive cases of COVID-19 among their students, colleagues, and others with whom they come into contact while on campus?*

The Administration has said they will defer to Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health to handle communication with respect to outbreaks and positive cases on campus.

*Will UGFA members who are assigned to teach face to face in a classroom that is not large enough to allow for two metres of social distancing be assigned a larger classroom? If not, will they be permitted to switch to remote delivery?*

The Administration is waiting on a memo expected from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) that may allow classes and labs to meet face to face with no social distancing requirements or with social distancing requirements that are weaker than those mandated by the Province. It seems clear that the Administration is waiting for this memo so that they can institute the weakest possible safety requirements and lay that decision at the feet of the MCU. While they could make their own decisions that take into consideration the very real and reasonable fears of members of the University community, they are instead pushing forward with a plan that will see the maximum-allowed number of students arising from the weakest distancing constraint in our classrooms. We have questioned why the Administration is seeking to implement the least stringent of these safety guidelines despite its professed concern for safety. We have asked that UGFA members assigned to teach in a space that does not allow for two metres of social distancing be assigned to a larger room or be permitted to teach remotely. We were told that this may not be possible. If you have asked your Dean to teach remotely and your request has been denied, please contact the UGFA.

You will recall that the UGFA had been working towards an LOU that would govern the working conditions of UGFA members in Fall 2021, after our current LOU expires on August 31. The Administration abandoned its negotiations with us. We pressed them to reconsider and we have also proposed discussing an LOU focused solely on a Fall 2021 lockdown, should that occur. The Administration has instead chosen to operate under our Collective Agreement, the only document governing our terms and conditions of employment in Fall 2021 in the absence of an LOU, and face whatever grievances we may file as a consequence.

It feels to us that the Administration's decision to attempt to navigate a path that both

- respects only the minimal set of recommendations from the government and/or Public Health (which they are obligated to follow, unless they seek and are granted exemptions, as they have done); and
- complies with our Collective Agreement

is the principal reason for

- their piecemeal and unclear approach to planning for Fall 2021, with ever-changing, absent, or still-being-developed policies;
- the dangerous and incredibly stressful situation we all find ourselves in mere days before the start of the semester; and
- the complete lack of any planning, discussion, and necessary bargaining related to the possibility of another lockdown.

Please know that members of the UGFA Executive Committee as well as the UGFA office staff are working as hard as we can to press the Administration to make decisions that will help all of us to keep safe. These last few weeks have been full of questions to which we have had few to no concrete answers. We will be in touch again as the situation evolves.

Mary DeCoste, UGFA President

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