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

Coalition of Toronto-area university staff call on Administrations to commit to transparency to accelerate a safe return to in-person learning

July 21, 2021

Toronto, Ontario – July 20, 2021 – As the Government of Ontario plans for campuses to fully open for in-person learning, a coalition representing faculty, librarians, counsellors, and staff across four Toronto-area universities (OCADU, Ryerson/X University, York University, University of Toronto) is calling on their Administrations to provide greater detail and transparency to allow for a confident and safe return to in-class learning this fall. The four campuses collectively teach 193,000 university students in Toronto.

“We strongly prefer in-person teaching and learning and we want to return to campus as soon as it is safe enough to do so,” said Terezia Zorić, President of the University of Toronto Faculty Association and a spokesperson for the coalition. “It is still not safe enough to return to campus and good intentions voiced by our Administrations are no substitute for concrete actions.”

The coalition has prepared a Health & Safety Checklist for a safe reopening that provides specific, measurable, and accountable steps to ensure students and staff can return to in-person learning with the confidence of knowing it is safe to do so. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities is permitting the post-secondary education sector to return to in-person activity this fall but continues to allow flexibility in safely delivering academic instruction in the mode that best suits the needs of students and institutions. The coalition is encouraging Administrations to use this flexibility and act accordingly until it is proven safe.

“We don’t want the return to campus to be a super-spreader event,” said Zorić. “University Administrations have announced very general plans with promising features in theory, but there is a disturbing lack of transparency in how those plans will implemented and measured, and what standards will be met in real life practice. We need to verify that the plans are being implemented, measured, and shared broadly.”

The coalition is offering each Administration their full cooperation with getting back to teaching and working on campus as quickly as possible. Until it is safe to return, the coalition is also calling on the Administrations to commit that no one will lose work as the result of a refusal to work in-person if it isn't yet safe enough to return to campus.

"Universities should be safe places and they should set a high standard for public health initiatives," said Laurie Jacklin, President of CUPE 3904 at Ryerson/X University. "Some of Canada's top public health experts are employed by Toronto-area universities and their Administrations should listen to what they have recommended to make our campus environments safe."

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Source URL (modified on Jul 21 2021):https://www.utfa.org/content/coalition-toronto-area-university-staff-call-administrations-commit-transparency-accelerate