

COVID-19 Bulletin # 1

You Shared, NUFA Listened

In May and June, the Grievance committee of NUFA took the unprecedented step of meeting with every faculty group and academic librarians at Nipissing. We talked to approximately 190 Members and logged nearly 40 hours of meeting time in the process. In the process we gathered ten pages of notes detailing your concerns, and we have been communicating them with the Employer throughout the summer.

Some themes, concerns and questions came up repeatedly:

- Lack of consultation and transparency in academic decision-making
- Lack of targeted training and technical support for faculty, especially for those who have little online teaching experience
- A concern for students, many of who may struggle with online learning, especially without a scheduled, synchronous component
- In skill-based academic areas, a worry about the near impossibility of fulfilling course expectations in an asynchronous remote delivery format

Workload:

- For tenure-stream faculty, increase in teaching workload with little recognition of the price being paid in research productivity
 - For full-time faculty on contract, concerns that moving practical courses such as labs online will take work during summer months when full-time instructors are laid off
 - For part-time contract faculty, concerns about lack of access to resources and support for online teaching as well as uncompensated work
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Recommendations for Next Steps

Employer should:

- Ensure that all decisions affecting course content and delivery, faculty working conditions, and research should be made using existing academic governance structures, and should include meaningful consultation with faculty stakeholders
- Be clear in communicating all decisions, including communicating rationales and evidence for such decisions
- Release the results of any student survey used to make decisions for the WI semester
- Ensure that there is ongoing administrative support for practicum-based courses, especially in Social Work and Nursing
- Agree to an LOA that will ensure a consistent response to requests for sabbatical adjustments and tenure clock stoppages
- Provide targeted support for faculty who come with varied levels of experience and expertise in remote teaching—one size fits all workshops, or a series of links to click, are not enough. Ideally every faculty member should have access to some one-on-one support from a LST or online course developer
- Offer coherent support to contract faculty to ensure that all Nipissing courses are able to meet minimum academic objectives
- Provide adequate support in library services in anticipation of heavy use of online resources for the fall—in particular fill the vacant academic librarian position
- Work with departments and schools who are considering creative ways for each program to meet its particular programmatic requirements—for example, consider scheduling synchronous class time for specific courses as is being done for labs; consider allowing small, cohorts, such as graduate classes, back on campus for face-to-face instruction, using appropriate physical distancing as required by Provincial mandate
- Work actively and quickly towards opening campus safely to faculty who wish to return to work in their offices
- Provide accommodation for faculty who may be at higher risk to work from home once the campus is open again

Faculty should:

- Use existing collegial governance structures frequently and strongly to maintain clear and consistent communication with Employer about working conditions and programmatic requirements
 - Communicate any concerns with working outside the terms of the Collective Agreements to NUFA as soon as they arise
 - Ask for help: You are not alone! Together we can manage our workload and overcome the mental health challenges of working from home
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