



Representing Faculty, Librarians,
Veterinarians & College Professors

June 4, 2021

MEMBER UPDATE

The week of May 10, the UGFA and the University Administration co-sponsored a survey that we hoped would inform our negotiations on a COVID-19 LOU for Fall 2021. The UGFA had agreed that the Administration, which had security concerns, would run the survey and provide the UGFA with the complete results. We are disappointed that things did not go at all smoothly. Two days after the survey opened, the UGFA learned that anyone, anywhere could access the survey any number of times. So much for security! We then learned that an invitation to participate in the survey had not been sent to UGFA librarian and veterinarian members. We assumed that this was an oversight on the part of the Administration but were told that it was not, despite the fact that many UGFA librarian and veterinarian members engage in teaching activities. (In order to collect information from UGFA librarian and veterinarian members, we surveyed them ourselves, separately.) That having been said, the survey results are telling:

UGFA members by and large wish to return to campus, provided that certain conditions are met.

Results of the survey are included below. We hoped that the Administration would see this as a good-news story; assuming that conditions are as safe as they are prognosticating, a majority of UGFA members will choose to teach their courses in person and on campus. The “vibrant on-campus experience” the students have been promised would be delivered without the Administration compelling members who have concerns for their health and for the health of others to teach face-to-face. After all, the Administration has spent years claiming to have deep concern for the wellness, including mental health, of its employees.

We are saddened to report that the Administration was unmoved by the results of the survey. They have consistently held the position that they want to compel UGFA members who may be reasonably concerned for their safety to teach their courses in person and on campus (unless the member obtains a medical accommodation from the Occupational Health and Wellness Office or the Administration is restricted by relevant directives from public health officials). The UGFA’s position remains that members should decide whether they will teach in person and on campus in Fall 2021.

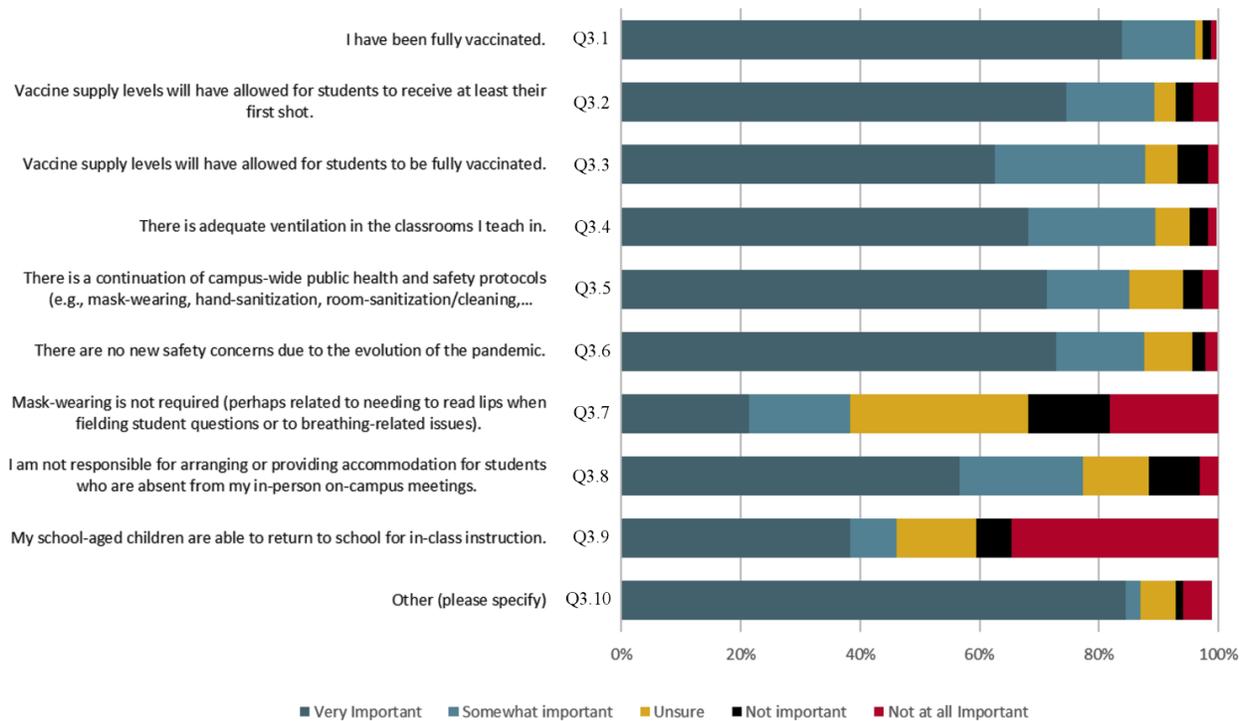
The presentation by Dr. Mercer on June 3 did little to allay the legitimate concerns of UGFA members. Although the UGFA provided the Administration with a list of questions we had received so that the list could be passed along to Dr. Mercer, her presentation focussed on vaccination rates and efficacy, with too little attention paid to specific questions about what a return to campus in Fall 2021 might look like. The feedback we have received from UGFA members regarding this meeting echoes our concerns. Excerpts from that feedback are attached below. Dr. Mercer acknowledged that there were risks associated with returning to campus, and she compared them to the risks of activities such as eating in restaurants and having your hair done in a salon. A crucial difference, of course, is that one might choose to avoid restaurants and salons, but the Administration will not allow you to choose to avoid campus.

