

TO: All MUNFA Members

FROM: The MUNFA Executive Committee

DATE: January 20, 2022

SUBJECT: Concerns Regarding the Return to In-Person Teaching

Following the announced return to in-person teaching on January 31st, the MUNFA Office has received a large number of emails from members expressing serious concerns. The MUNFA Executive Committee is scheduled to meet on Monday, January 24th, 2022, where we will discuss next steps and further advice for our members. **We welcome input from all Academic Staff Members (ASMs) to help inform these discussions.**

Since the beginning of the pandemic, faculty have expressed concerns over the senior administrations' pandemic response due to a lack of adequate health and safety information, unclear/confusing rationale for decisions being made, and an unwillingness to meaningfully consider input from members of the university community. Below is a non-exhaustive list of concerns we have heard from ASMs and communicated to the administration:

- The impact on students and instructors of quickly shifting course delivery methods and evaluations, and a lack of supports for the effective delivery of evaluations.
- The possibility of on-campus exposures, specifically the short and long-term health risks for those exposed, and the impact of disruptions in learning when students or instructors are required to self-isolate.
- The lack of clear guidelines/protocols on how on-campus exposures will be communicated to the University community. Given the changes to testing requirement for the province, we fear the administration will not communicate if/when there are on-campus exposures.
- The inability to maintain required social distancing in classrooms, labs, and common spaces on campus. Given Memorial's current infrastructure, we question whether it is possible to adhere to even the minimum density requirements in all spaces as outlined in the current public health guidelines.
- The need for proper assessment of our ventilation systems. Faculty concerns about ventilation have been dismissed by administration throughout the pandemic, frequently being told that ventilation is one of the least important controls to prevent the spread of COVID. MUNFA was informed on January 19th, 2022 that the administration is only now conducting a proper assessment of ventilation in classrooms on the St. John's campus and that 7 spaces have been deemed unusable until ventilation upgrades can occur.
- The need for the University to provide effective masks to all students, faculty, and staff required to be on campus, and clear communication on the proper use of these masks.
- A lack of compassionate accommodations for faculty who are high-risk, or have family members who are high-risk.

While we understand the desire of many faculty to return to in-person teaching, the health and safety of our university community and the broader community we exist within is our primary concern. Given our province is seeing the highest number of cases since the beginning of the pandemic, including 9 deaths since January 2nd, and lacking clear information from senior administration on health and safety protocols, MUNFA is very concerned about this decision and we welcome further input from our members on next steps.