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Omicron Update/End of Year Best Wishes

December 23, 2021

Dear UTFA Colleagues,

When we wrote to you last week we shared [a series of health and safety questions and concerns](#) we had been raising with the University Administration in light of the significant threat posed by Omicron. This email provides a brief update, including some positive developments, based on the Administration's responses to us in the last several days.

At an emergency meeting UTFA requested this Monday, we commended the Acting Provost and other senior Administrators for their [December 15 announcement](#) that halted in-person tests and exams and delayed in-person teaching and learning until January 31, 2022. We noted with appreciation their proactive approach to the surging variant of concern; the implicit recognition that a short notice requirement to 'pivot' to online exams would be untenable; and the clear acknowledgement that Omicron's threat to public health now requires serious new measures to reduce the risks to U of T and our broader community.

We also encouraged the Administration to make good use of the time being afforded us by the shift to remote work. UTFA requested again that the Administration consent to meet at one health and safety table with UTFA (including our public health experts) and all the leaders of the major employee and student groups. At such meetings, relevant information—including the key metrics that will determine when it is safe enough to return to campus—could be shared and discussed in an efficient and transparent fashion. And UTFA emphasized our members' and the students' palpable desire to obtain greater certainty as soon as possible about their courses for next term, especially regarding mode of course delivery. To that end, *UTFA formally requested that within the bounds of what is permitted by relevant public health authorities, and in dialogue with their chairs and departments, individual UTFA members be permitted to choose their mode of delivery for courses and instructional sessions they teach in Winter 2022.* While we did not reach agreement on this proposal, our conversations will continue in January.

UTFA will also be continuing our advocacy for a range of important health and safety measures, including

the need to: update the definition of “fully vaccinated”; revise indoor occupancy and density limits; provide N95 masks or their equivalents to students, staff, faculty, and librarians; expand the use of rapid testing; require the use of QR codes for entering buildings; and, work with UTFA to install and gather data from CO2/particle monitors in representative classrooms and occupied areas. The Administration did show some willingness to move toward UTFA’s longstanding position on the need to improve the University’s mask policy and will meet with us on January 7 to continue the conversation.

UTFA is proud to advocate on behalf of faculty and librarians at U of T. We appreciate that it has been an exceptionally difficult year for our members. We are grateful to all of you who have shared with us your concerns, perspectives, and suggestions for strengthening the work of the Association.

We will write to update you further on health and safety in early January, when we also hope to have a significant salary, benefits, and workload bargaining update, and information about which provisions in the [COVID LOU](#) will be continuing—as well as how you can make sure you have access to all the provisions within it to which you are entitled. (Note: since the CERF will not be extended beyond December 31, [spend your money now](#) if you haven’t already.)

Until then, we wish you a safe, happy, and restful winter break and a healthy New Year.

Sincerely,

Terezia Zorić
UTFA President

Jun Nogami
UTFA Vice-President, Salary, Benefits, Pensions, and Workload

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