



January 26, 2022

Dr. Vianne Timmons,  
President and Vice-Chancellor  
Memorial University  
St. John's, NL

**Re: Ongoing Concerns with MUNL's Pandemic Response**

Dear Dr. Timmons,

Despite the most recent update from the administration, MUNFA continues to receive emails from Academic Staff Members (ASMs) who are concerned with the University's decision to mandate all courses with enrollment of 99 or fewer back to in-person teaching. At the time of writing this letter, more than 50% of MUNFA bargaining unit members have responded to a survey concerning the return to in-person teaching. Of those who have already responded, 72% answered "No" when asked, "*Do you feel the health and safety information and guidance currently available from Memorial University's administration is adequate to ensure students, faculty and staff are safe, and feel safe, in on-campus classes?*"

Given that the return to campus is only days away, and there remain significant concerns relating to the available health and safety information, it is imperative that the administration provide clear guidance to the University community on the following matters:

- The University's most recent update indicated accommodations will be considered for individual students who are immunocompromised or who have immunocompromised family members but offered no guidance for employees in such a situation. Given the significant time it can take to consider workplace accommodation requests, **will the administration allow increased flexibility to individual ASMs who are immunocompromised or have other health-related concerns and/or those with family members in a similar position?**
- The University's most recent update encourages flexibility/accommodations for individual students. Given the increased workload associated with providing course material in multiple formats, administration is placing instructors in an untenable position – having to choose between taking on more work while already overburdened or having to inform students they are unable to provide the flexibility requested. **Does the administration plan to compensate the increased workload associated with providing courses in multiple modalities?** Given the suggestion for students to contact Department Heads if instructors are unable to provide the requested flexibility/accommodation, **what is the administration's plan if such a scenario arises?**
- The University's most recent update suggests that "Post-secondary institutions are exempt from the Public Health guidelines for gathering size, given the extensive controls in place and the classification of schools as essential activities." As ASMs have received conflicting guidance on this matter, **we request that you provide clear information**

directly from Public Health indicating that Memorial University is exempt from guidelines such as physical distancing, and direct us to communication from Public Health Officials where post-secondary institutions have been defined as “essential.”

- Given the likelihood that instructors will contract COVID-19 and/or develop symptoms requiring them to self-isolate, **what is the University’s guidance for instructors delivering in-person courses who miss multiple days of instruction while self-isolating?** To be clear, we do not support any expectation for instructors required to self-isolate as per public health guidelines to pivot back to remote course delivery while in isolation.
- While we note the University’s mask guidance only requires a 3-ply surgical mask, in a meeting on Friday, January 21, 2022, MUNFA representatives were informed by Dr. Florentine Strzelczyk, Provost, that any faculty member who would like an N95 mask, or a transparent mask, will be provided one by the University. As this information has not been communicated broadly to the university community, **please confirm that individual instructors (and students/staff) will be provided an N95 mask. Furthermore, what is the process for instructors to request N95 masks or is the administration intending to distribute masks to all instructors required to return to in-person teaching?**
- We note that the most recent update from the university references a ventilation assessment of all classrooms on the St. John’s, Grenfell, and Marine Institute campuses. Given the contradictory information we have seen provided by the Chief Risk Officer to ASMs in the past when raising concerns about ventilation, **we request that the full assessment be made public to the University community.** Furthermore, **MUNFA formally requests a seat at the COVID-19 Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Working Group** referenced in the University’s COVID-19 FAQ.

In closing, I am compelled to convey that a strong majority of MUNFA members do not agree with the direction in which the Administration is proceeding. Whatever the intent of Administration, the effect on MUNFA members is to further undermine their trust in the University’s leadership. To not provide clear health and safety information, or justification for radically changing health and safety protocols, is being experienced as a disregard for the health and safety of the Memorial University community.

Given we are only days away from the return to campus, faculty expect a detailed response from the administration within the next two days on the above noted concerns, with clear evidence/documentation to support the changing university policies.

Sincerely,



Dr. Josh Lepawsky  
President, MUNFA

cc: Dr. Florentine Strzelczyk, Provost  
Greg McDougall, Chief Risk Officer  
Geoff Williams, Director – Faculty Relations