

# MOUNT ROYAL FACULTY ASSOCIATION ADVISORY

To: All MRFA Members

From: Mount Royal Faculty Association

Date: October 7, 2020

**Re: COVID-19 Advisory #2**

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On Friday October 2, 2020, the University announced its decision to continue remote delivery for most courses offered in Winter 2021. This *Advisory* from the MRFA offers faculty guidance on how this decision impacts faculty work under the Collective Agreement. Please review COVID-19 Advisory #1 (sent via email on September 3, 2020) since its guidance remains in effect with respect to unpaid leaves, annual and sabbatical reporting, teaching evaluations, and T2200 tax forms.

Note: The Advisory draws on data from the COVID-19 Survey to which **almost 50 percent** of all faculty responded and shapes the advice we offer below. Thank you to everyone for taking the time to respond to the survey.

## **Faculty Work in Winter 2021**

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Classes will be offered primarily via remote delivery in Winter 2021. However, where on campus delivery occurs, the Association insists that all faculty must remain safe during the pandemic and that no faculty, especially those with medical conditions, be forced to deliver courses on campus when remote delivery can be accommodated. Faculty who have concerns about requests to work on campus should contact [Derrick Antson, Labour Relations](#) Officer of the MRFA.

Just under half of faculty responding to the Survey reported having dependent care responsibilities. Balancing remote delivery demands is difficult for all faculty, but they fall especially heavy on those with dependent care responsibilities. The University has stated that unpaid leaves will not be unreasonably denied to accommodate faculty dependent care duties, but other options exist.

Full-time faculty can request, through their Chair, that their instructional load be rebalanced by asking for workload to be shifted to Spring 2021. Chairs may also find flexibility in the department average (Article 14.6) to accommodate different workloads. All adjustments are subject to approval of the Dean. If you meet with the Chair or Dean, you are entitled to have a representative from the MRFA accompany you during these conversations. Also, please be advised and be mindful that these changes may have an impact on contract faculty.

Full-time faculty may also request an instructional load that falls below the minimum SICH specified for their specific work pattern. For example, Article 14.4 states that an Employee on Teaching-Service pattern must teach “no fewer than 336 scheduled instructional course hours annually [SICH], or more than 432 [SICH]” with the normal teaching load being around 384 (the equivalent to about 8 courses). Article 14.5 states that faculty on the Teaching-Service-Scholarship work pattern shall teach no fewer 240 SICH. Chairs and Deans will assess the impact of these requests on the department average. Exceptions are subject to approval by the

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Dean. Please note that lower instructional loads could result in lower pay. Faculty should contact Human Resources to assess any impact a reduced workload may have on benefits.

### **Workload Appeals**

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If Full-time faculty remain unsatisfied with the assigned workload, the workload can be appealed under Article 14.12 at any time. A workload appeal will result in a workload appeal committee being struck. A member appealing workload should be prepared to nominate a faculty member from the same discipline or Academic Unit to sit on the Appeal Committee. The Association will appoint a representative; the University will nominate two representatives. Article 14.12 contemplates swift resolution to workload appeals; however, given the timeframe, faculty should expect to work until a final decision is reached. Starting to teach courses in a semester does not mean an appeal is settled.

Please reach out to Derrick Antson, MRFA Labour Relations Officer, with any questions or concerns pertaining to workload matters.

### **Addressing Work-Life Balance, Mental and Physical Health Concerns**

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In the COVID-19 survey, 86 percent of respondents reported an increase in work related to student emails, lesson preparation and other remote delivery tasks. Seventy-five percent reported finding it difficult to maintain a work life balance. The following strategies have been shared by faculty members who have found these helpful in managing workload demands:

- Use the MRU calendar to delineate times when you are unavailable;
- Set specific times for students' questions to be answered via Google Meets;
- Provide a policy to respond student emails including: timeframe to expect a response and hours during which email will be read (e.g. Between 9 AM and 5 PM).

Members should report workplace health concerns related to remote learning to the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee

<https://www.mtroyal.ca/EmploymentCareers/HumanResources/EnvironmentalHealthSafety/index.htm>. Please also report these concerns to the LRO.

Mount Royal Recreation has re-opened to faculty and staff from Monday to Friday 11 AM- 7 PM. All MRFA members have a free MRU Recreation membership as part of their employment at Mount Royal. Using the Rec Centre can offer an opportunity to be physically active and de-stress from the demands of remote delivery.

Be certain to document any difficulties or negative experiences related to following this advice in annual reports, student evaluations, and to the [MRFA Labour Relations Officer](#) so that we can track the situation.

### **Compensation for Additional Work Related to Remote Delivery**

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Faculty who responded to the survey reported that they engaged in 61 or more hours to prepare for remote delivery in Fall 2020. And 30 percent report that they put 100+ hours of additional work into preparing for remote delivery.

The Association continues to insist that additional work related to remote delivery must be acknowledged financially, not just with words of gratitude and thanks. This message is being consistently conveyed to the Administration.

### **Accessing Professional Development Funds to Cover Remote Delivery Costs**

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Over 50 percent of faculty surveyed reported that remote delivery has required them to cover teaching-related costs themselves. These costs range between \$500 and \$2,000 dollars, with some faculty reporting spending more than \$2,000 to conduct remote delivery.

The Association insists that the Employer cover these costs and acknowledge downloading more invisible costs such as higher electrical bills and internet charges, which were formerly optional but now required to work. The Association continues to press for T2200 forms to be issued when CRA guidelines are revised. Please keep all receipts so that the appropriate claims can be made if and when CRA rules are amended.

The Association again maintains the Employer must assume the costs of remote delivery; members should not be burdened by making up the Employer's shortcomings with using personal PD allotments or other funds designated for professional development to cover the costs of remote delivery. However, given the University's current stance, the Association encourages faculty to access the following available funds to help offset their teaching costs.

- 1) **Underspent Faculty Development Committees (FDC) Funds.** Due to the pandemic, costs for attending conferences have been reduced, leaving available monies in the FDC accounts. **NOTE: Unspent FDC funds are absorbed into the University's budget.**
- 2) **Contract Faculty PD Fund.** Article 18.6 stipulates that the University must maintain a professional fund for contract employees. This fund has a substantial amount available for reimbursing costs up to \$1,200 per year on a first-come, first-served basis. Click [here](#) for details about how to access this fund.

The COVID-19 survey suggested that many Full-time and Contract faculty are reluctant to apply to these funds because they believe either they and/or their expenses may not qualify. The Association is working to reduce barriers and ensure clear processes for application. **Note: Internet charges, office supplies, and some furniture expenses are eligible for reimbursement.** Contact your Department representative on your FDC, if you have questions.

### **Annual Reports**

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Since annual reports are important elements in tenure and promotion processes, faculty should detail the impact of COVID-19 in their annual reports so that future committees can take account of the pandemic's effects when making decisions.

Given the current technical problems with Faculty-180, faculty are reminded that under Article 12.4.6, they have the right to submit a paper version of the report. Faculty who do so should submit a memo stating this right and copy the Association for tracking.

### **Student & Peer Evaluations of Teaching**

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The current MOU re. Continuing Impacts of COVID-19 modifies some of the requirements regarding Student Evaluation of Teaching (Article 28.4) and Peer Evaluation of Teaching (28.5). For Chairs, Deans, and committees that utilize Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPoTs), they must do so taking into consideration the impact of COVID-19. Further, where applicable, the Committee Chair must remind the committee members of this obligation in exercising their deliberation, weighting SPoTs as a lesser criteria. Additionally, Tenured Employees have access to an alternate student evaluation quota, and may choose:

- i) to maintain the requirements within Article 28.4.1 (at least one (1) per semester),
- ii) to do two (2) evaluations in Winter 2021, or
- iii) if applicable, one (1) in Winter 2021 and one (1) in Spring 2021.

\*Note: the required number of student evaluations of instruction remain unchanged for all other categories of employee. The Association will press management to re-examine its stance on teaching evaluations in light of the decision to continue with remote delivery.

### **Peer Evaluation of Teaching**

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Peer evaluators are obligated to review the best practices for evaluation of online instruction, a document prepared by the Academic Development Centre (ADC). The Association encourages faculty members and evaluators to have realistic conversations regarding how the current alternative delivery model enacted during the pandemic fits within the previously established framework of online teaching and appropriately note the impacts that COVID-19 has had on the delivery of teaching. Those evaluated should add remarks about the challenges of remote delivery so that they will be considered in future processes such as tenure, promotion and reappointment.

### **Looking Ahead**

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The Board must recognize the pandemic will have long-lasting implications to our institution and on faculty, namely:

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|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. Appointment processes,  | g. Compensation and benefits,  |
| b. Retirement,             | h. Professional development,   |
| c. Tenure processes,       | i. Leaves from the University, |
| d. Promotion processes,    | j. Collective bargaining,      |
| e. Performance evaluation, | k. Diversity and equity, and   |
| f. Workload,               | l. Workplace environment.      |

The best way to address these concerns is through collective bargaining where a negotiated settlement can provide a long-term process to ensure the pandemic's impact is not forgotten. Meanwhile, the Executive Board will consider how best to address these concerns through extending and/or revising the current *Extension of the MOU on COVID-19*.

### **How to Reach Us**

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The Association has also created two mechanisms whereby members are able to offer further input related to COVID-19. A [Pandemic Comment Form](#), where members can provide anonymous input specifically related to their experiences working from home and transitioning to remote delivery. You can also send thoughts to [office@mrfa.net](mailto:office@mrfa.net). The current MOU re. [Continuing Impacts of COVID-19](#) is also available on the MRFA website.