

TO: All MUNFA Members

FROM: The MUNFA Executive Committee

DATE: August 7, 2020

SUBJECT: Update on MUNFA's Pandemic Response Proposals

As reported in previous bulletins, on May 22nd the MUNFA Executive presented to the MUN Administration a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concerning a host of issues and concerns raised by Academic Staff Members (ASMs) during MUNFA's [COVID-19 Town Hall](#) on May 7th. In particular, the MoU addressed such critical matters as recognition of the increased workload that comes with remote instruction, appropriate flexibility in the Promotion and Tenure process, and assurances that contractual ASMs will not lose pay for cancelled course sections and will be compensated for work done to prepare courses prior to the start of teaching.

Unfortunately, we have made very limited progress in our negotiations with the administration. While some proposals contained in the MoU, such as those involving building access, are now largely moot, on most other concerns the administration has indicated an unwillingness to accommodate MUNFA's requests.

To be sure, the administration has shown some receptivity to our suggestions regarding flexibility in the promotion and tenure process, although we have yet to conclude a final agreement in this regard. In other areas, however, the administration has demonstrated an almost total lack of recognition of the profound challenges the University's pandemic response has imposed on MUNFA members.

Emblematic of the administration's overall attitude has been their response to MUNFA's proposal that teaching norms be adjusted – in the form of a reduction of one course – to account for the additional work entailed by the transition to fully remote teaching in the fall and winter. In a letter of July 10th, Faculty Relations rejected our request, writing that “the University does not view the pandemic as being a rationale to depart from the established norms”.

The administration also directly rejected or was effectively unresponsive to proposals regarding sabbatical leave accommodations for those on sabbatical when the pandemic began, normalizing early start dates for Teaching Term Appointees (TTAs) during the 2020-21 academic year, and assurances that tenure-stream and other ASMs on continuing appointments would not be unduly disadvantaged in the event their courses are cancelled as a result of the pandemic.

In short, notwithstanding messages of encouragement to faculty from some senior administrators, the administration has demonstrated very little interest in substantively supporting ASMs through the challenges of the global pandemic.

Where do we go from here? The MUNFA Executive will, of course, continue to engage with the administration on those issues where agreement seems at all possible. We will also continue to make the case to the administration that it is critical to include ASMs directly and meaningfully in planning regarding the university's pandemic response. In this regard, we emphasize the obvious: the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. Indeed, it is likely to be a part of our lives for years to come. As such, if and when a second (or third) wave of infections hits the province, there will be no justification for a repeat of the overly centralized and autocratic approach to governance that characterized the onset of the crisis at this university. Emergency measures are only for emergencies.

Given the limited progress we have so far made with the administration, we also encourage members to advocate for their working conditions at the individual level. In view of the increased time demands resulting from the pandemic, especially for those with significant caregiving responsibilities, members may seek adjustment of their workloads from their unit heads. As noted in an earlier [bulletin](#), MUNFA is informed that some TTAs have had success negotiating earlier start dates to allow preparation time for remotely delivered courses; we encourage other members to follow suit, as applicable. We also encourage ASMs to find ways to take account of the inevitable new time demands associated with the transition to remote teaching, for example, by divesting themselves of responsibilities in other areas where possible. And of course, where measures imposed by the administration violate members' rights under the collective agreement, we encourage members to consider filing a grievance.

While it seems the administration does not see the global pandemic as a reason to “depart from the established norms”, the MUNFA Executive knows that the situation is very far from the norm, and we are fully cognizant of the myriad challenges members have faced since the start of the pandemic. As ASMs prepare for an unprecedented return to teaching in September, as always, we encourage members to get in touch with MUNFA (munfa@mun.ca) with any workplace-related concerns.