

September 23, 2021

Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides,
Minister of Advanced Education
Government of Alberta (Office of the Minister of Advanced Education)
107, 10800-97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

RE: Official Request for Enhanced Public Health Measures for Alberta's Post-Secondary Sector

We the undersigned represent the elected leadership of 8 post-secondary Faculty Associations from across Alberta, and are issuing this joint letter to express our concerns regarding the health and safety of our campuses as they re-open in the 2021-22 Academic Year.

Over the past 18 months, post-secondary Faculty and staff have demonstrated an enormous capacity to adapt to a disorienting new world, and their efforts have ensured the vitality of our sector (an important cog of Alberta's economic engine) throughout the darkest moments of the current global pandemic. This "pivot" was one of necessity, as the need to keep students, staff, and Faculty safe was paramount during earlier waves of COVID-19. However, many of our members have been very nervous about their return to campus this Fall.

Although the majority of people eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccines in Alberta have chosen to do so, that number currently only represents three-fifths of our total population. The remaining 40% are far more susceptible to not only contracting the far more dangerous Delta variant of COVID-19, but are also more likely to get seriously ill and/or perish when they do, and transmit the disease to those who have been vaccinated as well.

During earlier waves of the pandemic, the Government of Alberta enacted a series of public health measures to help "bend the curve" and limit the spread of this disease. Regrettably, the government has elected to not reintroduce many of these same protocols as of this writing. Although many of our members have received their COVID-19 vaccines, vaccination is only one component of an effective public health strategy. Mask mandates, universal contact tracing, and mandatory quarantines are also effective measures that can help limit the spread of COVID-19 at a time when we are experiencing an explosive 4th wave in Alberta

As such, we are greatly disappointed in the abdication of responsibility that our sector has encountered from the Government of Alberta in recent weeks. Messaging around mask mandates has been indecisive, decisions to end universal contact tracing and mandatory isolation increase the likelihood of a person becoming exposed to COVID-19, and the decision to provide the option to "opt out" of the recently-announced Restrictions Exemption Program privileges the individual rights of a small (but very vocal) minority of people who refuse to fulfill their responsibilities in the collective fight against COVID-19. All of this has occurred using data projection models that the provincial government has now admitted were flawed. Simply put, this is unacceptable.

While we empathize with the desire to return to some sense of normalcy in our lives, we feel that such a return cannot come at the expense of the health and safety of Faculty, staff, and students in the post-secondary sector and the sacrifices we have all made over the past 18 months. The very nature of our

programs (large numbers of students congregating in classrooms for several hours) poses a significant challenge to minimizing the transmission of COVID-19.

To that end, we the undersigned call on the Government of Alberta to follow the lead of their counterparts in other Canadian jurisdictions and institute a mandatory province-wide vaccination policy for all post-secondary campuses, one with no option to “opt-out”. Such a policy should be in compliance with existing Collective Agreements and Human Rights and Occupational Health and Safety legislation in Alberta.

In addition, we call on the provincial government to reintroduce province-wide universal contact tracing and a commitment to require mandatory quarantine protocols for individuals who have contracted COVID-19 for the duration the pandemic’s 4th wave and any waves that may emerge in the future.

Furthermore, we call on the provincial government to commit to covering the cost of implementing public health protocols, (including rapid-testing and other COVID-19 screening measures) for the duration of this public health emergency, as it is not reasonable to download the cost of implementing public health protocols onto the backs of individual workers, students, and/or institutions who wish to go above and beyond in the fight against COVID-19.

And finally, we call on the provincial government to provide more robust guidelines on implementing measures to effectively combat the spread of COVID-19, and for more resources to ensure compliance with public health directives.

Our government has a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of all students, staff, Faculty, and visitors on our post-secondary campuses this Fall. Following a course of action that downloads the burden for keeping our public spaces safe onto individual institutions will result in the emergence of different protocols for different institutions (a phenomenon we have already seen emerge in recent days), and will result in increased non-compliance. This constitutes a shameful abdication of responsibility by our elected political leadership in Alberta, and as such, we call on the Government of Alberta to do what must be done to fulfill this responsibility.

Sincerely,

Alexandru Caldararu
President
NorQuest College Faculty Association

Blair Howes
President
SAIT Academic Faculty Association

Gord Koch,
President
Olds College Faculty Association

Ken Heather
President
Faculty Association of Red Deer College

Kristen Desjarlais-deKlerk
President
Faculty Association of Medicine Hat College

Lee Easton
President
Mount Royal University Faculty Association

Natali Rodrigues
President
Alberta University of the Arts Faculty Association

Penny Marcotte
President
Bow Valley College Faculty Association

Shauna MacDonald
President
NAIT Academic Staff Association