

Topic: Ongoing COVID-19 Considerations

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Hello Mount Royal Faculty Association members,

With the one-year mark of the pandemic approaching, the MRFA office is preparing to remain in its remote delivery framework until September. As we continue with remote delivery this semester, the Association wants to emphasize the importance of mental health and the measures it suggests can help with COVID stress, anxiety and burnout.

This advisory highlights the Association's efforts to take concrete measures to alleviate the ongoing effects of the pandemic and to highlight the range of available resources available to help support members.

## **The Association's Efforts to Reduce Workload.**

We have heard that the demands of remote delivery, the pandemic combined with increased responsibilities associated with dependent care responsibilities, especially for those with children have increased stress leading to burnout. On the service front, the Association has taken a leadership role in several fronts:

### **Reducing/Canceling Meetings**

- The Association enacted the University's suggestion to keep Thursdays as meeting-free as possible. The Board directed its committees and staff to reorganize Committee meeting schedules accordingly and with the exception of a few committees (e.g. the Executive Board and the Negotiating Committee), this was accomplished in early January.
- In February, to free up more time for members, the Executive Board directed its committees and staff to reduce the number of meetings that are currently planned, asking that when possible, topics and committee work be done asynchronous to accommodate members' other work/life commitments. The Association has reduced the number of committee meetings by about 18%, freeing up around 276 hours for committee members.

### **Email Communication**

- The Association has also given its committees and staff the directive that, as much as possible, Association business, including email, should be conducted in business hours (8:30-5:30), except in urgent situations.
- Committees and staff are not expected to respond to emails on weekends or during evenings.
- The Association encourages members to use the "schedule send" function when working during non-business hours.
- In recognizing that asynchronous work also creates a slower pace, the Association directed committees and staff that two working days is considered a prompt response to emails and actionable items, subject to emergencies.

The Association has engaged the MRU Coalition partners, the MRSA and SAMRU, in discussions about expectations related to email contact between students, staff, and faculty.

In doing this, there was consensus reached around several points.

- While working/emailing outside of regular business hours is not encouraged, students/staff/faculty need to be able to organize their schedules to respond to work/life commitments. The Out of Office function can provide a message indicating when a response can be expected.
- That students/staff/faculty should use their best judgement in determining the urgency by which work/emails needs to be addressed,
- That there is not an expectation that students/staff/faculty respond to work/emails outside of regular business hours.
- That 48 hours to respond to email is a sufficient standard for something to still be considered “timely”.
- That no one (students/staff/faculty) should be penalized for establishing a work/life balance and not working outside of business hours.

The Association has also had considerable conversations with the Employer, requesting that they take firm action to reduce the burden on members caused by the pandemic. The Association has requested that the Employer:

1. Acknowledge the reduction in service and scholarship as a result of dealing with the demands of remote delivery.
2. To reduce its expectations with respect to service and scholarship when full-time faculty submit annual reports for 2020-2021 academic year.
3. Provide a commitment that faculty will not be penalized (e.g. in the tenure and promotion processes or in the contract reappointment process) for reducing their service/scholarship and/or for altering their teaching pedagogy.

To date, the Employer has offered no firm commitment to take action.

### Existing Supports Focus on Supports.

The pandemic has created more anxiety around personal finances. Here are supports that member can utilize in emergencies.

### **MRFA’s Compassionate Fund**

Regulated by Clause 2 of the [MRFA Policies and Procedures](#), this fund is an emergency support fund to support member facing an extraordinary financial crisis. Please email [office@mrfa.net](mailto:office@mrfa.net) to apply.

### **MRFA’s Child Care Assistance Funds**

Regulated by Clause 3 of the [MRFA Policies and Procedures](#), this fund provides a 60-day interest free loan to members to allow them to accept a spot in a Child Care Centre. Please email [office@mrfa.net](mailto:office@mrfa.net) to apply.

### **Health Benefits Related to Mental Health Supports**

Research is showing that mental wellness during the pandemic is at more risk than ever. The multiple demands of working from home, caring for children or parents, and maintaining a life during COVID are taking a toll on workers across the country. Here is a list of resources that members can access to deal with mental health and wellness issues:

## MOUNT ROYAL FACULTY ASSOCIATION MEMBER ADVISORY

- **Mount Royal Wellness Webpage** includes a number of resources as well as access to Homewood support program open to all employees.
- **MRU’s Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP)** is a professional, confidential, and proactive service to support Employees with a wide range of personal, family and work-related concerns. More information can be found on [MRU’s Website](#). The EFAP can be accessed by calling 1-800-663-1142.
- **Your Benefits Plan:** Regulated by Article 16 of the [Collective Agreement](#), the Health Benefits that the Employer offers vary depending on an Employee’s rank and appointment category. These are specific supports for mental health and wellness

	Full-time Employee	Contract Employee
Psychologists or Social Workers	Coverage of 80% of costs, to a maximum of \$1,000 per person per benefit year.	
Health Spending Account	\$1,000 on the commencement of the benefit year.	\$500 on the commencement of the benefit year.
Personal Spending Account	You can choose to allocate your credits between your Health Spending Account and Personal Spending Account	You can choose to allocate your credits between your Health Spending Account and Personal Spending Account

Note: Article 16.8.1 regulates Contract Employee’s eligibility for Health Benefits. Additional information can be found in the [Sun Life Financial – Your Group Benefits \(Faculty\) Booklet](#) and the [Sun Life Financial – Your Group Benefits \(Contract Faculty\) Booklet](#). For full details and limitations, see the relevant booklet.

### **Ergonomics & Accommodation Requests**

Make sure you have the right equipment to do your work. The Employer is legally obligated to provide a safe workplace environment, which includes ergonomics and accommodation requests. For more information please consult [MRFA’s February 1, 2021 Advisory](#).

### **Professional Development Funds**

While we encourage Employees to request that the Employer cover the cost of the extraordinary developments related to remote delivery, the MRFA recognizes the Employer’s unwillingness to do so. The [MRFA’s November 20, 2020 Advisory](#) highlights other funds that can be drawn upon to cover the costs associated with remote delivery.

Please be sure to self-assess your mental health and be sure to your professional judgment to help maintain a sustainable work life balance. The good news is that we are nearing spring and vaccines are more available. We will continue to get through this pandemic.