

# NEWS YOU CAN USE

## President's Message: Update on the Pandemic Response

by Julia Wright, DFA President

I hope you are all safe and coping well under these extraordinarily difficult circumstances, now compounded by grief over the violence last weekend in our province. We hadn't planned on a newsletter this month, but obviously a lot has been happening that was not planned two months ago.

First of all, let me just say that I have always thought of Dalhousie colleagues as remarkable not only for the very high quality of their work but also for their deep commitment to our students and to the academic mission. The response in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how profoundly accurate that picture is. When this term ends, please take a moment to think about all that you and your colleagues have accomplished and protected over the last few weeks. It really is impressive.

In the DFA office, of course, we're well aware of the challenges that you have all faced: radically rethinking the last quarter of your courses on little notice, while adjusting other work that you do, including cancelling research travel, and adapting to this unprecedented way of life. You have been managing on the fly the effects on your own mental and physical

health, caregiver responsibilities (children, partners, parents), supporting graduate

students and research teams, setting up a home office, and solving a flurry of problems. Even getting groceries now requires more planning, and more than a little stress over new procedures and concern about safe physical distancing.

At the DFA (virtual) office, we have been looking out for DFA Members on various fronts, including: possible sabbatical deferrals; interrupted sabbaticals (see [30.21b](#)); copyright concerns (see our [overview](#)); effects on reappointment, promotion, tenure, and so on (there's some information on the administration's Sharepoint site, but it's hard to find so we've pasted it below); access to labs and other research resources; continuing surprises about teaching; and serious issues linked to collegial governance, including the [new grading policy](#) and the more general absence of Senate from discussions about online teaching and program integrity.



We have met a number of times with the administration to address specific matters. We have extended the work of the Association Board Committee (through which the DFA and Board representatives normally work on issues that arise), so that it now meets regularly to deal with the effects of the pandemic on DFA Members and matters governed by the Collective Agreement. We have also raised concerns about inconsistent and unclear messaging.

We of course recognize that the public health emergency required rapid action to protect the health and safety of everyone at Dalhousie, and I'd like to reiterate our appreciation to the senior administration. Dalhousie was the first university in the province to end in-person classes, and we are all safer for it. Senior administration have also been facing enormous workloads, trying to find a path through this unprecedented crisis and dealing with a torrent of e-mails. On matters that intersect with the Collective Agreement and DFA work, we might have been able to help more if they had consulted with us before making significant decisions, but they have chosen another path.

The lack of Senate meetings has only compounded the rift between decision-making and academic expertise, including specific knowledge of our programs and working conditions. Congratulating us all for working hard doesn't help us get all of this difficult, extra work done. It is our continuing position that decisions which affect DFA Members' working conditions and academic matters must be made in the context of the

Collective Agreement and university policies, and we have sent [a letter](#) to that effect to the senior administration.

We are posting materials specific to the DFA and the Collective Agreement on the DFA website under a COVID-19 tab. You will see there that, in addition to working on issues raised by our Members, the DFA has also been in contact with other unions, including all other Dalhousie unions: NSGEU 77 & 99, PSAC (postdocs), and CUPE 3912. The group issued a [Joint Statement](#) early on, and this alliance has grown week by week and now extends across the province. Sharing information and expertise is essential as we look for the best way forward. In that spirit, we have also updated the usual DFA review of [university finances](#).

From an "operational" perspective, the DFA office continues to function to its usual high standard. Staff have shown creativity, resilience, and rigor in transferring work to makeshift home offices, including new protocols for DFA finances. The DFA Finance Committee has taken steps to ensure that staff have the internet access, software, and equipment that they need to work from home, and I'd like to publicly thank Barb, Lynn, Catherine, and Kristin for generously using their own homes and computers in this crisis as well as for all of the vitally important work they have done to make the continued functioning of the DFA office possible.

Dave Westwood, as President-Elect, has played a key role in all of these measures as well as the continuing work we are doing for members, and we will all be in excellent hands when he becomes President next month. He is now ending his second year on the Association Board Committee, so he has been at the centre of important discussions about COVID. No one is better qualified to lead us in the next year.

