

Dear UGFA Members:

Much has happened since our communication yesterday morning, and we appreciate the feedback we have received from many members.

It should go without saying that we recognize that this crisis has an impact on public health, on the economy, and on society more broadly. There are many organizations looking after these aspects of the crisis. The legal obligation of the UGFA is to protect the rights of our members as guaranteed under the collective agreement, even, or especially, when times are tough. This is what we will continue to do.

At three p.m. on Friday, the University President sent a communication to the University community outlining the measures it is undertaking to address the COVID-19 crisis. Following this general communication, the Administration also produced the final version of its “Update” for faculty and other instructors. It appears that this Update has been distributed to faculty through the administrative hierarchy, so some members will perhaps not receive it until Monday. This Update details the Administration’s suggestions for how members may choose to deal with the elimination of in-class courses and in-person exams.

UGFA members are experts in their disciplines who perform their teaching duties with care and integrity, supporting and showing great compassion for their students. UGFA members have the expertise to determine how the academic mission of their classes would best be served. They determine the method of delivery of their course material and the nature and grading of student work, and, ultimately, they have the obligation to submit final grades for students in their classes.

Even in this extraordinary period, UGFA members remain the guardians and stewards of the academic mission of the University. While the most recent communication from the Administration is careful to make suggestions, the UGFA has heard from concerned members whose Deans are openly talking about “moving courses online,” and so on. These members put together the messaging from the different levels of Administration and feel rather pressured to make particular choices. UGFA members need not follow directions from the Administration on how to deliver their courses for the rest of this semester, or at any time. This point has been central in the UGFA’s discussions with the Senior

Administration over the past several days, and, indeed, President Vaccarino is rather clear on this point, writing, “Faculty members and instructors will, of course, have decision-making discretion and options and are encouraged to communicate with their deans and department chairs regarding this process.” The UGFA also encourages you to communicate your decisions to your Chair, but reiterates that the decisions are yours to make.

Given the unique constraints in effect, we suggest that you consider carefully how you would like to finish up your course, obviously, while maintaining its integrity. For example,

- will any remaining assignments be given, or will such assessments be modified or dropped;
- if 60% of the course grade has been assessed, will the final exam proceed in any case? We know that there can be compassionate reasons to do so;
- if a final exam will take place, does the planned final exam need adjusting? We have already heard from members who intend to modify their planned final exam to be an online multiple choice exam, even when they find that option undesirable; and
- how will any remaining material in the course be covered? Additional readings, self-directed work, or something else?

Our earlier communication explained our concerns about the potential collective bargaining implications of some choices being made en masse — yes, even during this period, it is the UGFA’s obligation to have and communicate to you those concerns — but, in the end, each of you must make the decisions you can live with for your course, based on your expertise.

Many members have pointed out that student course evaluation/questionnaire results will likely be fundamentally damaged by the removal of their preferred teaching mode, changes to the course assessments, the removal of the bargained right to have an in-class course evaluation, and the chaotic nature of the situation, in general. This issue is of particular concern for our tenure-track and contractually-limited members. The UGFA has pressed the Administration to make this switch: if members choose to have online course evaluations, they may then choose to include any results in their Assessment File. We are aware that at least one Chair has communicated to their Department that the preceding

sentence will be the protocol used, but the UGFA has not received official agreement from the Senior Administration.

Additionally, looking ahead, UGFA members scheduled to teach face-to-face courses in Summer 2020 who intended to teach using traditional methods are encouraged to contact the UGFA office.

If you are concerned about how to approach the remainder of the semester or feel pressure to make particular choices in your teaching during this period, please don't hesitate to contact the UGFA office.

The UGFA office can be reached by email at facassoc@uoguelph.ca.

Sincerely,

Herb Kunze, UGFA President

Mary DeCoste, UGFA Vice-President