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Update on Health and Safety

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Since I last wrote you with concerns about the U of T's plan for a return to in-person work for the Fall 2020 semester, UTFA and the coalition of employee groups advocating for improved health and safety measures have achieved some real gains

Our petition calling on the Administration to take a pause on most in-person teaching and other academic work where possible, and to consult meaningfully with faculty, staff, and student leaders received thousands of signatures (over 6500) and drew a widespread and sympathetic response from prominent media.

In the wake of that pressure, FAS Dean Melanie Woodin wrote to faculty and other lecturers on July 30th to acknowledge health and safety and other concerns with in-person teaching. She also announced an important change: "we need to pause briefly to reaffirm with you your preferred approach for Fall Term's course delivery." **For Fall 2020, faculty and other lecturers would now have the acknowledged right to teach online.** (Students received a different but related message.) Other units previously mandating dual-delivery teaching also granted faculty and lecturers the choice to teach online only.

When those who can work at home do so, those who cannot are safer.

If you require assistance in reaching an agreement with your unit head about teaching delivery in the Fall 2020 term, please contact advice@utfa.org.

Despite this success, many important issues remain unresolved, including the following:

- The expert advice of faculty members from the U of T's School of Public Health who are being regularly consulted by the World Health Organization, federal and provincial governments, and public health authorities, is being systematically ignored by the U of T Administration. UTFA is working closely with many of these professors who are informing the positions we are taking with the Administration;
- The University's senior Administration continues to refuse to meet jointly with the leadership of

UTFA and the campus unions to address our shared concerns;
- Important decisions related to health and safety, which our members, staff, and students are expected to bear, are still being made in a top-down fashion without shared or collegial governance or even meaningful consultation;
- Teaching Assistants (TAs) do not yet have the right to choose to teach online only (being given the choice to teach in person or to lose one's job is not a real choice);
- Several suggested changes to the new U of T Mask Guidelines that UTFA and the coalition put forward jointly, based on the expertise of leading epidemiologists and health and safety experts, were rejected without explanation by the Administration;
- The campus reopening plan still contains a wide range of gaps and deficiencies enumerated in our petition (please sign now, if you haven't already), and is based on out-of-date science about the nature of COVID transmission;
- The U of T General Workplace Guidelines is not consistent with "best practices available" in health and safety as is required by U of T's own policy, and continues to leave unanswered very serious questions related to airborne transmission within U of T buildings with inadequate (outdated, un-tested, or even non-existent) ventilation systems;
- Multiple requests by UTFA to the Administration, over several weeks, for relevant documents, including a list of the University buildings which require a replacement, repair, or upgrade to their HVAC systems have not been fulfilled; and
- Cleaning services have been contracted out in at least 18 U of T buildings, displacing U of T workers with new staff who will be far less familiar with the buildings they will be cleaning and disinfecting.

We are categorically opposed to the contracting out of cleaning and custodial services in U of T buildings, and encourage you to sign this CUPE petition.

UTFA continues to advocate for the principled view that the health and safety of all faculty, librarians, staff, and students must be protected through the delaying of a return to in-person teaching and other work, where possible, until at least January 2021.

Learn more about the science of COVID transmission and how to plan for a safe and healthy workplace at tonight's panel!

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UTFA President

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