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Fall Teaching: Faculty Need Choice and Support

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Some divisions have announced that all fall courses, or at least those with 200 or fewer students, will be taught through hybrid models that combine online with in-person teaching. This announcement raises a number of significant concerns that UTFA is addressing with the Administration.

UTFA's position is that members should be free to choose their course delivery mode, within reasonable parameters related to health and safety in the context of a pandemic. Considerations include, but are not limited to, the following: the academic freedom that undergirds our members' right to determine pedagogical objectives; excessive and inequitable workload; and personal circumstances, especially those related to family status and other protected human rights grounds.

UTFA is aware that many members are being pressed to indicate what hybrid model they will be adopting, with no express option to teach online only. We have written to the Administration to object both to these restrictions and to the short timeline.

Pedagogical Best Practices

Hybrid delivery models may work well for some courses, but might not be appropriate in all instances. In addition, it might not be possible to meet the needs of two different groups of students – those attending online and those attending in person – equitably and effectively.

If you have good pedagogical reasons for wanting to teach your course in a certain way, and your approach complies with provincial regulations on COVID-19, then make your wishes known to your chair or dean.

Workload and Support: Delivering the Curriculum Online

Through surveys and personal correspondence, members have told the Association that during the COVID-19 crisis workload has been excessive and unsustainable. Over 1,200 members responded to UTFA's COVID survey. A significant proportion describe their workload as personally and professionally

overwhelming. Our members stepped up to the plate in March and April and did their utmost to complete their courses in the best way possible. The Herculean efforts of the spring cannot be maintained over the longer term. We urge the Administration to have more support in place for the fall term. This support could take a number of forms. Many of our members want more IT support, especially if they are contemplating capturing lectures for distribution over the internet.

UTFA's members reasonably expect that the online delivery of the curriculum will support academic integrity. Those who will hold online tests/exams must be supplied with software that is robust in terms of security. Faculty conducting large-group online exams must also have enough TA and staff support to run exams in multiple time zones. Both international and domestic students are terribly important to us. We cannot meet their needs if we do not have support.

The Administration has confirmed that all appointments and workload policies remain in place.

Developing and delivering hybrid courses will likely be even more time-consuming than teaching either online or in person. Article 4.2 of the workload policy (WLPP) requires that in considering the teaching component of normal workload, certain factors ***must*** be taken into account, including "mode of delivery" (#6), "contact hours, including in-class and outside of formal scheduled class time" (#7), and "course preparation" (which includes "extraordinary course preparation" and "preparation of courses delivered by alternate modes") (#11).

Article 4.2 can be used by individual faculty members and by groups of members within a unit to advocate for protections against the excessive workload that can come with preparing courses for online/hybrid delivery. For example, UTFA understands that some units have agreed to credit 0.5 FCE in recognition of the increased workload of dual-delivery courses. Other ways in which excessive workload could be mitigated include caps on enrollment, course banking, and increased TA and IT support.

The WLPP affirms the University's commitment to a fair, reasonable, and equitable distribution of workload, and a transparent process of workload allocation within a unit. We encourage all members to use the processes set out in the policy to manage workload.

If your chair or dean refuses to address your workload concerns, please contact UTFA for advice: advice@utfa.org .

Health, Safety, and Accommodation

In-person teaching will not resume unless provincial emergency orders are lifted and public health standards allow for physical distancing to be relaxed. There is still, however, a great deal of uncertainty surrounding COVID-19. The risks associated with in-person teaching can be expected to differ depending on factors including the physical layout of the classroom and the number of students in class at one time and over the course of the week.

The risks associated with in-person teaching will also vary depending on the health status of individual members and potentially family members in their household. In-person teaching may pose an unacceptable degree of risk to individual members who are older, immunocompromised, pregnant, or living with various underlying conditions.

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* requires that employers take every precaution reasonable in the

circumstances to protect workers' health and safety, and provides that workers have the right to refuse unsafe work. U of T's Health and Safety Policy commits the University to following *best practices*. Members who believe in-person teaching is unsafe for them may be entitled to refuse that work and have an assessment made. You may not have enough information right now to make that assessment, and you should not be required to do so in a vacuum. UTFA's position is that even if members have indicated their preferred mode of course delivery for the fall, they retain their right to engage in a work refusal under the *Act*, if warranted.

In addition, members are protected against discrimination on the grounds of age, sex, disability, and family status, among others. The University has an obligation to accommodate members who are unable to engage in any in-class teaching for health (including mental health) reasons, or potentially because of the health concerns of vulnerable family members in their household.

If you require accommodation, contact the office of Health & Well-Being

You can also make the request directly to your chair. Under normal circumstances, medical documentation would be required to support a request for accommodation. That may not be possible currently, but you should nevertheless make the request for accommodation, and explain why you are unable to obtain documentation.

Questions?

The COVID crisis has produced confusion and stress. UTFA is in regular communication with the Administration to advocate for our members. We have recently asked for a meeting with the Administration to discuss the issues outlined above.

UTFA is grateful for the legal advice that Goldblatt Partners supplied for this communication.

Please email faculty@utfa.org with questions or concerns.

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UTFA President

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