March 20, 2020

Covid-19 Academic Continency Planning Information for TAs

To our Teaching Assistants,

As we continue to navigate through these trying times, the University community continues to work together to support the ongoing mission of the University. As the first point of contact for many of our students, many of our TAs have received inquiries from students regarding their academic concerns. We realize that these concerns may be in addition to your own uncertainty with the courses in your own academic program. Please know that course instructors, supervisors, and program leaders are working hard to ensure that all our students can complete their courses this Term.

If you have not already heard from your employment Supervisor, please contact your Supervisor to find out how your TA assignment and allocation of hours may have changed. The University is committed to honouring the hours of work that you were assigned for the Term and there may be requests to work paid hours beyond what you have been allocated. Thank you in advance for recognizing that there is an unprecedented need for flexible and nimble procedures relating to the redistribution of TA hours required to enable students’ successful completion of Term. With the Union’s agreement, we have waived the typical process for having to revise the Hours of Work Form to account for a change in hours or reallocation of hours for a TA assignment.

Many of your students may be reaching out to you with questions about their learning, course evaluation, and grades. We want to assure you that our faculty and course instructors have been working diligently to ensure that this transition goes smoothly, and they will have communicated a revised plan to the class. Please contact your instructor if you are unsure of what these modifications have been or unsure of how you are to support these modifications. Instructors should have communicated to all TAs in a course, but you should not hesitate to reach out if you need clarification. If you are unable to answer a question from a student, communicate with the instructor so that you can provide the correct answer or forward the student to the instructor.

We also ask that you partner with instructors in supporting our students. The University takes the academic success of all our students seriously and we recognize the stress that the current climate can cause. When courses have been modified, please help us to assure students that instructors and program coordinators have carefully considered the revised course plans so that they are clear, equitable and align with our shared academic expectations. We are taking a great deal of care and consideration to give students the best possible learning outcome in these less-than-ideal circumstances. While instructors are not able to immediately reassess individual student preferences with respect to the revised course evaluation structures, grades in all courses will be reviewed at the year-end by Chairs and the Associate Dean’s office to ensure that students are not disadvantaged. Also, please let students know that all the usual appeals procedures are available once grades have been received.
If you are seeking additional resources and supports for online team communications please see the information from the MacPherson Institute, Instructional Continuity and if you need help with IT connectivity from home, see the supports available here, IT Continuity.

We ask that you assure yourself and your students that the University is deeply committed to everyone in our community. Your own academic success, your health and your emotional well-being are front-and-centre of our decision-making.

**SUPPORTS**

In addition to the above, I would like to remind you of the 24-hour support resources available to you in our local community. Good to Talk is a free confidential 24-hour support line for College and University Students in Ontario. You can reach them at 1-866-925-5454 or at https://good2talk.ca/.

As a member of CUPE, you are eligible for access to the Employee Family Assistance Program through Homewood Health. Homewood offers short-term counselling online, by phone, and in person. They also offer many online supports, coaching, and other resources including a 24/7 phone line. You can reach them at 1-800-663-1142 or at https://homewoodhealth.com/corporate/contact-eap-efap.

CUPE 3906 members can get in touch with their Union at staff@cupe3906.org or mecampbell@cupe3906.org

Sincerely,

Kim Dej, Acting Vice-Provost, Faculty       Doug Welch, Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies