



Dalhousie Faculty Association

December 13, 2021

Sent via email: Provost@dal.ca

Dr. Frank Harvey
Provost & Vice-President Academic
Dalhousie University

Dear Dr. Harvey:

RE: Vaccination policy response

In your memorandum of December 8, you elaborate upon Dalhousie's revised COVID-19 vaccination policy by outlining required actions and dates, and highlighting possible consequences for Faculty, Staff, and Students who do not meet the requirements. We appreciate these necessary clarifications, but we remain concerned about several issues that directly impact the health and safety of our Members and indeed the entire University community.

You have repeatedly noted that the health and safety risks of COVID-19 are best mitigated by having multiple layers of protection, because any single measure has limitations. We agree completely with this assessment. It has been known since the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic that the likelihood of viral spread is minimized when people remain physically distanced. As we are witnessing right now at St. Francis Xavier University, the possibility of a significant outbreak is real even when vaccination rates are extremely high and people follow existing policies around gathering limits and masking. The health risks from an outbreak are greatest for individuals who have pre-existing health conditions, are unable to be vaccinated, live with other vulnerable dependents, or are waiting to receive a booster shot. Many of our Members fall into one or more of these categories. Our Members are concerned about the increasing pressure, or in some cases explicit directives, from senior academic leaders to return to "face-to-face" instruction in the Winter term, because they know that this removes the most important layer of protection against the spread of the virus and its variants. Senior academic leaders should receive clear direction from your office to remain flexible and encouraging of individual decisions to use on-line and remote alternatives to traditional in-person forms of instruction. This flexibility should extend beyond the kinds of formal accommodations that are required by law. The on-campus experience will be greatly enhanced if we can avoid an outbreak on campus by taking advantage of opportunities to engage with each other in ways that limit physical contact.

Trust is an important aspect of employment relationships, especially during a public health emergency. But this trust must be earned. Given that the policy in place for the fall semester was not enforced despite the availability of data clearly showing the extent of non-compliance, many of our Members no longer trust that a policy of this kind going forward will in fact keep people safe if it is not clearly executed and monitored. Your latest memorandum provides important details about the new vaccination policy, but it leaves several important practical questions unanswered. In order to rebuild a level of trust that the

vaccination policy will actually keep people safe, we require immediate responses to the following questions.

1. Exactly how and when will sanctions for non-compliance be enforced? Several possibilities have been noted in your December 8 memorandum.
 - If a student is non-compliant, how will it be determined which sanctions will be imposed?
 - What timeline will these sanctions follow? (e.g., will students be removed from class lists as soon as they are non-compliant, or will there be a series of warnings?)
 - How will students' class attendance be monitored during the period in which they are non-compliant?

Through the Campus Check system, it should be straightforward to flag someone who has not complied with requirements, and to impose an appropriate sanction. However, it is quite another matter to ensure that the sanction is respected and enforced if necessary. Our Members need to know how this will be achieved.

2. How will our Members know if there are individuals in their classrooms and laboratories who are not compliant with the vaccination policy? We suggest that each instructor should receive data about each of their classes on a frequent and regular basis that lets them know who is permitted to be in attendance, so that they can make an informed decision about the safety of their working environment. This could take the form of an updated weekly class list including only those individuals who are permitted to be in attendance. Such a list would not disclose any confidential information. Instructors should be adequately supported by a clear and effective process in the event that unpermitted individuals attend classes or laboratories.

The threat of COVID-19 remains clear and present. Uncertainty about the degree of protection from current vaccines in the face of new variants and the gradual roll-out of booster shots means that the need for multiple layers of protection is as important now as ever. Given that we are quickly approaching the end of term when most students, faculty and staff will be taking a much-needed break, we look forward to your response in the next few days. We also anticipate that these clarifying details will be broadly shared with all students and faculty.

Sincerely,



Dr. Tara Perrot
President, DFA



Dr. David Westwood
Chair, Grievance Committee

- c. M. Shinyei
K. Fierlbeck
B. MacLennan