The DFA Executive Committee is meeting regularly, in order to ensure that they are practicing due diligence over office operations, finances, committees, and so on, as we alter the means, but not the principles, of our work. It is also heartening to see candidates come forward as nominees for 2020-21, recognizing the critical importance of DFA oversight and support.

As you will have seen on Wednesday, we will have an excellent Executive for the coming year, including an accomplished President-Elect, Tara Perrot, to support Dave Westwood as President. It is worth noting as well that most Faculties--from Agriculture to Science--have a member on the new Executive, adding to the range of expertise at the table, and I thank them all for their willingness to serve in this important year.

Once again, please contact us if you are having problems and can't get a solution from your chairs, directors, or deans ([julia.wright@dal.ca](mailto:julia.wright@dal.ca) or [dfa@dal.ca](mailto:dfa@dal.ca)). Because we're not in the room for administration planning, and messages vary between deans, we need your help more than ever to do what we can to help you.

*From the Dal Sharepoint site, Remote Working:*

**“Employees applying for tenure, etc.**

As the university takes appropriate steps to address the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognize that many faculty (including librarians and counsellors) are facing disruption to their work. If faculty require additional time before applying for reappointment, tenure, continuing appointment, or appointment without term, we strongly encourage them to apply for deferral. Faculty can request to defer consideration for up to two (2) years.

All deferral requests stemming from COVID-19 disruptions will be granted. The university will also be reminding faculty of this option closer to their reappointment, tenure, continuing appointment, or appointment without term application dates. Faculty should be assured that they will not be penalized for any lost productive time, but they do not need to worry about applying for deferrals right now. A more detailed communication, outlining the deferral process, will be sent to all faculty in May.”

## **DFA AGM: Wednesday, May 13, 2020 @ 2 pm RSVP required**

**RSVP to [Kristin.Hoyt@dal.ca](mailto:Kristin.Hoyt@dal.ca) on or before Friday, May 8, 2020.** Before the meeting, you will receive via email a meeting link and password, as well as a link and voter key to enable you to cast a vote on motions presented at the meeting. We will be discussing the DFA budget for 2020-21, as well as providing an update on how the DFA is working on behalf of its members to address issues arising during COVID-19.

## **Employee and Family Assistance Program Offers Trauma Support**

As Nova Scotians cope in the aftermath of the recent tragic shootings, please be reminded that the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) offers the following resources:

- Immediate and confidential EFAP services are accessible 24/7/365. Call **1.800.387.4765** or visit **workhealthlife.com**. The website also has additional info on coping with trauma.
- **Crisis Support Line now open:** Morneau Shepell has opened a Crisis Support Line for anyone in the community in need of professional emotional support in relation to these events. **The Crisis Support Line is open 24/7 and can be reached at: 1-844-751-2133. This resource is available to anyone, not just members of the Dalhousie community.**

## **Dental Premium Holiday**

For the months of April, May and June, Dal employees will not have premiums for dental coverage deducted from their pay cheques.

## **CAUT Town Hall Series: COVID-19 and the Academic Job**

COVID-19 has had an enormous impact, in a short period of time, on the academic workplace. CAUT launched an online town hall series titled COVID-19 and the Academic Job, to support academic staff in this constantly changing and uncertain time. The next town

hall, scheduled for April 30, 2020 from 2-2:45 pm EST, will look at shared governance in the time of COVID-19.

While the seriousness of the current situation demands appropriate flexibility, the approval of any modifications to academic policy should remain the purview of academic governance bodies, consistent with principles of shared governance. This town hall will discuss practical steps to help ensure that these principles are upheld, as well as lessons for academic staff about how they might organize to strengthen governance at their institutions. Learn more and register [here](#) for the upcoming event.

---

**Dalhousie Faculty Association** [dfa@dal.ca](mailto:dfa@dal.ca) <http://dfa.ns.ca>

Twitter ... [@dalfacultyassoc](https://twitter.com/dalfacultyassoc) FaceBook ... [www.facebook.com/dalfacultyassoc](https://www.facebook.com/dalfacultyassoc)

