



Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

OCUFA urges university administrations to respect collegial governance structures when addressing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

OCUFA is concerned about the erosion of democratic, transparent, and accountable collegial governance practices at Ontario's universities as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. With it becoming abundantly clear that universities will not be able to return to their usual operations in the foreseeable future, some administrations are foregoing their responsibility to respect the shared governance structures of their institutions and, instead, are making academic decisions without the involvement of senates and academic councils or proper consultation with faculty.

OCUFA appreciates the priority university administrations have placed on protecting the safety and health of members of the campus community while determining how best to wrap up the winter term. In the past few weeks, universities have had to take many unprecedented emergency measures and implement swift changes to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as institutions shift to making longer-term decisions about their academic and operational activities for the summer and fall terms, they face challenging decisions about how to carry out the teaching and research that is core to their purpose. OCUFA is extremely worried by the unilateral and non-consultative approaches some administrations have engaged in to make these decisions. These approaches have seen the voices of faculty ignored, undermining the collegial governance processes that are vital to the effective operations of Ontario's postsecondary institutions.

Ontario universities pride themselves in their shared model of governance where voices of members of the campus community are heard and decisions are made through democratic, transparent, and accountable collegial processes. Therefore, it is very concerning that some administrations are undermining these principles by ignoring their obligation to follow proper procedure and respect the long-standing decision-making structures of their institutions. Given the technological capacities of our universities that render remote meetings possible, there is no justification for excluding faculty voices by circumventing critical governing bodies and processes. As the OCUFA policy statement on collegial governance clearly states, "while postsecondary institutions need to change to adjust to changing political, social, economic, and cultural conditions, these changes need to be determined and implemented through collegial processes that involve the meaningful participation of faculty, staff, and students."

Respecting these foundational decision-making structures is not just an exercise in democratic accountability, but the most effective way for universities to address the

challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is only through the collective wisdom and efforts of all members of the campus community that Ontario's universities will be able to chart a path forward that maintains the quality of education and research. As more information becomes available about future enrolment and university revenue, and as further decisions need to be made about course delivery, research, student support, and campus safety measures, administrations must engage with faculty through existing collegial governance structures to ensure that all decisions with academic implications are made by senates or equivalent bodies.

Public universities exist to create knowledge, educate, and serve the common good. As postsecondary institutions continue to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vitally important that the safety of the campus community is prioritized. However, universities must not use this pandemic as an excuse to ignore the democratic, transparent, and accountable collegial governance structures. University administrations must respect collegial governance and the voices of faculty.

Ontario's universities have a vital role to play in helping the province navigate this pandemic, but it is only by working together that we can effectively guide our institutions towards a future where the vibrant energy of students and faculty returns to our campuses.