



Dear President Frémont and Vice-President Academic and Provost Scott,

We write today on behalf of University of Ottawa academic staff, students, teaching and research assistants, and support personnel to convey our shared concerns about your administration's current plans for the 2021-22 academic year, and to propose an alternative course of action that will more effectively meet the needs of our university community.

It bears noting from the outset that this letter is motivated by our frustration and consternation with the top-down approach your administration has thus far taken with regard to the planned partial return to campus for the Fall semester, the lack of substantive information provided about these matters, and by continued delays in concluding Letters of Understanding establishing a fair operational framework for our working conditions and students' learning conditions. To date, our repeated requests to be included in the decision-making and planning processes have seemingly gone unnoticed. Indeed, we are perplexed by the lack of consultation and democratic decision-making in the planning of the partial return to campus, and the apparent failure to give adequate consideration to issues of pedagogy, equity, and health and safety.

The alternative course of action we propose is structured around three domains of concern:

1. A democratic mechanism with representation from all inter-union coalition members needs to be introduced to ensure plans for a partial and, eventual, full return to campus are pedagogically sound, equitable, and safe for all. The ongoing failure to consult unions, student groups, and the functional health and safety committees is an impediment to this goal not least because it fails to communicate, let alone establish, plans for addressing such rudimentary issues as: *How to proceed in the face of disparate vaccination levels among members of our university community? What protective measures will be in place to ensure the health and safety of our university community? Who will be responsible for managing flows of people in building corridors and hallways? Who will be responsible for sanitizing lecture halls and seminar rooms between classes? Who will be responsible for enforcing adherence to covid-related protocols and rules? Will students awarded teaching assistantships have a choice not to work on campus? What contingency plans are in place should another lockdown be imposed?* Democratizing decision-making is essential to ensure our respective memberships' diverse voices, experiences, and knowledge are taken into account and heard as we consider returning to in-person activities.

2. The opportunity the pandemic provides for the university to seek to impose a new teaching model in the short and longer term is not lost on anyone. Yet, to date, there have been no substantive consultations with inter-union coalition members about your administration's current plans to introduce a bimodal/hybrid/HyFlex teaching model for the Fall semester. Equally troubling, what little information our respective memberships have received has frequently been

contradictory and, at times, seemingly inadequately thought through. Effective bimodal/hybrid/HyFlex teaching that succeeds in providing students with rich interactive learning experiences normally is designed and implemented around small in-person class sizes and accompanied with multiple teaching assistants both inside and outside the classroom. To date, no detailed information has been provided to our respective memberships about the support measures that will be put in place to ensure that those students participating online are not at a disadvantage in terms of learning opportunities, and that they can fully and actively participate in bimodal/hybrid/HyFlex courses. Inter-union members are unanimous in viewing your administration's silence about these important issues as a serious risk to upholding the quality of education delivered at our institution and for which it is known. Recognizing that under the right conditions a partial return to campus, subject to public health guidelines, could be beneficial to morale and mental health, we propose a more viable option of dividing certain courses into smaller sections, with these sections designated exclusively for either in-person or remote teaching. This approach would provide students and university personnel with a choice about returning to campus in the manner in which they are most comfortable as well as ensuring the upholding of a high standard of student learning experiences.

3. The demands associated with continuing to successfully realize our university's mandates throughout the pandemic bear consequences on the physical and mental wellbeing of students and university personnel alike. Recognizing that the pandemic disproportionately impacts members of equity-seeking groups as well as those with dependents, and acknowledging our university's limited capacity to provide adequate mental health services to all community members prior to the start of the pandemic along with the identified gaps in our health benefits for mental health services, additional investments for health and wellness resources are necessary for a safe return to campus. We therefore request the creation of a Special COVID-19 Recovery Mental Health Fund accessible to all members of our community to assist with offsetting the costs associated with getting the care they need, whether on or off campus.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on our community's wellbeing will be felt for years to come, and a successful return to "normal" cannot be achieved without the input of our community.

In the spirit of collegiality, and with our University' best interest in mind, we put forward three demands:

- 1) Democratize the decision-making process for a partial and eventual full return to campus by establishing a joint committee, with representation from all members of the inter-union coalition.
- 2) Cancel plans for introducing bimodal/hyflex/hybrid teaching on a large scale for the Fall 2021 semester. Instead, create smaller course sections to provide community members with the main options of in-person or remote learning, with the bimodal/hyflex/hybrid teaching format being limited to a maximum of 10% of course offerings in order to allow for experimentation and learning.
- 3) Create a Special COVID-19 Recovery Mental Health Fund to support community members seeking the care they need to restore their overall wellbeing.

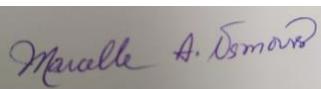
We hope the Central Administration will join the inter-union coalition in charting a path to a successful, pedagogically sound, safe, and equitable partial and full return to campus.

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