JOINT SURVEY RESULTS

The joint survey drew 395 faculty member responses; the UGFA ran an identical survey of veterinarian and librarian members, getting 5 additional responses.

There was a roughly even split in members intending to teach their courses using in-person on-campus course delivery (46.8%) and not (53.2%). Responses to the question about the Administration changing Fall 2021 assigned teaching were also split, with 53% of members saying no and 47% saying yes (only 2.3% with “no provisions”).

A key question (Q3) asked how important certain conditions are to the personal “feeling of safety and/or ability to return to in-person on-campus course delivery.” The results are illustrated below:



The values for the two levels of importance of each Q3 condition are

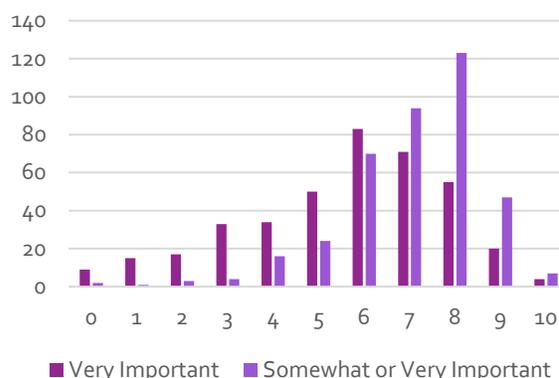
Importance	Q3.1	Q3.2	Q3.3	Q3.4	Q3.5	Q3.6	Q3.7	Q3.8	Q3.9	Q3.10
Very	83.8%	74.5%	62.5%	68.1%	71.2%	72.8%	21.4%	56.7%	38.3%	84.5%
Somewhat	12.3%	14.8%	25.2%	21.3%	13.9%	14.7%	16.9%	20.6%	7.7%	2.4%
At least Somewhat	96.1%	89.3%	87.7%	89.4%	85.1%	87.5%	38.3%	77.3%	46.0%	86.9%

The following table reports the number of respondents who gave N (from 0 to 10) of the Q3 conditions importance for them to feel safe to return to in-person on-campus teaching this Fall.

Importance	N	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
At least Somewhat	# members	2	1	3	4	16	24	70	94	123	47	7
	# members	9	15	17	33	34	50	83	71	55	20	4

We can visualize these results graphically, to the right.

