Published on *University of Toronto Faculty Association* (https://www.utfa.org)

U of T's Reopening Plan is NOT Safe Enough. We Need to Take Fall 2020 Online

July 28, 2020

For the past several months, UTFA has been raising concerns about the University of Toronto's plan to return to in-person learning, teaching, librarianship, and other academic work for the Fall 2020 semester. As you know, the University intends to have many Fall 2020 courses taught with an in-person component via dual-delivery/hybrid courses. It is UTFA's view that if implemented, this plan could jeopardize the health and safety of students, staff, faculty, librarians, and the greater U of T community.

Recently, we joined with a broad coalition of student groups and campus unions to create a petition calling on the U of T administration **to 'take a pause' on most in-person teaching and other academic work for the Fall 2020 semester** in favour of online-only teaching. **We are also calling on the senior administration to meaningfully consult with the leaders of campus unions, the faculty association, student groups, and joint health and safety committees**. The petition's title summarizes the message clearly: **U of T's Reopening Plan is NOT Safe Enough. We Need to Take Fall 2020 Online.**

I would like to encourage all UTFA members to sign the petition and to share it with colleagues.

There are many important reasons why we've taken this step:

- Epidemiologists and public health experts, including those at our own Dalla Lana School of Public Health, are alarmed at the deficiencies in the University's plan to re-open. Now is the time to exercise caution and take the time to get the plan right.
- Other universities within Ontario that are facing the same or lesser risks than those faced by U of T have opted to offer fall courses solely (or mostly) online. If "online only" is good enough for Harvard, why isn't it good enough for U of T?
- Emerging science suggests that close-range aerosol transmission is a likely spreader of COVID-19 and that loud talk exacerbates this possibility. Given the structure of in-person classroom lectures, many experts are concerned about the risks associated with in-person teaching. (See e.g., Katie

Mack and Gavin Yamey, “After Cruise Ships and Nursing Homes, Will Universities Be the Next COVID-19 Tinderboxes?,” *Time*, 16 July 2020, https://time.com/5867395/will-universities-be-next-covid-19-tinderboxes/)

- We’ve heard from many of you that while you normally strongly prefer to teach in-person and you find online learning challenging to implement (especially without proper tech support), you simply do not believe it is safe to do so yet. We have many members who are deeply anxious and concerned about the return to in-person teaching, and who do not feel that they have been given a real choice in the matter. Some chose dual delivery before it was clear what it would look like and no longer feel comfortable with the decision. Many others have requested to move to online-only teaching but have had their requests refused unless they can document specific medical needs for accommodation.
- Although the Administration asserts that “regular and meaningful consultation with unions and other employee groups has been ongoing since the start of 2020,” those consultations have not in our view been productive and meaningful. UTFA and other campus unions still have many serious concerns and unanswered questions.
- Since March 2020 UTFA has met with the Administration in multiple forums to try to reach agreement on COVID-related issues. We have raised concerns relating to health and safety, accommodation processes, emergency remote instruction/mode of course delivery, and workload. Our efforts included bargaining table discussions, attempts to negotiate a COVID-specific Letter of Understanding (LOU), more informal meetings, and a grievance mediation process. Despite numerous attempts, no agreement has been reached to address UTFA’s key concerns.

It is UTFA’s position that until the health and safety of faculty, librarians, staff, and students can be protected, in-person learning, teaching, librarianship, and other academic work should be paused. Time is tight to make a difference—please sign and share the petition.

Source URL (modified on Aug 17 2020):https://www.utfa.org/content/u-t-s-reopening-plan-not-safe-enough-we-need-take-fall-2020-online