



# QUFA VOICES

Your Queen's University Faculty Association Newsletter

## SPECIAL COVID-19 RESPONSE ISSUE

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### PRESIDENT'S VOICE

## Extraordinary Disruptions

The COVID-19 crisis portends university-wide uncertainties

By Elizabeth Hanson  
President, QUFA

Two weeks ago, my plan for this column had been to continue with the analysis of our faculty complement data. That plan belongs to a different reality than the one we are inhabiting now. There is one topic on everyone's mind, or variations on that topic, keyed to the different disciplines, appointment types, career stages, and family situations of our Members. I will continue to send updates every few days that pertain to specific issues and concerns as they emerge. We have received lots of mail from Members in response to these updates, which has alerted us to specific concerns and possible responses. Please keep these messages coming, but also please stay patient; some issues can and should be addressed only when we have a better sense of the time and scale of this disruption. We are working cooperatively with the administration to manage, first, the end of the teaching term. After that, we can take up matters pertaining to personnel processes, career development, and research. Also, please read this entire issue of *QUFA Voices* carefully, noting

### FYI

## QUFA Operations During Social Distancing

QUFA Executive and Council approved an emergency policy that allows the Executive Committee to continue to manage the Association if essential, constitutionally mandated meetings and actions have to be postponed owing to campus closure or public health requirements. As it is clear that we will not be able to run our usual April meetings (Council, Spring General Meeting) to make constitutional changes, to approve the budget, and to elect Executive Officers for next year, we will enact this policy and proceed on status quo assumptions until meetings can be resumed or moved to alternate platforms.

For total clarity, QUFA will not be holding any face-to-face meetings in March or April 2020. April Council and the Spring General Meeting will be postponed for the time being, and QUFA ad hoc and standing committee meetings will be cancelled, or will move to a teleconference or other mediated format. Committee Chairs will have discretion over these decisions going forward.

If, in the interim, the Executive elects to use alternate meeting platforms for Council or the General Meeting, we will reach out to Members via e-mail, *QUFA Voices* and the QUFA Web site ([www.qufa.ca](http://www.qufa.ca)). QUFA staff are all working remotely. Please contact us by e-mail. Please do not use the Queen's telephone lines, as we are not monitoring them. We continue to conduct union business and offer advice to Members, so do please get in touch!

**Executive Director Leslie Jermyn can be reached at [jermynl@queensu.ca](mailto:jermynl@queensu.ca).**

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in particular the information from Peggy Smith about what to do if you have recently returned from overseas and therefore are in quarantine, as now required.

We face both an extraordinary disruption and an extraordinary uncertainty. Not only has the term ended abruptly and all spring events for the dissemination of research results and meeting with colleagues been cancelled, but more

concerningly, since we don't know the course of the virus, including whether there will be a second wave in the fall, we also don't know how long any of this will last. Still more frightening is the worldwide economic contraction and severe recession it portends, which will be the cause of suffering and despair in itself, but also, if recent history is any indication, will serve as justification for further cuts to postsecondary education. And, of course, the institutional and economic disruptions will only be the most pressing concerns we face as long as the measures we are taking now slow the spread of the virus enough that there is not catastrophic incidence of death among people worldwide.

So, let me deepen the gloom a little. In the "before times" at the beginning of March, the first indication we had of the impact of COVID-19 on Queen's was a drop in foreign student applications, leading to, among other things, the suspension of the planned new appointments in the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS) announced at the beginning of March. As we have discussed here, the FAS had planned to increase its foreign student intake to allow for the shift of one hundred domestic students to Engineering and Applied Science (FEAS) and the Smith School of Business (SSB). This rearrangement was to offset the impact of the ten percent tuition cut the Ford government imposed last year. It was this decision, you will recall, that triggered QUFA's faculty complement data project. Let's leave aside the fact that this decision exposed the FAS in particular to what

a number of people, including senior administrators at Queen's, were identifying as a vulnerability. As I have discussed in previous columns, our analysis of the faculty complement in fact showed several structural weaknesses that affect multiple faculties: 1) a decade-long withering of the FAS that was not being offset by the new (now suspended) hiring; 2) a significant deterioration of the full-responsibility faculty/student ratio, in the FAS, the FEAS, and the SSB (roughly from 1:19 to 1:29); and 3) a striking increase in the reliance on continuing adjuncts (indicating an earlier reliance on term adjuncts) in the FAS and the SSB alike.

While there are some questionable decisions underlying some of the specific distribution of this weakness, the point I want to make here is different; the university whose life has been suspended is not as robust as it represents itself to be, at least if we take not the budget or "student experience," but strong capacity in research-inflected teaching and teaching-inflected research in *all* the disciplines of modern knowledge, as the vital sign of a major research university. In other words, we will face the financial mess on the other side of this worldwide shutdown malnourished and underweight.