The average number of conditions (Q3.1-Q3.10) identified as Somewhat or Very Important was 7.1, and the average number of conditions identified as Very Important was 5.6. **In other words, 6-to-7 conditions must be met for members to feel relatively safe to teach on campus.**



We can view these results in another way, by assigning numerical values to the word answers: 5 = Very Important, 4 = Somewhat Important, 3 = Unsure, 2 = Not Important, and 1 = Not at all Important. The mean response to each of the Q3 conditions is presented in the following table.

	Q3.1	Q3.2	Q3.3	Q3.4	Q3.5	Q3.6	Q3.7	Q3.8	Q3.9	Q3.10
Respondents	389	385	389	388	389	388	373	383	363	83
Mean	4.8	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.5	4.5	3.1	4.2	3.1	4.6

The fact that the average of almost 400 answers lands so close to the maximum value of 5 is telling and reflects the high level of concern amongst UGFA members.

It is worth noting that the small number of members who gave Not at all Important or Not Important responses to multiple conditions typically noted that they felt unsafe regardless of whether these conditions were met.

The results of the survey can also be seen in the many powerful comments that members submitted. Representative comments are included here, grouped thematically and edited for clarity and to protect anonymity:

HEALTH & SAFETY

“I feel the university is committing to in-person teaching when it is unclear that it will be safe. I am concerned about my health, and the health of my students, if in-person classes start up too soon. I would prefer if the University took a more cautious, evidence-based approach.”

“If mask-wearing is required, what protocol is in place for non-compliance? Also, the university is very active in recruiting international students. I am concerned about vaccine-resistant variants circulating widely on campus.”

“My concerns are related to public safety. I do not trust the judgment of the Administration.”

“Overhauling the classroom HVAC systems, replacing HVAC filters with enhanced MERV-13 filters, performing air flushing every morning in every building to replace indoor air with outdoor air [are required].”

“Need complete confidence that the university has outfitted classrooms with proper ventilation; that all student are vaccinated; that protocols are in place.”

WORKLOAD & STRESS

“University admin has their collective heads in the clouds regarding their current F2I plan but know that they can switch on a dime to remote delivery. I CANNOT waste my summer planning two delivery mechanisms for the two BRAND-NEW courses I am teaching in F2I, so it is purely a pragmatic choice in terms of minimizing my own disruption and maintaining my sanity. I am NOT excited about remote F2I delivery but the university admin is forcing me to plan conservatively due to their refusal to see the impracticality of their current dreams for F2I.”

“I was open to a hybrid option, one day in class one day on-line, but then I was told I would have to provide accommodation to those who could not or did not want to attend the in person offering. I think this last clause is unacceptable.”

“I have no idea what I’m doing in the fall as of yet, because the uni hasn’t shared their plans on how to keep folks safe. I believe they are jumping the gun and being overly optimistic, while ignoring the stress, anxieties, and fears of the faculty and staff.”

PEDAGOGY

“How can students shout from 6 feet with a mask on and have a meaningful learning experience?”

“I am unconvinced that the university has prepared the logistics for a campus in which classrooms need to be used differently and students do not expect to need to be present in class.”

“I taught remote asynchronously in fall 2020 and it went better than I thought it would. My student evaluations were good. Rather than be in a classroom with masks and distancing and worries about my health and my students’ health, I would prefer to teach again this way (remote asynchronously) until we can go back to regular in-class teaching and learning.”

“Hybrid teaching, that is in-class being recorded and made available on-line, will be technically demanding and add to instructors’ worries and responsibilities as equipment will fail in the most inopportune moments.”

“Instructors should not have to teach an ‘in person’ and an ‘online’ course, which are very different things.”

REPRESENTATIVE COMMENTS FROM DR. MERCER’S TOWN HALL, JUNE 3

MENTAL & PHYSICAL HEALTH

“We are also facing a psychological problem. They’ve been harassing us for a year and a half saying we have to avoid everything and everybody, and then they put us in class with tens or hundreds of people, overnight. It is precisely the wrong way to do things and it generates a lot of anxiety. Even if it does not lead to outbreaks or cases of COVID (unfortunately I do not think everything will go so smoothly) it will certainly make people suffer.”

