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COVID LOU Extension—New Town Hall; Health & Safety Update

February 28, 2022

Dear Colleagues,

We write to provide you with three important updates:

A. You are invited to a new Town Hall;
B. The COVID LOU has been extended in some significant areas, including PTR; and,
C. The Administration has recently indicated that it intends to continue to require certain key health and safety measures for at least the remainder of this term.

A. New Town Hall – COVID LOU Extension & 2020–2023 SBPW Agreement

This month UTFA hosted four well-attended Town Halls for UTFA members to review the **January 25, 2022 Agreement on Salary, Benefits, Pensions, and Workload (SBPW)** that your UTFA team negotiated with the U of T Administration. The agenda included a presentation on salary increases, significant benefits improvements, and the process for referring policy proposals and other priorities identified by the membership to arbitration. Each presentation was followed by an extensive open question period. Members' feedback on the Town Halls has been extremely positive.

Now, as we report below, UTFA and the U of T Administration have also just signed off on an **agreement** extending some provisions of the **COVID Letter of Understanding (LOU)**.

Accordingly, UTFA is hosting another Town Hall. The agreement to extend the COVID LOU will be presented at the top of the agenda. Those who have not attended one of the previous Town Halls featuring the SBPW Agreement are encouraged to stay for the second half of this event to learn about the 2020–2023 Agreement and what it means for you.

UTFA Town Hall – Morning Session
Friday, March 11, 2022

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Where: Via Zoom

RSVP: Please register by email at **faculty@utfa.org**. Questions may be sent in advance to **faculty@utfa.org** or be raised, time permitting, at the Town Hall.

B. Agreement on extending COVID LOU provisions

We are pleased to report that UTFA has reached an **agreement** with the University Administration to extend some of the terms of the **COVID Letter of Understanding (LOU)**. The original LOU, first signed in August 2021, was structured to ensure that some provisions would automatically remain in effect if the University's operations continued to be impacted by COVID protocols, and others would need to be revisited if the protocols continued beyond December 31, 2021.

The terms now extended by this agreement include the following:

1. PTR assessment for 2021–22 will follow the same process as last year, i.e., a three-year average of merit scores, or the score of the current year, whichever is higher.

- Note that according to policy improvements negotiated in a previous round, once your PTR score is determined, a letter must be sent to you "**explaining the judgment** underlying the award of PTR. The letter must include the basis for evaluation in each of the [three] components of the appointment (e.g., the criteria for evaluation; points or a scale where used)."

2. On workload relief: as was the case last year, in 2021–2022 those instructors who are teaching *six separate new half courses* "in each case requiring the development of a new online or dual delivery/hy-flex", or who are teaching an *aggregate number of students that is 1000 or above*, will receive one half course relief to be taken in future years.

- Note that the first of these two provisions will help only a small number of members since it requires the preparation of six new half courses for the current academic year. At the same time, we are aware that many UTFA members have not been provided with the course releases or course credits to which they were already entitled from work done last year, and we are investigating those cases that have been brought to our attention.
- Note also that course enrollments in Y courses should be doubled for the purpose of calculating entitlement under the second provision; that is, full courses should be counted in the same manner as two half courses with equivalent enrollment.

3. The deadline to spend COVID-related expenses (CERF funds of $750) per member is extended from Dec 31, 2021, to March 31, 2022.

- This provision will be helpful to members who did not have the opportunity to spend their funds before the year-end deadline (including, but not limited to, those on leave). New members hired in 2022 are also eligible to use the CERF, to recover expenses they incurred since being hired.
- The deadline for filing for reimbursement remains March 31, 2022.

4. Although provisions within Section 6 of the **LOU**, Accommodation Guidelines, remain ongoing, UTFA will be meeting with the Administration to discuss the way the Accommodation Guidelines are being

implemented.

- We are concerned about the unnecessary delays and difficulties many of our members are experiencing when they seek medical accommodation via the Health & Well-Being and Family Care Offices.
- A key issue at hand is the burdensome practice of requiring medical documentation from specialists even when other qualified medical practitioners have documented a member's need for accommodation.

Other aspects of the **COVID LOU** remain in place, including the following:

5. Protections remain in place to ensure there will be no compulsory "dual delivery" teaching:

- The University Administration *will not require* any faculty member or librarian to deliver any one section of a course both remotely and in-person ("dual delivery", i.e., presenting the same course material in two different modes); and,
- any additional work associated with teaching multiple sections of a course in different modes of delivery *will count* in the assignment of workload.
- Members' academic freedom in carrying out their teaching activities will be fully respected and no actions will be required that are inconsistent with the academic freedom provisions of Article 5 of the **Memorandum of Agreement**.

6. Tenure and Promotion Committees may opt to convene online.

7. Course Evaluations:

- Any member teaching a course that normally includes in-person classes that could not continue in person due to COVID may determine whether the student course evaluations for that course will be considered in any academic review process, including promotion and PTR.
- *No adverse consequences will flow from a decision not to consider those course evaluations.*

We encourage you to read the **original LOU** as well as the **recent agreement to extend it** for more details. If you have questions or concerns, we encourage you to reach out to us at **advice@utfa.org**.

C. Health and Safety Update

Earlier this month many faculties and other academic units began their transition to mostly in-person teaching, while some units permitted instructors to leave their courses online until after Reading Week, or for the full term. Given the decentralized nature of the University's reopening plans, the experiences of faculty, librarians, staff, and students have varied greatly.

Throughout the pandemic, UTFA has pressed the Administration to adopt a series of measures—layers of protection—that would facilitate a safer re-opening of the University and to fulfill its obligation under the **U of T Health and Safety Policy** to, "where reasonable, ... strive to exceed the legislated requirements by adopting the best practices available to protect the University community." Our sustained pressure has led to concrete changes, including some meaningful improvements regarding water safety, masking, ventilation, filtration, and the vaccine mandate, that have made our workplaces safer.

With respect to ongoing decision-making about mode of course delivery, UTFA will continue to advocate for meaningful collegial governance, academic freedom, and faculty choice, i.e., the decision of individual faculty members to either remain online or teach in person or offer some blended modes of course delivery—based on their pedagogical judgements, personal circumstances, and the time and resources available to them.

The UTFA Health and Safety team continues to meet regularly with the Administration to advocate for a variety of measures to mitigate the risks associated with a large-scale return to in-person work, including ventilation verification and CO2/particle monitoring; the use of, and access to, N95 masks; and strategies to prevent overcrowding to improve the safety of our in-person working environments. Notably, we are disappointed that U of T's mask guidelines still allow for cloth masks and merely recommend the use of medical grade masks.

At the same time, both UTFA and the Administration strongly encourage all members of the University community to get vaccine booster shots (note that it is now possible to register booster shots on the UCheck system). Additionally, the Administration has indicated that U of T's vaccine mandate and UCheck system will remain in place for at least the remainder of this term.

Sincerely,

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

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