The specific chain of pre-shutdown harm is unique to Queen's only at the point we first grasp it: hiring cancelled because COVID-19 stops applications from international students on whom the university relies to offset the populist ten percent tuition cut, which

hurts deeply because tuition, especially the higher tuition that can be charged by disciplines that promise to build stocks of intellectual capital for the private sector, forms an ever-increasing percentage of the operating budget, because the provincial government continues to diminish its grants to universities, decrying the expensiveness of basic services rather than increasing taxation, so off we go to skim wealth from China, India, and the Saudis. I'm going to stop climbing up this chain because the higher you go the more qualifications are called for, and hence the more my syntax will founder. The point is perhaps more salient in this moment if we think about Canada's too-lean healthcare system. We confront this crisis in a late stage of what American journalist George Packer calls "the great unwinding," a process admittedly far more devastating in the U.S. than Canada, of starving the infrastructure of public wealth constructed after the catastrophes of the mid-twentieth century. Unlike under-doctoring, the weakened state of the university will likely not exacerbate the present health crisis. But it is a result of the same processes that may diminish the capacity of Canada to respond to this crisis. I'd like to think that on the other side of this crisis we will start to rebuild that public infrastructure rather than starve it further. But on this bright, foreboding first weekend of spring, all bets are off.

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QUFA Voices publishes QUFA-related news and information for QUFA Members and provides QUFA Members with a forum to express their QUFA-related ideas and opinions. We want to hear from you! Please send your QUFA-related story ideas, news items, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, photographs, and other submissions to the editor.

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## GRIEVANCE CORNER COVID-19 Quarantine or Self-Isolation Form

Balancing the employer's right to know with your right to privacy during this challenging time

By **Peggy Smith**  
Grievance Officer, QUFA

Many of you may have recently returned from travel out of the country and been directed to quarantine or self-isolate for a period of fourteen days. You may also have elected to do so out of concern that you may have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus. In either event, QUFA strongly encourages you to report these events to your head or dean, and to complete the COVID-19 Quarantine or Self-Isolation Form:

<http://www.queensu.ca/humanresources/coronavirus>

Normally, if you were ill for a period of fourteen days, or absent from work for a total of fourteen days owing to a chronic condition, you would be expected to inform Human Resources to ensure timely access to access-to-leave provisions in the collective agreement, including sick leave, compassionate leave, or personal leave, and long-term disability (LTD) benefits if needed.

The purpose of this form is to streamline the reporting process in the current situation. In addition, it will provide information that allows the university to continue to provide a safe and healthy workplace for all employees.

### The University's Obligation to Ensure a Safe and Healthy Workplace

The arrival and spread of COVID-19 to Kingston and the Queen's University campus is a threat to the health and safety of all employees. The Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act

requires the university to take all necessary steps to provide their employees with a safe and healthy workplace during this extraordinary time. By necessity, this includes collecting and communicating data on the presence of COVID-19 in the workplace, to direct and support the administration in taking the necessary steps to mitigate the impact of the disease.

Mitigation measures can include:

- providing employees with the option to work at home;
- facilitating the transition from the classroom to remote learning;
- imposing restrictions on non-essential travel or access to campus facilities;
- cancelling or limiting attendance at meetings and gatherings; and
- encouraging and supporting proper hygiene by providing soap, tissues, receptacles, and hand sanitizer, and by generally maintaining a clean campus.

### QUFA Members' Access to Rights in the Collective Agreement

The simplicity of the form is a benefit to our Members. There is no medical note required. The form is submitted to the Return to Work Office, which has an established protocol for handling confidential information. If you require an extended leave in the future, by completing this form, you have established the basis for your absence from work, and triggered the obligation for the Return to Work Office to track your absences in a way that ensures a smooth transition to sick leave and LTD if needed.

### Privacy Considerations

The university is required to manage the collection and disclosure of personal information in accordance with the employee's statutory rights to privacy. They can only collect personal information that is necessary

**FYI**  
**Employee and Family Assistance Program**

All Queen's employees have access to the Employee and Family Assistance Program:

<http://www.queensu.ca/humanresources/wellness-accessibility/employee-and-family-assistance-program>

All you need is your employee number to access a wide range of support services, including mental health counselling.

for the purpose it is being collected, and disclosure of that information must be limited to individuals whose role is to process the information for the following purposes:

- to track and limit the spread of COVID-19 in the community;
- to process and administer WSIB claims;
- to process and administer sick leave claims;
- to process and administer LTD claims;
- to process and administer requests for medical accommodation; and
- to process and approve other personal leave requests, including compassionate or personal leave.

QUFA is currently seeking reassurance from the university that there are protocols in place to maintain the confidentiality of the information collected in the COVID-19 form from the time of intake to the transfer of information for future use as needed. In the interim, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail with any questions you have about access to health and sick-leave benefits during the next weeks and months.

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