

March 27, 2020

Sent via email: provost@dal.ca

Dr. Teri Balsler
Provost & Vice President Academic
Dalhousie University

Dear Dr. Balsler:

Re: New grade options for students for winter term

We respect and share everyone's concern with supporting our students at this difficult time, but the e-mail announcement of March 26th was alarming: there was no indication of who made the decision (just "we"); it overturned decisions faculty had been required to make quickly and under difficult circumstances to transform their syllabi, just days into the implementation of those new syllabi; there was no discussion at, even notice to, Senate. Grades are a general responsibility of Senate and a specific responsibility of course instructors, based on the principles of academic expertise, academic standards, and academic freedom.

The university must continue to maintain accountability and proper governance to ensure the academic integrity of our programs. The university gave faculty little time to come up with a plan to finish the Winter 2020 term, but they came up with plans suitable to their courses. Now that has been substantially modified, adding to already significant workload issues and integrity concerns. We know that the DSU asked for such a change, but they knew how it should be done: they "[urgently call\[ed\] on the Dalhousie Senate](#)," a body that includes faculty and students across Dalhousie's Faculties, ensuring broad participation in, and oversight of, any significant discussion of academic regulations. This is a Senate matter, and there was no immediate threat to safety that demanded otherwise.

The Dalhousie senior administration needs to facilitate emergency online meetings of Senate to deal with matters as they arise in the wake of the pandemic, and reaffirm its commitment to academic freedom and the integrity of academic programs, as well as the governance and accountability procedures that protect that integrity. In particular, the senior administration must ask the Senate to consider the grading proposals described in this memorandum. Clause 17.14 of the collective agreement requires DFA members to comply with the grading regulations that are established within its jurisdiction:

"Members shall comply with procedures and deadlines for reporting and reviewing the grades of their students and with other regulations, procedures and deadlines

as may be established or authorized by the Senate, Faculties, Schools, Colleges or Departments of Dalhousie University, provided these are consistent with this Collective Agreement and are published.”

In our view, the unilateral imposition of these grading processes by senior administration is improper and beyond your jurisdiction.

We appreciate the administration’s rapid action to protect everyone’s health and comply with instructions from the province, but we also need to protect the academic mission for our students, our faculty, and our programs with transparency, accountability, and proper governance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Julia M. Wright', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Julia M. Wright, PhD, FRSC
DFA President

Cc: Kevin Hewitt, Chair of Senate
All deans