

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA Faculty Association

March 19, 2020

UMFA President's message to Members

Hello everyone,

Needless to say, these are turbulent times. I hope all of you, and your families and loved ones, are safe and healthy.

The pace required to adapt to changing circumstances is unprecedented — many of you are having to find alternate means to deliver our courses, labs, and myriad other forms of instruction with only a few days' notice. While many are being pressured to put their lectures online, it's important to note what was expressed in Senate by the Provost on Monday: the changes you make should be done using your best professional judgement. Otherwise put, you have the academic freedom to modify your instruction as necessary.

Remember, you're not delivering an 'online course' but finding a way to complete the term in a reasonable way, given the circumstances. Do your best, and remember that as long as this basic requirement is met, how exactly this will be done is your academic decision to make.

Recently a CATL webpage regarding alternative modes of assessment was broadcast via UM Today. I recommend you check it out – it can be found here: <https://centre.cc.umanitoba.ca/assessment-alternatives/>

In addition to ensuring that Members who are teaching have the necessary freedom and resources to fulfil their responsibilities, UMFA has identified many concerns that we are trying to address with the administration:

1. The administration has not made sufficiently clear to Members that you are not preparing 'online courses', but are instead being asked to bring your courses to a reasonable conclusion. We're pressing the administration to make clear to everyone, through official channels, that the modifications you make to your courses, labs, etc., are to be done using your best professional judgement and not based on restrictive directives from Deans, Directors, or other administrators.
2. Where many of us are working on electronic provision of course materials, there's an increased risk of illicit copying and distribution of our Intellectual property. We've asked the administration to remind students of their obligations in this regard, and asked that the Copyright office be prepared to offer help when IP violations are discovered.
3. As your materials weren't designed for online instruction, despite best efforts there will inevitably be negative effects on teaching effectiveness as we bring the semester to a close. Where the VP Research has put restrictions on certain forms of research, we'll see negative effects there, too. We've asked that the admin agree to direct Deans and Heads to take this into consideration when evaluation time comes around. We've also asked that SEEQs not be

administered for the same reason. We've urged the administration to recognize that SEEQ's are likely to have even less validity under these circumstances than usual.

4. Similarly, if we're required to practice 'social distancing' for an extended period, the effect on probationary members' research programs may translate into issues with their tenure applications. We've requested that maximum untenured periods be extended should social-isolation go on for a long period.
5. Conference and research travel has been curtailed. We've asked that unused travel and expense funds be automatically rolled-over into next year (funds are replenished on July 1 each year). Similarly, we've asked that those members on RSL who can't complete their research/study projects because of the pandemic be allowed to return to work and have their RSL credits restored to their "bank", as is currently done in the case of sick leaves (if you're in this situation in the near future, let us and your Dean/Director know ASAP).
6. Librarians' and Archivists' vacation year comes to an end soon. We've asked that any unused vacation days be automatically rolled-over into the next vacation year.
7. We're concerned that Members will be asked to deliver purely online courses in the summer session. Any such move can't be imposed, but must be negotiated with the Association. We've asked for assurances that such a negotiation will happen.

Ensuring that our Members, our students, and all the workers in the UM community are safe, that their livelihoods are protected, and that the education we provide is the best possible under the circumstances is a top priority. While there are many issues here, topmost are:

- Many of our Members are still being asked to be on campus. We need to ensure that they are able to work remotely if possible, that their working conditions are safe, and that arrangements are made if their work conflicts with family responsibilities such as children now at home. If you are at risk and need to work off-site, but are be denied such leeway, let us know – we can help!
- Members of other unions should have their livelihoods protected. The university has significant financial resources, and looking after loyal, hardworking employees must be a top priority. Please inform yourselves of what is happening in your unit — if people are being laid off, advocate on their behalf. Let us know, too!
- Advocate for our students: we know them and the stress that they are under. Ensure administrators understand that we must come up with options that recognize that not all students have state-of-the-art laptops, good internet connections, healthy living conditions, or are even in the same time zone anymore.

Please do not hesitate to let us know of other concerns you may have or difficulties you encounter – contact the office at x8272 or by email at FAUM@UMFA.ca. Rest assured that our staff are taking precautions, too, and working by phone and online when necessary.

We understand that, like us, our administration is having to make many decisions quickly in a changing environment, and mistakes and errors in judgment occur. By working together, we hope to ensure that we get to the "right places" as quickly and collaboratively as possible, and we all need to be kind and supportive.

Best wishes,

Janet Morrill
UMFA President