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Message to members on COVID-19

March 13, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Yesterday morning, UTFA's Joint Committee (the president and the vice-presidents) met with the Provost and other members of Simcoe Hall to discuss the Administration's approach to managing the COVID-19 outbreak, now described as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO).

UTFA wishes to support our members and the Administration in all efforts to manage this serious situation.

However, none of the memos and forms the Administration has distributed mention the importance of academic freedom and instructor autonomy. UTFA noted that we continue to have concerns about some of the phrasing in the Academic Continuity Policy, and we will take up these issues formally, as we have done in the past.

UTFA encourages instructors to be prepared to move teaching online and to consider course re-design, in the event of the declaration of a disruption. But we will defend members (faculty and librarians) who believe that they cannot implement the changes their unit heads are suggesting. We recognize that, embedded in take-home assignments, for example, is the obvious problem that the instructor cannot verify who is actually writing the assignment.

UTFA conveyed these additional points to the Administration:

1. A patchwork of information is flowing to the divisions, with some divisions generating more information and more frequently than others.

2. A central website should be developed and promoted, where **all** information about the University's response to COVD-19 could be found and where links to teaching resources could be easily located.

3. The Administration must take additional steps to help faculty move teaching online (should the need

arise), including supplying equipment and doing more to explain to all instructors, including TAs, how Quercus might help.

4. Lab research would potentially be under threat in the event of closure. The University has protocols and business continuity policies in the event of an emergency. It should make that information more readily available.

UTFA has also expressed concern about pre-tenure and pre-continuing status faculty, whose teaching and research are especially vulnerable in the event of a disruption. Any faculty member who believes that they will need more time before they are reviewed for tenure or continuing status should be sure to make an appointment with UTFA for advice. Contact UTFA on appointments matters at advice@utfa.org.

Please see these links on COVID-19:

WHO: https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses

U of T FAQs: https://www.utoronto.ca/message-from-the-university-regarding-the-coronavirus#faq

CTSI: https://teaching.utoronto.ca

Useful phone numbers:

Toronto Public Health Hotline: 416-338-7600

Hours: Monday to Friday 8:30am to 8pm and weekends from 10am to 6pm. Translation available.

Telehealth Ontario
Telehealth Ontario is a free, confidential service you can call to get health advice or information. A Registered Nurse will take your call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
Phone: 1-866-797-0000
TTY: 1-866-797-0007

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have questions or concerns. Write to me at faculty@utfa.org.

Cynthia Messenger

UTFA President

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