



Representing Faculty, Librarians,
Veterinarians & College Professors

News & Views

August 2021



Dear UGFA Member,

On August 12, the Administration announced that “the University will be mandating vaccinations for the University of Guelph community including faculty, staff and students at our Guelph and Ridgetown Campuses and indoors at all U of G-managed field stations.” This announcement was followed the same day by a Town Hall meeting featuring presentations by Interim President Yates and others from the University Administration.

On June 10, we wrote to you with the update that the Administration’s actions at that time constituted an abandonment of its negotiations with the UGFA on a COVID-19 Letter of Understanding (LOU) for Fall 2021. Both before and after the collapse of negotiations, the UGFA was urging a cautious approach to Fall 2021, but the Administration pressed ahead with its plans for a “robust on-campus experience.” At the August 12 Town Hall meeting, Interim President Yates told us that the Administration’s decision-making has been guided by science and focused on the health and safety of the University community; we also heard at this meeting that the Administration’s goals of 60% of all courses having some face-to-face component and the cap of 250 students in a classroom were not based on science, but were instead a reflection of what the Administration considered to be “robust.” The long-predicted “fourth wave” is now upon us, and the newly-announced vaccination mandate, for which Interim President Yates told us the Administration must still “develop the details,” is further evidence that the Administration’s sanguine assurances that everything would be fine were ill founded. We were told at the Town Hall that we may once again be asked to “pivot,” as we head into a semester that is far from normal and without the guidance that an LOU would have provided. It is telling that one of the most-heard voices at the Town Hall meeting was that of Aaron Miller, whose title is “Director, Marketing and Digital Engagement.” Surely this reflects the fact that this Administration is not focused on the health and safety of the campus community as much as on its desire to be seen as such.

In our proposed LOU language, we were asking that individual UGFA members be permitted to take into account their own unique concerns for their health, and for the health of those in their care, and choose for themselves how they would carry out their teaching in Fall 2021. Instead, UGFA members who, for any number of reasons, were fearful about a return to campus in Fall 2021, were told that, except under certain circumstances, they would be compelled to return to campus. We know from the many communications we have received from UGFA members that some will be reassured by the vaccine mandate, while others will not be. In any case, we are left with a great many questions that went unanswered at today’s Town Hall. We have asked for a meeting with the Administration, at which we will attempt to get answers to many questions, including the following:

What assurances will the Administration provide that their vaccine mandate, whenever the details are developed, will protect the health and safety of UGFA members and others in the University community during the COVID-19 pandemic?

What options will the Administration provide for those who continue to have concerns about their health and safety or the health and safety of those with whom they live?

What will the Administration require of those who are not vaccinated for medical reasons or on human rights grounds? Or of those who decline the vaccine for other reasons?

Will rapid testing be available on campus?

When will the Administration provide transparent information on how physical distancing requirements, occupancy limits, cleaning schedules, and appropriate traffic flow on campus will be upheld?

How will the Administration enforce a mask mandate, or any other public safety hygiene requirements that may be in place?

When will the Administration make public an assessment of each building on campus (including offices, classrooms, stairwells, building entries and exits, corridors, washrooms, elevator lobbies and cabinets, study areas, labs, libraries, and any areas in which people congregate)?

How will the Administration notify UGFA members of outbreaks and positive cases of COVID-19 among their students, colleagues, and others with whom they come into contact while on campus?

Given that the Administration abandoned its bargaining of an LOU with the UGFA for Fall 2021, how does it see its vaccine mandate vis-à-vis its obligations and our rights under our collective agreements?

We will communicate the Administration's answers to these questions to you as soon as we can. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact us if you have additional questions.

With best wishes,

Mary DeCoste, UGFA President
Herb Kunze, UGFA Vice-President