



MRFA Statement on Return to Campus Plans

Under terms of the Collective Agreement, Mount Royal University is obligated to maintain a safe and healthy workplace, especially as the University prepares for faculty, staff and students to return to campus and in-person teaching in August and, in larger numbers, in September.

The Association notes that the University has taken some encouraging measures to create this safe working environment, including reducing the number of classes taught in person, enforcing traffic flow restrictions and mandating masks in classrooms, laboratories and when groups of more than twenty people assemble. These are important steps to ensure a safe workplace in these times.

The Association is aware the University administration is reviewing its own return to campus plans in light of the plans of the University of Alberta, University of Calgary and University of Lethbridge to have rapid testing for those coming on campus. Over the past week, media reports have noted that some other post-secondary institutions have followed MRU and made masks mandatory. Other institutions are still considering their plans. To be clear, the provincial government's inaction has left each university and college to manage this fourth wave largely on its own. Earlier this week, [CAFA](#) called on the Minister of Advanced Education to take all necessary steps to ensure safe campuses, including the use of vaccine passports. So far, the Association has not been informed of the Minister's response, if any.

The below table indicates the announced back-to-campus plans of other Alberta institutions, although this is a very preliminary summation. CAUT national data can be viewed [here](#).

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| University of Alberta | Mandatory Masks in all indoor spaces. Rapid Testing with Vaccine Exemption | Implementation plans are unclear. |
| University of Calgary | Mandatory Masks in all indoor spaces. Rapid Testing for all who come on campus with exemptions for those who are vaccinated. | Implementation plans for rapid testing are not yet public. |
| University of Lethbridge | Mandatory Masks in all indoor spaces. Rapid Testing for all those coming to campus | Implementation plans not public at the moment |
| Bow Valley College | Mask Mandate | No other plans known at the moment |
| MacEwan University | Plans to implement a rapid testing program for September. | Implementation details to be announced. |

The Mount Royal Faculty Association's Perspective

The MRFA shares the goal of ensuring that all members of the campus community have a safe and healthy environment. Looking at the scientific evidence so far, the preponderance of [information](#) suggests that ensuring all people on campus have been fully vaccinated remains the best practice for providing a safe workplace. We also note that there are more universities and colleges requiring students, staff and faculty to be vaccinated to be on campus. We note that both the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina are among those who have taken this approach. In a snapshot of faculty opinions this week, the Bulletin's Question of the Week had a relatively high response rate and the results there suggest that many MRFA members prefer stronger measures, including vaccinate mandates, vaccine passports and on-campus rapid testing in return to campus plans.

Based on these findings, the MRFA believes a vaccine mandate for faculty, staff and students is the preferred way to ensure a safe and healthy workplace, provided that individuals who cannot be vaccinated based on medical or other protected grounds recognized by the Alberta Human Rights Act can request an accommodation. The Association has also reviewed and supports CAUT's list of suggested [guidelines](#) that must be considered with this approach.

We also recognize that there are many [issues](#) that arise with this approach.

- While we hold that any vaccine mandate should include proof of vaccination, this must have appropriate safeguards in place to ensure that privacy concerns are addressed.
- This information must be used solely for the purposes intended and for only as long as required.
- The Association also strongly advocates a non-punitive approach in which accommodations for those unable or unwilling to comply are made available, including, but not limited to, the option of remote delivery.

Rapid testing has been adopted by several Alberta universities. To be effective, however, rapid testing must meet certain thresholds. For example, it must be administered to all coming on campus. These tests must be frequent and sufficient to ensure safety. We also believe proof of vaccination must be provided in order to be exempt from such testing, subject to appropriate accommodations for human rights and medical exemptions.

The Association supports Mount Royal's mask mandate. We believe it is a good first step, but there are many questions about implementation and compliance for which we are seeking answers. There are also concerns about the scope of the mask mandate. As COVID-19 is an [airborne virus](#), the Association believes Mount Royal should go further with its masking mandate to ensure a safe campus environment. The Association advocates that Mount Royal immediately adopt a policy, similar to that which is in place at the University of Calgary, wherein masks are mandatory in all indoor and outdoor common areas where physical distancing is not possible.

Other Steps the Association is Taking

1) Occupational Health and Safety: The Joint Occupation Health and Safety Committee has not been engaged in the return to campus plans. The Association is calling for the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee to meet to review and offer input into the return to campus plans as required by legislation.

2) Supporting Vaccine Clinics: Faculty are encouraged to get vaccinated now, since it will ensure the highest level of protection is in place by the start of September classes. The Association is pleased to hear the University is working to have on-campus vaccination clinics in September and is prepared to support these.

3) Campus Community: We will continue to work with our Student and Staff Association partners to ensure their health and safety needs are protected.