“I don’t think the concerns about new variants or a possible fourth wave and this a pivot to remote in fall were adequately addressed.”

“Specifically, I do not understand why those already naturally infected with SARS-CoV2 are still recommended to receive vaccine. I am not an immunologist but always believe that natural infection produces the most effective immunity than the vaccine.”

“[Dr. Mercer] constantly referred to the current situation in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) and the projected, best possible scenario, for the Fall, ignoring that most of our students are from outside WDG. [She] did not address to my satisfaction question dealing [with] 1.) students who commute regularly from Peel Region, York Region, Toronto, and Hamilton, etc., [...] where the numbers are currently much higher than in WDG. She mentioned that they can get infected through car-pooling but did not address the issue of importing the infections to Guelph faculty & staff commuting from outside the WDG 2.) students, faculty, and staff living in multi-generational homes and crowded settings making social distancing impossible and risk of increased infections 3.) health vulnerable students, faculty and staff or living with vulnerable family members (e.g. very old parents, immuno-suppressed family members, unvaccinated children, etc.) by being forced to be in crowded classrooms and corridors 4.) variants of concern, in particular, the variant first discovered in India. The numbers of infected with this variant are going up, in particular in Peel region, and there is projection that by the end of July this will be the dominant variant in the Province.”

“Dr. Mercer stated that COVID-19 will be with us for very long time and that there is a risk associated with every activity (she mentioned going to a restaurant or getting a haircut). She ignored that many of us may decide not go to a restaurant or not to get a professional haircut (opting for a haircut by a willing and moderately skilled family member) until it is safe to engage in these and other activities. I saw a statement to this effect in the Chat, but it was ignored by Dr. Mercer. Furthermore, Dr. Mercer ignored potential mental health issues and stress of faculty and staff caused by premature reopening.”

“Dr. Mercer said that some of us will get sick with COVID-19, that it is possible. Even vaccinated individuals get sick and may die. My point is that there is a big difference in risk for somebody who is 18 or 24 than somebody who is over 60.”

OPERATIONS

“What can I do if a student won’t wear a mask?”

“The message seems to be we can just reopen in the fall. I am not interested in policing mask wearing, social distancing etc. I don't want that interaction with my students, it's hard enough sometimes getting them to put their phones away in class. I don't want to get into arguments, altercations, discussions about this issue and I imagine most of my colleagues and most of the staff have no interest in engaging this way either.”

“In particular, there was some unclarity as to whether or not there is likely to be a social distancing requirement in September. Rooms[are being] assigned on the assumption that there will be no social distancing and zero concerns about transmission: e.g. a course with an enrolment cap of 100 has been assigned a room with a capacity of 100, our classes of 50 cap have been assigned rooms with capacities of exactly 50, etc. Added to which, yesterday’s covid update memo said “Based on information from Public Health, we expect that by September physical distancing requirements will be reduced.” Which is it? Reduced implies some social distancing...It's quite confusing.”

“I think the most important point on which I am still not clear is whether Dr. Mercer currently believes that distancing will remain a requirement in the fight to control COVID this Fall. If distancing remains a requirement, then it seems clear to me that we will NOT be providing a ‘vibrant in-person experience’ in F21.”

“If the admin is hoping to have a spilt – partial in person, partial remote offering to address the lack of appropriate classroom space, who will determine which students attend in person and which ones are attending remotely? Is it a student preference? If it is – who enforces the maximum room capacity if a ‘remote’ student shows for a F2F lecture? Faculty? The Campus police? Is there any allowance for teaching loads under our DOE if we are expected to deliver the same content twice (once in person, once online?)”

“I know that admin really wants there to be face-to-face components. I hope that if it is made clear that their lack of communication, and of clear decision making regarding ensured compliance with safety policies, that it is through admin’s own inaction that faculty feel unsafe in the workplace.”

PEDAGOGY

“If they wish an online component, then they should create a distance ed section for the course.”